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*Florida Philosophical Review* has its roots in the Florida Philosophical Association, one of the largest and most active regional philosophy associations in the United States. For several years, the Florida Philosophical Association envisioned a scholarly publication that would support the professional interaction of philosophers in Florida, the enhancement of philosophical education in Florida, and the development of philosophy both within and beyond Florida. *Florida Philosophical Review* realizes that vision and is committed to respecting and encouraging diverse philosophical interests and diverse philosophical approaches to issues while demonstrating the value of philosophy in the contemporary world.

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### **EDITORS' INTRODUCTION**

We are exceptionally pleased to present this inaugural issue of *Florida Philosophical Review: The Journal of the Florida Philosophical Association*. Founded in 1955, the Florida Philosophical Association (FPA) is one of the largest and most active regional philosophy organizations in the U.S. Its mission is to support the professional interaction of philosophers in the state of Florida, the enhancement of philosophical education in Florida, and the development of philosophy both within and beyond Florida. As part of this mission, the FPA hosts an annual conference at which philosophers share their research and enjoy informal, as well as formal, exchange of ideas. Since its inception, this conference has welcomed the submission of papers and the attendance of members representing numerous forms of diversity. The FPA includes members from community colleges, baccalaureate and graduate-degree granting institutions, from private and public schools in Florida, as well as independent scholars and persons with ties to Florida who may no longer reside or work here. The FPA further enjoys the membership and welcomes the presence of faculty and students representing a broad range of philosophical interests and who employ a diverse range of methodologies and philosophical styles.

The *Florida Philosophical Review* represents a natural stage in the evolution of the long-standing collegial exchange of ideas that happens annually at the FPA meetings. Indeed, the development of a professional journal has been the subject of discussion among FPA members for several years. A primary barrier to implementing this has been the cost of such a publication. In order to ensure access to students and faculty occupying a wide variety of positions, the FPA has endeavored to keep membership costs and conference fees minimal. The decision to publish the *Florida Philosophical Review* on-line maintains the FPA's commitment to accessibility. Because it costs less to produce, while reaching a larger audience, than a paper journal, philosophical ideas can be made available to all persons free of subscription costs.

As the journal of the Florida Philosophical Association, it seemed appropriate that the inaugural issue represent the talents of some of Florida's own philosophers. This issue thus contains selected papers from the November 2000 meetings of the FPA. The first essay included here is Aron Edidin's Presidential Address to the organization. In this poetic address, "A Little Philosophy is a Dangerous Thing," Edidin recalls his introduction to the FPA as an undergraduate student, asking a question central to most scholar-teachers, namely: What role should philosophy play in the life of our undergraduates, including those undergraduates who may never take more than a single

philosophy course? Acknowledging that courses in, for example, introductory epistemology provide "no body of established fact," nor assured methods for building knowledge, Edidin argues that introductory science provides a poor model for "the value of learning a little philosophy." Exploring an analogy between philosophy and art, Edidin suggests that neither creative writing nor even clarity of expression is central to that we wish to teach. Nonetheless, the analogy between art and philosophy proves instructive when considering the one-time philosophy student. Just as "a painter little trained . . . can experience a measure of that felicity that painters know," so too can a beginning philosophy student gain a measure of that delight the professional philosopher knows. In particular, Edidin suggests, the value to be gained by students who take a course in philosophy is exposure to "a world of questions with no easy end but pleasure in the effort to address." Philosophical wonder, he concludes, is a non-negligible part of the good life and thus we succeed as teachers of philosophy when we impart to students some measure of delight in thought less decisive than that of science or of practical concerns.

As part of its commitment to students, each year the FPA awards the Gerrit and Edith Schipper Award to an outstanding undergraduate philosophy paper and the Outstanding Graduate Philosophy Paper award to a graduate student paper. This year's undergraduate student prize was awarded to Elijah Chudnoff (University of Florida) for his essay, "On Kim's Troubles with Physicalism." The graduate student award went to Jeremy Kirby (Florida State University) whose essay, "Contextualism and Confusability," is included here. In this essay, Kirby argues, contra Stephen Schiffer, that epistemological contextualism provides the means to dissolve certain philosophical paradoxes. The particular paradox with which Kirby concerns himself here is that generated by the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis. The statements, "I know that I have hands," "I do not know that I am not a brain-in-a-vat," and "If I do not know that I am not a brain-in-a-vat, then I do not know that I have hands," are all true, Kirby argues, although not simultaneously. The skeptic's paradox is generated, he suggests, by virtue of persons' dispositions to confuse the context of skeptical utterances, as this context is relatively unfamiliar. Kirby concludes "the reason one mistakenly thinks that one knows he has hands, while entertaining the skeptical hypothesis, is that one is overwhelmingly more familiar with the context in which one knows that he has hands."

The importance of understanding conflicting epistemological contexts is also the subject of Nick Power's paper, "On Losing a Debate to a Creation Scientist." Recalling his participation in a public debate concerning the relative virtues of evolutionary science and creationism, Power seeks to understand why the Christian audience to this debate

was unreceptive to his reasoned arguments in favor of evolutionary theory. To understand the Christian fundamentalists' commitment--in the face of countervailing scientific evidence--to the "creation science" hypothesis, Power begins by analyzing the social-historical context of the specific debate in which he engaged, arguing that "Pensacola, FL is at the epicenter of extremist religion in the U.S. and hence is *the* salient factor impinging on the debate." From here, Power turns to examine the axiological context in which such debates take place, reflecting on the inadequacy of "a philosopher's appeal to . . . critical thinking faculties," when addressing an audience that has prior doxastic (and other) commitments." Finally, Power examines the phenomenological context of his audience, suggesting that the respective cultural capital of religion and of science and the Christian's greater experience and degree of familiarity with the former domain over the latter are key to understanding their negative attitude toward enlightenment science. He concludes that "a charitable reading of the fundamentalist's thinking about evolution theory is plausible," encouraging a "more engaged relationship between fundamentalists and secular humanists" and "further research into their distinctive modes of thinking."

The fourth essay included here, "Stem Cell Research and Respect for Life," also engages with religious opposition to the culture of science. In this essay, Ronnie Hawkins critically examines the religious and ethical arguments against performing stem cell research, suggesting that two primary arguments for abstaining from experimenting with human embryos are flawed. First, utilitarian and religious arguments that we should preserve all potential human life (e.g. "be fruitful and multiply"), Hawkins argues, inadequately grapple with advances in technology such as cloning that would make this injunction impossible to follow without seriously damaging our human and nonhuman environments. Second, the argument that we should refrain from "playing God," Hawkins implicitly likens to a version of bad faith: "[w]hether or not God features prominently in her metaphysics, [a human must take] responsibility for decisions about life and death in this world--there is nobody else to do it." Central to Hawkins' argument for permitting stem cell research is an evolutionary view of life, used to critique the notion that human life is utterly unique and/or sacred and thus more deserving of respect--even in its embryonic form--than other potential or actual life forms. Hawkins concludes thus that a "thoroughly Darwinian understanding of biology" combined with a "thoroughgoing respect for life" suggests that we develop the courage to stop playing games of "Father May I?" and take responsibility for the tough--indeed often excruciating--decisions we must make about matters of life and death, "be that human or nonhuman."

Examining from a different angle issues of respect, Robert Moffat examines the pervasiveness of incivility in our society. More specifically, as the title of his essay, "Incivility as a Barometer of Societal Decay," suggests, this final essay argues that uncivil behaviors are related to "more deep-seated pathologies," thus making it "plausible to see incivility as a barometer of social decay." The uncivil behaviors Moffat enumerates include those manifested in courtrooms, in places of business, in political campaigns, and in the media, as well as various infractions of etiquette that take place in our homes and on the roadways. Violence among children, Moffat suggests, needs to be examined in the larger context of litigiousness, deceitfulness, cynicism, and our "quick recourse to confrontation in every social or political disagreement." The root problem, Moffat further suggests, may be the sense of personal entitlement felt by children and adults alike in an affluent society characterized by the lack of serious national challenges and, hence, of solidarity-building interaction. Following Emile Durkheim, Moffat concludes that "the real cost of incivility [is] the loss of social cohesion that is also the root social cause of our burgeoning incivility."

Together, the essays included here represent, in a small way, the diversity of and yet collective conscience of philosophy. The authors' various attempts to address pedagogical, philosophical, and social challenges by exploring points of view other than their own represents what is, arguably, a core value of much philosophy. To be sure, these other points of view explored may also be critiqued. Yet, philosophical disagreements are expressed here with a respect for, and, in several cases, a moral sensitivity to, the others with whom one is engaged. While contemporary philosophy has been disparaged by some as an adversarial endeavor little concerned with issues of social relevance, these essays demonstrate both implicitly and explicitly the constructive contributions that philosophy can make to social dialogue, whether that dialogue takes place in the university classroom, at a professional conference, in a public debate, on a bioethics panel, in a newspaper, or within another professional or public forum.

The *Florida Philosophical Review* is committed to furthering such public dialogue by distributing thoughtful philosophical explorations of issues to both professional and lay philosophers. We thus welcome, for future issues, submissions of papers that employ a diversity of philosophical methods and explore a variety of philosophical issues. For our next issue, we especially welcome papers that address the epistemological, ethical, and/or political issues underlying and emerging from the 2000 U.S. presidential election. This election--containing special relevance for Florida, but having an impact continuing beyond state and national borders--cries out for a

widespread philosophical analysis and response. Potential contributors to this special topic issue should consult the [call for papers](#) in the back of this issue or contact the editors for more information. Subsequent issues of *Florida Philosophical Review* will include selected papers from annual meetings of the FPA and further special topic and general issues, including an issue devoted to student papers tentatively slated for December 2003. We hope that this journal will become a regular part of your scholarly life, both as a reader and as a potential contributor.

Of course, in addition to readers and contributors, a successful journal requires the support of many others. We thus wish to thank, in addition to the contributors to and readers of this issue, those who have provided the financial, intellectual, professional, and moral support needed to bring the *Florida Philosophical Review* into existence. Special thanks goes to our sponsors, our editorial board, our anonymous reviewers, and the FPA itself. In addition, a special thanks goes to Sae Schatz who designed this site, to the University of Central Florida who has provided the web space for us to inhabit, to Ronnie Hawkins and Suzanne Jaeger who have assisted with proofreading, to Daniel Boisvert who has compiled book review information for the upcoming issue, and to Leslie Gale, the Office Manager of the UCF Philosophy Department, who has assisted with matters related to budget.

Shelley Park and Nancy Stanlick, Editors

*Florida Philosophical Review*

June 2001

## **A Little Philosophy is a Dangerous Thing**

Presidential Address of the 46<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting  
of the Florida Philosophical Association

*Aron Edidin, New College of Florida*

If I speak somewhat briefly here tonight  
I hope you won't wish I were briefer still.

In fall when first I'd left high school and home  
midway through that first fall of college life  
I traveled north to Gainesville with a gang  
of students and professors to attend  
for the first time the annual meeting of  
this Philosophical Association.

I was a student here at New College  
which then as now was just a little place  
with few philosophers in its employ.  
Each year the meeting of the FPA  
afforded my sole opportunity  
to hear the thoughts of a more varied bunch;  
as student here I never missed a year.  
And, both as student and since my return  
attending now with students of my own  
I've never known one member of this group  
be any less than warmly welcoming  
to students come among us when we meet.

So, honoring the place the FPA  
holds in my memories of college years,  
recognizing too the central place  
that teaching present undergraduates  
holds in most of our philosophic lives,  
I'll talk tonight 'bout undergraduates  
and of the role philosophy might play  
among their studies. Since I mostly teach,  
as many of us willy-nilly must  
students who choose to concentrate their work  
outside our field, I'll concentrate on them.  
Indeed, I'll focus on what we might hope  
to leave with students in a single course,  
what we can offer those who will pursue

philosophy just minimally.

Now,  
we may note certain courses in our field  
with easily identified objectives  
which, if the course achieves, will clearly be  
a boon for students choosing to enroll.  
A course whose emphasis is ethical  
can exercise and sharpen and expand  
a student's moral sensibility.  
Symbolic Logic offers tools and skills  
of value across whole curricula  
(tho' teaching such a course in such a way  
that this value will best be realized  
is quite a tricky matter.) And a broad  
historical survey within our field  
can yield some knowledge of a great domain  
of civilized human activity.

But turn now to a different kind of course.  
Consider, say, epistemology,  
philosophy of science, or of mind.  
Or metaphysics, most abstract of all.  
Suppose a student who takes one of these  
as her sole philosophical endeavor.  
These are the courses I most often teach  
to some who will pursue philosophy  
extensively, but too, to some who won't,  
contenting themselves with the single course.  
So, what's for them to gain, if they should choose  
a course like these, and if the course works well?

(Before proceeding I emphatically  
affirm that I mean no invidious  
suggestion that these courses are somehow  
more rigorous or central or important  
than those whose value to nonspecialists  
is easier to see. They're central to  
*my* philosophical writing and teaching.  
I realize that in this I conform  
to the norms of an ideology  
which does invidiously valorize  
these "hard-core analytic areas."  
This ideology I disavow  
but still, my interests in philosophy

are what they are, much focussed on these things.  
Most of the students in my classes are  
not majors in philosophy, but I  
remain convinced these courses serve them too.  
I'm thus presented with the puzzle of  
enunciating my didactic goals  
in teaching, say, epistemology  
to majors and non-majors both alike.)

In focussing on courses such as these  
I follow somewhat the august example  
of David Hume, who in his famous chapter  
"Of Different Species of Philosophy"  
sought to defend such philosophic thought  
as seemed both most dry and most diffident  
about proclaiming relevance to life.  
But his conclusion won't avail me here.  
I can't pretend the courses that I've named  
instruct in firmly evidenced results  
of careful and methodical research,  
however modest such results might be.  
There is no body of established fact  
in metaphysics or philosophy  
of mind, or in epistemology  
or in philosophy of science, to  
transmit in part to keen, receptive minds.  
This is the scandal of which Kant complained  
so bitterly, but could himself not end.  
Copernicus's great accomplishment  
of transformation yielding consensus  
would not be duplicated in our field  
by Hume or Kant, Descartes or Husserl  
or any of that multitude who sought  
to place philosophy upon the firm  
and fruitful path trod nobly by true science.

We've no results to offer those we teach,  
no tempting bits of philosophical  
discovery with which to inform them  
so they'll know more stuff at semester's end  
than at its start (or, if some knowledge comes  
of facts of philosophic history  
or of some facts whose mention may occur  
perchance in course of philosophical  
debate - since even true philosophers

at times find facts found elsewhere relevant  
to our pursuits - well, if a few such facts  
as these are learned, that's really not the point,  
not what these courses principally pursue.)

But here, a scientist might well object,  
insisting that a catalogue of facts  
is no more the objective of her teaching  
than of our own. It's method matters most;  
to learn *how* scientists learn *what* they learn.  
Thus, students whose ambition leads to sci-  
entific work may be initiate  
in the beginnings of their coming craft  
while those whose scientific pursuits  
come quickly to an end may yet be taught  
a bit about how this great engine of  
the growth of knowledge works, the better to  
appreciate such scientific knowledge  
at they through life may casually acquire.  
The better too to exercise the role  
of citizen in following disputes  
of policy where science matters much.

Might it be so for us? Might science still  
provide a model for the value of  
learning a little of philosophy,  
since scientific education comes  
now to be seen as more than feeding facts?  
Well, no. We've no more methods to convey  
for building knowledge than we have results  
that count as knowledge in philosophy.  
Had we the one, full soon we'd have the other.  
Nor need a citizen, to follow well  
debate within the polity on grave  
concerns of common good, adjudicate  
the claims and counter-claims of those like us,  
metaphysicians, epistemologists.  
Congressional committees rarely call  
on us to testify, and probably  
they're wise in that restraint. No, if we teach  
something that's good to learn, we'll find dim light  
in science's example to discern it.

So science is no fitting analogue  
in which we can discern the value of

what one-time students might acquire from us.  
Well, what of that? Philosophy's no science.  
Perhaps the other pole can promise more  
and we should look to art where science fails.  
We all remember Carnap's famous sneer  
that metaphysics is bad poetry.  
(Perhaps his influence, transmitted by  
my teacher, Bryan Norton, on to me  
is part of what now leads me to produce  
tonight's bold testing of this classic claim!)  
In any case, we now hear others too  
who emphasize that philosophical  
writing is *writing*, with its rhetoric  
and maybe its poetics. Certainly  
one of the things I hope my students learn  
is how to read a certain kind of text  
and how to write within our idiom.  
Like art instructors, we strive to impart  
modes of expression central to our work,  
to help our students to express their thoughts  
as we do ours in philosophic style.

Still, I'd not for a moment rest content  
to place expression at the central point.  
Creative writing's really not our bag.  
Expressive power, emotional precision,  
deft characterization, skillful pace  
of narrative, surprising twists of plot  
may have their place in philosophic prose  
but that place is peripheral at best,  
mere window-dressing to the thought displayed,  
far from our object of instructive zeal.  
It's thinking we purport to value most  
and cogency the quality we want.  
No more the poet than the scientist  
can model for us what we wish to teach.

Well, now a poet could dispute, and note  
that thought and words are not so isolate  
one from the other that the first is formed  
full inarticulate, then later spoke  
or written, finding words for what itself  
is not a thing of words. Instead the thought  
is formed in forming words to sentences  
and these to paragraphs and arguments

articulate on page or voiced aloud.  
Indeed, when first I speak to students of  
writing assignments in each course I teach  
I say that thinking in philosophy  
writhes nebulous while hidden in the head.  
Precision is the privilege of thoughts  
articulate, and better still on page  
whose discipline requires such clarity  
as allows comprehension of the thought  
without the benefit of questioning  
the thinker. So I couldn't well contend  
that writing is mere accidental dross  
in which the golden thought may be displayed.

I'll need return to this before I'm through  
But just for now I'll brazenly declare  
that justice of the claim that word and thought  
are intertwined won't make philosophy  
creative art whose model for instruction  
is that of poets or of painters. Still,  
there's one analogy in teaching of  
philosophy and of creative art  
that proves a key in my unraveling  
of what our students might most fitly learn.

If I should learn beginning rudiments  
of painting, when I see in later life  
the work of painters hung in galleries  
I can perhaps, better appreciate  
the expertise and inspiration there.  
In this the value of my learning leans  
in a direction noted earlier  
concerning learning of a little science.  
I said that learning certain elements  
of scientific method can enhance  
science appreciation. But with art,  
say, as a painter just a little trained  
I also can experience a measure  
of that felicity that painters know  
for whom to paint is life's entire work.  
I can partake, if just a little bit  
in that enhancement of a human life  
for whose sake painters paint. (In like respect  
although it is as plain as boiled potatoes  
that as a versifier I'm no poet,

yet in the preparation of this text  
I have from time to time experienced  
pleasure in finding fit alliteration  
or some occasional grace as may occur  
when thoughts accustomed to the forms of prose  
find words to dance in measured meter.) Here  
the case of science seems quite different.  
The joys of scientific work are saved  
for those whose training fits them for the task  
by progress far beyond the first semester.

What of philosophy? Are those delights  
with which our lives are gifted by our work  
available in any measure for  
our former students, now on other paths?  
To answer, we must measure our own lives  
and find the springs of intellectual joy  
that feed philosophers' felicity.  
In this, I can speak only for myself.  
The joy philosophy affords for me,  
the richness in my life's experience  
that I deem philosophical, consists  
first of all in a sensibility,  
a sort of intellectual perspective  
that finds in each phenomenon it notes  
questions and puzzles, possibilities  
for reaffirming solid common sense  
or speculating on alternative  
constructions than the comfortable ones  
ensconced in ordinary speech and thought.  
This inquiry into the commonplace,  
can make of time, or sense, or proper names  
or of believing, or of evidence  
or life beyond one instant, mysteries.  
I find with Augustine that life is full  
of what I know as long as I'm not asked  
but once I start to think explicitly  
phenomena familiar all my life  
turn strange; for every explicit account  
presents its problems, casts itself in doubt  
and raises questions too of whether our  
initial inexplicit ease of thought  
is dogmatism better blithely dumped  
or stuff of real and fluent mastery  
of matters obvious enough to all.

The pleasure of these puzzles of the plain  
continues in detailed development  
of clear conception of alternatives  
in rendering explicit those accounts  
that vie to supplement or to supplant  
our tacit comprehension, studying  
the works in which philosophers propound  
their various hypotheses, and, too,  
developing ideas of my own.

To be aware of these hypotheses  
is prelude to their critical regard  
weighing the pro and con of rival views  
evaluating arguments, devising  
arguments of my own, considering  
the weight and relevance of evidence  
advanced supporting this, opposing that.  
Perhaps now judging one kind of account  
most plausible and worthy of the work  
of its elaboration and defense,  
to find success in overcoming flaws  
in earlier examples of that line  
or in developing new reasoning  
new applications to existing puzzles  
new challenges for those alternative  
approaches incompatible with this,  
the one that seems to me most reasonable.  
Succeeding, judgements may be reinforced  
or, failing, may be undermined and changed.

To hope to know, as evidence evolves,  
whether what I find plausible be true  
is hope forlorn within this inquiry.  
My reasonings remain conjectural.  
Philosophers intelligent as I,  
careful, judicious, diligent, informed,  
will yet weigh all the reasons differently,  
choosing conjecture opposite my own.  
But as uncertain and conjectural  
as, ineluctably, our views remain  
yet it is evidence we seek to weigh  
and reasoned argument that we propound.

And so, though discourse is our medium

and writing is the product of our pains  
and though our reasoning is exercised  
in sentences and paragraphs and though  
thought unexpressed is thought yet undeveloped  
still we're not poets, and our words remain  
the means and not the ends of our endeavor.

Skillful pursuit of this endeavor brings  
such subtlety of dialectic sense  
as can help sort out other arguments  
where more decisive outcomes may be hoped.  
Exhortation to this usefulness  
in opposition to apostles of  
unreason, was my predecessor's theme,  
Ron Cooper's purpose, one short year ago.  
But quite apart from any usefulness  
to fellow citizens or even to  
fellow philosophers, when each one's work  
enriches stores of thought that nourish each,  
apart, I say, from altruistic worth  
of any kind, this thinking is for me  
a life's delight, and source of selfish joy  
and, I affirm, such contemplation plays  
a central part in what can make a life  
worthy of being lived. I do not say  
that only a contemplative career  
is good, but contemplation rather is  
one good, and can be quite profoundly so.

Well, now perhaps I'm ready to return  
to that poor student left so long ago  
in the one single solitary course  
of her small schooling in philosophy.  
Even as some artistic amateur  
applying little training to his task  
can yet enjoy some measure of that same  
good which rewards true artists in their work,  
so too I hope that some of that delight  
for whose sake I pursued philosophy  
and whose full measure is my best reward  
for that life's choice, may be accessible  
to students whose perspective has been trained,  
if just a little, in a realm where fact  
however obvious, when probed, reveals  
a world of questions with no easy end

but pleasure in the effort to address.

Should such a student seek now to repeat  
and to intensify this thoughtful joy  
by further study of philosophy,  
this first course might then come to be the start  
of philosophical apprenticeship  
and so might prove first source of those rewards  
attending the profession which we share.  
But amateur philosophizing too,  
a modest part of philosophic thought  
in lives devoted most to other goods  
might yet be not a negligible part  
of a good life, and so I teach in hope  
that the rewards of such an element  
may be augmented even by one course  
that practices its students' faculties  
on issues that most fascinate my own.

Here my address, praise Heaven! comes to close  
concluding with the reaffirmed hope  
that philosophic wonder might find those  
whose schooling in't is limited in scope.

This hope in any case I yet pursue  
When, as most of us must do perforce,  
I teach my classes as I mostly do  
to students whose profession won't be ours.

Instruction in the facts is not our style  
nor methods by which knowledge may be got.  
But in each fact, find questions to beguile,  
To teach delight in less decisive thought.

Now nears my end of presidential work,  
I sigh relief, and pass the torch to Kirk.

## Contextualism and Confusability

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The most promising approach toward explaining skeptical puzzles seems to be that employed by the contextualist. Contextualists enjoy both a resolution and an etiology of skeptical puzzles. However, Stephen Schiffer, in his “Contextualist Solutions to Scepticism,” has argued that “the contextualist fails to solve the paradox.”<sup>1</sup> In what follows, I essay a response to Schiffer’s objection. I begin with an exegesis of the Contextualist’s solution to the skeptical puzzle. Subsequently, I summarize and outline Schiffer’s argument against the Contextualist’s solution to the skeptical puzzle. In the final section, I provide a criticism of Schiffer’s argument against the Contextualist’s solution.

### Skepticism and Contextualism

Epistemologists provide skeptical puzzles in many and sundry ways. The skeptical argument with which I am presently concerned, hereafter referred to as the (SA), runs as follows:

1. I don’t know that I’m not a BIV (i.e., a bodiless brain in a vat who has been caused to have just those sensory experiences I’ve had).
2. If I don’t know that I’m not a BIV, then I don’t know that I have hands. Hence,
3. I don’t know that I have hands.

This argument has an air of paradox because we consider it sound; and, yet, we think of it as expressing a false conclusion. Since one cannot rule out the possibility of being a BIV, one is loath to deny premise one. Likewise, the conditional in the second premise seems undeniable, since if I don’t know that I’m not a BIV, I don’t know that I have certain properties which a BIV lacks, i.e., hands. The conclusion, however—which derives validly via *modus ponens* from the first and second premises—seems to be false. As a result, something of an impasse is presented by the (SA), as one finds oneself in the puzzling position of maintaining three things which are seemingly mutually inconsistent: “*I don’t know that I’m not a BIV*”; “*If I don’t know that I’m not a BIV, then I don’t know that I have hands*”; and the negation of the (SA)’s conclusion: “*I know that I have hands*.”<sup>2</sup>

Of course, the skeptic will maintain that the (SA) is unequivocally sound and that it really is the case that we are completely ignorant of even the most basic Moorean facts, e.g., I have two hands.<sup>3</sup> However, if we side with the skeptic, we are quickly led into a most inclusive form of skepticism. Try telling the judge you can't sign the traffic ticket because you don't know that you have hands. The skeptic's position is not without force; but it is not altogether acceptable either.

A Moorean, or defender of common sense, will maintain that the skeptic's position is without force. He will attempt to stand the argument on its head by contrapositioning premise two thus:

1. I know that I have hands.
2. If I know that I have hands, then I know that I'm not a BIV. Hence,
3. I know that I'm not a BIV.

Taking this Moorean argument into consideration, hereafter referred to as the (MA), suppose we attempt to criticize the first premise of our Moorean interlocutor's argument. We might ask how our Moorean knows premise one, when it is possible that he is a BIV merely thinking "he" has hands? Our interlocutor might respond either that it's not possible that he is a BIV or that he simply knows—in a way that doesn't require further explication—that he has two hands. Taking the first horn of the dilemma—not that anyone would—would be tantamount to claiming that necessarily he isn't a BIV, which would, in effect, be tantamount to claiming that there is an inherent contradiction in maintaining that he is a BIV. If the second horn of the dilemma is maintained, then it seems a mere tautology is asserted: "I know that I have hands because I know that I have hands." However, offering an uninformative tautology, such as "*I know that I have hands because I know that I have hands,*" to solve the skeptical puzzle, seems to be an arbitrary solution at best. One begins to wonder why we are compelled to consider the skeptical puzzle at all, when we might just as easily wave our hands and go home. While the (MA) seems *prima facie* compelling, insofar as it affirms our most common beliefs, a solution with more explanatory force would be considerably more appealing.

Some philosophers deny the second premise of the (SA) by arguing that it is not the case that if I don't know that I'm not a BIV then I don't know that I have hands. These philosophers deny premise two of the (SA) by denying that knowledge is closed under known implication, i.e., they deny that if one both knows that *p* and that *p* implies *q*, one knows *q*. However, denying that knowledge is closed under known implication here seems incredibly *ad hoc*. The denial that

knowledge is closed under known implication seems useful only *vis-à-vis* solving skeptical puzzles, such as the one in question, and completely irrelevant in nearly every other situation. For example, in a beginning logic course, if an adept student knows that  $p$  implies  $q$ , and knows that  $p$ , surely he knows  $q$ . And yet, those who support the solution to the skeptical puzzle under present consideration will deny that an adept student knows  $q$  on the basis of knowing that  $p$  then  $q$  and that  $p$ . In short, the proposal to deny that knowledge is closed under known implication offers a solution to the skeptical puzzle, but only at the cost of generating a great deal of skepticism about our ability to reason deductively *vis-à-vis* propositions concerned with knowing.<sup>4</sup> We should try to do better.

Contextualists offer a solution different in kind from those offered heretofore. The Contextualist maintains that the propositions expressed by “I don’t know that I’m not a BIV”; “If I don’t know that I’m not a BIV, then I don’t know that I have hands”; and “I know that I have hands” are all true—albeit not simultaneously.

A semantic theory concerning the context-sensitivity of utterances plays a significant role in the Contextualist’s solution to the skeptical puzzle. The crucial point to bear in mind *vis-à-vis* a context-sensitive utterance is that the proposition expressed by the utterance derives its intelligibility, in part at least, from the context in which it occurs. Take, for example, the sentence “It is raining.” The sentence “It is raining” does not express any proposition *per se*. For the sentence to express a proposition, it needs to apply to a specific spatio-temporal location; for example, the indexical phrase “in London” could be supplied. Only when a spatio-temporal location in context is understood, tacitly or otherwise, can the sentence “It is raining” express a proposition, i.e., a statement that asserts or denies something. When “It is raining” is expressed by someone standing in London, *ceteris paribus*, it likely expresses the proposition “*It is raining in London.*” If “It is raining” is uttered while standing in Oxford, it likely expresses the proposition “*It is raining in Oxford.*” The moral to be gleaned is simply that some sentence-tokens, call them context-sensitive sentences, can express different propositions depending on the context in which they are uttered.<sup>5</sup>

Some epistemologists maintain that knowledge ascriptions are context-sensitive. The truth value of knowledge attributions depends both on the situation of the person to whom knowledge is being attributed and on the circumstances surrounding the person attributing knowledge. The context upon which knowledge ascriptions are dependent is usually said to be part and parcel of the standards implied in the conversation in which the ascribers of knowledge have been engaged.

Few will doubt that in a great many cases conversational context determines the scope of concern and to a commensurate degree the scope of determination for the truth value of a given proposition. For illustration, suppose I answer correctly a question concerning nineteenth-century history in a game of *Trivial Pursuit*. My competitors, recognizing that I know the answer, allow me to advance my game piece accordingly. Were I to declare, however, that I know the content of this answer among a group of scholars of nineteenth-century history, who require that an individual be acquainted, as I am not, with all the primary, secondary, and otherwise relevant literature on the subject, to be qualified in asserting that I know the answer, I would be making a false declaration.<sup>6</sup> The standards in the latter conversation have, as it were, been ratcheted up by the change in context, to the extent that my declaration of knowledge *vis-à-vis* the content of my *Trivial Pursuit* answer no longer makes the grade. A change in context, as the above example illustrates<sup>7</sup> can issue in more stringent standards of knowing than those normally insisted upon.

The scenario given above is similar to that employed by Contextualists in their solution to the skeptical puzzle. Contextualists maintain the following: “*I know that I have hands*” is true in normal discourse, i.e., discourse in which the BIV hypothesis is not being entertained. Furthermore, I can go about my daily business knowing fully all my Moorean beliefs until I begin to entertain the BIV hypothesis. Once one appeals to the BIV hypothesis, however, “*I know that I have hands*” becomes false. When appealing to the BIV hypothesis, *ipso facto*, the hypothesis increases the standards and restrictions for attributing knowledge to the extent that the conclusion “*I don’t know that I have hands*” really does follow.

So how does this solve the skeptical puzzle?—the puzzle which, one will recall, portends that we are compelled to maintain three things as true which are seemingly mutually inconsistent. The Contextualist resolves the puzzle by recognizing “*I know that I have hands*” expresses a true proposition, as the Moorean suspected, except in contexts in which the standards and restrictions for attributing knowledge are more stringent due to one’s entertaining the BIV hypothesis. Hence, the skeptic is, moreover, correct in maintaining that the (SA) is sound. And if the argument is sound, and is recognized as such, then the conclusion of the (SA), i.e., “*I don’t know that I have hands*,” is true and inconsistency with regard to the skeptical puzzle is thereby averted.

The (MA), however, isn’t sound, since its mention of the BIV hypothesis makes the standards for being correct too stringent. Nonetheless, basic Moorean beliefs, such as “*I know that I have hands*,” are preserved by the Contextualist’s solution, since they are true in most contexts—contexts, no less, which immensely outnumber skeptical contexts. In short, by

recognizing that knowledge ascriptions are context-sensitive, the Contextualist resolves the puzzle by giving the skeptic his due while simultaneously keeping the common sense beliefs upon which we rely in our daily lives sufficiently intact.

Of course, incumbent on the Contextualist is the need to explain why previously we were mistaken in thinking that the triad is a paradox. The skeptical puzzle presents an air of paradox only when the proper context in which one finds oneself is not recognized. The triad is not mutually inconsistent once it is seen that the proposition expressed by “I know that I have hands” is in fact true, save contexts in which the BIV hypothesis is entertained. Naturally, the puzzle presents an apparent paradox for any individual who doesn’t recognize that the BIV hypothesis has altered the context so as to make the standards for knowing more stringent; in a condition such as this an individual will think that the token “I know that I have hands” expresses one proposition which is paradoxically both true and false. But “I know that I have hands,” according to the Contextualist’s analysis, can express one of two propositions, i.e., “*I know that I have hands*” and “*I know that I have hands while entertaining the BIV hypothesis.*”<sup>8</sup> The former according to the Contextualist is true, the latter false. Hence, the puzzle is generated by a lack of recognition concerning the change in context issued in by the BIV hypothesis.

Before turning to examine Stephen Schiffer’s criticism of the Contextualist’s solution, I would like to list and summarize some of the advantages which the Contextualist’s solution has over other “solutions.”<sup>9</sup> Unlike the skeptic’s proposal, the Contextualist’s solution leaves our common sense beliefs largely intact—keeping our common sense beliefs intact was, after all, the virtue of the Moorean approach. But the Moorean approach in its reliance on an uninformative tautology seems, as we saw, to be merely evincing the declaration “I know that I’m not a BIV.” In contrast, the Contextualist’s approach resolves the puzzle and also provides an etiology of why we are compelled to consider the puzzle *ab initio*. Most importantly, the Contextualist’s solution provides an explanation of why we have conflicting intuitions *vis-à-vis* the conclusion of the (SA): when we fail to recognize the more stringent standards issued in by the BIV hypothesis, we mistakenly think that “I know that I have hands” must refer to one proposition rather than two. As a result, given both the force of the (SA) as well as our common sense, pre-analytic, intuitions, we think “*I know that I have hands*” is both true and false. Furthermore, the Contextualist’s solution, in both explaining and resolving the puzzle, manages to preserve our general notions regarding the closing of knowledge under known implication.

### Schiffer's Challenge to Contextualism

The essence of Schiffer's criticism of the Contextualist's solution is that the semantic theory employed by the Contextualist is incompatible with the explanation of why the skeptical puzzle arises. He writes:

Both the semantics and the error theory are needed for the Contextualist's response to the [SA].<sup>10</sup> The semantics is needed to locate the false proposition in the set of mutually inconsistent propositions that we get by combining [SA]'s premises with the denial of its conclusion, and the error theory is needed to explain why the sentence expressing the false proposition—the sentence 'I know that I have hands'—deceptively appears to be stating a true proposition. *The trouble is that the semantics is refuted by the error theory . . . .* It's as though a fluent, sane, and alert, speaker, who knows where she is, were actually to assert the proposition that it's raining in London when she mistakenly thinks that it's raining in Oxford.<sup>11</sup>

Schiffer seems to be suggesting that speakers do not confound the propositions they are uttering in one context with propositions they would be uttering in other contexts. And, so the argument runs, if speakers do not make such an error, with regard to context-sensitive utterances, then they do not err in the way the Contextualist maintains—i.e., they wouldn't, once introduced to the BIV hypothesis, fail to recognize that the proposition being expressed is "*I know that I have hands while entertaining the BIV hypothesis.*" For the sake of simplicity, we can think of the argument as taking the form of a *reductio ad absurdum*:

1. Suppose the Contextualist's response to the skeptical argument is correct.
2. Both the semantic theory, i.e., that knowledge claims are context-sensitive, and the error theory, i.e., that people uttering knowledge sentences systematically confound the propositions their utterances express with propositions they would express by uttering these sentences in other contexts, are correct (from 1).

By severance,

3. Knowledge claims are context-sensitive (2).
4. People uttering knowledge sentences "systematically confound the propositions their utterances express with propositions they would express by uttering these sentences in other contexts"(2).

However,

5. With regard to context-sensitive claims, speakers [do not] confound the propositions their utterances express with propositions they would express by uttering these sentences in other contexts.

Hence,

6. With regard to knowledge claims, speakers do not confound the propositions their utterances express with propositions they would express by uttering these sentences in other contexts (3,5).

So, by conjunction,

7. “People uttering knowledge sentences systematically confound the propositions their utterances express with propositions they would express by uttering these sentences in other contexts” and it’s not the case that “people uttering knowledge sentences systematically confound the propositions their utterances express with propositions they would express by uttering these sentences in other contexts” (4,6).

Whence it follows:

8. The Contextualist’s response to the skeptical puzzle is false.

### **Schiffer, Contextualism, and Confusability**

I want to begin my criticism of Schiffer’s argument by extracting the following subargument with which to work:

3. Knowledge claims are context-sensitive (2).

5. With regard to context-sensitive claims, “speakers . . . [do not] . . . confound the propositions their utterances express with propositions they would express by uttering these sentences in other contexts.”

6. With regard to knowledge claims, speakers do not confound the propositions their utterances express with propositions they would express by uttering these sentences in other contexts (3,5).

Now, recall that Schiffer’s formulation of the error theory runs as follows:

“[The error theory is] the claim that people uttering certain knowledge sentences in certain contexts systematically confound the propositions their utterances express with the propositions they would express by uttering those sentences in other contexts.”

For my part, it is not clear where Schiffer locates the error in the error theory. However, the direct object of “confound,” in his formulation, is “the propositions.” Hence, with respect to one plausible interpretation of Schiffer’s formulation, the error in the error theory occurs not with regard to the “certain context” in which a speaker thinks he is, rather, it is the proposition which the speaker thinks he is expressing which is *apropos* for a context other than the one in which he thinks he is.<sup>12</sup> For example, to borrow Schiffer’s language, it is as if a “fluent, sane, and alert, speaker”<sup>13</sup> who, having surveyed his circumstance, thinks that it is raining in London, and intending to express that it is raining in London, expresses that it is raining in Oxford—all the while conscious of the different referents (or mere difference) of “Oxford” and “London.” Such an error theory as this, admittedly, doesn’t seem in the least tenable. Is the Contextualist committed to this error theory?

Would it not be a great deal easier to suggest that a speaker or thinker, supposing that the skeptical puzzle is not merely a linguistic phenomenon, confuses the context he is in rather than the proposition he is expressing?<sup>14</sup> The former quite plausibly allows for a speaker to be mistaken and still know what he is saying; the latter is quite counter-intuitive insofar as it does not.

Schiffer does not offer an argument denying that the error can occur over context. So there is no apparent reason why it cannot be maintained that what is being confused is not the proposition expressed by the utterance but, rather, the context of the utterance. For example, the speaker might not know that he is presently in Oxford – as a native of London he has momentarily forgotten – and as a result he mistakenly expresses that it is raining in London. To those who maintain that speakers do not confuse the context of their utterances – maintaining, in effect, that our speaker would not forget – here we might ask what the intended extension of the term “speakers” is. If the scope is to include every speaker, then immediate counterexamples to this premise spring to mind, e.g., I suppose there are a number of people suffering from mental illness who do not even know where they are when they make an utterance. Perhaps the scope could be limited, as in fact Professor Schiffer suggests, to the “fluent, sane, and alert.”<sup>15</sup>

Let us reconstruct the subargument in order to see if an adapted version of Professor Schiffer’s argument presents an impasse for the Contextualist.

3'. Knowledge claims are context-sensitive (2).

5'. With regard to context-sensitive claims, fluent, sane, and alert speakers [do not] confound the contexts in which their utterances are made.

6'. With regard to knowledge claims, fluent, sane, and alert speakers do not confound the contexts in which their utterances are made (3',5').

This argument, if it were sound, could, I think, undermine the Contextualist's solution to the skeptical puzzle. However, the terms "fluent", "sane," and "alert" are sufficiently vague in themselves and Professor Schiffer does not specify precisely what he means. And, unless Schiffer means to suggest that a speaker having the properties to which these terms refer is infallible, 5' is false. On occasion, speakers who are fluent, sane, and alert mistake their surroundings, circumstance, etc., and express a proposition which is *apropos* for the context in which they *think* they are, but which, unfortunately, is not *apropos* for the context in which they *are* in fact. For example, for a moment I think I can make a declaration concerning my knowledge regarding a point in nineteenth-century history because I have forgotten that I am dealing with scholars of nineteenth century-history who require stricter criteria than my own. Subsequently, I learn differently. Here, likely, one will object that I was not alert when I made my declaration—I should have known with whom I was dealing. But if by "alert" is meant "*not currently making a mistake*," then the question is completely begged in 5', which, in effect, could be rendered as follows: 5''. With regard to context-sensitive claims, fluent, sane, speakers, who do not make mistakes with regard to their context [do not] confound the contexts in which their utterances are made.

But 5'' is clearly circular and therefore not a viable option. Since the reconstructed subargument above is clearly defective, it is difficult to see how any reconstruction of Professor Schiffer's argument can establish the Contextualist's solution as implausible.

So how does the contextual confusion described in the *Trivial Pursuit* example compare in connection with the BIV hypothesis? I submit that some contexts are less familiar to us than others. The extent to which we use our hands within the context of our daily lives is, for those fortunate enough to have hands, enormous. Accordingly, we have an unquestioned belief in the existence of our hands almost every time we put them to use; and the number of times we put our hands to use is surely immense. In contrast, we don't consider the BIV hypothesis very often. (Even for philosophers the number of times hands are employed greatly exceeds those occasions in which appeal to the BIV hypothesis is made. Consider the amount of administrative work you did last week instead of epistemology.) And, what is more, an increase in consideration *vis-à-vis* the BIV hypothesis can, as is consistent with the Contextualist's account, result in an increase in

appreciation of its strength. Hence, it does not seem implausible that when the BIV context is initially issued in, that we are quick to judge mistakenly “I know that I have hands” as “*I know that I have hands while entertaining the BIV hypothesis,*” since it is the common sense context rather than the BIV hypothesis with which we are overwhelmingly more familiar. Through analysis, however, the bias which accompanies familiarity can be overcome. This, I submit, is the nature of the Contextualist’s solution to the skeptical puzzle. The idea that we are sometimes loath to accept the conclusion of the (SA), which we recognize to be both soundly arrived at and yet utterly unfamiliar to the intuitions we most frequently employ, is not, I submit, overly controversial.

In summary, for Professor Schiffer’s criticism of the Contextualist’s solution to have force, we must agree that it is not plausible that speakers or thinkers mistake the context in which they think and speak. But it is not implausible that we *prima facie* fail to recognize the full extent to which the standards issued in by the BIV hypothesis apply, and, subsequently, recognize the full extent to which the standards apply, once the Contextualist’s solution is understood.<sup>16</sup>

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**Notes**

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<sup>1</sup>Stephen Schiffer, "Contextualist Solutions to Scepticism," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 96 (1996): 318.

<sup>2</sup>This way of formulating the skeptical puzzle is in keeping with Schiffer's treatment. It is also in keeping with Keith DeRose's formulation in 'Solving the Skeptical Problem,' *Philosophical Review* 104 (1995): 1-51.

<sup>3</sup>By 'Moorean' I simply mean of or pertaining to common sense, as G.E. Moore was the great defender of common sense in our era. C.f. his "Defense of Common Sense," *Contemporary Analytic and Linguistic Philosophies*, ed. E.D. Klemke (New York: Prometheus, 1983) 1-51.

<sup>4</sup> For a decisive rejection of the denial that knowledge is closed under known implication cf. Keith DeRose's "Solving the Skeptical Problem." *The Philosophical Review* 104 (1995): 27-29.

<sup>5</sup>My discussion and understanding of context-sensitivity is based in large part on John Perry's "Thought Without Representation," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 60 (1986): 137-51.

<sup>6</sup>I have here borrowed and adapted an illustration which I particularly like from Christopher Hookway's "Questions of Context," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 96 (1996): 1-16.

<sup>7</sup> For this example, I am indebted to Christopher Hookway.

<sup>8</sup> 'While entertaining the BIV hypothesis' could be replaced with or should be seen in this paper as synonymous with 'while more stringent standards are at work in virtue of the BIV hypothesis being appealed to.'

<sup>9</sup>My intent *vis-à-vis* the first section of this paper is mainly exegetical. My aim in this section is limited to explaining the Contextualist's solution and its appeal, with the overall purpose of handling specifically Stephen Schiffer's criticism of the solution. For a straightforward and systematic defense of Contextualism see Stephen Rieber's "Skepticism and Contrastive Explanation," *Nous* 32 (1998): 189-204, as well as DeRose's "Solving the Skeptical Puzzle," *Ibid.*

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<sup>10</sup>*Sic.* Schiffer seems here to equate the [SA] with the paradox where I have heretofore made a distinction. His acknowledgment of the distinction is apparent in the lines that follow.

<sup>11</sup> My italics.

<sup>12</sup>The reader will notice that the term ‘think’ is found in my description of Schiffer’s description of the error theory but not in Schiffer’s. Perhaps Schiffer would find this objectionable. But I find no reason in his criticism of the Contextualist’s solution of the skeptical puzzle to think this the case. And the fact that there is an error occurring at all seems to presuppose that there is thinking, albeit incorrect thinking, going on.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 326.

<sup>14</sup>Heretofore, I have assumed that the skeptical puzzle is not merely a linguistic phenomenon. I am not sure whether this is an assumption Professor Schiffer shares. At any rate, a semantic theory which maintained that the skeptical puzzle is merely a linguistic phenomenon would not be the only semantic theory available to the Contextualist.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 326.

<sup>16</sup> After reading this paper the reader might wonder whether he knows that he has hands. The answer, of course, is no. For appeal has been made throughout to the “BIV Hypothesis.” However, the reader can, I think, acknowledge that in the nearest possible world, *ceteris paribus*, where the hypothesis is not on his mind, he knows that he has hands.

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## On Losing a Debate to a Creation Scientist

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### Introduction

*Recently I volunteered to join a sociologist colleague in debating a pair of evangelical Christian ministers on the topic of creation science versus evolutionary theory on the campus of my university. The opposing side was led by a professor and pastor at an area Baptist College named Kent Hovind, who does this for a living; he markets his materials through major Christian outlets, appears regularly on televangelist stations, and maintains a well-trafficked website. Three-hundred fifty people attended the debate, most from area churches, and they were not an audience receptive to intellectual critiques of creationism. Our main points—the compatibility of modern evolutionary theory with some versions of theism, the absolute incompatibility of Genesis I with modern evolutionary theory, the latter’s universal acceptance among experts and its unmatched degree of confirmation across a broad range of disciplines—were no match for Hovind’s multimedia stream of cartoon Darwins, dire biblical quotations, and images of Hitler. From our perspective, their presentation was a laughable pastiche of the same old sophisms: the geological column is a hoax, speciation events have never been observed, vestigial organs are contradictory, and so on. To anyone versed in this debate, this defense of creationism would have appeared as anything but persuasive, and yet it effectively elicited the desired result from the audience. The local media loved the story, and an edited and editorialized videocassette version is now making the rounds of televangelist stations.*

The result of a public debate between a pair of intellectuals from a university and a well-known pastor in a very religious community is massively over-determined. That much is obvious. What is less clear, however, are the reasons for the outcome. What social and psychological factors are implicated in the apparently vast gulf separating “us” from “them,” the committed religious believers of the audience? How can we make sense of their distorted assessment of the evidence, evidence which the scientific and educational and religious communities at large see as unassailable? In particular, what philosophical and logical categories and tools are useful in exploring this ideological fracture? I would like to examine the epistemic or doxastic position of the audience members from as neutral a point of view as possible, in order to better understand both what is being expected, by us, of them as believers and information-processors and their response to this expectation. Since that response illustrates one dimension of the sudden and global resurgence of religion in an age of increasing secularization, a phenomenon which has surprised social scientists, this perennial topic deserves study.

The lack of understanding which I brought to the debate is remarkable when one considers the broad appeal of at least parts of the opposing side's point of view. Hovind represents an extremist position in a worldview that is so foreign, mysterious, and even alien to me, that I am put in mind of Garry Wills' comment regarding the religious right in the U.S., that "it seems careless for scholars to keep misplacing such a large body of people."<sup>1</sup>

How can we best redress this carelessness? Recent epistemology has recognized that context matters;<sup>2</sup> that thinking, learning, and belief revision do not occur in isolated, static, fixed situations. "The cat is on the mat" epistemology has given some way to more realistic settings in which to test theories of justification and warrant. Although much of this "contextualist turn" has been used as a response to scepticism, I think it is crucial for us to locate properly the judgments of our audience. In light of this, I will proceed by attempting to isolate the context in which the audience rejected our approach. After discussing the broader social context in the next section, I will narrow down the axiological (or attitudinal) context and discuss the epistemic values the audience members have (or failed to have) which are germane to our issue. Next, I deal with some of the complex logic of the decision procedure faced by some Christians, and finally I will confront what I consider the most fundamental point of dislocation or fracture in our respective assessments of the theories of origins. I locate this fracture in a "phenomenological context" since it revolves around the subject's appropriation of selected aspects of perceived reality. This layered, gradual approach to our subject is demanded by the fact that the creationist phenomenon is part and parcel of a mass movement (so psychological categories may fail to characterize fully its every dimension); also, in so far as they are fundamentalist Christians, creationists exhibit a particular way of thinking (which may escape a purely sociological or historical description).

### **The Social Context**

I am trying to understand what happened that day charitably, for to dismiss the audience reaction as blindness or ignorance is too simplistic—and too radical. In a well-regarded 1991 nation-wide survey, only 9 percent of respondents agreed that "man evolved without God" while 47 percent held that "God created man in his present form at one time within the last 10,000 years."<sup>3</sup> Close to one-third of Americans believe that "the bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word."<sup>4</sup> It is hard to believe that each person who is disposed to accept the Genesis myth as the starting point in a scientific theory of the origins and diversity of life is unaware of the outlines of modern evolutionary theory or is intellectually blocked from weighing them both. As we will see, intellectual barriers aren't the only barriers we need to recognize here.

The American people's religiosity is well documented. The current social movement

roughly identified as “fundamentalism” must be understood in the context of the great movements of religious “awakening” in the United States. Their attitude toward science, equally relevant here, is similarly singular, and will be discussed in our final section. A. N. Wilson, however, after surveying the dynamic of faith and doubt in the Victorian age, concluded that “America’s Protestantism is even stronger than its dedication to the Enlightenment.”<sup>5</sup>

A caveat is in order here: although I will characterize the audience of the debate as fundamentalist, I am using the word in a loose sense.<sup>6</sup> Many among the audience, I trust, would disavow some parts of that view’s creed. (And of course many fundamentalists don’t push the inerrancy of scripture to the point that they are creationists.<sup>7</sup>) The difference this disavowal makes is important in one sense and negligible in another. It is important in that, from the point of view of this essay, “fundamentalism” is a pejorative category, connoting dogmatic and closed-minded thinking strategies. “Scientific Creationist” cannot be considered such, lest I am to be accused of question begging. That is, I am trying to accommodate the idea that being a person of faith or having firmly held religious beliefs does not in and of itself bar one from properly assessing evidence for and against a modern scientific theory. Religious beliefs and attitudes are regarded of late as signs of mental health and are considered to be reliable coping strategies by many clinical psychologists.<sup>8</sup> However, I am attempting to isolate the fulcrum at which such beliefs deviate from the norm. In any case, the category of “fundamentalist” is vague and it is safe to assume there to be a continuum between this and that of merely “committed religious believer.” I should add that the audience’s loud approval of those aspects of Hovind’s talk directed against “secular humanism” leads me to believe that many would consider themselves “fundamentalist.”

Hovind’s creationist message certainly exhibits the fundamentalist worldview, as is evident from a quick look at a statement of the “Tenets of Biblical Creationism” supplied by Institute for Creation Research:

The Creator of the universe is a triune God-Father, Son, and Holy Spirit . . . .

The Bible . . . is the divinely-inspired revelation of the Creator to man. Its unique, plenary, verbal inspiration guarantees that these writings, as originally and miraculously given, are infallible and completely authoritative on all matters with which they deal, free from error of any sort, scientific and historical as well as moral and theological.

All things in the universe were created and made by God in the six literal days of the creation week described in Genesis 1:1-2:3, and confirmed in Exodus 20:8-11. The creation record is factual, historical, and perspicuous; thus all

theories of origins or development which involve evolution in any form are false .

. . .

The first human beings, Adam and Eve, were specially created by God, and all other men and women are their descendants . . . .

The Biblical record of primeval earth history in Genesis I-II is fully historical and perspicuous, including the creation and fall of man, the curse on the creation and its subjection to the bondage of decay, the promised Redeemer, the worldwide cataclysmic deluge in the days of Noah, the post-diluvian renewal of man's commission to subdue the earth . . . .<sup>9</sup>

Hovind's presentation certainly assumed these tenets. He explained that Satan was behind education in evolution, which in turn is responsible for what the ICR calls the "evil fruits" of evolution: atheism, humanism, materialism, pantheism, communism, nazism, racism and slavery, as well as abortion, homosexuality, euthanasia, promiscuity, pornography and the drug culture.<sup>10</sup>

Pensacola is at the epicenter of extremist religion in the U.S. and hence is *the* salient social vector impinging on the debate. We think of the fundamentalist teachings and following of the religious revival of Southern Baptists and Pentecostals and the siege mentality of an oppressed religious minority, one whose values, whose very autonomy and sense of self, is seen to be at stake here. Anthropologists<sup>11</sup> have described the religious fundamentalists' self-image as one of embattled guardians of right conduct opposing the moral anarchy they see everywhere around them. Sociologists and cultural critics<sup>12</sup> observe the dramatic surge in "prosperity-gospel" groups, "occult economies" and millennial movements happening across the globe. Psychologists characterize fundamentalists in terms of engaging a self-defense or self-regulatory mechanism whereby they maintain a sense of stability and order in an otherwise stressful world.<sup>13</sup> One also thinks of the general current of anti-intellectualism and resentment towards the academe in the deep South these days. Hovind crystallized some of these fears by intoning the fact—and it probably is a fact—that: "many Christians go to universities and slowly begin to disbelieve the Bible."<sup>14</sup>

I can't speak adequately to these psycho-social forces; hence I will focus mainly on the logical and epistemological circumstances of those fundamentalists in attendance that day. Most of my contribution to the debate consisted in a sustained appeal to the critical thinking and the intellectual responsibilities of the audience. Hence I characterized the ideal non-expert observer as one who assesses the evidence and arguments put before them in a skeptical manner while being disposed to offer reasoned supports for his or her own beliefs. (Hovind pointed to what he called a "subtle connotation" in my approach and paraphrased it as: "like, if you believe that [i.e. Genesis I], you are dumb, scientists know . . . they know better.") I charted, perhaps in too

arched a fashion, the parallels between the virtues of highly confirmed scientific theories (simplicity, productivity, etc.) and the intellectual virtues (of self-scrutiny and the love of inquiry). In this essay, I further explain my line of argumentation during the debate to facilitate an understanding of the audience's reaction to it.

In my first three-minute section, I ran through some of the unreliable grounds on which the audience members themselves might accept evolutionary theory. First, that it is demonstrably true or "provable": secondly, that it is empirically adequate; thirdly, that it was simpler than the relevant alternatives; and last, it is important to note the testimony of authoritative sources in the field. To these I provided replies on behalf of the skeptic, in order to (logically speaking) accentuate the differences between the professional's assessment of the theory and the layperson's and to (rhetorically) appear to be fair-dealing. So I argued that a theory such as this was not amenable to "proof"; that other theories can be empirically adequate (including vacuous ones) and that this one may not yet be; that it is, in fact, much more complex than the one proffered by the Scientific Creationists; and, that an appeal to authority in this specific matter is likely to leave things as they stand. In subsequent sections, I offered what I took to be more salient grounds for the audience to believe in evolutionary theory: that it is capable of becoming adequate and that a complex domain like biology will operate over explanatory principles and models that we will never see as simple.

I talked, in essence, of epistemological norms and standards. Why? As philosophers, we are trained to believe and have come to expect that epistemological prescriptions are categorical, and hence transcend whatever psycho-social contextual contingencies are in play. This explains the high-minded approach I adopted, but it doesn't justify it. In fact, it may not be justifiable. Let's explore the applicability of "our" rules of reasoning to this topic for these reasoners.

### **Epistemic Oughts and Religious Believers**

This part of the essay is a close look at the philosopher's appeal to the audience's "critical thinking faculties" and epistemic duties. For while I think such strategies constitute the main weapons at our disposal in encountering such fundamentalist thinking, I think that this appeal is flawed on several counts. First, it is unclear just what the demands and duties of even the best "critical thinkers" are. Furthermore, any such appeal ignores the real weight of the fundamentalists' prior commitments, doxastic and otherwise.

However, pre-theoretically speaking, many observers of the debate would side with the philosopher in his urging the audience to think critically. Each of us accepts this "burden of reason" (to borrow Rawls' term) as a precondition to any conversation on matters of substance. Going beyond this general prescription, however, what sort of epistemological normativity, what

notion of “the ethics of belief,” ought I have invoked that day? Any such appeal, it seems to me, will be heavily dependent on internalist assumptions regarding warrant, justification, or entitlement. By “internalist” here I mean any assumption that we have access to our doxastic practices and can modify them to some degree. These are the guiding assumptions of western epistemology, especially since Locke. Externalists think that as long as your beliefs (or belief-forming processes) are suitably linked to the facts, they are fully justified, regardless of your reflective awareness of the processes used to access the facts. So Alston’s defense of mysticism as a reliable belief-forming practice is one application of this sort of theory to our area (an heroic application by my lights).<sup>15</sup> Internalists hold that a proper grounding of one’s beliefs also requires a special first-person access to the justificatory status of one’s belief (or belief-forming process). So with the latter accounts, it isn’t sufficient that your belief that *p* counterfactually depends on *p*; one’s reflective knowledge of this relation is also necessary for justification. Must believers understand something of their epistemic condition with respect to the facts in order to know of them? I don’t have the space to go into this issue in depth, but for our purposes, externalist accounts can be put aside. After all, in a debate like this we are attempting to persuade the audience members to self-diagnose and correct their own cognitive practices and/or standards of warrantability, so our appeal is sure to have a heavy internalist emphasis.

Assuming enough has been said to allow us to focus on internalist accounts of justification, we can begin by looking at the deontic or duty-based versions of these. Many argue that each of us has a responsibility to actively seek evidence for our beliefs and to revise them in light of this inquiry. W. K. Clifford’s thesis that “It is wrong, always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything on insufficient evidence”<sup>16</sup> is perhaps the most influential of such views. But this is uselessly vague. Take Bill, and consider the belief that *p*, for any proposition *p*. Do we mean that Bill ought to bring all of the evidence he currently has *and* that he considers relevant to *p* to bear on *p* before he believes that *p*? Such a minimal requirement may not improve matters, since Bill presumably is doing this already. Or do we mean that he ought to bring all of the evidence available to him through various and increasingly burdensome means to bear on *p*? This asymptotic requirement may not help either. Besides its similarities with the Frame Problem in artificial intelligence, the principle of “ought implies can” has force here. This may simply be an unreasonable demand upon Bill. That is, imperatives of an epistemic or moral sort cannot be such that they require the impossible of us. For instance, I can’t say that one has a moral obligation to harm no living thing if it is physically impossible for you to live without doing so. Likewise, saying that Bill is compelled to seek out all the information germane to *p* is going too far. So perhaps a defensible admonition to the fundamentalists will lie somewhere on a range between these minimal to maximal criteria—e.g., Bill ought to bring all the evidence which

a reasonably informed thinker would to bear on *p* prior to believing *p*—but I wouldn't want to bet against any such criterion being viciously circular. In addition, there are obvious limitations in enforcing any such standards. For unlike moral conventions which are action-guiding and hence behaviorally verifiable, epistemic conventions are harder to discern from a third-person point of view. How could we assess Bill's probity or assure Bill that he has considered all of the evidence for and against *p*?

Even if we could devise a statement of our doxastic duties, any such epistemic responsibilities are easily defeasible. What if the only way to find sufficient evidence is through great personal cost? We are asking the fundamentalists in attendance that day to question the very set of beliefs which identify them as fundamentalists, with all of the turmoil that comes with that. Since for such a person to question the literal intent or inerrancy of the Bible is to risk what may be a major source of self-esteem, of solidarity, and status, duties of prudence might trump their epistemic duties here. Alternatively, what if this duty conflicts with other moral duties of ours, such as the ones we bear to family and to associations we value? Whether any sort of robust hierarchy of duties can even be formulated is an ongoing issue.<sup>17</sup> We have to conclude that epistemic oughts, including ones involving critical thinking, can not bear too much weight.<sup>18</sup>

Most will remain unimpressed by my partial defense of the religious fundamentalist to this point. After all, we are only requiring the fundamentalists to retain the ability to revise their beliefs in light of contrary evidence, and surely that is not an unreasonable expectation. This, I think, gets to the heart of the critical thinking dimension of this debate. We do understand the situation of one who is raised in and educated into a certain world-view and we do realize the strength that it takes to even begin to challenge one's formative and persistent beliefs, values, and "habits of the heart." Yet for all this, we do take people to task for not displaying a degree of flexibility, fallibilism, and humility before the facts.

This practice surely expresses a key intellectual virtue and is reflective of definitive aspects of the self and of what it means to be a person. When applied to our context, it assumes an implausible degree of doxastic voluntarism.<sup>19</sup> Doxastic voluntarism is the view that individual thinkers independently and freely adopt their beliefs and values about the world around them. Of course this principle has purchase in most epistemic settings, and its place in the liberal tradition attests to this. After all, why protect the freedom of thought if those thoughts are not freely adopted, but rather are coerced or indoctrinated; why tolerate people with views incompatible with our own if they do not control the views they have? Voluntarism has become platitudinous; to fail to think for yourself is to lose your humanity, to become robotic. If this notion is pushed too far, however, it becomes extremely individualistic and neglects the social forces operating upon us. I believe this individualism and voluntarism must be tempered by an acknowledgment

of the powerful bonds that *involuntary* commitments make upon us and the lasting influence this formative construction has upon our thinking and being. Central to all such bonds of association are those of religion. The very word, “religion,” shares a root with “ligature” and etymologically implies being held back or restrained—restrained, that is, from purely personal concerns and projects, so that one is relegated to a role in a larger purpose. To think of religious beliefs as voluntarily adopted and summarily shorn, therefore, is to misunderstand the very nature of that belief. Voluntarism and the cognitive autonomy of the individual are limited, and I simply find it implausible on its face to say to these fundamentalists: suspend your faith, accept an empiricist cast of mind, moral anarchy is a tolerable risk.

In the context of our debate, the unadorned appeal to critical thinking is also at fault for assuming what I call an isomorphism between everyday and loaded reasoning (or between existential and practical reasoning, or, if you’d prefer less pompous language, between thick and thin, or deep and shallow reasoning). Loaded (existential) reasoning is that which we are forced to engage in when the information with which we are working is complicated by our other (often incongruent) value and belief systems, our attitudes, commitments and expectations. Though it is hard to neatly demarcate this domain from the everyday, or to specify a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for its employment, we can safely say that loaded thinking operates over mental states which: (i) are highly associative or evocative, (ii) have a tendency to become “overvalued” (to be vividly and regularly considered) (iii) have an inordinate influence on behavior (with high moral content), and finally (iv) have a high degree of conviction and commitment.<sup>20</sup> Persinger sees elevated limbic activity, as in some forms of epilepsy, as co-indicating religiosity and even theorizes that the “profound, personal meaningfulness of god experiences are generated by electrical transients within the amygdaloid-hippocampal regions of the temporal lobes.”<sup>21</sup> His 1987 book summarizes his findings, which seem to remain largely uncorroborated. Jones compares the delusions of schizophrenics, the overvalued ideas of anorectics, and religious beliefs of churchgoers along seven distinct vectors and finds that, although each measures very differently along such vectors as “the extent to which imagination is used in the formation of the belief,”<sup>22</sup> some parallels are found among the latter two groups. I think it reasonable to suggest that we do not process and recall information in equivalent ways in contexts in which our deepest values and beliefs—that is, those beliefs of ours which order or prioritize so many others are at issue. In such a circumstance, the most salient, most expressive, and most revelatory aspects of ourselves are perceived to be at stake. If that is true, then we are perhaps being unfair in expecting to reach some shared level of reasonableness with those for whom a more loaded setting is unimaginable. As Hovind put it, “if evolution is true, you are nothing; you are nothing important” and “I wonder how many kids have doubted the Bible and

died and went to hell because of this lie.” All in all, to assume that average thinkers bring their critical thinking faculties to such a debate is preposterous.

### **The Logical Context**

Thus far I have argued that any epistemic duties we may have considered as pressing upon committed religious believers will have minimal motivational force. Adherence to a conventional epistemic standard requires both a rational and a motivational stability. The first of these is gained by the increased explanatory power or inferential economy it offers (the topic of this section), but the second, motivational appeal, is a necessary condition of the former and needs a pay-off in prudential or instrumental terms.<sup>23</sup> I believe that our discussion up to now points to the fact that we have little to offer the fundamentalists in this latter regard.

Fair enough, one may say, but even granting the problems with voluntarism, and of the criteria for a statement of our proper epistemic duties, we must hold on to some sort of notion of critical thinking for our considered judgments and reasonable doctrines to be, well, considered and reasonable! Since “being reasonable” is a normative expression, it entails that there be a (set of) criteria for its proper application to some claim, agent, or policy. Not just anything goes, right? The audience members are guilty of failing to reach this minimal standard of reasonableness. They lack, or have failed to engage, the proper and normal cognitive faculties, dispositions, or habits of thinking, a partial list of which would certainly include the ability to recognize contradictions and attempt to resolve them, to see the implications of our beliefs, to infer from some observed fact to its most plausible explanation, and so forth.

I think there are several problems with this accusation. I think it ignores the logical complexity of the cognitive situation facing the audience members, creation-scientist/fundamentalist or not. Secondly, it falsely locates the real decision they face to be at the level of theory choice or first-order content, when, in point of fact, they must choose between two symbolic representations of competing authoritative sources of knowledge. My first point here concerns (a) the broad range of cognitive sub-routines required of the sort of task we are assigning the audience members; (b) the under-determined status of key aspects of evolutionary theory and of science in general; and finally, (c) the relatively easy rhetorical and logical task of the opposing side in the debate. Let me take these in turn.

Three major points need emphasis when we focus in on the logical task confronting our Francis, our representative audience member: First, Francis is being asked to engage in abductive reasoning. Abductive reasoning is the name given to the variety of cognitive tasks involved in forming a hypothesis about (or inferring to a satisfactory explanation of) some phenomenon, in this case, the presence of nature’s incredibly diverse biota. Abductive reasoning is one of the

most complex and least understood modes of thinking. Let me explain why. To start, let me use one of Charles Peirce's examples: suppose you find a stone that looks like a petrified shell or crustacean in the interior of a country. You wonder how it got there. You create several potential explanations: this place was at one time under the sea; some geological process moved this stone to this place; someone put the rock here to fool me. You then settle on the best explanation, typically by generating (deductively) a set of further implications of these rivals and testing (inductively, analogically) their veracity. Each of these steps: from asking "why this, rather than that?" to creating hypotheses, to assessing these explanations utilizes a broad amalgam of cognitive abilities which are surely a stretch of the abilities of anyone of normal intelligence and hence are intimidating.<sup>24</sup>

Secondly, they are merely trying to poke holes in the orthodox position and that is a position—a philosophical position, Hovind correctly points out—based on an empirical theory. This empirical status brings with it inherent uncertainty. Whether Francis has read David Hume or not, he can hardly ignore the qualified, stochastic, and unfinished tenor to much of the scientists' views. After all, the conclusions and implications of evolutionary theory *are* to date unclear. Think of the confusion generated by Hovind's acceptance of "micro-evolution" (i.e., evolution within lineages, that is, denying speciation), his (technically correct) characterization of the geological column as an idealization, or his quotes (*sans* context) from Gould, Raup and other experts finding flaws with strictly Darwinian evolution. Not only are biologists divided over sub-parts of the theory, but philosophers and biologists of a philosophical persuasion debate vociferously over its real meaning. Some see huge implications for sociology and psychology (even philosophy) in Darwinism. Daniel Dennett calls evolution via natural selection "Darwin's Dangerous Idea" and describes it as a "universal acid"<sup>25</sup> with the potential to dissolve every one of our most cherished values and beliefs that it touches. (Dennett's treatment plays right into Hovind's hands when the latter says that "evolution is not science, but is metaphysics parading as science.") Others, including most practicing biologists, don't see such metaphysical and moral fallout from the guiding principle of their discipline. Such provisional conclusions are grist for Hovind's mill and raise doubts in the minds of those not sufficiently versed in the theoretical framework within which these divisions can be oriented.

Thirdly, Hovind *et alii* are arguing for a pluralist view of scientific inquiry and of science education, one which appears to be more tolerant, democratic, and politically benign than our "absolutist" and "exclusionary" one. This feature of their position appeals to many educators and administrators of both liberal and conservative-libertarian political persuasions. Can't this debate at a public university be seen as an illustration of the state's principle of neutrality on questions of value? Shouldn't we, when in the public sphere or in the public's schools, follow I. A. Snook

when he says:

There is a sense in which all bodies of knowledge, even an empirical science, are *sui generis*. Ultimately, the test must be how well they accord with human experience. When the educator has made available the alternative schemes, the final judgment must be left to the student.<sup>26</sup>

Shouldn't we strive to avoid dogmatism in our science curriculum, so that evolution can survive and thrive in the free marketplace of ideas? Eger argues that science educators themselves would be better prepared to teach evolution had they been exposed to its logical alternatives. On the other side of this old debate we have the views succinctly expressed by noted philosopher of education Harvey Siegel: "Like the belief that the earth is flat, creationism deserves *no* acknowledgment in the science classroom."<sup>27</sup>

One compromise position suggested by Siegel's terms—that creationism and Genesis are to be covered somehow in non-science classrooms such as world literature—is not acceptable to some extremist fundamentalists. Their idea of a compromise—that evolution not be presented as established fact, but as one theory among several—is complicating the curriculum unnecessarily and is, quibbling aside, false. (The central and offending parts of evolution through natural selection are established fact—that is what I meant when I said during the debate that "something like evolution by natural selection" is beyond doubt.) This debate is beyond our scope here, though I think it should be noted that it is in public school classrooms where this debate casts its real pall. I have met many teachers who are genuinely conflicted over how to handle this issue.

### **The Phenomenological Context**

I said that the charge that the audience members are guilty of failing to reach a minimal and agreed-upon standard of reasonableness is false for another, deeper reason. I have in mind the idea that we are misplacing the real logical task confronting the religious believer when he or she confronts science. Our debate is, of course, part of a much larger cultural debate. If this cultural debate was simply a matter of avoiding inconsistencies and ferreting out improbable implications, then it would have been settled by Clarence Darrow's thorough scouring of William Jennings Bryan in the Scopes trial.<sup>28</sup> But of course it isn't, and unfortunately it wasn't. The real decision procedure facing our audience on that day turned on an implicit measure of trust which the teams, like emissaries, brought from their respective profound and profane domains. Which sources of knowledge claims are trustworthy when it comes to such existential issues? With which side do I feel a degree of comfort such that I can hand over the authority to rule on questions regarding my origins, my spiritual makeup, and my destiny? This isn't rightly called a decision procedure at all; no amount of knowledge will decide this issue. Instead, it turns

on the confluence of two vectors: the respective cultural capital of science and religion and the individual cognizer's experiences and degree of familiarity with these domains. By cultural capital I mean a measure of the influence, power, and trust which the dominant groups of a society place in an institution. One's assessment of this will have an element of subjectivity, and will be partly a function of one's background acquaintance with the institution in question.

The symbolic or semiotic dimensions of the debate are key, I believe, to any full account of our failure on that day, for they complicate our topic in crucial ways. They are multifaceted and hard to specify but allow me to conclude with the following passing observations. First of all, science has simply long foregone the plenary authority that ministers, politicians, even newscasters and celebrities enjoy. It has failed to prevent obesity and cancer, environmental degradation and misery, and these failures outweigh its successes because scientism and a characteristically American zealous faith in the progress of science is shaken by even one let-down. Secondly, science has become associated with the large, impersonal, forces which strip us of any measure of self-control and autonomy. Science is the source of modernity and the unraveling of the mythic structures of past eras. I conceded to the audience that I was no biologist, yet I assumed the guise of the scientist and in doing so became the inventor of cold fusion and HIV, who wants to fluoridate your water supply, farm your ovaries, and make you eat margarine.<sup>29</sup>

Lastly, and most importantly, we must realize that Hovind is drawing upon, and effectively expressing, an attitude towards science which is not only culturally ingrained, but philosophically principled. There is an entire tradition within post-modernist philosophy and science studies which takes a decidedly ambivalent attitude towards "enlightenment science." This tradition runs from Vico and Herder to Heidegger and the Frankfurt School to Foucault. The central theme of all the multi-varied works of the latter is the false liberation provided us by the medical, legal, and political sciences. In his work, *The Order of Things*, Foucault writes:

We are inclined to believe that man has emancipated himself from himself since his discovery that he is not at the center of creation, nor in the middle of space, nor even, perhaps, the summit and culmination of life; but though man is no longer sovereign in the kingdom of the world, though he no longer reigns at the center of being, the human sciences are dangerous intermediaries.<sup>30</sup>

"Dangerous" because they de-personalize us (in "bio-politics") and overreach their charge, oftentimes cutting us off from alternative ways of seeing and being. As Heidegger puts this latter point, in his seminal "The Question Concerning Technology":

The threat to man does not come in the first instance from the potentially lethal machines and apparatus of technology. The actual threat has already affected man

in his essence. [Technology] threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth.<sup>31</sup>

In addition, Foucault does well to remind us that science and the sort of secular humanism which galls Hovind are not somehow removed from the ideological and cultural forces which help to solidify the barriers between alternative sources of human value. That is, we often claim for science an undisputed monopoly on objectivity, in methodological and axiological terms, and for humanism alone a commitment to free thought. However, as Foucault says, "At least since the seventeenth century, what is called humanism has always been obliged to lean on certain conceptions of man borrowed from religion, science, or politics."<sup>32</sup> So when we humanists "lean on" a Darwinian conception of man, and do so to the exclusion of all other conceptions, we do so with little more surety (to the outside observer's lights) than we previously had leaning on an Aristotelian, a Biblical, or a Marxist one.

Perhaps, I am suggesting, Hovind and the creationist foot-soldiers and leadership of this mass religious movement have learned the lesson that knowledge (read: enlightenment science) and power form an ineluctable unity and that this power, within modernity, can threaten terror on a massive scale as well as promise gadgetry on a ever-smaller one. Perhaps, may I also suggest, the uniquely American nature of the "creationist problem" is in part due to the unbalanced and unrealistic views we hold of science as a mere instrument for our enhanced pleasures; Europeans—both the "plebes" and the philosophers—have long seen the deleterious capabilities of unchecked science. Whereas, for Americans, science has won wars, for much of Europe, it has helped maintain them. US academicians and intellectuals have a role to play here.

In addition, the ability to assess information sources as authoritative in a domain—as trustworthy or not—is, as an aspect of critical thinking, complicated when the subject is dealing with a representation of the knowledge base, and not that knowledge itself. Anyone can appreciate the advances of science while receiving a CAT Scan, or undergoing surgery, or while sending an e-mail message half-way around the world for pennies. But few of us recognize these as the fruits of scientific research. What we do recognize as science, because it explicitly claims to be science—the Hubble Telescope or Mars Rover or Stephen Hawking himself—is often not obviously beneficial or useful. Finally, though the ability to evaluate information sources is for all intents and purposes identifiable with the ability to think critically itself, it is no better understood, and any appeal to it has to confront the paradox that reason ultimately discounts authority. One fact that is becoming better understood, however, is that our attitudes towards scientific authority range across a broad spectrum, that they wax and wane through the history of science and across disciplines, and that they are deeply influenced by external cultural forces—

political and economic forces particularly. Cold War science made promises it never could deliver, while your preacher's promise of a more comfortable death is either constantly validated or, at least, ever beyond the reach of invalidation.

### **Conclusion**

Given this, part of any possible solution to the impasse between the sides of the evolutionary science/creationist debate will have to occur in science education. It is not enough to say that science education fails to equip our neighbors with the required body of knowledge and/or critical thinking skills needed to assess these competing perspectives in evolutionary theory; rather, it is more germane to say that it doesn't intend to—it never was the aim of science education to train each of us to this degree of expertise. In fact, that would be exactly contrary to the ends of such an education.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, we should not be surprised to see a multitude of attitudes toward science, including the “distorted” ones we have discussed above. The authority of science will be increased when we stop assuming that the secularization of our culture is inevitable and instead reinvigorate our efforts at making sense of the underlying aims, methods and values of scientific inquiry.

A charitable reading of the fundamentalist's thinking about evolution theory is plausible and does illuminate their hostility towards its exponents. This conclusion would support a more tolerant, engaging relationship between religious fundamentalists and the secular camp, though, above all, it would encourage further research into their distinctive modes of thinking. Philosophers (and philosophical categories) have a role to play here, beyond where this small effort has left off.<sup>34</sup>

### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Gary Wills, *Under God: Religion and American Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990) 15.

<sup>2</sup> See S. Cohen, "Knowledge, Context, and Social Standards," *Synthese* 73 (1987): 3-26.

<sup>3</sup> S. L. Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief* (New York: Doubleday, 1994) 303 n. 13.

<sup>4</sup> M. Corbett and J. M. Corbett, *Religion and Politics in the U.S.* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999) 436.

<sup>5</sup> A. N. Wilson, *God's Funeral: A Biography of Faith and Doubt in Western Civilization* (New York: Ballantine, 2000) xii.

<sup>6</sup> "Fundamentalism" was coined in 1920 by Curtis Lee Laws, a Baptist periodical editor, to refer to a conservative movement among protestant theologians. They stated their opposition to modern biblical criticism and liberal theology in a series of tracts entitled "The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth." The central "fundamental of faith" was the infallibility of the Bible, while the remaining four--the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, Christ's ability to atone sin, and the Second Coming--were derivative. The term, of course, came to designate a broader social movement after the First World War, when this conservative group began exerting considerable political clout, eventually culminating in Jerry Falwell's close ties to Ronald Reagan.

<sup>7</sup> C. B. Strozier, *Apocalypse: On the Psychology of Fundamentalism in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994) 92.

<sup>8</sup> J. F. Schumaker, ed., *Religion and Mental Health* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> Institute for Creation Research, "Tenets of Biblical Creationism," Internet, <http://www.icr.org>.

<sup>10</sup> R. T. Pennock, *Tower of Babel: The Evidence Against the New Creationism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999) 315.

<sup>11</sup> C. Toumey, *God's Own Scientists* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> J. Comaroff and J.L. Comaroff, "Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming," *Public Culture* 12 (2000) 291-343.

<sup>13</sup> Mortimer Ostow, *The Need to Believe: The Psychology of Religion* (International Universities Press, 1969).

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<sup>14</sup> A partial transcript of the debate is available online at [www.uwf.edu/tprewitt/debateindex.htm](http://www.uwf.edu/tprewitt/debateindex.htm) while the video can be ordered from Dr. Hovind's web-site: [www.drdino.com](http://www.drdino.com).

<sup>15</sup> W. P. Alston, *Perceiving God* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991).

<sup>16</sup> W. K. Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief," in L.J. Pojman, ed., *The Theory of Knowledge*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> See R. J. Hall and C. R. Johnson, "The Epistemic Duty to Seek More Evidence," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 35 (1998): 198-218.

<sup>18</sup> Jack W. Meiland, "What Ought We to Believe? Or the Ethics of Belief Revisited," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 17 (1980): 22, contains an argument for an extreme version of the view stated here. He argues that "extra-factual" and "practical" considerations do and should "determine which factors should influence belief . . . and the selection of a particular belief from the alternative beliefs available."

<sup>19</sup> Here I am drawing upon themes developed in M. Sandel, *Democracy's Discontents* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1996).

<sup>20</sup> Some of this terminology is borrowed from the field of psychopathology. Such a strategy may appear uncharitable in the extreme--as one anonymous reviewer for this journal puts it, "Does this admission by the author betray what religionists would view as a *prejudice* against their world view, invoking the authority . . . of the social sciences to characterize fundamentalists as lunatics?"--but I think to ignore the element of abnormality in *some of* the thinking styles and strategies of *some of* the deeply religious is to go beyond charity to disingenuity.

<sup>21</sup> M. A. Persinger, "'I Would Kill in God's Name': Role of Sex, Weekly Church Attendance, Report of Religious Experience, and Limbic Liability," *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 85 (1997): 128.

<sup>22</sup> E. Jones, "The Phenomenology of Abnormal Belief: A Philosophical and Psychiatric Inquiry," *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* 6 (1999): 1-16.

<sup>23</sup> D. Gauthier, *Morals by Agreement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986) analyzes moral conventions in these terms.

<sup>24</sup> J. Woods, "Peirce's Abductive Enthusiasms," *ProtoSociology* 13 (1999): 43-76.

<sup>25</sup> D. C. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

<sup>26</sup> I. A. Snook, *Indoctrination and Education* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972) 83.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in M. Eger, "Dissonance in the Theory and Practice of Rationality: Teaching Evolution and Teaching Morals," in M. R. Matthews, ed., *History, Philosophy, and Science Teaching: Selected Readings* (Toronto: Teachers College Press, 1991) 68.

<sup>28</sup> A transcript of which is available online at <http://www.borndigital.com/scopes.htm>.

<sup>29</sup> C. Toumey, *Conjuring Science: Scientific Symbols and Cultural Meanings in American Life* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1996).

<sup>30</sup> M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Random House, 1973) 348.

<sup>31</sup> M. Heidegger, *The Question of Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977) 28.

<sup>32</sup> M. Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984) 44.

<sup>33</sup> J. Ziman, *Teaching and Learning About Science and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980).

<sup>34</sup> I would like to thank Sally Ferguson, respective audiences at the Florida and Alabama Philosophical Societies' annual meetings for 2000, and (most especially) the anonymous reviewers of this journal for helpful comments on earlier versions of this.

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## Stem Cell Research and Respect for Life

*Ronnie Z. Hawkins, University of Central Florida, Orlando*

Research with human embryonic stem cells is so promising for biomedicine that the journal *Science* hailed recent work as the "Breakthrough of the Year" for 1999.<sup>1</sup> Embryonic stem (ES) cells are undifferentiated cells that can give rise to all three germ layers--ectoderm, mesoderm, and endoderm--which subsequently differentiate into all the tissues of the body. If the proper technology can be developed--and some of the most difficult problems seem to have been overcome already--it may become possible to repair or replace damaged heart muscle, ineffective pancreatic islets, or injured spinal cord and brain cells, among other bodily tissues, with a potential for improving the lives of over 100 million people in this country alone.<sup>2</sup> But the two primary methods of obtaining undifferentiated human cells to date, deriving them from "leftover" embryos created for *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) and harvesting primordial germ cells from aborted fetuses,<sup>3</sup> are troubling to many people on religious or ethical grounds. Recently released NIH guidelines, which allow federal funding of stem cell research, subject to certain conditions, only on stem cells that have already been obtained from private sources, have already been criticized by President George W. Bush and will likely be challenged in Congress and in the courts. Representative Jay Dickey (R-AR), for example, has charged that "the guidelines show obvious disregard of the moral conscience and the laws of our nation,"<sup>4</sup> and he vows to fight against them.

When human embryonic stem cells are derived from an embryo left over from IVF, the fertilized ovum is allowed to develop for about 5 days, up to the blastocyst stage, comprising around 140 cells. Some of the cells produced, if permitted to continue development inside the womb, would form the placenta, while others, the cells of the "inner cell mass," would form the embryo. If separated, isolated and then maintained under all the right conditions (which would entail reuniting them *in vitro* with cells able to form placental tissue and then reinserting the combination into a woman who would carry the embryo through gestation), each of these cells would, theoretically at least, have the potential to form a new human being. It works in the mouse, at any rate.<sup>5</sup> Mouse embryonic stem cells (as well as ES cells from other animals) have been produced and maintained in cell culture for some years now, and there have been few ethical concerns raised about them. But a petri dish containing embryonic stem cells from a mouse and one containing cultured human embryonic stem cells (several human ES cell lines are now in existence) will look identical. One would have to distinguish them by testing their DNA--which would still be found to differ by only a small percentage of the total, with virtually every

human gene having been found to have a homologous gene in the mouse genome.<sup>6</sup> Why the enormous difference in the way the two culture plates should be regarded, according to some people, supposing they could be distinguished? And why is it that the one offering the most potential benefits to human beings (since mouse tissues and organs would, given our present state of technology, be rapidly rejected by human patients) is the one that they think should be outlawed? I have tried to disentangle a few of the strands of thought behind the no-human-ES-cell-research position, and then to consider what someone with a consistently Darwinian understanding of biology and at the same time a thoroughgoing respect for life might say in reply, in an effort to redraw the moral high ground.

### **Potentiality**

One strand in the thinking of those opposed to embryonic stem cell research, as well as all forms of abortion subsequent to the union of the sperm with the egg, surely the one that gets the most air time, is the issue of interfering with the development of something that has the potential to become, under all the right conditions, a full-fledged human being. If the status of a rights-bearing "person" is attained at conception, the thinking goes, no one should be permitted to interfere with that entity's right to life, not even the woman in whose womb it must develop for nine long months. The case seems fairly simple and straightforward to those intent on prohibiting abortion, or at least using it as a litmus test for "true believers" at this time in human history (since it has been pointed out that this prohibition did not actually become added to the content of what some accept as "Christian doctrine" until 1879<sup>7</sup>). The issue becomes a little more complicated, however, with our recent advances in technology. When couples seek IVF therapy for infertility, since the procedure is difficult to undergo and technically demanding, with a substantial failure rate for single fertilized eggs, women are often given fertility drugs to allow collection of multiple eggs. Reinsertion of more than one embryo is performed in hopes that at least one will implant and develop to term. Is the woman then obligated to gestate all of the created embryos, perhaps over subsequent pregnancies, since each has the potential to become a human being? When the couple is at risk for genetic diseases, moreover, totipotent cells from the early embryos are removed for DNA testing, a process that will damage these cells irreparably. Are human beings being murdered in the process, even if the remaining cell mass is returned to the womb and allowed to develop normally?

The difficulties multiply rapidly in light of somatic-cell nuclear transfer technology, the "cloning" process that produced Dolly and by now a sizeable menagerie of other animals. If this method were fully perfected, it might become possible to grow replacement human organs with

zero risk of rejection, since they could be produced from a cheek epithelial cell, say, taken from the selfsame adult individual in need of a transplant (though research using such technology is, for now, still outlawed under the new guidelines). But this means that, given such technology, any single cell of your body or mine might, under all the right conditions, give rise to a new human life. If it can be done, should it be done? In other words, are we under an obligation to bring all possible "potential people" into existence, if it seems to be within our power to do so? Certain religious traditions do seem to think so--witness the prohibitions on contraception and even onanism, which are at least still given lip service by some. And such an obligation may also be recognized for nonreligious reasons: utilitarian philosopher Richard Hare, for example, believes that "there can be duties to merely possible people," duties which arise in attempting to maximize preference satisfactions without illegitimately restricting a "universal" prescription (in time and place) to merely actual individuals, assuming that those possible people, if brought into existence, would go on to prefer having been so.<sup>8</sup>

Hare reasons that another human life on the planet, assuming its experiences on the whole are positive rather than negative, is an additional good, and he subscribes to the utilitarian "total view" that seeks to maximize total, not average, utility. (This is the view which generates Derek Parfit's "repugnant conclusion," which Hare finds, allowing for some substantial modifications--the total number of people that we should strive for on the planet, while larger than the present total, would rapidly be limited by the unpleasantness of crowding and resource shortages that would be encountered--not necessarily all that repugnant.) Presumably many of those who fervently decry abortion would agree with him, welcoming as a positive good the million or so extra people that would be born into the United States each year, or the 50 million or so brought onto the planet, were it not for the availability of abortion.<sup>9</sup> Given the fact that world population recently topped six billion, however, this imperative may be a little harder to justify now than it was in the days when Adam and Eve were instructed to "be fruitful and multiply," even if we're just talking about joining as many sperm as possible up with as many eggs as possible. In the era of cloning, however, the number of "possible people" has expanded by many orders of magnitude, leading even a "total" utilitarian untempered by Hare's stipulations, I would hope, to have some second thoughts.

Setting aside theoretical considerations concerning the total possible number of people, however, the attainment of which admittedly few actual people are likely to find desirable, what about the potential of one early human embryo--the particular embryo that you or I, or the white-coated researcher standing next to me, just happen to hold in our hands? When the question becomes immediate and personal, not one of all human embryos in general but of this embryo, specifically, the parallel with the decision facing a woman learning for the first time of an

unplanned pregnancy becomes obvious, and acute. When the embryo is *in vitro* rather than *in vivo*, relatively more actions than omissions are needed to usher the potential person into actuality, since implantation and gestation in this case require some positive action, not just "letting nature take its course." The decision stripped bare, however--this one shall live, shall come fully into being, this one shall not--is a frightful one indeed, it must be admitted, one before which it is proper to stand in fear and trembling, I will maintain--as are many similar life-or-death decisions even if they do not specifically concern a human embryo. But it is nevertheless a decision to be made by taking full human responsibility, not by shirking it and declaring the act of deciding itself to be off limits to human beings, in this and in other portentous cases, as I consider in the next section.

### **Chutzpah**

Another strand in the human embryonic stem cell controversy, equally present in the abortion debate, and probably carrying far more emotional weight than the issue of potentiality in the abstract, is the matter of humans "playing God." Perhaps it is not, in fact, so much a matter of bemoaning the actual loss of "murdered children" from our society that spurs a sizeable proportion of abortion opponents to protest--some would say many of the children we have now often go without the material things and the care they need for a "good" life, without overmuch concern on their part--but rather the idea that some humans have the temerity to stand up and claim for themselves a decision-making power that they believe belongs to God alone. This, as I see it, is at the core of the dispute: there is a fundamental disagreement over the proper nature of the human being. On one view, humans are cast in something of a childlike role, playing at a game of "Father, May I?" It is presumed that, in regard to a fairly large set of decisions, God the Father has given us blanket permission to do as we will with things; decisions about mouse stem cells, for example, or about taking nonhuman life generally, or even about extinguishing entire species from the planet seem to fall into this category and often garner little intelligent scrutiny at all. A certain subset of decisions, however, decisions that deal with whether or not human lives should come into or go out of being, and also to some extent how those human lives should be lived, particularly when it comes to issues of reproduction and sexuality, seems to have been declared out of bounds for human determination. On this view of human nature, humans are meant to be essentially passive creatures submitting to "God's will," happily playing with the toys they've been given and obediently shunning anything that smacks of forbidden fruit. The really tough decisions are not for humans to make.

An alternative view of the human being makes life a little harder for us. Enmeshed in the marvelous workings of the natural world, and only gradually coming to understand and appreciate their intricacies, the human on this account accepts with a measure of humility a limited place within the scheme of things. But whether or not a God figures prominently in her metaphysics, this human takes responsibility for decisions about life and death in this world--there's nobody else here to do it. A particular human life may come into being, may develop in a woman's womb, may grow through childhood and adolescence into maturity--or not, and it is a human decision, rightfully a human decision, perhaps also ecstatically or agonizingly a human decision, either way. Human decision making can intervene, moreover, at any stage of the process: before the egg and the sperm unite, or shortly afterward; before the embryo implants on the uterine wall, or later; indeed, after the infant is born, up until the adult's final breath is taken. Different beings will be encountered at these different stages, however, from one or a handful of cells to a thinking, feeling, socially complex person, and such different beings call for different considerations on the part of the decision-making agent.

Likewise, different beings are encountered when existence decisions are made about nonhuman life: a monolayer of mouse epithelial cells on a petri plate, a fully developed mouse suffering the pain of a chemically induced liver tumor, an AIDS-infected adult chimpanzee staring out through the bars of his cage. A responsible human being, on this account, cannot claim that "Father" said these beings are all of no consequence. A responsible human being must encounter these different beings as they are, and then make a decision about their fate, if indeed their fate is in her hands. And perhaps a deeper question arises at this point--whose fate is it that most rightfully belongs in human hands, if not precisely the fate of human beings? A jurisdictional issue presents itself: if we have not absolved ourselves of all responsibility by placing such decisions "in God's hands," ought we not to have the most authority over ourselves and those of our "own" kind? Could we not say that that which is "self," or closest to "self," is that which we are most able to be cognizant of or empathetic with, that which we are most disposed to "do unto" as we would have done to ourselves, and that over which we thereby ought to have the most say so? Deciding, in full responsibility, that some particular life will not continue to exist will never be an easy decision, less so the more "like" the human decision-making agent it is. The more we make such decisions with the full gravity of the situation in view, the more likely, I would think, we are to treat that life with the "respect" it is due.

## Respect

Life is hard for the secular bioethicist who gets appointed to a seriously political policy-recommending body like the NIH's Human Embryo Research Panel or the National Bioethics Advisory Commission, which recently sketched out what became the new rules for stem cell research; in this pluralistic society, whatever you recommend will never make everybody happy, and in the attempt to reach some sort of collective agreement, little coherence is likely to be manifest in the final position. The Human Embryo Research Panel, charged in 1994 with providing advice on federal funding of work on "the *ex utero* preimplantation human embryo," finally came up with the view that such an embryo is not quite yet an entity with interests or rights, but still one that "deserves special respect" and "serious moral consideration."<sup>10</sup> But what, exactly, does that mean, when a researcher is faced with a cell culture in a petri dish? At least one who marks a human "right to life" beginning at the moment of conception has a working definition of "respect": certain things you just do not do. But once you've admitted the cells into your lab--should there be two different biohazard bags provided for the disposal of used material, one marked "handle with respect" for the human stem cell cultures and one left unmarked for the mouse cell lines? And then, pray tell, how would you carry out the different injunctions?

Even without a religious orientation, we can recognize an urgent need to maintain that living human tissues should be "respected" in some way, since we face seemingly irresistible forces in the opposite direction--market forces. The U.S. Patents and Trademark Office has been issuing patents on living things, or elements thereof, from genetically engineered organisms to human gene sequences, ever since the landmark Supreme Court decision on *Diamond v. Chakrabarty* in 1980.<sup>11</sup> Then there is the famous case of John Moore, a patient at UCLA's School of Medicine being treated for hairy cell leukemia in the late 1970s. His spleen was removed in the course of treatment, along with repeated samples of blood and bone marrow; certain chemicals derived from these tissues were patented, apparently without Moore's knowledge or consent; and Sandoz reportedly paid \$15 million for rights to develop "the Mo cell line."<sup>12</sup> Moore brought suit against his doctors at UCLA when he found out about it in 1984, declaring "I was harvested." Many were amazed, however, when the court sided with UCLA, not wanting to threaten "the promise of biotechnology innovation."<sup>13</sup> Neither embryo-derived nor pluripotential, the Mo cells don't seem to have attracted protestors on the streets speaking out for their rights, but the incident and its legal outcome should raise a host of ethical questions. What is this "respect" that we hear about on occasion? What might a policy of "respect" consist of, and what would a coherent foundation for one be?

### Revaluing Life--And Not Just Human Life . . .

The biomedical research community finds itself embattled today on a number of fronts, and like the secular bioethicist has problems with consistency and coherence. *Science's* lead editorial on the new stem cell rules, for example, ends on a combative note that recognizes a difference of worldview underlying a number of debates: "The forces that have placed stem cell research in peril are powerful, and they are among a number of voices challenging science, whether the issue is research on embryos, reproductive biology, or the teaching of evolution in the schools."<sup>14</sup> Evolutionary theory, as a grand unifying theme within contemporary biology, is key to one of these worldviews, all right; but working through all of its implications is something that many of us, biomedical scientists, secular bioethicists, and the scientifically enlightened general public, have heretofore shied away from. Perhaps its most central tenet is that of evolutionary continuity. As the co-decipherer of the human genome, Craig Venter, remarked on the day completion of the first draft was announced, "[o]ne of the wonderful discoveries that my colleagues and I have made while decoding the DNA of over two dozen species, from viruses to bacteria to plants to insects and now human beings, is that we are all connected to the commonality of the genetic code and evolution."<sup>15</sup> But if we fully integrate this main insight of modern science, evolutionary continuity, we will need to rethink one of the fundamental ontological commitments that most of us in western culture, religious and secular alike, hold dear: that there is a great gulf existing between human life and all other life, a difference not just of degree but of kind, on which we may found the profound difference in our valuation of such lives. One can, of course, hold to a certain ontology through a "leap of faith" that spurns all empirical evidence, but only at great cost to any hope of coherence between the physical and the metaphysical.

If we do recognize and respond to evolutionary continuity, however, it may prove somewhat inconvenient to our comfortable lifestyles. Realizing that farm animals have well-developed vertebrate nervous systems not unlike our own means, for example, that, yes, they probably are suffering on the factory farm, as are the hundreds of thousands of rats and mice who receive no pain medication for their intentionally induced malignancies. Interestingly, in June of 2000, *Nature Neuroscience* took note of Steven Wise's recent book, *Rattling the Cage*, in an editorial addressing animal experimentation. Wise, an attorney arguing that at least some nonhuman animals--the great apes, in particular--should be given legal rights, since there is now a tremendous weight of evidence attesting to their higher cognitive capacities, which he mobilizes effectively in making his case. The editors observe that "[t]he traditional view is that there is an absolute distinction between humans and all other animals, but Wise argues that

modern biology has made this obsolete, and that there is no reason why it should remain embodied in law," and they admit that "[i]t would be unproductive to deny that the arguments raised in Wise's book have some force."<sup>16</sup> They advise, however, that biomedical researchers "will need to refute [the book's] arguments" if they hope to stand up to the coming legal challenge.

Certainly, if the laws change, there will be adjustments to be made on the part of researchers. However, I think a little reflection on adopting a position of greater consistency within bioethical thought about all the issues I have raised here could prove immensely valuable. Yes, there is often not a great deal of respect shown to nonhuman animals or their tissues in research labs: unless things have changed quite a bit, for example, rats and mice are probably still killed, in many cases, by swinging them by their tails and hitting their heads into the lab bench. We don't want the treatment of human beings to go there, nor are we comfortable with the prospects of our organs and tissues being reduced to commodities on the open market. But, if we were to acknowledge the truth of evolutionary continuity, why should the slide be in that direction? In other words, why not revalue all life, and take responsibility for treating it all with "respect"? What would some of the implications of such a change in attitude be?

Should we begin to truly respect all life on the planet, first of all, an imperative to bring more and more human lives, and only human lives, into being would become very difficult to support. If we update our ethics with our current science, an ecological understanding makes it clear that, within any ecosystem, there need to be organisms of different types, in proportions that can be specified within broad limits, in order for their needs to be complementary and the system itself to be optimally functional. In many places, human numbers have probably already exceeded those limits, to the detriment of other life, if not their own. If all life is valued, how might we respond? Though this is easier said than done, one option is for all of us to decide to reduce our human family sizes steadily over the coming decades; religious and cultural commitments aside, this course of action would seem to be as prudent for us as it is ethical.

Would there still be animal experimentation? Well, improving the quality of lives--all lives--would certainly not cease to be a worthy goal if the valuation of life were strengthened and expanded. We are fortunate that, at this time in our history, if we choose the path of experimenting with human cells and tissues maintained in laboratories, combined with the willingness of individual human volunteers to further our collective knowledge, we have the means to learn just about everything we could wish to know without further coercion and exploitation of nonhuman animals. Invasive and destructive neurological research on nonhuman primates? There's not much it could tell us now that wouldn't be discoverable utilizing noninvasive techniques on consenting human subjects, though this may not have been the case

twenty or thirty years ago. With some notable historical (and perhaps current) exceptions, the principle of informed consent lies at the heart of human experimentation, as outlined by the Nuremberg Code. But nonhuman animals cannot give "informed consent." Are there any conditions under which we might reasonably, as guardians, impute such consent? Possibly; certainly if a proposed experiment offered a hope of improving a disability the animals themselves suffered from, as we consider permissible for the inclusion of young children in experimental medical procedures today. And, given present social conditions, it might not be unreasonable to suggest that dogs and cats that would otherwise be euthanized instead be employed for, say, teaching veterinary students spaying and neutering techniques or other therapies, if in repayment for their "volunteering" they were given to loving homes--something that in fact was prohibited in many vet schools just a few years ago, when vet students and others who offered to take home their experimental animals were forced, instead, to terminate them at the end of the experiment.

Lurking in the background of such a draconian rule, as well as more generally in biomedical research, is, I think, a notion that many researchers are presently unwilling to give up--the notion of disposable life, a holdover from the "Father told me it doesn't count" view of nonhuman life. If vet students, med students, and other interested parties took home their experimental surgery dogs and made them into pets, they could no longer be considered "disposable," and suddenly a slip of the scalpel would matter more, as would a kind word or deed--considerations that might reasonably be expected to accompany an attitude of "respect." In my time, out of concern for the undue burden this attitude might impose on professional students, whole courses were devoted to "desensitizing" them, making them less distractible by the pains and privations of those in their care, animal or human. Times have changed in this regard, and I think we should all be glad they have. But an essential part of the change should be a questioning of the fundamental assumption, made not only in the research lab but far and wide around the world, that in order to treat one form of life well, another must be treated badly by contrast. What, indeed, do we express in linguistic constructions such as "we were treated like animals," unless there is widespread agreement that harsh, injurious, and disrespectful treatment is appropriate for animals, and that one way to distinguish people is by their not being treated in such a fashion? Who set up such a rule--is it given in the Ten Commandments, if you embrace them, or implicit in secular ethics, if you do not?

To return to human embryonic stem cells, an interesting defense is given, by one bioethicist, of the mandate to show "respect" to the human embryo and its derivatives. The author speaks of "the fundamental wonder of life itself: the journey of an organism of microscopic size through various patterns and processes of development," a veritable "mystery"

of life; he goes on, then, to speak of the development of "a flourishing human person."<sup>17</sup> But all multicellular living things undergo a pretty miraculous transformation in developing into what they eventually become, and we are far from unraveling, let alone understanding, all the processes involved in this "mystery." Why, then, is the human course of development the only one worthy of respect? I think that a consistent Darwinian position on this question would answer that it is not. There is no wide ontological chasm, at least not one underwritten by any scientific evidence, distinguishing a petri dish bearing human embryonic stem cells from one containing mouse stem cells, nor is there much of one, fundamentally, between the ways the cells from each dish might develop. There are differences in the characteristics of the adult animals, but also far more commonality than we have been given to appreciate, and this is something that we should now be able to acknowledge without a threat to our self-esteem. But to move on beyond this point we need to have the courage to stop playing a game of "Father May I?" as a way to avoid taking responsibility for the tough decisions we must make about matters of life and death, be that life human or nonhuman.

Notes

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<sup>1</sup> News and Editorial staffs, "Capturing the Promise of Youth," *Science* 286 (1999): 2238-9.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Perry, "Patients' Voices: The Powerful Sound in the Stem Cell Debate," *Science* 287 (2000): 1423.

<sup>3</sup> The research teams of Roger Pedersen at UCSF and James Thomson at the University of Wisconsin are working with IVF-derived embryos; John Gearhart's team at Johns Hopkins is working with primordial germ cells. See Shirley J. Wright, "Human Embryonic Stem-Cell Research: Science and Ethics," *American Scientist* 87 (1999): 352-61.

<sup>4</sup> See Donald Kennedy, "Two Cheers for New Stem Cell Rules," *Science* 289 (2000): 1469, and Gretchen Vogel, "Researchers Get Green Light for Work on Stem Cells," *Science* 289: (2000): 1442-3, 1442.

<sup>5</sup> See Wright, 354.

<sup>6</sup> See Stephen J. O'Brien et al., "The Promise of Comparative Genomics in Mammals," *Science* 286 (1999): 458-80, 460.

<sup>7</sup> As reported by Gregory Pence, *Who's Afraid of Human Cloning* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), 88.

<sup>8</sup> R. M. Hare, "Possible People," *Bioethics* 2 (1988): 279-93, 284.

<sup>9</sup> These very round estimates were taken from my "Reproductive Choices: The Ecological Dimension," as reprinted in *Contemporary Moral Problems*, sixth edition, ed. James E. White (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2000). For original figures, see Population Crisis Committee, *Access to Birth Control: A World Assessment*, Population Briefing Paper No. 19 (October 1987), as reported in brief for Population-Environment Balance, et al., as Amici Curiae supporting appellees in *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*, Supreme Court of the United States, October term, 1988, and Jodi L. Jacobson, *The Global Politics of Abortion*, Worldwatch Paper 97 (Washington, DC: Worldwatch Institute, 1990).

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<sup>10</sup> See Eric Parens, "What Research? Which Embryos?" *Hastings Center Report* 25 (1995): 36, and John A. Robertson, "Symbolic Issues in Embryo Research," *Hastings Center Report* 25 (1995): 37-38.

<sup>11</sup> A microbiologist, Ananda Chakrabarty, was awarded a patent on a genetically engineered microorganism designed to clean up oil spills by ingesting and breaking down the petroleum, the first patent to be issued on a living organism.

<sup>12</sup> See Dorothy Nelkin and Lori Andrews, "*Homo economicus*: Commercialization of Body Tissue in the Age of Biotechnology," *Hastings Center Report* 28 (1998): 30-39, 32.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Kennedy, 1469.

<sup>15</sup> Excerpt from news conference at the White House on June 26, 2000; *New York Times* 27 June 2000, D8.

<sup>16</sup> Editorial staff, "Legal Challenges to Animal Experimentation," *Nature Neuroscience* 3 (2000): 523.

<sup>17</sup> Courtney S. Campbell, "Awe Diminished," *Hastings Center Report* 25 (1995): 44-46, 44.

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## **Incivility as a Barometer of Societal Decay**

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*"Kindness is the golden chain by which society is bound together."* Goethe

If we may judge by the number of current books on the topic by major authors, the decline of civility has come to be viewed as a major issue in our society. Current publications by Deborah Tannen,<sup>1</sup> Steven Carter,<sup>2</sup> Dominique Colas,<sup>3</sup> Mark Caldwell,<sup>4</sup> and a number of others<sup>5</sup> attest to the popularity of the subject. Moreover, the topic has exploded into the popular media.<sup>6</sup> In addition, governments are adopting civility policies.<sup>7</sup> Other government officials are appealing for civility in governmental meetings.<sup>8</sup> Our local city attorney pleads passionately for civility in the public meetings of the city.<sup>9</sup> The Florida Bar urges lawyers to aspire to civility.<sup>10</sup> Some legislatures are passing laws attempting to require school children to be polite.<sup>11</sup> Even university faculty are offered training sessions to help them restore civility to the classroom.<sup>12</sup>

Is incivility in fact increasing? Whether or no, we can be certain that there is a widespread perception that it is. Hence, I examine the extent of that perception in a variety of settings. Of necessity, almost all of the evidence is anecdotal in nature. Equally inconclusive is the analysis of that evidence, since it consists almost entirely of interpretations. However, the reader may become persuaded that incivility seems to be an indicator of deleterious social and psychological effects. More specifically, I suggest that Emile Durkheim's anomie theory provides insight into the relation between apparently superficial incivility and more deep-seated social pathologies, so that it becomes plausible to see incivility as a barometer of underlying societal decay.

### **Pervasive Incivility**

How widespread is this apparent growing incivility in our society? Closer examination reveals that it appears to be extensive. We see it in the growing litigiousness of our society. Rudeness is becoming more widespread in business and industry. The flowering of political deceit and dissembling engenders a widespread cynicism in society. That cynicism is nourished, perhaps most of all, by the well-documented journalistic incivility rampant in our society.

### **Litigiousness**

The growth of litigiousness in our society has been widely lamented. Despite occasional efforts to contain it, the pursuit of legal vindication of rights continues to grow at a rapid pace.

That growth has been aided by an accompanying phenomenon: an explosion of rights.<sup>13</sup> The source is both legislative and judicial, but each forum is responding to demands from a public eager to out shout each other that they are greater victims than any other. Not surprisingly, the possibility of a civilized dialogue or discussion about issues becomes remote under such conditions. The noted philosopher Martin Golding comments, "We have experienced such an inflation of rights that the coinage of moral discourse has become debased."<sup>14</sup> Harvard Law's Mary Ann Glendon also worries about a reduction in the civility of civic discourse:

Our rights talk, in its absoluteness, promotes unrealistic expectations, heightens social conflicts, and inhibits dialogue that might lead toward consensus, accommodation, or at least the discovery of common ground. In its silence concerning responsibilities, it seems to condone acceptance of the benefits of living in a democratic social welfare state, without accepting the corresponding personal and civic obligations.<sup>15</sup>

Those concerns are not confined to the scholarly arena. Even the columnist Molly Ivins, who would normally be inclined to favor trial lawyers, draws the line, worrying that the "Just win, baby" approach to lawyering may reflect a "societal decline in civility and decency."<sup>16</sup>

### **Rudeness in Business**

But our growing incivility is not restricted to the legal arena. Rudeness in business and industry has been identified as a problem of increasing significance. Dan Rather reports his rather glum observations of the rudeness of clerks (especially younger ones) in New York City commercial establishments. He concluded: "Once, Americans knew how to work and cared about good, hard work. Maybe good times have spoiled us. Most especially, our kids."<sup>17</sup> Recent studies confirm that this is a widespread problem. One study of the growth of the "ranks of the etiquette-challenged" found that the reactions to incivility can be costly to the organization in which it occurs. What did victims of incivility do? "Twelve percent said they intentionally decreased the quality of their work; 22 percent said they decreased their work effort; 28 percent said they lost work time trying to avoid the person; 52 percent said they lost time worrying about the person and the interaction; and 46 percent contemplated changing jobs. Twelve percent actually changed jobs to escape the bully."<sup>18</sup>

Other research reports that bullied persons complained of "anxiety, sleeplessness, headaches, irritable bowel syndrome, skin problems, panic attacks and low self-esteem."<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the Gallup Poll reports that half of respondents report they are generally at least a little angry at work.<sup>20</sup> Another study indicates that "painful little incivilities" in the workplace are the

most costly to the enterprise.

Rudeness "can affect the company's bottom line by reducing productivity and leading to costly worker turnover."<sup>21</sup> There are even claims that office conflicts have produced such severe results as post-traumatic stress disorder.<sup>22</sup> For example, the rudeness of a false accusation of sexual harassment resulted in illness, disability, and permanent unemployment.<sup>23</sup> Is the rudeness problem widespread? "Three-fourths of workers agree the workplace has become a ruder place in the past decade."<sup>24</sup>

### **The Rasp of Politics**

Such developments in the workplace should not surprise us in light of the trends in our political life. We cannot ignore the fact that our national political debate is becoming increasingly characterized by the so-called culture wars.<sup>25</sup> The religious right attacks the academic left and vice versa.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, since so many of the participants view themselves as the unique bearers of universal truth, any means to the sacred end is frequently embraced. What immense irony there is in the fact that Richard Nixon used the national interest as an excuse to engage in dirty tricks in order to ensure that the dangerous McGovern could not possibly unseat him from the presidency! A generation later Bill Clinton used virtually the same "sacred quest" excuse to justify illegalities in fundraising in order to prevent the dangerous Bob Dole from occupying the White House. Regrettably, such moves are no longer isolated events. In the view of the public, political deceit and dissembling has become the expected norm in the public life of the nation. How deeply damaging to our national fabric must it be to embrace that depth of cynicism?

Yet we have continued to plumb those depths. The scandals that have dogged Bill Clinton have disgusted our citizens and, if possible, further eroded their trust in politics in general. Some observers called for serious punishment of him in an attempt to raise our moral standards by defining deviance upward.<sup>27</sup> At the same time, the campaign of the Congressional Republicans to remove Clinton from office was wildly unpopular and that effort was seen by other observers as "political partisanship at its worst."<sup>28</sup> The dour conclusion was that the whole mess enhanced no reputations on either side.<sup>29</sup> The net result has been even greater cynicism regarding political life than we experienced previously.

### **Negative Journalism**

Is our political cynicism really warranted? To some extent, no doubt. But that costly

cynicism is nourished, not just by a factual foundation, but most of all by journalistic preoccupation with scandal in particular and the negative "angle" on things, in general. In her recent book *The Argument Culture* Deborah Tannen devotes an entire long chapter to the failings of the media.<sup>30</sup> In the process, she documents the single-minded media determination to present all issues as deadly battles between opposing forces.<sup>31</sup> We are now familiar with the slogan: "If it bleeds, it leads." In their quest for increased ratings, journalists strive to make every issue as bloody as possible.<sup>32</sup> One result of this tack is that the flow of information is actually reduced.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the quality of civilized civic discourse is debased. And, of course, the inbuilt media incivility generates widespread public cynicism, while the public respect for the press wanes even further.<sup>34</sup>

So, should we concern ourselves with the growing incivility in our society? Our growing litigiousness and rudeness in business carry substantial hidden costs. Political deceit gives birth to cynicism in society. That cynicism is, in turn, nurtured by widespread journalistic incivility. But that is not all. There is now substantial research showing that these "mere" incivilities generate not only harmful stress but more serious social pathologies, even to the point of mental illness and murder.

### **Incivility and Social Pathology**

Just one of the significant costs of all these incivilities is felt in increasing stress and other social pathologies. For example, Judith Martin points out in her "Miss Manners" etiquette column that violence is occurring more frequently in disputes about matters that should be questions only of etiquette or even over issues too insignificant to merit an etiquette ruling, such as the murder that ended an argument over how to put the silverware in the dishwasher. She says: "Highway discourtesy and the perception of being treated disrespectfully are also now commonplace motives for crime. Whether they realize it or not, aggressive drivers and touchy teen-agers care so much about etiquette that they kill to maintain it. This is not the approved method for keeping society polite. Miss Manners cites it only to show that the craving to be treated politely is so fundamental that even outlaws feel it."<sup>35</sup>

### **Rudeness Kills!**

We may note that "Miss Manners" mentions road rage as an example, and road rage might be dismissed as mere rudeness. However, we read all too often of road rage that culminates in murder.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, reports of "air rage" occur frequently, with worries by airline

personnel of more and more violent confrontations. At the same time, airline service continues to deteriorate in a setting in which no one is willing to take responsibility for service delays.<sup>37</sup> If we are inclined to dismiss such "rages" as associated only with the frustrations of travel, we should note that cell phone use has become a bone of increasing contention. What is more, frustrations arising from the use of cell phones by others have led to violent confrontations.<sup>38</sup> Simple rudeness can be deadly. A Florida woman who failed to respond to a younger woman's "Good afternoon" was then challenged for her lack of manners. She subsequently died from a heart attack brought on by the stress of the incident, and the woman who greeted her now faces murder charges.<sup>39</sup> It has even become commonplace to hear of incidents in which males attempting to act like gentlemen are berated for their "condescending and inappropriate" behavior. Even though such behaviors are interpreted by some as patronizing, Miss Manners laments the treating of "obviously well-meant, conventional, trivial gestures of politeness as if they were insults. That is not only ruder, but . . . causes greater damage to the cause of civility."<sup>40</sup>

### **The Dangers of Repudiation**

Miss Manners' conviction is felt even more intensely by columnist William Raspberry, who believes that we must reduce our quick recourse to confrontation in every social or political disagreement: "Social activists don't just disagree with their opposition; they speak and behave as though their opponents are the personification of evil: racist, sexist, market-worshipping pigs or irresponsible psychobabbling idiots. They'd have us believe our world is divided between nonchalant baby-killers and bedroom-invading fetus worshipers." Does such incivility have deep costs? Raspberry believes so: "Am I suggesting that ordinary incivility is partly to blame for the deaths of school children? In a word, yes. I'm saying that adult irascibility--from political intemperance to road rage--can poison our social and civic atmosphere." In other words, he sees the rampant incivility of our social and political life as creating an environment in which an occasional middle school child will absorb the spirit of the violent rhetoric that permeates society: "We behave in our civic and political lives as though anything goes, so long as it fits our side of the issues. And we are endlessly surprised when our children show themselves to be heartless teasers, graceless winners, bitter losers, self-centered jerks--and occasionally killers."<sup>41</sup> Does that connection seem too far-fetched to be believable? We do not seem to have difficulty understanding how children that age are capable of learning violence from their elders in more obviously troubled parts of the world: youthful armies in Africa, Muslim militants in many places, children conscripted by the Tamils in Sri Lanka, and terrorist

activities in Northern Ireland, Israel, Algeria, etc. Indeed, the United Nations now claims that "more than 300,000 girls and boys under 18 are involved in fighting in more than 30 countries."<sup>42</sup> There seems no obvious reason why we should think that our youth would be immune to the culture of violence and hatred.

### **Egoism and Entitlement**

A slightly different, but complementary, theory is offered by columnist Leonard Pitts, who concludes that the violent kids are simply spoiled brats: "Spoiled in the sense that they live lives of entitlement, their every waking thought revolving around themselves--their problems, their needs, their wants, their gratification." His guess is that the root problem is self-centeredness: "They can't see or sympathize beyond the borders of their own lives. Can't begin to respect the needs or feelings of others." And he sees this phenomenon as societal in nature: "Being spoiled is the all-American affliction. Our culture celebrates acquisition, treats self-interest as the only interest that matters."<sup>43</sup> Pitts appears on the mark in singling out the social isolation of rampant individualism as the culprit in the growing social pathologies we experience. The FBI's recent comprehensive study of the patterns of school violence points out that the troubled teens are "left out of peer groups." Among the personality traits that indicated high risk: "poor coping skills, signs of depression, alienation, narcissism."<sup>44</sup>

But the problem of egoism is not confined to schoolyard killers. It flourishes all the way to the very top of the social pyramid. William Raspberry takes to task both former Indiana basketball coach Bobby Knight and the tennis superstars Venus and Serena Williams for their complete lack of graciousness.<sup>45</sup> To see at play some of the extremes of egoism, there may be no better example than the extracurricular activities of former President Bill Clinton. His response to criticism of his failure to tell the truth is an apology that appeared far more angry than sincere. We will never know whether some appropriate kind of sanction short of removal from office could have been agreed upon, because the egoism of the House Republicans blocked entirely the possibility of any compromise. The whole mess illustrates Alexis de Tocqueville's observation of "the insidious ways that egoism, individualism, and narcissism destroy the conditions that make shared life possible."<sup>46</sup> Clinton's reckless actions were the product of complete self-centeredness. It would be unreasonable to expect that he could suddenly become able to transcend it. The same may be said of the political stance of the House Republicans. It is often said that a society gets the leadership it deserves. Presumably then, Clinton and the Congress have been ideal leaders for a self-centered society: people as rapt in and wrapped up in their own selfish interests as one could imagine. If we all seek to drop the social bonds that would

constrain our self-indulgence, we must accept the consequence: a decaying social fabric.

### Solidarity Amidst Adversity

Throughout human history, people have for the most part lived by surviving the immense challenges of war, famine, pestilence, and similar calamities. Also for the most part, those tragedies have helped people discover a deep sense of community because of their need for mutual help. We have small ideas of this sense of community in the face of disaster from scattered experiences, such as the devastating flood that destroyed so much of Grand Forks, North Dakota, in 1997, or the terrible dangers from the voracious wildfires in Florida during the summer of 1998.

But in the United States and the other industrialized nations, we no longer face such challenges *on a society-wide basis*. Despite temporal fluctuations in the levels of public assistance, the welfare state has insulated the bulk of the populations in these countries from the serious challenges to economic and physical survival faced by most of the world's population. Moreover, governmental provision of welfare has substantially reduced the role of private charity in our communities. Consequently, private citizens have far less occasion for solidarity-building interaction with the less fortunate members of society.<sup>47</sup> Community-building charitable activity has been replaced by impersonal, professionalized government isolation of the less well-off from the remainder of society. Such social distance makes it easier to rail against government welfare programs. But even corporate giving programs have become the regular targets of shareholder resolutions.<sup>48</sup> And some businesses even feel the need to pressure their employees to donate their Christmas gift certificates to charity.<sup>49</sup> With the advent of the Internet, charitable giving has become even more remote from the object of charity, because one may now donate without personal cost to charities online, since the retailer from whom you purchase will pick up the tab.<sup>50</sup>

We should not ignore the possibility that the loss on the other side of the exchange may be equally significant. Persons who receive charity typically give thanks. Those who receive government benefits easily come to view them as an entitlement. But such "benefits" come from many sources other than government. Hence, the entitlement attitude extends even into family relations. Indeed, in Miss Manners' view, that anti-social mindset has become so widespread that in some cases ungrateful progeny have become "defiant, ignorant, mean, selfish and greedy."<sup>51</sup> As egoism triumphs, both benefactors and beneficiaries are released from the strong social bonds of charity and gratitude.

Now those who once sought fulfillment for their lives in charitable activity are free to

pursue the gratification of their merest whim. In place of adversity, we face the multiple challenges of prosperity. The catch is that the evidence supports the proposition that adversity tends to encourage the building of community, while prosperity seems to break down into the pursuit of ego gratification by individuals isolated from one another by their selfishness. Our growing wealth combined with the absence of real challenge has generated a social phenomenon that future historical analysis may reveal as alarmingly similar to social conditions in previous highly successful empires, during the beginning of their declines but prior to their awareness that they were on the downward slope.

### **Anomie Amidst Affluence**

The century which is now closing has been characterized (in the industrialized nations) by an unprecedented broad prosperity and the flowering of the individualism which it nourishes. At the beginning of this century, that prospect worried Emile Durkheim, who forecast the breakdown of a society into anomie if the solidarity that generated social cohesion were to be lost.<sup>52</sup> He perceived that societal cohesion is founded on participation in the *conscience collective*, the morality of society that binds it together. Translated into the terms of our present discussion, adherence to the bonds of society is reflected in the civility of a society.

At the same time, incivility is an indication of anomie. Rampant individuals who have lost the moral limits which society imposes in order to maintain its strength feel no hesitation in displaying incivility to others. Digby Anderson sees the threat to civility arising from "the assorted barbarians, relativizers, self-esteemers, narcissists and egalitarians who are now burning the city."<sup>53</sup> In fact, a recent study indicates that excessively self-centered people are the most aggressive when they are criticized. The study concluded that "narcissists mainly want to punish or defeat someone who has threatened their highly favorable views of themselves."<sup>54</sup> Why should such egotists care about others at all? Their only reason would be that others can be used to help them achieve their own selfish goals. Hence, civility is an important indicator of the health of a society. Incivility, by the same token, indicates societal decline. Taken far enough, it means nothing less than the destruction of society.

In the Durkheimian perspective, it is now possible to see that the effects of incivility recounted in the first section pale in comparison to the real cost of incivility: the loss of social cohesion that is also the root social cause of our burgeoning incivility. Civility is Durkheimian morality: adherence to the bonds of society. Incivility is its opposite: anomie, the loss of the limits of those social bonds. That loss means that society loses its cohesion. Since cohesion is the cement that holds society together, the presence of anomie in itself becomes a barometer of societal decay.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Deborah Tannen, *The Argument Culture: Moving From Debate to Dialogue* (New York: Random House, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Stephen L. Carter, *Civility: Manners, Morals, and the Etiquette of Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> Dominique Colas, *Civil Society and Fanaticism: Conjoined Histories*, trans. Amy Jacobs (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Mark Caldwell, *A Short History of Rudeness: Manners, Morals, and Misbehavior in Modern America* (New York: Picador, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> Bill Stumpf, *The Ice Palace that Melted Away* (New York: Pantheon, 1998); Donald McCullough, *Say Please, Say Thank You* (New York: Putnam, 1998); Digby Anderson, ed., *Gentility Recalled: "Mere" Manners and the Making of Social Order* (London: Social Affairs Unit, 1998); Robert Hughes, *Culture of Complaint: The Graying of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> For example, "How Rude! How Crude! How Socially Unacceptable!" *USA Today*, 5 June 2000: 5D.

<sup>7</sup> For example, "Seminole County OKs Civility Policy," *Gainesville Sun* 15 Apr. 1999:1B.

<sup>8</sup> For example, Pegeen Hanrahan (Gainesville City Commissioner), "Civility Please -- In Public and In Private," *Gainesville Sun* 22 May 1999: 9A. See also Jud Magrin, "Different Focuses: Newly Sworn-in Commissioners Speak Out," *Gainesville Sun* 7 May 1999:1B.

<sup>9</sup> Marion Radson, "Participate in 'Civility Month' by Treating Others with Respect," *Gainesville Sun* 15 May 2000: 6A.

<sup>10</sup> Paula Stephenson, "Aspirational Civility," *The Professional* 3 Sept. 1999: 3 (A publication of the Center for Professionalism of The Florida Bar).

<sup>11</sup> Robert Tanner, "'Yes, Ma'am,' 'No Ma'am' Enters into Political Debate," *Gainesville Sun* 29 May 2000: 9B. (An *Associated Press* follow-up story on the legislation adopted in Louisiana in 1999.)

<sup>12</sup> The University Center for Excellence in Teaching, "Faculty on the Front Lines: Reclaiming Civility in the Classroom," *PBS Adults Learning Service*, 8 Apr.1999.

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Robert A. Licht, introduction, *The Framers and Fundamental Rights* by Robert A. Licht ed. (Washington D.C.: American Enterprise Institute Press, 1991) 1; Benjamin R. Barber,

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"Constitutional Rights--Democratic Instrument or Democratic Obstacle?" in *Ibid.* 23, 24; Henry Shue, "Subsistence Rights: Shall we Secure *These* Rights?" Robert Goldwin and William Schambra, eds., *How Does the Constitution Secure Rights?* (Washington D.C.: American Enterprise Institute Press, 1985) 74, 77.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Golding, "The Significance of Rights Language," *Philosophical Topics* 18 (1990): 63. (This is a review article of A.I. Melden's *Rights in Human Lives: An Historical-Philosophical Essay*.)

<sup>15</sup> Mary Ann Glendon, *Rights Talk* (New York: Free Press, 1991) 14.

<sup>16</sup> Molly Ivins, "The Rambo Approach to Law," *Gainesville Sun* 29 Apr. 1999: 11A (*Fort Worth Star-Telegram*).

<sup>17</sup> Dan Rather, "It's Service in America with a Smirk," *Gainesville Sun* 7 June 1998: 1G, 4G (*King Features*).

<sup>18</sup> "Incivility in the Workplace Costs Companies Time, Money," *Gainesville Sun* 30 May 1998: 7B (*Associated Press*).

<sup>19</sup> Jessica Guynn, "Make Yourself Bullyproof at Work," *Gainesville Sun* 18 Jan. 1999: Worklife 3 (*Knight Ridder Newspapers*).

<sup>20</sup> "One in Six Employees Cite Anger at Work," *Gainesville Sun* 6 Sept. 1999: 9B (*Associated Press*).

<sup>21</sup> "High Cost of Rudeness," *Gainesville Sun* 27 July 1998: WorkLife 13.

<sup>22</sup> Frances A. McMorris, "Can Post-Traumatic Stress Arise From Office Battles?" *Wall Street Journal* 5 Feb. 1996: B1.

<sup>23</sup> Bob Rosner, "A False Accusation of Sexual Harassment," *Gainesville Sun* 2 Oct. 2000: Worklife 15 (*Working Wounded* syndicated column).

<sup>24</sup> Bernice Kanner, "Politeness is Endangered," *Gainesville Sun* 20 Apr. 2000: 11A (*Knight Ridder Newspapers*).

<sup>25</sup> For one side of the debate, see, e.g., David Cantor, *The Religious Right: The Assault on Tolerance & Pluralism in America* (New York: The Anti-Defamation League, 1994).

<sup>26</sup> Hilton Kramer, "The Second Cold War: This One is Internal. Culture is the Battleground," *Wall Street Journal* 2 Apr. 1999: W13.

<sup>27</sup> A.M. Rosenthal, "Define Deviancy Up, Senate," *Gainesville Sun* 31 Jan. 1999: 3G (*New York Times*). Rosenthal is referring to Senator Moynihan's 1993 adaptation of Durkheim's notion of the social definition of deviance.

<sup>28</sup> William Raspberry, "Political Partisanship at its Worst," *Gainesville Sun* 22 Dec. 1998: 15A (*The Washington Post*).

<sup>29</sup> Dennis Farney & Gerald Seib, "The Stature Debate: Monicagate Left Few Reputations Enhanced," *Wall Street Journal* 16 Feb. 1999: 1A. The article is subtitled: "Is It a Sign of These Times, Or of the Saga Itself, That No Heroes Emerge?"

<sup>30</sup> She titles chapter three: "From Lapdog to Attack Dog: the Aggression Culture and the Press." Deborah Tannen, *The Argument Culture: Moving From Debate to Dialogue* (1998) 54-94.

<sup>31</sup> Tannen states: "Because of the belief that fights--and only fights--are interesting, any news or information item that is not adversarial is less likely to be reported." Tannen 30.

<sup>32</sup> Tannen is scornful of the media practice that "the best way to cover news is to find spokespeople who express the most extreme, polarized views and present them as 'both sides' . . ." Tannen 3.

<sup>33</sup> But, as Tannen observes, the overly critical posture of the media dries up the flow of information by discouraging potential sources from being more forthcoming. Tannen 68.

<sup>34</sup> See Robert Moffat, "Mustering the Moxie to Master the Media Mess: Some Introductory Comments in the Quest for Media Responsibility," *University of Florida Journal of Law and Public Policy* 9 (1998): 137-49.

<sup>35</sup> Judith Martin, "Miss Manners: Yes, Etiquette Actually can Ward Off Violence," *Gainesville Sun* 12 May 1997: WorkLife 14 (*The Washington Post*).

<sup>36</sup> "Man Shot, Killed During Apparent Road Rage Case," *Gainesville Sun* 5 Aug. 2000: 3B (*The Associated Press*); "Man Charged in Apparent Road Rage-Led Shooting," *Gainesville Sun* 7 Aug. 2000: 3B (*The Associated Press*).

<sup>37</sup> Laurence Zuckerman, "Rising Tide of Passengers Fumes Over Delays at Nation's Airports: Weather and Labor Tensions Worsen Troubles," *New York Times* 16 July 2000: 1.

<sup>38</sup> Dave Carpenter, "Etiquette Lost as Cell Phone Use Grows," *Gainesville Sun* 2 Aug. 2000: 1A (*Associated Press Business Writer*); as the subhead indicates, "Aggravation leads to scuffles," 8A; report includes "black eyes and even a cracked rib after eruptions of 'cell phone rage'," 8A. See also Gary T. Marx, "Manners in the Age of New Communications Technologies," *The Communitarian Update* 29 online, Communitarian Update Archives, 2 Aug. 2000: "Suddenly

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there are dozens of new ways to be rude. Do respect for privacy and other social norms stand a chance in the face of cell phones, beepers, and caller ID?"

<sup>39</sup> "Police: Greeting Turned Deadly," *Gainesville Sun* 29 May 1999: 6B (*The Associated Press*).

<sup>40</sup> Judith Martin, "Miss Manners: Don't Mistake Kindness for Insult," *Gainesville Sun* 17 July 2000: WorkLife 14 (*The Washington Post*).

<sup>41</sup> William Raspberry, "How to Handle These Toxins in America's Social Atmosphere?" *Gainesville Sun* 26 May 1998: 7A (*The Washington Post*).

<sup>42</sup> Dilshika Jayamaha, "Rebels Sell Belief that Pain Brings Liberation," *Gainesville Sun* 10 Sept. 2000: 6A (*The Associated Press*; the report is "Close-up: Child soldiers")

<sup>43</sup> Leonard Pitts, "What Is It That Drives Kids Today to Commit Such Violent Acts?" *Gainesville Sun* 16 July 1998: 11A (*The Miami Herald*).

<sup>44</sup> "FBI Releases Model of School Shooters," *Gainesville Sun* 7 Sept. 2000: 3A (*The Associated Press*).

<sup>45</sup> William Raspberry, "Graciousness Is a Quality Some of Us Surely Could Use," *Gainesville Sun* 15 Sept. 2000: 11A (*The Washington Post*).

<sup>46</sup> See Rochelle Gurstein, "The Tender Democrat," *New Republic*, 5 Oct. 1998: 41 (reviewing Stephen Carter, n. 2).

<sup>47</sup> See, e.g., the dramatic statistics presented in Charles Murray, *In Pursuit: Of Happiness and Good Government* (Simon & Schuster, 1988) 276.

<sup>48</sup> E.g., *The Pfizer Corporation 1999 Annual Meeting Shareholder Proxy Solicitation Statements V-15-16*: "Item 5 -- Shareholder Proposal Relating to Charitable Contributions."

<sup>49</sup> "Dear Abby," *Gainesville Sun* 27 Jan. 2000: 2D.

<sup>50</sup> "Online Shoppers are Helping Charities with Purchases," *Gainesville Sun* 4 Jan. 2000: 5A (*The Associated Press*).

<sup>51</sup> Judith Martin, "Miss Manners: Children Never Learned to Express Gratitude," *Gainesville Sun* 3 Jan. 2000: WorkLife 12 (*The Washington Post*).

<sup>52</sup> Emile Durkheim, *Suicide*, ed. George Simpson, tr. John A. Spaulding and George Simpson (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1951) 241-76.

<sup>53</sup> Digby Anderson, "Civility Under Siege," *Wall Street Journal* 2 Oct. 1998: W14.

<sup>54</sup> Brad Bushman and Roy Baumeister, "Threatened Egotism, Narcissism, Self-Esteem, and Direct and Displaced Aggression: Does Self-Love or Self-Hate Lead to Violence?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 75 (1998): 227.

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