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Dr. Frank Opie is an Environmental Educationist at the Cape Town College of Education. Here he continues his series from his personal journal.

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Jim Leffel is Director of an apologetics ministry called The Crossroads Project and is on the staff of Xenos Christian Fellowship. He has an MA in philosophy of religion and teaches in the philosophy department of Ohio Dominican College. This article is reprinted from the World Wide Web (<http://www.crossrds.org/pomouniv.htm>) and is used with permission.

REACHING UPWARDS AND BACKWARDS 24/1/1996

Frank Opie

We gathered around the telescope gazing at the scarred face of the full moon. It was amazing, like an old black and white photograph...awesome in its tangible antiquity, even at this distance....its majestic barrenness.

We saw the clouds of Magellan, our nearest neighbouring galaxy - far beyond imagining, yet only 150 million light years away. The Hubble telescope is seeing starlight from 10 billion light years distance. Alpha Centauri our nearest star after Sol is

only 4,5 light years away but at space shuttle speeds we would take 1800 generations to cover this distance.

It seems we will forever be limited to this tiny solar system - such is the wonder of creation that The Creator saw fit to show us almost everything but keep us close to the home planet - the promised land forever inaccessible. The glory of God shines brighter the closer we look. The almost infinite distances and design planing stretches so infinitely beyond our thinking or praising. But why were we kept out of the cosmic garden - or are we?

The unfolding wonder left my mind reeling with the realisation of how much more magnificent He is than we have ever heard and perhaps less than 1% of all the wonder has been told. Worlds exist beyond our knowing that are perfect. They will never be seen by any man yet we can be certain that their beauty is not diminished by our ignorance for they were created for His pleasure not ours, and declared good long before men first looked upon the night skies. They stand on our far cosmic horizons as indicators of a purpose so much greater than our own. How can we ever imagine again that we could ever be of any importance whatsoever apart from God's special pleasure? The unreachable stars burn forever to remind us that man is less that he ever imagines, yet more that he will ever grasp.

" Intellectually, modern man knows almost all there is to know about the pattern of creation in himself, the forms it takes, the surface designs it describes. He has measured the pitch of its rhythms and carefully recorded all the mechanics. From the outside he sees the desirable first object of life more clearly perhaps than man has ever seen it before. But less and less does he experience the process within. Less and less is he capable of committing himself body and soul to the creative experiment that is continually seeking to fire him and charge his little life with great objective meaning. Cut off by accumulated knowledge from the heart of his own living experience he moves amongst a comfortable rubble of material possessions alone and unbelonging, sick, poor, starved of meaning...palely loitering through life."

Laurens Van der Post

BEYOND MURPHY - QUIRKY LAWS OF NATURE (from the Internet)

* Gunnensen's law : "The probability of a given event is inversely proportional to it's desirability."

* Snafu's law : "Given any problem containing N equations, there will be N+1 unknowns."

* Meskimen's law: "There's never time to do it right, but always time to do it over."

* First law of Chaos Theory: "You cannot successfully determine beforehand which side of the bread to butter."

* Mathis' rule: "It is bad luck to be superstitious."

* Morton's law: "If rats are experimented upon, they will develop cancer."

* Goldwyn's law: "A verbal contract isn't worth the paper it's printed on."

* Corry's law: "Paper is always strongest at the perforations."

NEWS BRIEFS

* Faith healing causes needless deaths

A study has shown that four out five juvenile deaths would probably have been avoided if parents sought medical help instead of merely trusting in faith healing.

* Oldest observatory discovered

The journal Nature has reported on the discovery of the oldest astronomical observatory yet. It was found in the Sahara Desert in Egypt and dated at 4000 to 4500 BC making it 1000 years older than Stonehenge in England. It probably served as a calendar and temple.

* God has landed in Texas according to sect

A Taiwanese sect leader predicted that God, accompanied by flying saucers, would land at his "home" in Dallas, Texas at 10:00 on 31 March 1998 and shake hands with those present. The big moment turned out to be quite uneventful. The sect leader's response: God had entered the souls of those present and those who did not see him were denying their identity as humans.

* More confirmation for Einstein's general theory of relativity

The theory predicts that spinning objects will generate space-time curvature. Observations of spinning U.S. satellites by an international team of researchers has shown that Einstein was correct yet again.

* Most distant object in cosmos found by astronomers

The object, a young galaxy, is 12 billion light years away. Because of its great distance astronomers have been given a window into the past - a look at the universe when it was less than a billion years old.

* The face on Mars found to be just a hill

The 1976 Viking mission found an apparent face on Mars fuelling speculation that an ancient civilization lived on the red planet. NASA have released the closest photograph of the site yet and have established that it is a natural feature.

* Physical basis for female homosexuality found

Researchers have discovered that lesbian and heterosexual women respond differently to certain sounds and that this difference is established at birth. The cause may be exposure by the female foetus to male hormones.

* 200 million year dinosaur discovered

One of the oldest dinosaurs has been discovered by researchers from Catholic University in Rio Grande do Sul state, Brazil. It was plant-eating, lizard-like, sheep-sized and belongs to the suborder prosauropoda.

SPECIAL PLEADING OR WHY ARCHAEOPTERYX DOESN'T FLY SO WELL

Mike L Anderson

Archaeopteryx is perhaps the classic transitional form with its curious mix of reptilian(1) and avian features. Unsurprisingly, those who feel that evolution is incompatible with Creation have a vested interest in belittling Archy's transitional status. Typically, this is done by emphasizing its bird-like features. So, it might surprise you to learn that I can prove that the creationist Duane Gish does not think much of Archy's flying capability. Well I can. Gish says, and I quote from the title of an article of his: "Archeopteryx won't fly" (2) I managed this "proof" by omitting key words on the title. The full title reads: "As a transitional form Archeopteryx won't fly." What he means, of course, is that Archy is not a good transitional form. My "proof" can be considered as a species of the fallacy called special pleading; we commit this fallacy when we make much of material that is favourable to our position and ignore or downplay material that is not.

Gish commits the same fallacy in "proving" that Archy was a fully fledged bird and no transitional form. He says "No doubt Archeopteryx was a feathered creature that flew - it was a bird!" Gish's "proof" is to show that all of the 21 specialized characters of Archeopteryx claimed by some paleontologists to be shared with coelurosaurian dinosaurs are in fact bird-like. (In fact he only discusses 6 characters). But I'm prepared to let him have all 21. What he fails to mention, which is the crucial point, is that Archy does indeed share many unspecialized characters with coelurosaurian dinosaurs - so many that a turkey might have outfoxed Archy in a dogfight!

What is remarkable is how often this fallacy is committed with respect to Archy and in the name of Christianity. Philip Johnson, who is trained in legal philosophy, might be expected to give a fair summary of the evidence before announcing his verdict that Archy is "on the whole bird-like" (3). Yet he failed to tell the jury of any of Archy's exclusively reptilian characters; if you left it to Johnson you would never know that it had a tail, an unfused backbone, unfused digits, a pubic peduncle, ribbed cervical

vertebrae and no uncinata processes to name a few. Apart from Archaeopteryx these are only found in reptiles. Instead he chose to mention only those reptile-like features which are sometimes found in birds.

As a transitional form Archaeopteryx flies rather well. It takes a special fallacy to conclude otherwise.

(1) For the purposes of this article it is not necessary to distinguish between reptilian and dinosaurian features.

(2) Gish, D.T. (1989) As a transitional form Archaeopteryx won't fly. IMPACT No. 198.

(3) Johnson, P.E. (1991) Darwin on Trial. Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois.

ANECDOTES ABOUT ACADEMICS

From the Internet

The great mathematician David Hilbert was once invited to give a talk on any subject he liked during the early days of air travel. His subject:

The Proof of Fermat's Last Theorem

Needless to say, his talk was eagerly anticipated. The day arrived, the talk was given, and it was brilliant -- but it had nothing at all to do with Fermat's Last Theorem.

After the talk, someone asked Hilbert why he had picked a title that had nothing to do with the talk. His answer: "Oh, that title was just in case the plane crashed."

During a lecture, the famous physicist Professor Paul Dirac made a mistake in an equation he was writing on the blackboard. A courageous student raises his finger and says timidly : "Professor Dirac, I do not understand equation 2." Dirac continues writing without any reaction. The student supposes Dirac has not heard him and raises his finger again, and says, louder this time: "Professor Dirac, I do not understand equation 2." No reaction. Somebody on the first row decides to intervene and says: "Professor Dirac, that man is asking a question." "Oh," Dirac replies, I thought he was making a statement."

UNDERSTANDING TODAY'S POSTMODERN UNIVERSITY

Jim Leffel

What's going on around here?

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," Dickens said of the early industrial revolution. The same can be said of the Christian witness in today's secular university. On the one hand, we see more openness to spirituality than in several decades as naturalistic, materialistic dogma has fallen into disfavor in many quarters. On the other hand, the kind of spirituality people are open to is decidedly anti-Christian.

I am convinced that as the social and ideological landscape changes, the way Christians approach evangelism in the university is in need of change. All too often, we continue taking the same approach that we did two or three decades ago--only to a new generation that no longer accepts many of our key assumptions. Here's one measure of what I mean: Twenty years ago when I was an undergraduate philosophy major, Christianity was largely rejected because it was thought to be "unscientific" and consequently untrue. But today Christianity is widely rejected, not because it was carefully examined and found wanting, but merely because it claims to be true.

Effective campus ministry requires discerning the spirit of the age. Until recently, Christians enjoyed substantial common ground with most non-Christians. The majority of non-Christians grew up with at least nominal church experience. When they took the time to think about it, most people had a loosely Christian world view. So straightforward gospel presentations like Campus Crusade for Christ's four spiritual laws effectively put these common notions into a meaningful and relevant framework.

Today, we have far less common ground with secular culture. Contemporary students, children of the "sixties generation" that left the church in record numbers, have grown up with minimal exposure to Christianity. In an age of religious pluralism, God is viewed more as an impersonal force than a transcendent Person. And biblical notions such as objective moral guilt don't fit into the dominant ethic of openness to everything.

The kind of sceptics we now find on university campuses are not terribly moved by the evidence for Christianity. Rather, they find Christianity implausible and offensive because of its content. Christianity can't possibly be true, they think, because it excludes other religious voices and traditions. Christianity may be subjectively true in the sense that it "works" for those who believe, but imposing the gospel on others violates today's carefully cultivated credulity toward all universal truth claims.

What accounts for these changes? It's both ideological and sociological. And the two relate to each other in an important way. Let's briefly consider some sociological factors that shape contemporary thought, then examine more carefully the ideological dimension.

Sociological factors

Historically, family and faith provided the foundation for

personal identity, beliefs and values. These institutions produced a sense of permanence and stability. That God exists and that certain things are right or wrong were simply given. Church and family helped to establish and reinforce these convictions.

Now both of these sources of identity and belief in trouble-- and along with them, the sense of stability and permanence they once provided. Growing up without meaningful participation in a faith community of any kind, and often without a two parent family, today's student has very different lenses to see the world. Alan Bloom has suggested in his *The Closing of the American Mind* that children of divorce are more likely to embrace a relativistic, fragmented outlook because, psychologically, that's been their experience. When a child's most intimate trust has been violated by voluntary separation, nothing seems worthy of commitment, nothing is given.

In the vacuum created by the absence of faith and family, education and media have emerged as the new shapers of contemporary thought. And these, sociologist Robert Bellah observes, are the most secularized institutions in American society. The outlook encouraged by media and education mirrors and reinforces secular thought in the university. Let's turn our attention to the ideological undercurrent of our day.

Understanding the postmodern shift

We're witnessing a broad based backlash against reason in our culture. The argument is that every time somebody claims to be in possession of the truth (especially religious truth), it ends up repressing people. So it's more "informed" not to make truth claims at all. How has this surprising outlook gained such wide acceptance especially in the humanities and social sciences? That requires us to understand the emerging ideology of our day: Postmodernism.

Postmodernism abandons modernism, the humanist philosophy of the European Enlightenment. Enlightenment thinking is based on French philosopher Rene Descartes' concept of the autonomous man -- the one who starts from his own thought ("I think, therefore I am") and builds his world view systematically from reason alone. Naively, postmodernists charge, modernists assumed that the mind is a "mirror of nature," meaning that our perceptions of reality actually correspond to the way the world is. From this presumption, modernists built a culture that exalts technological achievement and mastery over nature. As postmodernists see it, expansion-minded capitalism and liberal democracy, outgrowths of modernist autonomous individualism, subjugated the earth to the eurocentric, male dominated paradigm.

But modernism planted the seeds of its own undoing. As modernists conquered the globe in the name of progress, oppressed and marginalized people have responded. "Progress toward what?," they cry. Postmodernists say that the idols of humanistic rationalism and technological proliferation have brought the modern age to the brink of disaster. The myth of

"modern progress" ends up in a nightmare of violence, both for the people it marginalizes and for the earth. That's why today there is such interest in primal cultures and for a world view that promotes the unity of humanity with nature, rather than man standing over nature.

Postmodern critiques of humanism, progress and the efficacy of autonomous reason are warranted. Grandiose claims of Enlightenment rationalists, who believed that human reason was sufficient to arrive at ultimate truths independent of divine revelation, are unfounded. Blind optimism that technological advancement and essential human goodness will solve all social problems is equally naive.

While Christians should welcome much of postmodernism's critique of modernism, the basis of their critique rests on equally dubious assumptions and leads to disastrous conclusions. The rhetorical power of postmodern terms like "tolerance," "openness," and "inclusion" effectively disguise a more destructive objective -- the end of all absolutes. Postmodern openness to spirituality may seem like a positive step away from modernist naturalism. But the reality is that postmodern spirituality is inherently anti-Christian, because it considers the Christian message (like all world views) true only for those who accept it.

Postmodern constructivism

Rather than seeing humanity as an ocean of individual rational selves, as modernists held, postmodernists think of humans as products of culture and deny the individual self all together. Humans are considered "social constructs." Postmodern psychologist and social critic Kenneth Gergen notes in his *The Saturated Self*,

1.

With the spread of postmodern consciousness, we see the demise of personal definition, reason, authority. . . All intrinsic properties of the human being, along with moral worth and personal commitment, are lost from view. . .

The self stands under "erasure" for postmodernists, meaning that all transcendent categories, including essential human personhood and human value are lost. This raises not only important questions about human rights, but directly relates to the question of objective truth and reason. Postmodern anthropology is based on the idea that humans are "social constructs," or socially determined beings. Peter Berger's work in the sociology of knowledge well expresses postmodern "constructivism" and its implications. In *Invitation to Sociology*, Berger states,

2.

A thought of any kind is grounded in society. . .The individual, then, derives his worldview socially in very much the same way that he derives his roles and

his identity. In other words, his emotions and his self-interpretation like his actions are predefined for him by society, and so is his cognitive approach to the universe that surrounds him.

Rather than conceiving the mind as a mirror of nature, postmodernists argue that we perceive reality through the lens of culture and language. This leads postmodernists to reject the possibility of discovering objective truth since each culture approaches reality differently, depending on its particular needs and historical conditions. To claim knowledge of objective truth presumes the possibility of transcending the social construction of knowledge, which is, on postmodern assumptions, impossible.

In the place of objective truth and what postmodernists call "metanarratives" (comprehensive world views), we find "local narratives," or stories about reality that "work" for particular communities--but have no validity beyond that community. Indeed, postmodernists reject the whole language of truth and reality in favor of literary terms like narrative and story. It's all about interpretation, not about what's real or true.

Postmodernists hold that the pretence of objective truth always does violence by excluding other voices (regarding other world views to be invalid), and marginalizing the vulnerable by scripting them out of the story. Truth claims, we are told, are merely tools to legitimate power. Michel Foucault writes, "We cannot exercise power except through the production of truth." For postmodernists, truth claims reduce to mere propaganda, the pernicious "will to power." That's why in postmodern culture, the person to be feared is the one who believes that we can actually discover ultimate truth. The dogmatist, the totalizer, the absolutist is both naive and dangerous.

Consequently, rather than dominating others with our "version of reality," we should accept all beliefs as equally valid. Openness without the restraint of reason, and tolerance without moral appraisal are the new postmodern mandates.

Personal beliefs define truth

In postmodern culture, it's not possible to separate what a person believes from who they are since the act of believing makes it true (for the person who believes). So rejecting the content of faith means rejecting the person holding it, because truth now means personal preference and personal empowerment. It's no more appropriate to question the validity of a person's belief than to critique their choice from the dinner menu. Simply believing is justification enough. Striving together to discover truth through debate and spirited discussion is out, because no real difference exists between what a person chooses to believe and what's "true for them." The real concern is finding spirituality that "fits."

America is a religious smorgasbord. The only question seems to be "what are you hungry for?" And taste is more important than

substance. That's why people are largely unmoved when it is pointed out that their beliefs are often hopelessly contradictory or that they live inconsistently with them.

For most people, the postmodern outlook I've described is more "absorbed" than thought out. An impressive majority of Americans believe that truth is relative. But few know why they think that way. Still fewer have any clue about how their beliefs practically relate to their own lives. In general, people are more ideologically confused than deeply committed to their convictions. So while we hear the rhetoric of openness to everything and tolerance for everyone, it's rare to find someone who really understands what this means. It's just the socially appropriate attitude to have.

Ironically, in an age of anti-dogmatism, radical subjectivity leads to the dangerously arrogant inference that no one can ever be wrong about what they believe. If we are free from the constraints of rationality, nothing separates truth from self-delusion. Gergen's words are both candid and chilling:

3.

. . . evaluation can only take place from within a perspective. To favor one of these perspectives because it is 'objectively true' presupposes that I have a perspective in which 'objectively true' is an intelligible criterion of evaluation. If in my view 'objective truth' is a misleading term, I can scarcely condemn a theory because it is objectively false.

The age of anti-dogmatism ends up being the age of anti-intellectualism. Truth has been replaced, especially among many academics, for politically empowering narrative. This kind of thinking is the foundation of revisionist history, feminist critical method, and many current formulations of multiculturalism.

Christians need to be respectful of what others believe and of the traditions and experiences that form those beliefs. But the postmodern demand to uncritically accept all beliefs as true (at least for the person who believes them) is fanatical. Beliefs formed in the postmodern climate of openness and tolerance create a firewall against genuine and substantive dialogue about spiritual and moral truth. For example, "Political Correctness" advocates like Stanley Fish have argued that since all speech is a political power-play, ideas must be monitored and managed, not rationally and constructively engaged. This has given rise to the accusation, even among liberal academics like Harvard's Alan Dershowitz, that a new McCarthyism pervades intellectual life today. History offers sobering testimony to the high price such anti-rational dogmatism exacts.

To reach today's university student with the gospel and to raise up a new generation of Christian servants, Christian leaders on campus must understand postmodernism in both ideological and popular forms. Traditional apologetic approaches that stress historical and scientific evidence will be compelling only when confidence in the objectivity of truth

and reason have been restored--and this is the central apologetic task of our day.