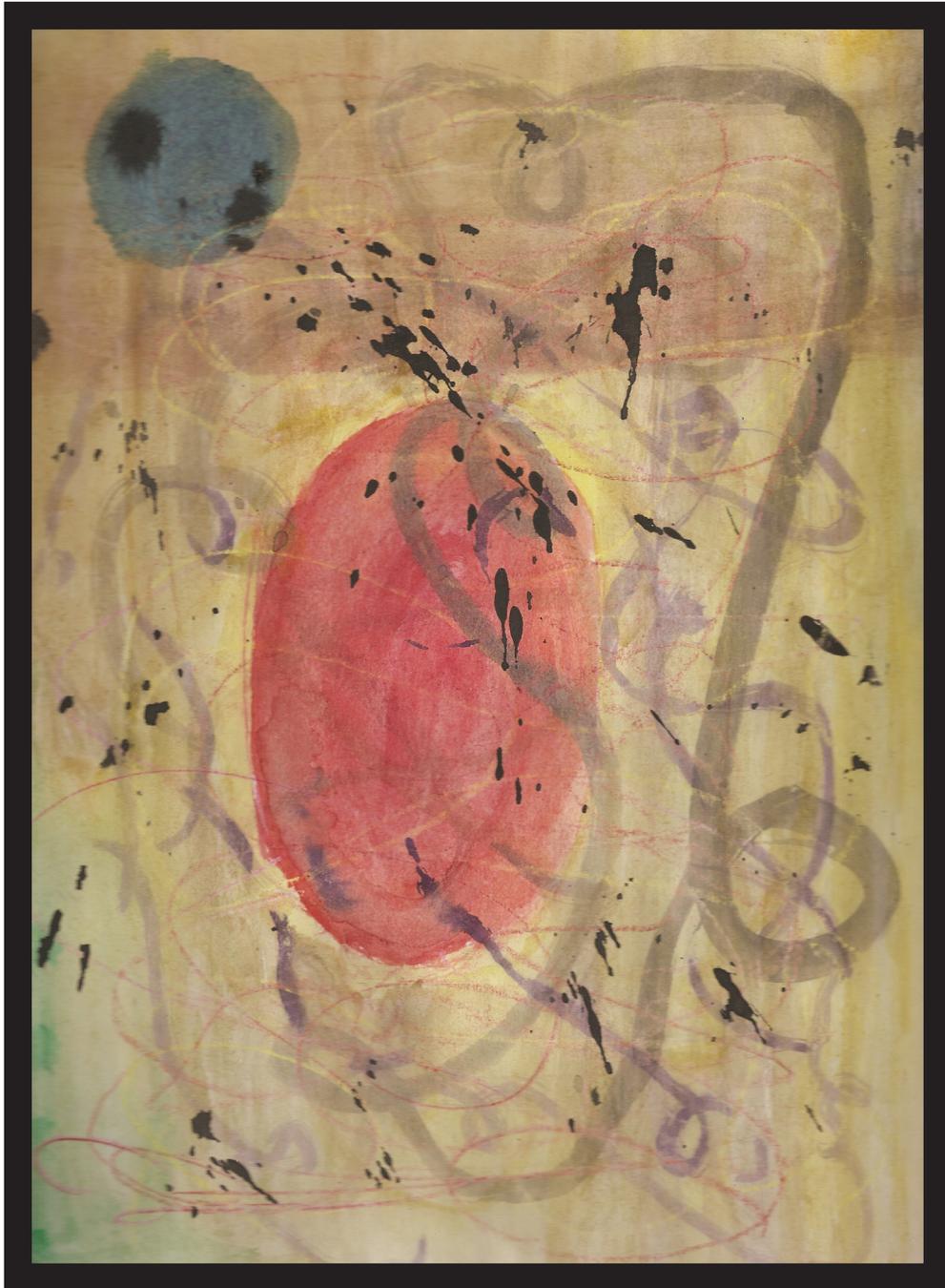


THE

Autumn 2011

QUAD

of Grove City College



"FALL" BY SAM PERRY

THE QUAD

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EDITORS' NOTE

In his poem, "A Noiseless Patient Spider," Walt Whitman compares his soul to a spider exploring its surroundings and unreeling filament after filament. He describes his soul as "surrounded, detached" and "ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing." Often we find ourselves in a similar place of surrounded, detached venturing. In our community, enveloped as we are by ideas, people and opportunities, we are often detached from the very people, places and moments that have brought us to our current station. We lose touch with our families and our history, both personal and communal, and easily miss a perspective that gives our musing and our venturing direction.

Several pieces in this issue are the products of the deliberate and grounded venturing of students and professors. As they explore physical or ideological surroundings, they also consider their attachments to community and to history. In her essay, "Why Asians are Better at Everything" Rachel Werner explores a central dichotomy that exists in parenting today, considering both her own upbringing and Amy Chua's memoir *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*. Stephen Horst recounts his exploration of the mountainous outskirts of Prague and a Vesper's service in a cold cathedral. Laura Hermesmann examines the fresh grapefruit on her kitchen counter which is "bulging with wood and ancient time" in her poem "Historical Grapefruit."

Although we're proud of every piece in this issue, we're especially excited to present an essay by Dr. Wyneken entitled "Don't Know Much about History." In his piece, which comes with a set of footnotes that are entertaining, to say the least, Dr. Wyneken addresses the way in which the Christian community examines history and searches for the truth. He discusses the widespread "oversimplification and incorrect views of history's purpose," from which Christians are not exempt and identifies dangers that come with looking for God in history. He challenges us to be aware of our limitations as we look at history and search for truth, and to be vigilant in examining the world around us.

Andrew Walker

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Volume 4, Issue 3, Autumn 2011. *The Quad* is published quarterly by students of Grove City College and funded by the college. The works in this magazine, however, do not necessarily represent the views of Grove City College, the editors, the advisor, or the editorial advisory board. The editors are responsible for the selection of articles; responsibility for opinions and accuracy of facts in articles published rests solely with the individual authors. *The Quad* grants permission for any original article to be photocopied for local use, provided that no more than 1,000 copies are made, are distributed at no cost, and *The Quad* is properly cited as the source.

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The Quad is available online at www.quadmagazine.org

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HISTORICAL GRAPEFRUIT

LAURA HERMESMANN

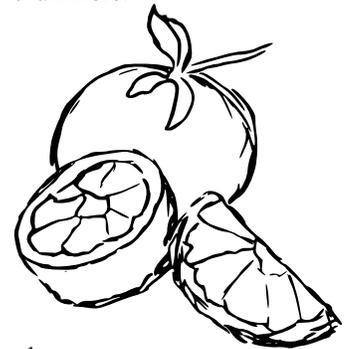
That grapefruit on the kitchen table,
halved and pulpous by the course cutting board,
is probably the oldest thing in this room.
Its own skin is ripening taut, porous and yellow
and plucked by the brown hands of Florida fruit-pickers just four days ago,
but its seeds are bulging with wood and ancient time.

Years and years ago the houses were just tree branches and molecules
unstripped; intact. The seeds still hid in the wet, sun-colored fruit,
hanging low on wild palm trees and softening slowly with age.
Beneath the trees are green-calloused alligators
with ridge backs and salty teeth and slow eyes,
sinking low beneath the lakes and terrain of Florida
(that is not yet Florida, only a nameless marsh),
waiting for a deer or a snapping turtle
to lunge at; lunch on.

In the evenings the primordial moon rises, a thin white wafer
fed upon by hungry night —
year after year, until only a crescent remains.
For now, it knows only today:
the black stomach of sky
the sulky alligators
and the plump swell of the grapefruit trees.

Years later there came the houses with the Plexiglas windows
the thrumming can-opener
the steamy whistle of the tea kettle
the four-setting toaster
and the refrigerator with rounded metal corners, stocked with TV dinners.
Even the cookie jar is new, hammered together in a tin factory
and shipped in cardboard and Styrofoam.

The grapefruit, though, sits still on the table,
rosy and yellow-skinned; seeded
with the ancient ancestors of the old marshy fruits.
Its heart is scooped at with a jagged silver spoon,
gutted and honeyed and finally consumed,
not by alligators, but by the owners of the toaster and the tea kettle.
“To eat grapefruit for breakfast,” they say, “is a healthy start to the morning.”
To eat grapefruit for breakfast. Like the night, they feed on history.



Laura Hermesmann thoroughly enjoyed the last two grapefruit poems printed by the Quad. She wrote this poem with the intentions of keeping up the trend.

WHY ASIANS ARE BETTER AT EVERYTHING

RACHEL WERNER

Like almost every other middle class American kid, I started playing piano at the age of seven. For the first few weeks I had fun because it was new and interesting, and I caught on quickly. Then things went downhill. My teacher bumped practice time from a manageable half hour to an outrageous forty-five minutes. I had to learn two page pieces instead of shorter half-pagers, and worst of all, my teacher tried (failed) to convince me of the importance of practicing scales. Scales. Nothing but up-and-down fingering exercises. So boring. The problem was that I couldn't get my left hand to play at the same speed as my right hand. Nothing worked. I hated it. I had had enough. I wanted to quit. "Mom," I said from the bench at home, "I hate piano. It's not fun anymore."

At this juncture, my mother had a choice. She could indulge my whims and let me quit for the sake of making me happy, knowing full well, however, that I would most likely live to regret it. On the other hand, she could insist I stick with it and enforce her authority, thereby risking that I might redirect my 2nd grader wrath and decide to hate her more than the piano. This is a perfect example of the parenting dichotomy that Amy Chua addresses in her memoir, *The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (2010).

Chua, a Yale law professor and mother of two girls, would identify the two options my mother faced as representative of the respective difference between Western and Chinese parenting styles. The front flap of the book jacket neatly sums up the two positions:

Western parents try to respect their children's individuality, encouraging them to pursue their true passions and providing a nurturing environment. The Chinese believe that the best way to protect their children is by preparing them for the future and arming them with skills, strong work habits, and inner confidence.

In practice, Western parents are more likely to allow

their child to give up an instrument once it gets difficult (Chua argues that in such situations, it is actually the parents who are giving in to difficulty). Chinese parents, on the other hand, operate on the assumption that "nothing is fun until you're good at it. To get good at anything you have to work, and children on their own never want to work" (29). Dedicated Chinese parents will override their child's preferences in the hope of producing what Chua calls "the virtuous cycle." The Chinese parent makes the child log multiple hours a day in practice, the child begins to excel, the child gains confidence from the praise and admiration of teachers, coaches, and evaluators, and finally the not-so-fun activity is the child's favorite thing, and the parent has an easier time making the child work at it even more.

Early on in the book, Chua explains that her monikers of "Western" and "Chinese" are imperfect. She acknowledges that plenty of other cultures (and even some counter-cultural Westerners) have the same driven approach towards parents that her Chinese immigrant parents instilled in her, while at the same time many Chinese parents (usually second or third generation Chinese Americans) have allowed the concepts of independence and freedom of choice to pervade their parenting styles.

In the first half of the book, Chua allows her readers to follow the upbringing of Sophia and Lulu, her daughters who were never allowed to have sleepovers, watch TV, or get grades lower than As. Once they start their musical instruments (piano and violin, respectively) Chua pushes them to the utmost of their abilities. All the while trusting that they will rise to the occasion, Chua yells and screams, telling the girls that if they do not live up to expectations then they are "garbage" and "just wasting time." As the teeth marks on the grand piano in their living room indicate, neither of the girls particularly enjoyed this side of their mother. Yet Sophia and Lulu practice and practice until they become

The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother
Amy Chua
The Penguin Press, 2011



known as local child prodigies, and are able to take lessons with Julliard professors.

No matter what the reader thinks of Chua's parenting style and dogmatic insistence that Chinese parenting trumps all comers, the undeniable fact is that the book is delightfully well-written. Chua's writing is surprisingly self-aware. Through passages such as this one, she indirectly acknowledges that her methods are over-the-top: "When the girls were very young, Jed got them a pair of rabbits named Whiggy and Tory. I disliked them from the moment I saw them and would have nothing to do with them. They were unintelligent and not at all what they claimed to be." At this point, either Chua is truly deranged and obsessed, or she's crafting a caricature of herself to lighten the mood at her own expense. The reader who finds Chua's extreme methods unsettling should be comforted by Chua's sense of humor; even she realizes that she was overbearing and out of control.

Many have observed the worst of Western parenting and well know the ill effects that a non-disciplined parenting style can have. Chua makes some excellent observations about child psychology and the need for authority and discipline in all of life, but especially in the home. Yet her extremes (like making the girls practice for three hours a day with non-English-speaking teachers while on vacation in Europe) are concerning. This is where the second half of the book comes in. Chua narrates her struggle to train and challenge her second daughter, the strong-willed Lulu.

This is the most honest, humble, and heart-felt part of the book as Chua realizes that children are individuals, and not everyone responds positively to being told that she is a "failure, a disgrace to the family." In the midst of this ideological shift, Chua brings the final skeleton out of her own closet and admits that she has not been entirely honest with her readers regarding the success of Chinese parenting in her own family. The book ends on a strong note, as Chua acknowledges that living under Chinese-style parents can, with some children, encourage more bitterness and resentment than success and confidence, and the sensitive reader breathes a sigh of relief. Yet in her own resilient, strong-minded way, Chua affirms that much good can be gleaned from a rigorous, tiger-mother approach to parenting that values the child's ultimate happiness and success far above temporal amusements and placations.

I've been playing piano for fourteen years now. I love Bach, Brahms, and a number of twentieth century composers. Along with a love of music, my study of piano has taught me discipline and the value of hard work. Amy Chua is right; slow, monotonous practice leads to improvement which leads to more slow, monotonous practice. But stick with it long enough, and eventually one can achieve excellence, and maybe discover a passion in the meantime. I would not wish Amy Chua on any kid, but I am glad that my own mother has a little streak of tiger in her. **Q**

Rachel Werner is in PEW, practicing scales.



NEW EXPERIENCES

STEPHEN HORST

I. A Beginning

My first two weeks here in Prague have been a blur. I arrived with no place to live, no understanding of the language or the culture—just a boyhood dream to grow and experience as much as I possibly can. So far I have met with success, but it has not been easy. I am learning more viscerally that to take, you must first give. To have, you must first give up. Sacrifice.

A few days ago I went on a solo adventure—a hike to the mountainous outskirts of the city. No map, no phone, no plans—just the clothes on my back and a travel bag at my side. As I ran (I was running), the one word that came to mind was escape. I don't know why, but I had an itch to just get away from anything familiar even though nothing really was. I burst up the first trail I found, breathing almost frantically as my legs took their swiftest pace. I could conceive no reason for this spontaneity, but I suppose that's how these things often are—unreasonable. My right heel was burning with pain, bleeding probably, but I didn't care. What's a known pain in the body to an unknown burning in the soul? I kept going, going, up and up, chasing the sunset on the western side. Running, from what I know not. I came to a clearing and a breeze hit me on the bend—or a wind I should say for it was strong.

It was like breathing for the first time. Freedom.

I finally reached the top—or what I thought was the top, I still don't know exactly where I was. And then I saw it: sunset. In stillness I stood watching the atmosphere swallow this red orb like a pleasant gumdrop. My heart slowed. My restlessness was gone. I turned around and began the descent, retracing my steps from a subconscious memory. The heavy noise that had been blasting from my soul was replaced by the soothing clip-clop-clip-clip of my feet trouncing back down the hill. The night cool came swiftly, and blanketed my surroundings with tranquility, putting my weary soul to rest.

Since that day my footing has felt more sure. I feel

grounded, and emboldened by some inner strength that has no words. I am ready to begin, to explore, to adventure, though I often will not know the way . . .

II. Perspective

Last week, I was exploring more of this city on the North side of the Vltava, and stumbled upon a beautiful cathedral—you know, the kind you would never have found unless you stumbled upon it. It was evening, and the night air breathed a wash yellow-brown light on the cathedral, giving it a translucent sort of radiance. I skipped up the front steps and heard the faint sound of singing as I drew nearer the door; a Vesper's service. I opened the door, and the low hum of the organ swelled suddenly full, flooding my ears with composed brilliance. I slid into a hard wooden pew near the rear, and sat down quietly.

The cold was biting.

During prayer I peered above interlocked hands and saw small clouds of breath form in front of sober faces as they responded in unison to the priest's prompting. The liturgy continued—kneel, stand, prayer, song—it moved right along and I followed as best I could. During the exchange of peace, I offered my hand and a smile and mumbled the word in soft English, hoping my foreign tongue would go unnoticed. Cold hands met, and sober faces turned up warm smiles. I was surprised by that; I couldn't tell you why.

The congregation was full and it was not even Sunday. It was cold and uncomfortable, and this alone would have been enough to drive most people out of the building altogether and into the warmth of their own homes. But here they sat—the elderly, families, even infants—here they sat through the freezing cold, and in stiff pews, holding on to the hope of warmer days to come, no matter how far off that seems.

I don't complain about the cold anymore.

III. WESTMINSTER ABBEY SERVICE

This is difficult for me. I went through something during this service—a fully integrated experience involving my whole being. A transformation perhaps? I really don't know, or at least I don't fully understand it yet. (I remember the first time I went to Europe and the feelings and thoughts that I had as I entered all the different basilicas and cathedrals, particularly during services.) Most every time I did, something struck at the core of my soul, and I gained a clearer perspective and understanding of myself, the Lord, the world—the whole thing, really. It's the distinction between seeing a work of art in a book and experiencing it in person. What you see does not change (in a categorical sense), but the knowledge is strengthened in a way, that is quite mysterious.

The opening hymn set the tone. The organ was pounding away victoriously as the Westminster choir processed into their pews. The four of us were seated in highly ornate private pews opposite the half the choir with the soloists. Before the choir came five little altar boys wearing red robes with white frill fenced 'round their necks. The crucifix led the procession, followed by the incense and the rest of the priests.

The liturgy began as the choir sang the *Gloria*. This was where I almost lost it. I sank into the back of my pew, hidden from my neighbors, alone, staring at the softly lit countenance of a boy soprano. He sang in the quartet sections. And from his first note, my eyes began to water—for many reasons I am sure; but for right now I will name just two. The first is because of what that sound represents. A young boy with soprano voice carries with him a tone so pure, natural, and unadulterated that it seems to have been left untainted by the sin born from Eden. It's perhaps the closest representation of actual purity in all the natural world. This understanding caused my eyes to swell. And they did so secondly, for a very personal reason, and most difficult to explain.

I've been in choirs all my life, boy choirs included. I've also been around sacred choral music my whole life. I was born in to it. And I've heard the *Sung Eucharist* before—many

times. But for some reason, this evening was vastly different. I saw my life flash by—growing up in Bowie as a small boy, taking voice lessons from my mother, joining the Maryland Boy Choir when I was old enough to audition. Touring New York as an eight year old. I saw my family too—as it used to be—four young adventuring boys singing our way through life as our musical parents guided our steps. I saw Jimmy's face again, innocent and kind, as he touched the heart of every listener. I saw my oldest brother give his last soprano performance with a full symphony and professional soloists. I saw my dad at his old piano in our old house, both of which he was so fond at the time. I watched the years go by. Not just any years, but a particular set. It is probably most accurate to describe them as my growing years. And while I am obviously still growing (as is clear from this very experience), a major transition has met my eyes all of the sudden. It has been slowly happening I suppose, but it has never been so visceral. It's like the day historians wake up and realize we all just passed through a new period. "Oh, that was the Renaissance." Except this is much more personal. Both of my older brothers have real jobs, soon to be careers. My younger brother, who I have always been closest to, is about to graduate high school and go on to college. I miss being with him every day. I miss the days when I was his guide to life, and we never left each other's side. I miss following my older brothers because they always knew what to do next. But all of this is gone—it has dissolved into one long soliloquy that is the past, and it cannot be retrieved.

So it was in Westminster Abbey during a *Sung Eucharist* service, while listening to a boy choir with tears ready to flow down my face, that I realized I am a man. Boyhood is gone. My parents grow old, my older brothers move on, my younger brother grows up, and I am no longer where I have been for so long. I have no choice in the matter. I must embrace the memories of boyhood and bring them forward to where I must now go. Nothing is lost. More is realized. A lot more. **Q**

Stephen E. Horst is a junior Philosophy major seeking a fuller aesthetic in life. His faith is weak. But he is learning more each day that that's okay.

REVIEW OF *MOONWALKING WITH EINSTEIN*

LAUREN THOMAS

While interning for Slate magazine, Joshua Foer became interested in memory and decided to observe the 2005 U.S. Memory Championship, which features self-proclaimed “mental athletes” who compete to remember the most random numbers, lines of poetry, and shuffled decks of playing cards. Impressed by what he saw, Foer interviewed participants, expecting to hear reports of exceptional intelligence or photographic memories. Instead, the competitors claimed that any person could train his memory to compete; having a good memory is not a matter of intelligence, they insisted, but of dedication and training. Foer determined to find out for himself, and with the assistance of Ed Cooke, an eccentric young “grand master of memory,” he spent a year training his own admittedly average memory. In 2006, he returned to the U.S. Memory Championship – this time, not as an observer, but as a top contender. Not only did Foer take home the trophy, but he set a new record in the “speed cards” event by memorizing a deck of 52 cards in 1 minute and 40 seconds.

Foer documents his remarkable journey from intrigued observer to U.S. Memory Champion in *Moonwalking with Einstein*. Classified as “participatory journalism,” the book attempts to be both an entertaining memoir and a treatise on memory, including forays into cognitive neuroscience, chicken sexing, ancient history, and the complexities of mnemonic devices. Although Foer spends much of the book explaining the classical techniques he learned over the course of his year of training, the book is not intended to be an instruction manual for improving memory.

Foer is at his best when he writes about mnemonic devices, all of which are based on the concept of elaborative encoding, which posits that the more meaningful something is, the easier it is to remember. Foer explains:

“The principle underlying all memory techniques is that our brains don’t remember all

types of information equally well. As exceptional as we are at remembering visual imagery . . . we’re terrible at remembering other kinds of information, like lists of words or numbers. The point of memory techniques is . . . to take the kinds of memories our brains aren’t good at holding on to and transform them into the kinds of memories our brains were built for.”

During his year of training with Cooke, Foer developed a mental collection of often ridiculous images, which he assigned to numbers, playing cards, and anything else he needed to memorize. This translation of dull sets of numbers into vivid images assisted him as he raced to memorize an entire deck of playing cards at the U.S. Memory Championship. The unusual title of the book represents the combination of four of spades, king of hearts, and three of diamonds, and is one of the more wholesome images Foer uses to aid his memory. (In an attempt to create highly memorable images, Foer often relies on lewd, explicit, or offensive scenarios.)

In addition to developing creative mental images, Foer uses “memory palaces” to store the images. This technique is based on the classic “method of loci,” which requires visualizing a location that one knows well (such as a childhood home) and mentally walking through it, distributing each of the items one needs to remember to a specific place in a room of the “memory palace.” Interestingly, unlike the average person attempting to memorize a series of words or numbers, trained mnemonists who use this particular memorization process engage areas of the brain involved in spatial navigation and visual recognition, including the right posterior hippocampus—the very same areas of the brain used by experienced London cab drivers.

In his attempt to blend entertaining memoir and serious treatise, Foer at times tends toward writing that sounds more like a reality TV script than a thoughtful evaluation of memory (his writing style has not yet reached the heights

Moonwalking with Einstein
Joshua Foer
The Penguin Press, 2011



attained by his older brother, Jonathan Safran Foer.) Although he asserts that memory is an “art and science,” the central event in the book, the U.S. Memory Championship, treats memory more like an athletic sport, requiring discipline, training, and concentration. Foer at times overworks the mock-heroic metaphor, referring to the U.S. Memory Championship as a “three-day memory decathlon” whose participants are “warriors of the mind.” Despite using such language to honor his colleagues, he acknowledges that the championship is not the Super Bowl of savants he initially expected to find. Instead, it unfolds with all the glamour of the SAT, and the contestants, despite their illusions of athleticism, are mostly eccentric men wearing blacked-out goggles and headphones to improve their concentration while they perform “geeky party tricks.”

It is in the epilogue that Foer becomes philosophical, reflecting on memory and the way training affected him. Although he doubled his digit span, his working memory is still no better than average. And he admits that although he

can still memorize any given kind of structured information (such as shopping lists, phone numbers, and directions), he rarely does so, finding it more convenient to simply write things down. “It’s not that the techniques didn’t work,” he writes. “I am walking proof that they do. It’s that it is so hard to find occasion to use them in the real world in which paper, computers, cell phones, and Post-its can handle the task of remembering for me.” Foer challenges his readers to consider the role of memory in the human life. Although memorization techniques have limited utility, cultivating attentiveness and engaging with the world in maximally memorable ways are valuable pursuits. Foer asks his readers an important question that will resonate among many in this age of externalized memory: “Socrates thought the unexamined life was not worth living. How much more so the unremembered life?” Q

Lauren Thomas appreciates McSweeney’s Non-essential Mnemonics.

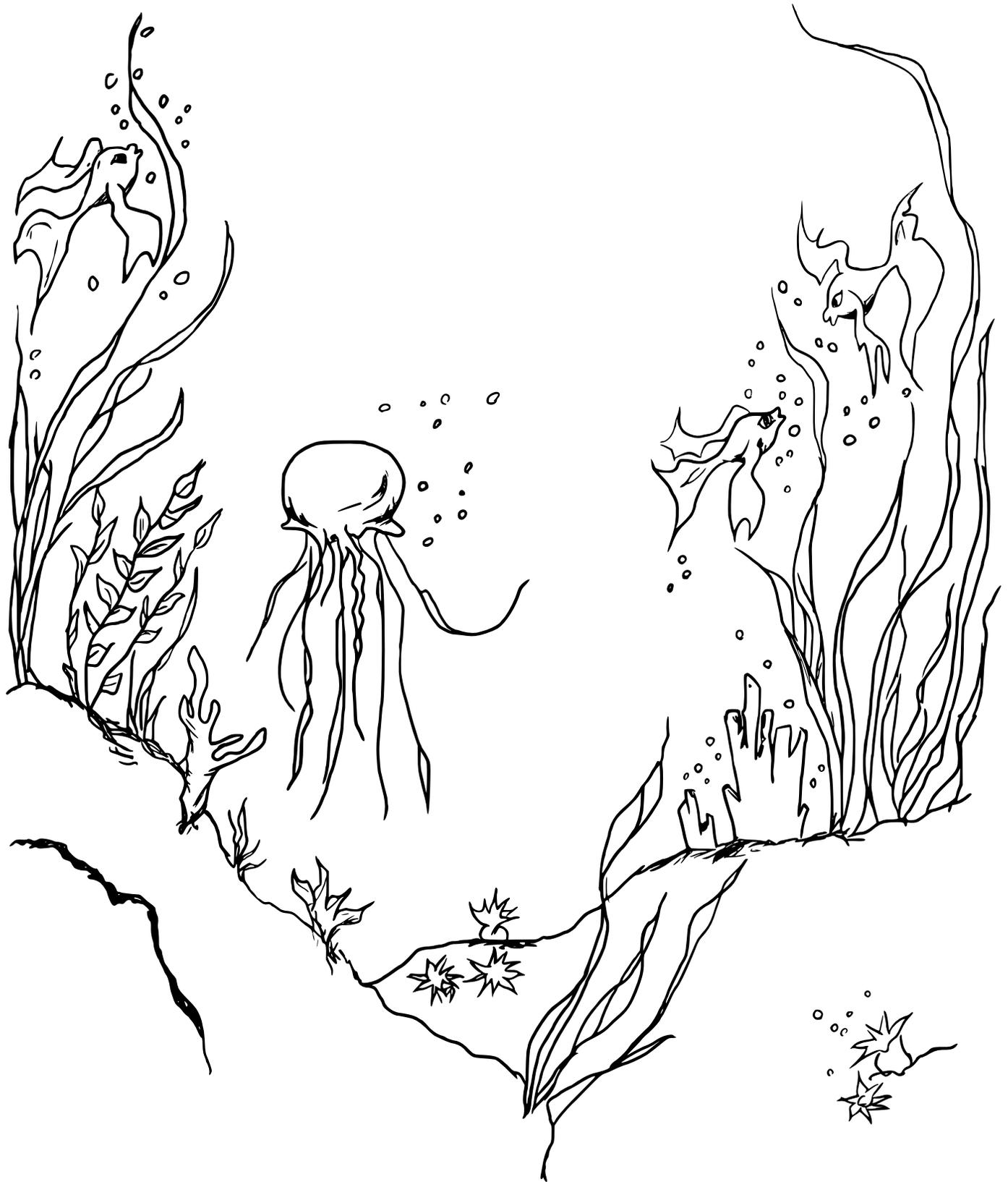
UNTITLED

ANDREW BARTEL

Let wishes be fishes,
Swimming about in the smoky blue air of our shared consciousness,
An ethereal lake, stocked with wriggling silver-scaled dreams
Of love, happiness, prosperity
Glissading, unspoken, deep above our heads.

Be careful what you fish for,
In that vaporous Jungian sea.
After all, wishes aren’t in season.

A crotchety curmudgeon since he was seven, Andrew Bartel looks forward to owning a porch and a rocking chair someday.



HEAVEN IN THE AMERICAN IMAGINATION: A REVIEW

ELIZABETH VANDYKE

At the beginning of American history, a group of New England settlers clung to a vision of heaven centered on God, his glory, and the people he would allow into his presence. Although far from perfect, these settlers strove to make God's kingdom a reality and, after decades of trying, they failed. Four centuries later the United States populace largely believes heaven is for every person who lives a good life, not just the Christian believer. Even Michael Jackson with his history of dabbling in religions and plastic surgery is widely believed to have gotten in based on his living a life of love and charity. After all, how could God not love the man who sang "Thriller?"

So why is a man the Puritans would have consigned to hell now widely believed to be 'living it up' in heaven? Dr. Gary Scott Smith explores the answer to this question, and many others, in his latest work, *Heaven in the American Imagination*. The book examines America's views of heaven from the time of the Puritans until Michael Jackson's funeral in 2009. Using journals, books, comics, tombstones, pop songs, hymns, poems, sermons, movies, magazines, letters, lectures, jokes, articles, and tales, Smith probes American religion, searching for themes and patterns within its history. Conversely, Smith also looks for what makes each period unique. Every perspective of heaven reflects its own time and setting, giving fresh nuances and emphases to an age old hope. Thus, Smith writes a dynamic story of change and development centered on a constant belief, demonstrating how stable faith is and yet how easily molded by the culture around it.

Unlike many American histories, Smith begins his account by describing the New England settlements and then moves to the early Republic, skipping the less thoroughly educated and religious Southern colonies. Citing over a dozen different sources on the Puritans, Smith proves their obsession with God's glory and the world to come.

He does much the same with Jonathon Edwards and the First Great Awakening. However, he hardly romanticizes the past, noting the Puritan's ruthless banishment of anyone considered unorthodox and the fading power of the First Great Awakening against secular forces. On the Second Great Awakening, Smith emphasizes a growing inclusivism as Deists, Unitarians, and Arminians all played a greater role in American life. As American's faith in American reason grew, God played less of a role in determining who went to heaven.

The Victorian Age and the Civil War witnessed other shifts in the American imagination of heaven. As loved ones died in a distant war, families took comfort from emphasizing heaven as home. Here, Smith quotes abundantly from a popular novel of the time called *The Gates Ajar*. The book and its sequels describe Union soldiers living, growing, and raising families in heaven, surrounded by relations who have already died. Smith also includes the perspective of African slaves and their hopes for heaven. Like other Americans of the time, they directly correlated their wants with heaven. Some spoke of masters going directly to hell and slaves directly to heaven, while other slaves hoped for mere equality in the world to come.

After the Civil War, several themes became more common in America's perception of the afterlife, including disension about hell's purpose and a fear of boredom within heaven itself. Americans worried an eternity of hymn singing would be inexplicably dull compared to their fast paced, well educated lives. Smith writes of liberal influences in the church that tried to soften hell into a temporary station. Debates over hell's purpose raged into the Progressive Era which proclaimed present day action. By then, some Christians made the argument that to concentrate on heaven was to deny the needs of the poor in the present. To them, the desperation of this world deserved more attention than

Heaven in the American Imagination
Gary Scott Smith
Oxford University Press, 2011



thoughts of the next.

During the 20th century, Americans further expanded many of the concepts presented by their forebears. Citizens and scholars continued to debate hell, how to get into heaven, and whether heaven should even be a concentration of the modern Christian. However, new perspectives and emphases on heaven continued to develop. Smith details a growing obsession with 'near death experiences' (people claiming to return from heaven after dying), as well as the idea that heaven is a place of fulfillment and acceptance. Apparently, the American belief in equality for African Americans, immigrants, women, and gays is not limited to this life but spread to next as well.

The final chapter before Smith's conclusion describes the themes of today's therapeutic cultural imaginings. The doorway to heaven is wide open, and the paradise beyond provides the ultimate understanding of life's issues and complications. Smith represents this belief by summarizing two recent books, *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* and *Lovely Bones*. In these stories, heaven provides a meaning the characters never had in life, while also giving them a new and perfect setting that seems much like a glorified version of this world. Meanwhile, the role God plays in each story is negligible; instead, the characters focus on themselves and the life they lived. Drawing from other sources, such as the writings of sociologists, psychologists, and theologians, Smith fills out his argument. Americans do not ponder and hope for heaven like they once did. Instead, the modern American focuses on this life and its pleasures. Smith's critique is insightful and biting. The modern conception of heaven grows from a society that obsesses on pleasure, self, and therapy.

Overall, Smith writes thoroughly and winsomely. His book combines a massive amount of information and compiles it into a revealing, easily grasped argument. Simply put, Smith demonstrates how the American perception of heaven reflects its own desires and culture, no matter the time period. By examining American history this way, Smith not only provides a view of the heaven that America perceived, but of the Americans who perceived heaven. Thus, he leaves the reader with a greater, more rounded, dynamic understanding of each period.

Smith does fail to address several topics within his book, leaving the reader unsatisfactorily curious. Notably, the First, Second, and Cold Wars of the 20th Century receive barely any notice. These conflicts rippled through American society and culture, changing everything from gender roles to economics. Surely they directly touched America's understanding of the world to come as well. Additionally, Smith often discusses the complimentary topics of hell, salvation, and God, but he rarely addresses the connections between America's view of heaven and the end of time. At several points Americans have believed the world's end to be imminent. It would seem that this immediacy would change America's stance towards heaven. Smith fails to ask the question, but it should be granted that his work was written as a survey. An author cannot cover all theories, and the absence of these discussions does not destroy his argument. Rather, like all good historical accounts, his conclusions create the need to ask more about the theories he explored.

In the end, the most critical question to be asked of Smith's work comes from his critique of the modern conception of heaven. The book proves that no Christian can escape the effects of their culture, and the modern world seemingly stunts the truest imaginings of heaven. Can the modern Christian believe his vision of heaven, knowing that he lives in a corrosive culture? Here, Smith provides subtle comfort. Throughout the book, he is always careful to give examples of Christians clinging to orthodox views of heaven based on the Bible, Christians doing things for this world while focused on the next. They form a chain of consistency throughout a story filled with variety and degradation. These fellow believers prove that it is possible to hold to the truth despite culture's quiet and pervasive effects. The task is difficult, but what awaits the believer at the end of life anchors him to the truth. The God of heaven keeps his followers, no matter the time or the culture they come from. Our hope is built on nothing less. **Q**

One fine day in Switzerland Elizabeth realized that the heavenly glory of God will surpass everything she saw during her travels. Sadly, she also realized that nothing in the States can quite compare to visiting Geneva. Since then, she has been eagerly anticipating a return trip to Europe or dying.

SIN IS DIRT?

THE REDEMPTIVE COGNITIVE METAPHOR IN PSALM 51

WILLIAM ROSS

Psalm 51 is often, and for good reason, called “The Sinner’s Guide,” or “The Sinner’s Psalm.” In it, we find a lament from King David after his sins of adultery and murder. The Psalm is a confession and a plea for cleansing and restoration. Even a brief look at the psalm’s contents will reveal why the Christian can deeply identify with David: all have sinned, all need cleansing after repentance. Why does this psalm have such resonance with the believer? The function of the central cognitive metaphor in Psalm 51 provides a means by which to find an answer. Although the conceptual metaphor accessible at first glance to the *modern* individual is helpful, a richer understanding of Psalm 51 comes about through the cognitive world of the *Israelite*, framed primarily by YHWH’s commandments in the Levitical laws of purity.

Prior to examining the Psalm itself, a working definition of cognitive metaphor must be established. Literature and cognitive science professors Mark Turner and George Lakoff explain that cognitive metaphor “suffuses our thoughts” automatically. In other words, *everyone* employs cognitive metaphor in conversation and thought almost *all the time*. It is irreplaceable, allowing us to “understand our selves [sic] and our world in ways that no other modes of thought can... [I]t is indispensable not only to our imagination but also to our reason.”¹ Again, with *cognitive* metaphor, we refer not only to intentionally poetic or literary use of metaphor, but metaphor used *unconsciously* as a part of constructing and communicating meaning in everyday speech. Indeed, metaphor “resides in thoughts, not just words,” and is processed and understood immediately by the listener with no explanation on the part of the speaker.²

An example will help. If a student returns to her dorm room from the library, and her roommate asks if she had a

productive night, the student might respond by saying: “Not really. I was out of it. I knew I was behind schedule and I got off to a good start, but I kept getting sidetracked. I guess I had pretty low motivation and the night went by quickly somehow.” Packed into her response are no fewer than *five* cognitive metaphors. Each metaphor helps this student communicate something abstract in terms of something more concrete. By saying “I was out of it,” the metaphor STATES ARE LOCATIONS³ is invoked, so that the student expresses, by contrast, that she was “in” an unfocused mental state instead of a focused one (“it”). Saying “I was behind schedule” also uses the STATES ARE LOCATIONS metaphor, so that the state of being finished with her work (represented by her “schedule”⁴) becomes the location she is “behind.”⁵

Likewise, “I got off to a good start” implies that LIFE IS A JOURNEY,⁶ on which she initially progressed well, specifically in the domain of the work aspect of her life, but later she became less productive, thus “slowed down.” Saying “I had pretty low motivation” invokes the metaphor MORE IS UP (and conversely, LESS IS DOWN), so that being very productive is equivalent to having “high” motivation. Finally, in saying “the night went by quickly,” the student employs the metaphor NIGHT IS A MOVER.⁷

The example above demonstrates how cognitive metaphors work by mapping aspects of what is called the “source

³ In the discussion of metaphor, capital letters are used to denote the cognitive level. For a brief but fuller discussion of metaphor than is provided here, see Charles Forceville, “Metaphor,” in *The Encyclopedia of Semiotics*, ed. Paul Bouissac (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 411-415.

⁴ See the encyclopedia cited above for a discussion of metonymy, or the interchangeability of word for idea, or vice versa, due to multiple shared properties.

⁵ We could also speak about the metaphor PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS implicit here.

⁶ Or even, TASKS ARE JOURNEYS, not to mention the idiom “getting off” to imply beginning a journey.

⁷ Or TIME IS A MOVER, since time is represented metonymically by “night.”

¹ George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), xi.

² Lakoff and Turner, *More than Cool Reason*, 2.



domain,” the more concrete thing, onto the “target domain,” or the abstract thing being described. By doing so, a better and shared understanding of that target domain is created. To specify: THE TARGET DOMAIN IS THE SOURCE DOMAIN. Metaphor works best when we “find-or impose-some correspondence between the [source domain] and our [common] knowledge of the kinds of events typical of the target domain.”⁸ That is why many cognitive metaphors are ubiquitous, such as LIFE IS A JOURNEY. Since everyone experiences the challenges, decision-points, and weariness common to the process of taking a journey, this shared experience serves as an excellent source domain to better describe the target domain of life. In this way, metaphor is not personally isolated, but “part of the way members of a culture have of conceptualizing their experience” and sharing it with one another verbally.⁹

Armed now with cognitive metaphor¹⁰, Psalm 51 may be tackled.¹¹ First, to specify again the difference between poetic metaphor and cognitive metaphor, poetic metaphor compares two *concrete* things, as in the statement “Your eyes are doves.”¹² The *cognitive* function of this poetic metaphor, however, contrasting the concrete with the abstract, might perhaps be: ASPECTS OF FEMININITY ARE ANIMALS. With this distinction in mind we turn to Psalm 51.

David writes his psalm in two main parts. First, verses 1-12 detail his confession (vv.3, 4a, 5), plea for mercy (vv. 1-2, 7, 9-12), and, importantly, the basis for each (v. 4b). Then, in verses 13-19, David expresses what he will do after he has been cleansed by YHWH (note in verse 13 “*then* I will . . .”¹³). With these two parts of the psalm in view it becomes evident that the psalm is centered not on David the sinner, but on YHWH as his “saving God” (v. 14) who has abundant mercy (v. 1) on sinners who have a contrite heart (v. 17).¹⁴

In the first portion of the psalm, the writer employs a unifying cognitive metaphor centered on cleanness and uncleanness. Between verses 1 and 12, he says that transgressions can be “blotted out” (v. 1), and iniquity can be “washed” thoroughly (v. 2) or “blotted out” (v. 9). Sin can be “cleansed” (v. 2), just like the sinner (v. 7) and his heart (v. 10). The sinner can also be “purged” (v. 7) or, alternatively, “cast away” (v. 11), bringing images of filthy rags to mind. Though each phrase implies a slightly different nuance of metaphor, at the end of the day,¹⁵ the overarching cognitive metaphor at work in the psalm is SIN IS DIRT. By using this metaphor, the reader or listener understands something more about what the psalmist is saying about the target domain, sin, by mapping onto it what is already known about and experienced in the target source domain, dirt. Dirt, to the modern, is something that that is undesirable. It is a problem, a hazard, an inconvenience, and must be gotten rid of by whatever means possible. In Psalm 51, David realizes that *he* cannot cleanse himself of the dirt of his sin, but rather YHWH must do it *for* him.

When dealing with a simple cognitive metaphor like SIN IS DIRT, it is possible to broaden its implications to see further metaphoric worlds. For example,¹⁶ throughout scripture man is referred to in a way that evokes the metaphor PEOPLE ARE PLANTS, such as in Gen. 1:28 when Adam and Eve are told to “be fruitful and multiply.” Given that people are plants, the broader implication is that YHWH IS A FARMER (cf. Is. 5:1-7a; Jer. 2:21; Ezek. 17:1-10). Within the conceptual framework of this broader metaphor one can also draw implicative metaphors, such as THE WORLD IS A FIELD (Mt. 13:38), JUDGMENT IS WINNOWING (Ex. 15:7; Is. 17:13), and DEATH IS HARVEST (Rev. 14:14-20). To take SIN IS DIRT, then, and broaden it, we might find the following ideas emerge. If sin is dirt, then it follows from Psalm 51 that FORGIVENESS IS THE STATE OF CLEANNESS, and, most broadly, YHWH IS A WASHER. Parallel to these ideas are the metaphors MERCY IS A CLEANING

⁸ Lakoff and Turner, *More than Cool Reason*, 38-9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁰ COGNITIVE METAPHOR IS A WEAPON

¹¹ This portion of the essay will prove most interesting when read with Psalm 51 at hand. I have primarily used the ESV in my examination, as well as the Hebrew. Also note the metaphor PSALM 51 IS AN OPONENT here.

¹² Eccl. 1:15b (ESV)

¹³ The word “then” is lacking in the Hebrew text, but has been added in the translation process.

¹⁴ For more on the chiasmic structures in Ps. 51, see Frederick J. Gaiser, “The David of Psalm 51: Reading Psalm 51 in Light of Psalm 50,” *Word*

& *World* vol. 23 no. 4 (Fall 2003): 382-394. Page 387 is referenced here.

¹⁵ Notice the metaphors: THE PROCESS OF THOUGHT IS A DAY, and DAYS ARE JOURNEYS.

¹⁶ The following example is dependent upon Fred Putnam’s discussion in “YHWH is a Farmer; People are Plants,” accessed May 7, 2011, <http://fredputnam.org/?q=node/56>.



AGENT, and CLEANNESS IS WHITENESS.

Are these ideas all that the psalmist intends the reader to gain from his metaphor? In the modern, cognitive environment, there are specific ideas concerning what defines cleanness and dirtiness. These ideas are undoubtedly different from an Israelite's. Did the Israelite, in hearing Psalm 51, glean the same target domain information from the source domain as a modern does? Would the Israelite's source domain have even *been* "dirt"?

To answer this question, we turn to Scripture.¹⁷ The language of clean and unclean is prevalent in Scripture, especially in the Old Testament realms of the Levitical priesthood, where YHWH's commandments specify what is or is not considered clean and what to do about it. The cleanness required of Israelites is not, a hygienic cleanness, but a *ritual* cleanness. Though no explicit reason for this system of laws is given in the OT, a survey of the cognitive environment created by them will demonstrate that the purity laws "served to inculcate in the mind of the ancient Israelite the sacredness of the tabernacle/temple" due to the presence of YHWH.¹⁸ Assuming this conclusion, let us briefly consider the various parts of this system in order to clearly see what implications these laws might have on the cognitive metaphor in Psalm 51.

The Israelite was specifically instructed how to "perform" those things that would make him or her ritually unclean; there are four broad categories of what could result in that undesirable estate. The first is skin disease, which is often translated "leprosy" but could include a broader range of diseases (Lev. 13-14).¹⁹ Second, the discharge of bodily fluids that did not result from accidental wounds also rendered one unclean (Lev. 12:1-8; 15:16; 15:25-30, Deut. 23:12-14, etc.).²⁰ Third, touching unclean things, such as a corpse, certain animals, or unclean objects, would transfer

uncleanness to a person (Lev. 5:1-3; 15:4-11; 11:33-34, etc.).²¹ Finally, specific animals and foods were unclean to eat or even to touch. Some of these items were especially unclean, and considered "cultic abominations" (Lev. 11:10-13; Deut. 14:3).²² Though all of what precedes could equally make the Israelite unclean, there was a scale of degree of severity. Some unclean states requiring greater reparations than others.²³

For the Israelite, the issue of avoiding uncleanness and of returning to a clean state as soon as possible was important. Anyone who became unclean was obligated to stay away from anything holy, at risk of death (Lev. 15:31). Additionally, an unclean person could not approach the tabernacle where YHWH dwelt (Lev. 16:16; Num. 19:3), since doing so would defile it *and* the land (Lev. 18:27). Moreover, if uncleanness remained too long, the entire nation was put at risk of divine wrath and even expulsion from the land (Lev. 18:25). This would eventually occur in the Exile.²⁴ Any uncleanness in Israel defiled the sanctuary and had to be removed, namely by the instrumentality of the priesthood and the numerous laws given to restore cleanness.²⁵

So what would the Israelite have known about not only the benefits of cleanness and the dangers of uncleanness, but the *reasons* for the laws given to the nation from YHWH? What was the cognitive environment that would have been conjured up as a source domain from the language of Psalm 51? Joe Sprinkle, leaning on the scholarship of Jacob Milgrom and Gordon Wenham, helps us draw some conclusions.

First of all, several explanations can be dispensed with as rationales for the law system. The issue of hygiene or public health was almost certainly not "the issue on God's mind" when he prescribed these laws to His people. If this were so, one might expect "clean" and "unclean" plants (which would presumably be the poisonous ones), or a more consistent delineation of uncleanness pertaining to animals which modern science has found likely to carry health hazards. Neither of these, however, is extant.²⁶ Nor can we rationalize

¹⁷ The following overview of Israelite purity laws leans upon the work of Joe M. Sprinkle, "The Rationale of the Laws of Clean and Unclean in the Old Testament," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43/4 (December 2000): 637-657.

¹⁸ Sprinkle, "The Rationale of the Laws . . .", 637.

¹⁹ Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 195; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 816-826.

²⁰ Sprinkle, "The Rationale of the Laws . . .", 638.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 639-40.

²² *Ibid.*, 640-41.

²³ Milgrom identifies skin disease, followed by childbirth and genital discharges as the top three most severe. Jacob Milgrom, "Rationale for Cultic Law: The Case of Impurity," *Semeia* 45 (1989): 104.

²⁴ Sprinkle, "The Rationale of the Laws . . .", 641.

²⁵ For an overview of these procedures, see *ibid.*, 642-645.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 646.



the laws by saying YHWH intended them as ways to avoid disgusting or pagan things, since these criteria do not hold up when deductively applied to the purity law system.²⁷

Instead, the issue of *holiness*, especially as an aspect of the character of YHWH, is the primary rationale behind these laws, and is manifested in a few ways. First, these laws “convey in a symbolic way that YHWH is the God of life (order) and is separated from that which has to do with death (disorder).”²⁸ Connections have been shown between cleanness/holiness and concepts like “wholeness” and “completeness,” the opposite of which can be considered movement towards death, thus into disorder and away from YHWH.²⁹ Secondly, the notion of separation is key in the idea of cleanness as holiness, represented by the separation of physical spaces within Israel,³⁰ as well as Israel’s separation from the gentile nations around it (Lev. 20:25-26; Exod. 19:6). The purity laws, then, were “object lessons” of sorts, which created Israel’s identity as a “separated” people.³¹

Most importantly, however, the purity laws were ways that YHWH conveyed his own holiness and the comparative contamination of man. When Nadab and Abihu were struck dead for approaching the sanctuary incorrectly (Lev. 10), YHWH states “Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified” (10:3).³² Also, after listing the food laws, God says to Israel “You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy” (Lev. 11:45). Holiness is elsewhere reinforced by the prohibition to enter the Holy of Holies, where YHWH dwells (Lev. 16:1-2). From these observations, we might conclude with Sprinkle that the purity laws “imply that human beings, by virtue of being part of this sin-cursed, fallen world, are “unclean” or “contaminated” and are not automatically eligible to approach God.”³³

Taking what we have seen and turning again to Psalm 51,

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 647.

²⁸ Sprinkle, “The Rationale of the Laws . . .”, 649.

²⁹ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 51-57.

³⁰ Which Sprinkle identifies as the tabernacle (holy), Israel (clean), and everything else (unclean). Sprinkle, “The Rationale of the Laws . . .”, 651.

³¹ Sprinkle, “The Rationale of the Laws . . .”, 651-652.

³² The RSV translates this verse: “I will show myself holy among those who are near me, and before all the people I will be glorified.”

³³ Sprinkle, “The Rationale of the Laws . . .”, 652.

it becomes evident that, though our cognitive metaphor SIN IS DIRT is not necessarily incorrect or unhelpful, understanding Psalm 51 becomes richer in light of an *Israelite’s* source domain experiences that result from God’s purity laws. If cleanness was not understood in terms of non-hygienic, “dirty” situations, but instead in terms of the holiness of YHWH, an Israelite might have concluded that the cognitive metaphor in Psalm 51 is THE CHARACTER OF YHWH IS ‘X’ PURITY LAW. Here, the difficult, abstract idea of the character of YHWH (or aspects thereof) is conceptualized by use of “‘X’ purity law”, so that each law in some way helps the Israelite understand something more about his God that he would not otherwise have understood. Moreover, the metaphor THE CHARACTER OF YHWH IS ‘X’ PURITY LAW is not simply a tool of communication used by two people. It is a metaphor put to use *by God*, through the purity laws, to convey something about himself *to man* that man would otherwise have never known.

Seen in this light, the conceptual metaphor of Psalm 51 is indeed rich, and carries with it considerable hope for the Christian. Though it is true and helpful in some ways to say that SIN IS DIRT, considering Israel’s purity laws it becomes evident that sin is *more than* dirt, more than a spot or blemish on man. It is man’s *nature*. As a result of the Fall, man is not mostly “good” with just a few patches of dirt on top that need to be cleansed. He is depraved through and through (Rom. 3:9-23; 7:18; 1 John 1:8-10). The good news for Christians, however, is this: just as God stooped down to show man something about his character through the purity laws given in the OT, He did so again *perfectly*, through the person of Jesus Christ, who is the full and final revelation of the character of God (John 1:18; 6:46; Heb. 1:3). It is through Christ that God not only graciously broke down the barriers between the clean Jew and the unclean Gentile (Acts 10-11), but also made His clean, sacred space within the *hearts* of his people (John. 1:14; Matt. 27:51; 18:20). In doing so, God has fully and finally reconciled His otherwise unclean people to himself (Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20). 

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WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

BETHANY DZIELSKI

Where are you from?

I say, "West Virginia"

They hear

Incest

Uneducated hillbilly

Missing teeth

I think

Mines- my great-grandfather's black lungs,
black hands, miners who bleed black blood,
suffering, layered
in coal dust

Mountains- God's majesty. Creation at its peak.

Elegant jailers, keeping the prisoners weak with
ignorance, and lack.

Poverty—"The Dirties" — government paid lunch, showered
In the locker rooms before school, or didn't.

Body Odor- poverty's perfume

The invisible slavery, bars and chains that cannot be seen, but are
heard in the child's gargling stomach

Family- mine- Large and Italian. Loud laughter echoing into the ears of plump women and short men.

Warm spaghetti sauce, green peppers, Italian bread with margarine

Jokes in Italian translated for the grandkids — "Well, it's funnier in Italian."

Dedication- sweat and tears- Factory workers, coal miners, and before that only dirt
poor immigrants,

Famers maybe,

some green beans, a few cows. Hard. Work.

Music- Fiddle, banjo, guitar, sitting on

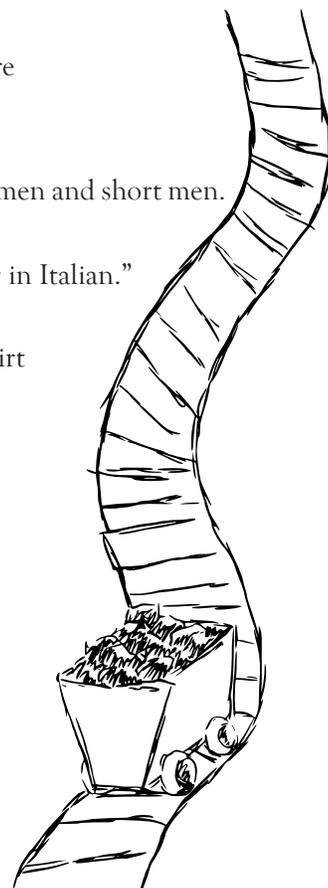
the porch steps, humming to blue grass,
country, gospel - Jesus, whiskey, and

the old hound dog.

Love- the only kind worth having.

Whispering, "West Virginia is home."

Bethany Dzielski is proud of the rich history that surrounds her birthplace. She strives to live a colorful life, and to leave behind a story worthy of being told among the greatest Appalachian folktales.



OTIS

ANDY WALKER

So, I'm sitting in Bud Halley's back room, looking at the three guys who are already in for the day, and it isn't even four o'clock.

Do you want to know why they drink so much?

Eddie Farris; he's the one sitting in the back with the soft, churchgoing face, and the sad eyes that keep darting up to the door and then drooping back down, he's the one slumped over his drink like Old Halley's gonna come and snatch it from him, pour it all over his face. That nice churchgoing face—don't he just look like he belongs in the back of a Sunday service, in a checkered shirt, next to a middle-aged woman, him singing "Blessed Assurance" at the top of his lungs, off key and the most beautiful you've ever heard? He didn't start coming here until last May. His son was out in the field, on the tractor, and he fell off it. The tractor rolled right over him, and it popped his head open like a melon, spreading it all over the corn field. No one knows what knocked him off. It was right in the middle of the field and the field was nice and smooth, no bumps to throw him off and no branches to knock the boy down. His wife will probably be crying again when Eddie stumbles in at nine tonight, cross eyed and mad enough to beat the band and her with it.

Mel Seneca—he's the one at the bar with the bum leg staring straight ahead like he's taking an eye test—he finally married Dodd's daughter Jody after her first two fiancés died in the war, made her full name Jody Seneca like he'd always wanted to. "He just wore me down," she'd always say in an exasperated voice. Mel would beam whenever she threw that particular barb, beam like his life had been changed right then and there. Heck, he probably beamed when she came to him after the first time she left, when she told him her new husband did nothing but clean his guns and sneer at her. "Not like you used to laugh at my jokes Mel, oh why was I so stupid?" He probably beamed the second time she did that to him, after she told him to leave and then came back to him after man number two, only

this time with a big purple bruise covering her left cheek. And this third time she's decided not to bother with the hassle of leaving Mel again, lets him stick around her house while she parades through town with her new husband, the two of them beaming like a couple of newlyweds.

And the businessman in the corner with the thin black tie and the smart brim of his hat, with cobwebs just starting to form on the corners of his baby face. Well, you can take your pick with stories about him. But seeing as I don't think he's lost a wife and kids in three different car wrecks and I don't think he's a hitman, I'll tell you the only thing I do know is true. Last year, Mindy Carlton had the stomach flu and couldn't sleep on account of the fever, and she walked out of her bedroom onto the front porch of the hotel in order to get some air. Mindy said the man was on the front steps—he comes and goes from the hotel every couple of weeks, "just passing through," he says, and he tips nicely—and he was on the front steps leading up to the porch. He was doubled over, hissing and snorting like he was crying and mumbling something Mindy never could make out, even though plenty of people have nicely tried to fill it in for her.

To my mind, that's the reason why the businessman comes here.

*

And do you want to know why I come here? Do you want to know why I drink so much?

I like the taste of the stuff.

I'm going to repeat that again.

I like the taste of the stuff.

It's almost the first thing I think about when I wake up in the morning. The sheets usually have come off my cot in the night, and my sweat makes my cheek stick to the plastic lining on the mattress underneath. I'll have slept with my whole girth on my left arm and even though it'll feel lifeless



and asleep, I'll use it to sit up and I'll swing my feet around and put them on the blue rug on the floor, then I'll look at him through the bars of my cell. And he'll look back, face as calm as it always is.

"Well, good morning, sleepy head," he'll say. "Why, it's almost eleven o'clock already. Ready to go?" And he'll come towards me, with the jail keys out and ready. I'll look around the room that will still almost be spinning. With the vase of flowers and the prim rocking chair, it'd be like something out of a painting, if it weren't for those iron bars on the window, with their strong vertical lines piecing up the sunshine, and I'll say,

"Yeah, I'm ready, I'm ready," I'll say, "get me outta here."

And he'll just smile and unlock the door. And then he'll say, "see you back sometime tonight," and look at me with that calm, friendly look on his face and then I'll just want the taste of the stuff so bad. As I stumble to the door and say "Bye-bye" as friendly as I can, it'll be all I can think about—the taste of the stuff, it'll be all I can think about.

I'll start out that morning with the determination to make some money, to get myself a good breakfast and maybe have enough left over to get my shirt mended—the one that's back home lying on the sofa with the big tear and the ketchup stain right down the front. Pop bottles and pop cans are usually the best way to do it; pop bottles and pop cans, all over the sidewalks, and if you turn 'em in at the right place you can get two or three cents apiece.

The day'll start out right, I'll find a big green pop bottle can right next to the park bench, 'as good as cash,' I'll think as I'll bend over to pick it up. After a good twenty minutes of looking, I'll find two more.

That's about as good as it gets. The next two or three hours I'll have no luck, and the sun'll be getting higher. I'll still be in my jacket and nice pants from the night before and I'll start to cook in them like a baked potato in tin foil. I'll know I should go home then, know I should quit while I'm ahead, but six cents is barely enough to get a couple of eggs at the diner, and besides I want to get that shirt mended. That ripped, stained shirt is important to me, it was a

gift from my wife after all. So I'll set my three glass bottles on park bench, and then I'll go over to a trash can and just start to dig. It's not as dirty as it sounds; people don't throw out much on main street that isn't dry trash, and digging through old newspapers didn't ever hurt anybody. I'll work there for about ten minutes, digging through, sifting through with my meaty fingers, anticipating the cool touch of glass and aluminum.

I'll be doing this when I hear somebody behind me clear her throat.

"I'm sorry," she'll say and she'll be standing there in a blue dress, holding a gum wrapper, "may I, uh, throw this out here, or. . ."

And then I'll be embarrassed. "Oh yeah," I'll say, "throw it out right here," I'll say as earnestly and politely as I can.

For further effect, I'll make a grand sweeping gesture with my arms towards the trash can and she'll smile and throw her wrapper out.

And then as she leaves, she'll shoot me a look. After that look, I'll get so thirsty, I'll want the taste of it so bad, that I'll leave all three bottles on the bench and head straight towards home—not looking back, not doing anything but heading straight for home.

Of course, I won't acknowledge what I intend to do when I first get in the house.

The appearance of the place will help me at first.

There are two rooms in my place, the sitting room and the kitchen room, and there is my bedroom also. All three will help me for quite a while. The sitting room just looks shabby, with nothing but a brown rug, an old radio, and three of my ripped, bloodied shirts draped over my lopsided old rocker chair.

The kitchen is what's the most striking. It looks like I've taken everyone one of Rita's dishes out of the cupboard and put them down on the counter, scattering them to and fro on purpose, just to make a mess. I haven't done that to Rita's dishes on purpose, and you can tell by the fact that none of the dishes are clean. The bowls are all crusted with cold cereal and the plates are covered with stubbles of



chili or baked beans. They just sort of all got down on the counter, all dirty and messed up.

When I start to clean up, I'll notice that the cup I'm holding is flecked with ants. Then I'll notice that almost every dish on the counter is flecked with ants. I'll be so disgusted with the dishes and the ants and myself, that I'll throw the cup in the sink and stalk into the room with the rocker, the living room. But then I'll notice how bad that room really is, how the knobs are missing from the radio, and how the brown rug is really a red rug covered in a husk of dust, and how the rocker is broken in half, almost unusable.

That's when the shame runs over me like a wave of nausea, and it helps me steel myself, helps me resist wondering why I came back here and ignore that box over the radio. I know I should do something about the place, but I feel so sick with myself that all I can do is go lay down in my bed. My bed is also covered with shirts, and the sheets and blankets have that boozy smell, but I feel so sick about myself that I'll flop down and fall right into it.

It's my stomach that does it.

You don't really notice your weight as it comes, in a slow, rolling build, until you're lying awake in the middle of the afternoon, trying to situate yourself comfortably in your bed despite the giant gut that's attached to your front. I'd probably leave that box alone more if it weren't for that gut. As it is, I have that gut, and it'll make me toss and turn. And as I toss and turn, I'll start to think of that box.

I'll think of that box, and how easy it'll be to get up, reach inside, and leave, just like any other time. And though I'll ignore the thought in that moment, I'll have already decided to follow it. The minutes will tick by like the bead of sweat rolling down my temple, and the rancid smell of my sheets will be what ultimately does it, and then I'll push myself out of bed with a quick, concentrated burst. I'll go into the sitting room, quickly so I don't lose my nerve.

Whenever I grab the cash inside that box, I think of the day she left.

"That money inside the shoebox? It's not for—" she pauses. "It's just for emergencies. Alright?"

"Yeah, yeah. Okay," I say.

"I'll send more, as it comes to me."

She's holding that ratty red suitcase of hers.

"Yeah. Okay. You don't, um. Yeah. Okay."

"Alrighty. Well . . . bye. I'll be back. I'll be back soon. Okay?"

Then I say "I can't help it, Rita. You know I can't."

She says, "I know, honey," and then she smiles a little, there's no bitterness in it. "It's okay, I know." She looks at me with that calm, understanding look. It's the same look that girl looked at me when I was digging through the trash can, the same look the Sheriff looks at me every morning with, the same look I'm thinking of as I go to the bar, clutching my money to my chest because both my pockets got torn out, moving somewhere between a run and a trot, cutting a ridiculous figure, I know, but I don't care because I'm so stinking thirsty.

*

You'd think four o'clock would be the most depressing. It isn't. It's me and the other devout alkies. We all leave each other alone as we pray while we sip our beers. The bar owner is the only one in the place besides us, and the only thing he ever does to make his presence known is throw us a dirty look that I find incredibly satisfying.

Five o'clock, is when things are their worst, and this place fills with respectable, well dressed men. They're like cows in a cattle barn. Their faces have always been crumpled by something that day, be it stress, or women, or distaste, and no matter how much they think they're going to enjoy their drink, it's really just one more thing on their list. The real alkies, except for me, all have their special, secret pains known only to us. I think you could even call my love of the taste pain. These ordinary men, they're so bothered, so removed from the everyday world, it's like it doesn't even register with them that they're all bothered by the same thing. You'd think it'd be a comfort—it would be to me—you'd think they might all get together, might all realize that they're annoyed about the same thing, and then



be done with it. But of course, I don't understand them. I really never have, which is probably another reason I don't like them when they're here at the bar. It's also probably why I'm not one of them, although there may be more important reasons for that.

Six o'clock things are a little better; all of the ordinary guys leave. The ones who are a little off kilter are the only ones who stick around. And even though none of them are anything special either, they're not as annoyed and that counts for something. I like having them around. Some of them are a little put off by me, but I don't even mind that, I understand most of them know that they could be like me if they wanted to and sometimes, if alcohol has silvered up my tongue a little I'll even tell them that. Usually I don't though, as they're good guys, and I like having them around.

Most of the really good ones stick around until about eight, but by about seven, I've left the bar to take myself a walk.

The reason that I take a walk is to pace myself.

I want my walk to be long enough that I can be ready for later and short enough that I can stay ready.

I'm not taking a drunk walk by this time, I haven't been hitting it hard and I'm barely even buzzed. Even so, I walk through a holler or down into a field so that people in town don't think I'm taking a drunk walk. I know that it's odd to worry about a thing like that, given how I am, but I had an uncle that used to wander all over the place drunk and it embarrassed my aunt something awful.

"He'd go up and down, alleyways, side streets, back trails, you name it," she'd recite the rote to us children whenever she was making food or folding laundry or in the mood to say it. "Said that liquor gave his feet wings. Never mind what they said about his wife, never mind what they said about him, he wanted to do what he wanted to do, and that was that. He'd made his decision to please himself, and he stuck to it. Your uncle was a good man in a lot of ways, but he was also selfish. Very. Selfish. And I want you children to remember what happened to him. I want you to remember. Because one day, on one of those

drunken walks, he fell right down into a deep, deep hole and snapped his back. It was like when I snapped my finger in the car door last year, only it was his back."

When she would tell this story, her words would be punctuated with a fiery and detached emotion, like she was a radio preacher selling vacuum cleaners. The story wasn't bitter, and I never felt like my uncle had actually died that way even before I knew he hadn't. The fact that I found out later though, the fact that she'd still tell this story when everyone in the family knew that my uncle had died one year sober of a fever in his bed made some kind of an impression on me.

*

I'd like to say it kept me sober some nights, but the fact is that every night I leave that bar I'm too drunk to even fool myself into thinking I won't be back by about nine. Sometimes I vomit before I go in again, but usually I'm alright.

At nine, things are usually very fuzzy and mellow. By that time, it's me and a few of the colorful characters from town, some visitors, some college boys back for the summer, and some of us old farmers that have been coming here for years. At nine o'clock, we'll just sit and wait, and the college boys and the old men will talk in ways that are not witty yet, even though they're on the edge.

"Gimme some more of that Hemingway's lemonade," one of the boys will say, as he'll shove his empty glass towards the bartender.

"Like I know what that is," the bartender will say.

And the boy will say:

"It's whiskey. Hemingway's lemonade is whiskey. It's after the writer, Hemingway, because he's a drunk, you know?"

And the bartender will pour the boy another shot and say:

"I never cared much for a writer like that guy. A guy that only tells dirty stories probably doesn't have any good stories to tell at all."



The boy will usually just sit there. And he won't smirk, or look sullen, or talk back to the bartender. That's usually the way nine o'clock goes.

Ten o'clock isn't usually so good. Most of the college boys are fairly wild by then, and the farmers are the opposite, cross and surly, looking for a fight. All of them always want to tell you about their problems with the world. What they have wrong with them, what they have wrong with you. And no one wants to do anything but drink and gripe. By then, I'm the opposite, well past my surly stage and roaring to have a good time. I can't tell you how irritating it is to have to wait for these people to catch up with you, as they gripe at you with an "Otis you're such a waste" this, and "Otis, you dumb old drunk" that. They're drunk themselves, but they just don't know it yet, and so they're foul to be around.

The businessmen have either all left or are crying their eyes out in a corner.

And eleven o'clock. Ah, eleven o'clock.

It's like something breaks in the whole bar, like the tension releases across the room. Suddenly everyone is joking again. Only this time everything is better, louder, and it's infected with something good. I just need to open my mouth, and all my friends—everyone in the bar is my friend now—answer back with their own jokes and laughter. Soon, my very movements cause laughter. I bring my bottle a little farther below my lips than planned and everyone laughs. I put my weight wrong in my chair, flopping side to side to remain on top of it, and everyone laughs. Soon, I'm flailing my whole body from side to side, dancing in the middle of

the room.

I'm king then, if you can see it. Everyone is singing for themselves, clapping to keep time, and looking at me enviously.

I'm king then, as I leave, and I walk down the street like I'm in a parade and I'm singing.

I'm king then, when I go inside the courthouse, grab the cell keys off the wall, and let myself into my own personal suite.

I'm king then, when I'm standing in the middle of the room, on top of a gorgeous blue rug, inside my own personal castle, guarded by strong iron bars.

Then the rug drops out beneath me, like a long winding black hole with a deep well at the bottom. There's a frog looking up from the bottom of that well at me and I'm bitter and dizzy, and I'm still up on life, up on the beer, and I want to sing and cry and puke at the same time.

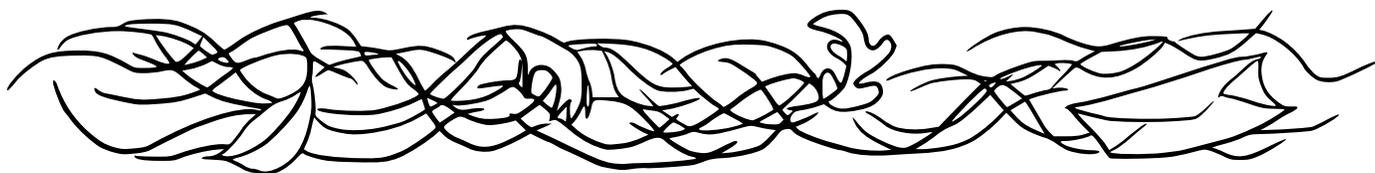
The light in the back office is more of a shape now than a color, and the bars on the jail cell door start to multiply like ants on a half eaten biscuit, dividing up the outside world again and again and again. And I'm afraid and I'm happy, and I want to sing and laugh and puke at the same time, but when I open my mouth what comes out is this:

"Sherriff? Sherriff! Sherriff."

Questioning, sharp, and then apologetic.

Then a long and mournful "Sherriff, come and sing me a lullaby. Please come and sing me a lullaby." **Q**

Andy Walker wishes he could write about Mt Airy, NC like George Packer.



“DON’T KNOW MUCH ABOUT HISTORY . . .”*

JONDAVID K. WYNEKEN

**You can decide at the end of this essay if this is true or not . . . Also, for the record, I really detest that song . . .*

I can admit it—I *really* love being an historian. Beginning when I was a six-year-old boy staring down wide-eyed at the sunken hull of the U.S.S. *Arizona* resting in the mud of Pearl Harbor, I have become increasingly interested in and fascinated by the narratives built out of the past, which, when combined together, we call “history.” Some of these narratives are frightening, others inspiring, many mundane and yet, they always reveal in some way the vagaries of the human condition over time. As I grew up, the continued thrill of discovering more about history ended up putting books about the world wars, the Napoleonic era and the first transatlantic explorers on my nightstand next to those about my other interests.¹ By the time I finished high school, I knew that I wanted to study and teach history for a living, a conviction that I never once questioned even as it became increasingly clear to me in college and graduate school that the researching, writing and teaching of history (all intertwined processes for me) are much more difficult and involved than I had ever before imagined.

As my Christian faith grew via twists and turns and fits and starts,² my professional training shattered nearly all of my previously held notions of what constituted “history.” In the years since, I continue to hear those same notions from students, peers, pundits, bloggers, screenplay writers, people-sitting-next-to-me-on-transcontinental-flights and everyone else who has “read a book once” or seen a documentary on their favorite historical subject on the History Channel or YouTube. These include popular clichés like “history repeats itself,” “hindsight is 20/20,” and “history is only written by the victors.” None of

¹ In chronological order, these included Butter Battles, Wild Things and where they are, islands with blue dolphins, swash-buckling pirates, sharks that might eat me if I ever went swimming in the ocean or even a darkened pool, lampposts in forests, hobbits and wizards, “The Kid” in Seattle, one particular Irish rock quartet, Beat poets, “Blood On The Tracks,” letters from Screwtape and a Spanish guy attacking windmills with a short guy on a mule chasing after him. Space remained on that (admittedly crowded) nightstand for my Bible.

² Easy to admit now, tough to navigate then.

these statements are really accurate, nor would they be all that useful or illuminating if they were.³ Another notion that proves difficult to kill is the more subtle but equally faulty belief that historians merely memorize facts and spit them back out in books and lectures; therefore, the related assumption emerges that any book or class on a certain subject is more or less the same as any other. Many likewise believe incorrectly that historians unavoidably, and maybe even consciously, have contemporary political, intellectual, social or religious agendas that guide their work. This may make an historian untrustworthy to some, while to others it may mean that history can legitimately be used as a weapon to advance a particular agenda, even if it means playing fast and loose with facts—the idea being that the truth is simply “relative.” The result is often that some people “line up” behind particular historians⁴ and reject others on the basis of the real or imagined contemporary connotations of that historian’s work. The cumulative result of all these assumptions is usually an oversimplified and incorrect view of history’s purpose, of how it is crafted and articulated, its larger value and its limitations.

Of course, it should not be surprising that those who genuinely love history but are not professional historians would have limited understandings of history since they have not received the same training. Indeed, the same is true for professional historians vis-à-vis other fields of knowledge—I know much less about accounting than accountants and much less about avionics than a pilot, hence I do not help people do their taxes or land the plane flying me to Seattle to visit my parents. Nevertheless, it is my experience that historians often don’t get the same deference from non-historians. Instead, while I would never presume to tell a mechanical engineer how to build a bridge just because the most recent episode of *Modern Marvels* told me how the Golden Gate Bridge was built, many seem to have no problem telling me what the “real” story of (insert subject here) is or how

³ Yes, I said and believe all that. Chew on it for awhile . . . I’ll wait . . .

⁴ Or those who CLAIM to be historians. The list of such people is, unfortunately, quite long and undistinguished and more trouble to list here than it is worth (and thus avoid being sued for libel). But they know who they are . . .



I don't *really* know the history of World War II because I can't rattle off the *exact* caliber of machine gun on a German ME-109 fighter plane or might I know *exactly* where Field Marshall Hans Guderian (not von Manstein, but *Guderian*) was at *precisely* 2:12 pm on September 23, 1941. In many of these conversations, I end up nodding politely more than I do anything else. The only alternative is boring my counterpart to death while explaining that facts—while obviously important—are merely *historical*, while understanding their context, their interrelation, and the various interpretations of why these all matter is really what makes something *History*. When I've tried to explain such things in the past, I'm often met with looks built on thoughts that are decidedly hostile—Killjoy! Snob! Know-It-All! Nerd!⁵ While I certainly appreciate the passion and interest of such interlocutors in history as they see it, it is usually difficult to see such exchanges as valuable or instructive for either party, since it seems like we are speaking different languages—about history, at least.

Lest all this be dismissed as overly smug or whiny,⁶ I do understand that these people love knowing about historical events and consider it valuable knowledge. And while it often proves difficult to remedy people's misunderstandings of history without quashing their enthusiasm and their love of knowing about the past, it is nevertheless the responsibility of professional historians to attempt to do exactly that. In fact, doing so is a task all historians should *want* to take on.

In this vein, it needs to be made clear that in my seven years of teaching at Christian colleges and universities, I have found that Christians are not exempt from such oversimplifications and misunderstandings about history as a discipline. In fact, in my experience Christians are often among the "worst" offenders. In most cases this results unintentionally from the very understandable and admirable desire of Christians to see God working in the events of the past, to see His Providence played out for the ultimate benefit of believers. As a Christian, I understand this desire and believe strongly that God is indeed present—immanent, even—in history. And yet, as my personal faith has grown concurrently with my historical knowledge and training, I have become increasingly convinced that Christians who look for God in the

events of history that are *outside of scripture* are, at best, bound to be disappointed because His presence will not be clear or obvious or undisputed and, at worst, inclined to see Him in the events and in the ways they want to see Him. The foremost dangers in this—among many others—are that such interpretations of the past can result in twisting theology to address contemporary anxieties and beliefs. It can also anachronistically project contemporary understandings of ourselves onto past events and historical actors that were operating in particular contexts in particular times and circumstances. This produces bad theology and inaccurate history, neither of which should be accepted by Christians.

For whatever reason, the weather in history is regularly cited by Christians as evidence of clear divine Providence; the "Protestant Wind" destroying the Spanish Armada in 1588, or fog obscuring Washington's crossing of the Delaware, or storms preventing the British from evacuating Yorktown.⁷ One of the most illustrative is brought up to me regularly by Christians trying to provide clear proof of God's Providence in history is the invasions of Russia by the armies of Napoleon Bonaparte (1812) and Adolf Hitler (1941-1944). After usually pointing out that these events prove that history does repeat itself (both were ardent nationalist conquest-obsessed dictators, both invaded Russia without adequately preparing for a long stay there, both were short and angry, etc.), the argument continues that the worst winters ever recorded in Russian history just happened to be the same years of these invasions. These resulted in overwhelming defeats of Napoleon and Hitler that led to the eventual collapse of their empires and the end of their tyranny over the European continent. The implication is that the overly frigid Russian winters were clear signs of God's "intervention" to produce defeats against leaders and systems that had systematically beaten all human adversaries until that point. Certainly the idea that God would openly intervene to stop powerful dictators in their tracks to unravel their power is attractive at first glance. This idea creates echoes of God humbling the Egyptian Pharaohs and the Babylonian kings in order to free His people from slavery or His blessing of the underdog David against the behemoth Goliath

⁵ Or is it just my students who say that? I forget . . .

⁶ I'm really only shooting for just-the-right-amount-of smug with a splash of whiny.

⁷ If you don't know what any of these events are, then I suggest you take a History class. Again. I happen to teach a few . . . I'm serious . . . Good ones . . . Wait, where are you going?



and other adversaries.⁸

But in the cases of Napoleon and Hitler, despite the initial attraction to seeing their demises in a similar light, their fate can be traced more directly and notably—even empirically—to *their* failures and not to any direct intervention by God. Leaving aside the rather obvious theological fact that neither invasion of Russia makes an appearance in scripture, and aside from the contextual fact that people of other faiths often read the divine in the weather too—the Japanese belief in the “Divine Wind” or *kamikaze* that saved Japan twice from Mongol invaders comes to mind—it is clear to me that the idea Napoleon’s and Hitler’s defeats in Russia was the result of the “Hand of God” (a la the climactic scenes from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*) is more hocus pocus than it is good history. These military defeats can be explained empirically and, frankly, with good old-fashioned common sense.

First, the problem with the Russian winters in those years was not that they were longer and colder than usual. Most Russian winters tend to be long and very cold. The fact that these particular winters were “colder than usual” is not that significant when we are talking about temperature variations from a norm of about zero degrees Fahrenheit to ten degrees below zero. Cold is Cold at that point. Exposure to that kind of cold for prolonged periods will kill, especially when a great deal of snow and ice—whether it is two feet or ten—is on the ground. The colder weather was not significantly worse in its effect from “normal” Russian winters.

Additionally, and perhaps most importantly—*Russians get cold too*.⁹ The fact that the Russians were simply better prepared for winter and used to enduring such harsh conditions is a much more important factor here, as is the fact that Napoleon or Hitler did not provision their men or prepare them mentally and physically for winter combat since both believed—not without reason—that Russia could be defeated quickly in summer campaigns before the winters hit. Nor did these men prepare their nations for the sacrifices and patience that would be necessary to keep morale and the war effort strong back home. Lack of prepara-

⁸ Including David himself, it should be added.

⁹ This obvious but often overlooked fact/contextual perspective is brought to you by my seminar notes from my graduate school professor of Russian history, Steven Merritt Miner. I promised him years ago I would always credit him every time I quoted that in writing. I’ve now written it and cited it . . . once.

tion rooted in hubris resulting from particularly confident ideologies of superiority (though of different kinds) combined with simple geography and technological/economic limits—all of them examinable as evidence—explain the disasters in Russia. Finally, the implications of God intervening on behalf of Napoleon’s and Hitler’s enemies to give them victory, particularly on behalf of Stalin and the Soviets, is a decidedly uncomfortable thought that few Christians should embrace enthusiastically. So, while Christians can have no doubt on the basis of their faith that God was involved in some way in the Russian campaigns (He is in ALL historical events, whether big or small) there is no way to prove with evidence exactly HOW He was involved or for what purposes. Nor, I believe, should Christians worry about trying to prove such things.

Why? The question is best answered with a question: why should Christians *need* to have more proof that God is present in history beyond what He tells us *in scripture*, where He tells us and shows us repeatedly that He IS present and always will be? Examples from throughout the Old Testament remind us that we are called to be faithful and to seek Him in order for Him to become the center of our lives. We should not to “read the tea leaves” by looking for unequivocal signs of Him in every single historical event or in every contemporary crisis. Psalm 139 tells us that God is omnipresent, and only many years after being sold into slavery could Joseph realize and then reveal to his brothers that God had done this/allowed this in order to save their lives (Genesis 45: 5-7). Nor could any of them have seen that eventually their people would be enslaved in the same land the Joseph once effectively ruled over or see how they would be delivered and reach the Promised Land. Time and time again, in story after story, the Israelites had to be faithful that God’s purpose for their history and their present would in time be revealed, even if it was long after they themselves had passed on. In one of the clearest examples of this, Zechariah 8: 6-23 lays out clearly God’s past, present, and future intentions for Israel as His way to convince them to follow through on rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem.¹⁰

The New Testament is even more direct. Christ tells us in

¹⁰ Read the whole thing—trust me, it’s worth it. The “minor” prophets have a lot to say on such matters; though I think the whole “minor” designation is unfortunate. It seems to me that anyone who is a true prophet of God is pretty major.



Matthew 28 that “all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age,” while in Ephesians 1 Paul tells us that through God will “bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.” In all of these examples and in many others, we are called to be faithful to God, to know Him in the present, recognize His control over the past (even if we don’t see the specifics as to how he did so) and entrust our futures to Him.¹¹

And yet all of this discussion about what history is NOT (both in terms of God’s role in it and how the discipline operates) begs the question as to what history’s purpose or value is as a discipline in general and for Christians in particular. As I am casting doubt on the idea of what might be called Externally Discernible Providence¹² that is quite prevalent among (mostly) evangelicals, this question deserves to be considered. My sense is that God’s Providence is usually a very personal thing, something each of us discerns and experiences distinctively as our lives unfold uniquely from everyone else’s. Scripture lays out so much about how God has been involved in history, even if controversies exist today over things like the exact way and timeframe in which the world was created or how exactly scripture is to be interpreted. The more each of us try to speak for other Christians or non-believers about how God can be “proven”, the higher the risk of seeing God where and how we want to see Him and excluding Him from the places and ways we don’t. The result of too many people doing this is a cacophony of noise made from arguments and debates that risk drowning out the serene truth of scripture AND of God’s centrality in history—these truths keep us aware of our limits as human beings, of our need and God’s desire for us to know Him as the central element of our lives now and hereafter. It could be that the purpose of history—the making of it, teaching of it, and learning of it—is really that simple; it leads us back to God by showing us the depth, breadth, wonders, successes, catastrophes, and mundane elements of human existence that show us our limits and our resulting dependence on and

ongoing search for Him.

With that in mind, how should a Christian be a good historian? The answer is simple: be a good historian, period. In terms of the practice of history—research, evaluation, writing, reviewing, and revising—to be a Christian does not mean we get to have separate rules of methodology. The same rigor and honesty is needed in researching documents, the attention to detail, the willingness to change conclusions or overturn hypotheses on the basis of as-empirical-as-possible collections of representative evidence, the same need to learn from other scholars and take them seriously, whether they are Christian or not. The philosophies of practicing history put forward by those from either outside the faith or who don’t profess any faith openly—from Thucydides and Tacitus centuries ago to John Lewis Gaddis, Richard J. Evans, Gertrude Himmelfarb and others today¹³—deserve the same seriousness of consideration by Christians that we give to Christian scholars who make their faith evident. Good history—no matter who produces it—takes time to compile. It requires ascertaining facts and placing them in contextual and interpretive frameworks that need to be simultaneously useful and honest, has to be both truthful and measured in their conclusions based on evidence, and must be aware that new evidence and interpretations can and often will at some point require revision of previous conclusions. In this sense, history can and should be a continually humbling exercise. As Christians, this shouldn’t be too much of a stretch to at least understand and accept conceptually.

So are Christian historians different in any way from non-Christian ones? Yes, of course. In short, the difference is in *recognizing* the centrality of God in history, of believing in its larger purpose even if the exact details cannot be seen empirically. This is a distinct conceptual framework of vital importance. Of the many ways Christians have tried to articulate this with precision, to me the best of these comes from the eminent Christian scholar George M. Marsden, who in his 1975 essay “A Christian Perspective for the Teaching of History” points out that Christians should learn history “so that we may better understand ourselves and our fellow men in relation to our own culture and to the world.” He goes on to assert that understanding history helps shatter

¹¹ You’ve probably noticed that this is now the really serious part of the essay, not just the serious part. This will continue for a little while yet. Thanks for sticking with me on this

¹² As far as I know, I just invented this concept/term. Not quite “strategy” or “existentialism” or “metanarrative,” but it’s a start. Can I get a witness? The royalties could be immense if someone runs with this idea

¹³ Look them up yourself!! (I have ALWAYS wanted to write a footnote/endnote that said that.)



our self-centeredness and highlights God's love and our need to reflect that in our love for others. Knowing history therefore reveals our "natural tendency to be pretend to be as God, or to think too highly of ourselves." In this process, "we see ourselves as dependent on God. Our hearts are changed. We can no longer live as though we stand at the center of the universe; rather, seeing ourselves in the perspective that God is at the center of all life, self-centeredness appears foolish and short-sighted and true love is possible."¹⁴ As most Christian scholars have done for the past seven decades, Marsden calls upon C.S. Lewis for help:

Most of all, we need intimate knowledge of the past. Not that the past has any magic about it, but because we cannot study the future, and yet need something to set against the present, to remind us that the basic assumptions have been quite different in different periods and that much which seems certain to the uneducated is merely temporary fashion. A man who has lived in many places is not likely to be deceived by the local errors of his native village: the scholar has lived in many times and is therefore in some degree immune from the great cataract of nonsense that pours from the press and the microphone of his own age.¹⁵

While certainly many non-Christian historians continue to agree with Lewis here, his words are particularly noteworthy for Christian ones in more ways than those laid out by Lewis and Marsden. We should take great care in avoiding making our faith

¹⁴ George Marsden and Frank Roberts, eds., *A Christian View of History?* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1975), 32. Had to cite that one for real

¹⁵ Marsden and Roberts, 33.

into "temporary fashion" or making it a "basic assumption" in how we judge how human beings have lived over time. Christians should live in "many places" and be aware of making their own "local errors" by narrowing their conceptions of history to their own time or their own notions of theological truth. Being vigilant for nonsense from press and microphones should also be applied to those presses and microphones that we tend to like. In the end, God's truth is the truth—as with history, we can only discern a fraction of that in our limited earthly lives. Waiting for all this to play out in our lives is one of the joys of experiencing God revealing Himself, ourselves, our worlds and His plans for us daily, each day a glimpse of what is to come for us when our part in this world's history is done. The child that I once was, looking down from the cement deck of a memorial to a sunken warship six feet below me, did not understand the reality of any of this. The historian that I am today (and the better historian and man I hope to become) cannot thank God enough for revealing more of it to me in the years since. I cannot help but be excited about what the rest of His journey for me—both in this world¹⁶ and the next—will reveal to me, about me, about humanity, and above all, about Him.¹⁷ Q

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¹⁶ For example, God, will my Seattle Mariners ever win the World Series? Wait, why not???

¹⁷ I Peter 1: 3-9. Amen.

MATILDA

SAM LEUENBERGER

A room with just Matilda
Pronounces like an axe
The harsh years of her ash-wood nose.
Curlers lodge like logs
Between the straw and wire
Of a dusty auburn chicken coop
That tangles on her weathered scalp while
Chicken tracks scatter towards her temple,
Gathered there to peck at sunrise and sunsets
Cawing from her eye:
“It’s bean time, Matilda.
And you’re too old to cry.”

Ploughed into a corner by a year that never dies,
Matilda, the incarnate of 1939.
Whatever she is, she has already been,
And whatever she will be, she has been before,
And the God inside this room has called it all into account.

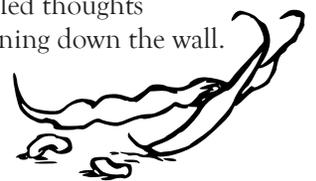
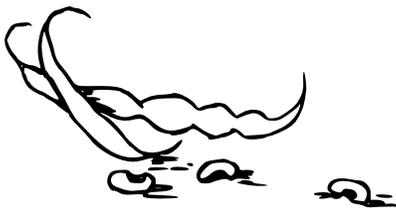
Nestled in her chair, silence tickles the walls
With the whiskers of the clock.
All these years of years
Have rolled her yarn-smile,
Like a tongue, into a taciturn ball;
She’s longing for something to play it out,
And let it dangle from her lips when a
Sound like radio draws out a moment
She’s made feel like her own,
And all she sees is sound:
She is the satin gown and gossamer wings
Of her Hollywood dream floating to the ground,
Ladies and gentleman, Miss Judy Garland!
That’s all she ever dreamed to be, someone inside that
sound.
It whisks her like a Dorothy far away from home.
How she wanted those ruby slippers at a store in town,
But the truck was always broke with no other way around.
Husband was ten years wiser and trying to feed the bank.
He grew wheat. Money doesn’t keep. Not like it used to.
“It’s bean time, Matilda.
And shoes should just be brown.”

That was Husband,
So he was.
He was Kansas-born. She was Kansas-bred.
Choice, she knew, made all the difference.
There’s no place like home for the living,
And one place, like Kansas, for the dead.

Still, her yarn-smile lays there till it tumbles
Down the aisle of her wedding clothes,
Children hung with a garden hose,
And hungry Husband at the table
Eating weeds and loans.
Her smile snags on his thumb over her repose,
“It’s bean time, Matilda.
And your picture says you’re old.”
Her heart cooks in the memory
Of a woman’s skin
Peeled to its onion bone.
There’s not much but smell to simmer
In an empty house at home.
“It’s bean time, Matilda.
My soup is getting cold.”

Though Husband passed in ’79 and it is only ’95,
She knows what life’s like enough to die:
Husband comes and so Husband stays,
Like a man behind a curtain,
His voice remains.
Know this:
After nearly eighty years of mouth swallow
Wooden words through a saw-tooth slit,
It’s no wonder a woman
Wears a dress spotted with chunks of woodchip-spit.
In a room of her own, the TV whispers,
“Look here, Matilda.
It’s bean time, Matilda.” And slobbers
On her thoughts until they’re foam.
Her room is dim with dusk and a lamp
That Husband never lit.
Once it was pregnant with the light of ‘39.
Now it’s done and set aside
With the other egg-bulbs leftover to crack.
She taps their shells with chicken-filled thoughts
And gazes at the shocks of light running down the wall.
“It’s bean time, Matilda.
And death’s too old to stall.”

MATILDA: 1918-1995.



On Tuesday/Thursdays, Sam Leuenberger sends his more effeminate alter-ego, Boaz, to all of his classes. If you have any constructive compliments for Sam on Tuesday/Thursdays, please send them in care of Boaz. If you do not know Boaz, do not ask. If you do know Boaz, do not tell.

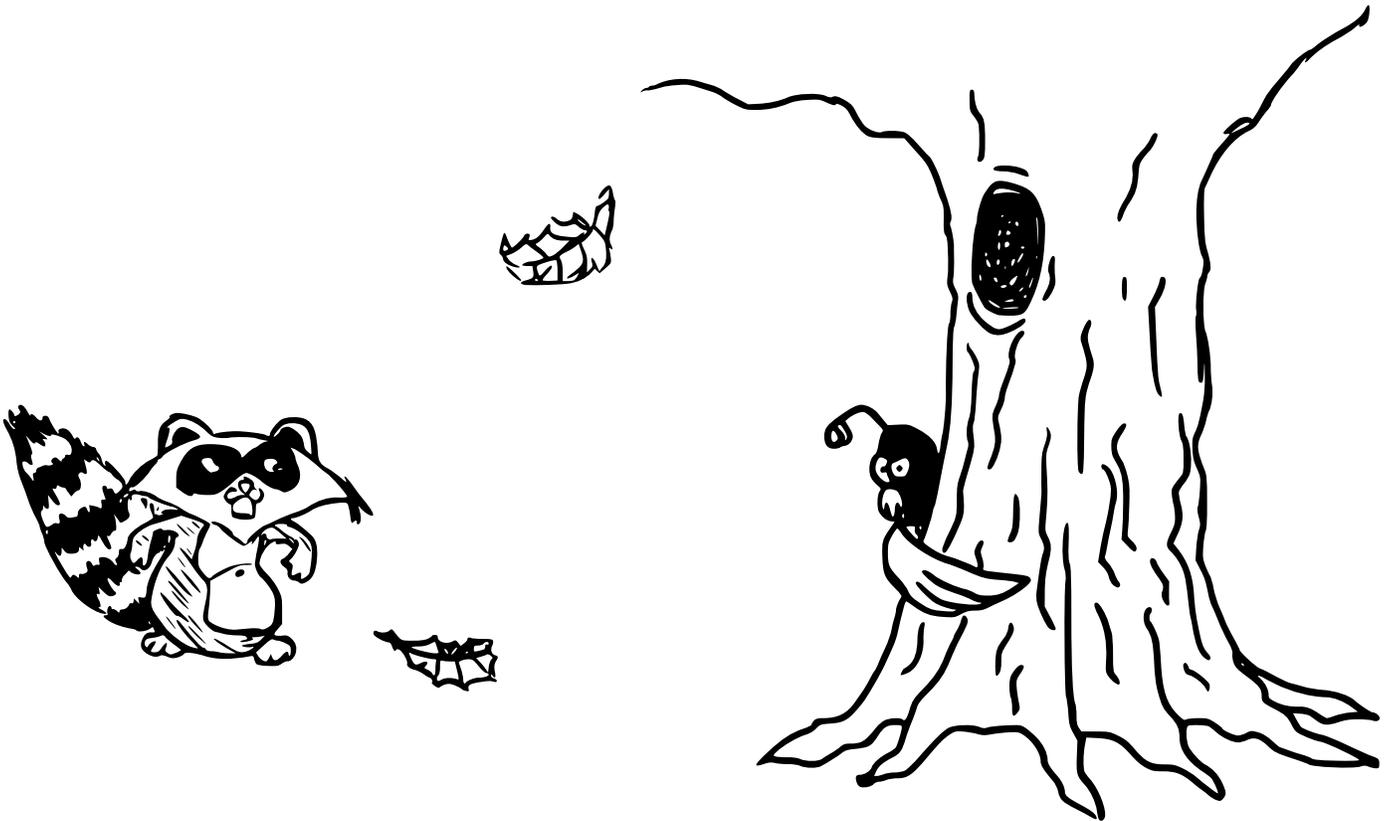
CONUNDRUMS

Find the next term in the following sequence, and explain.

0 1 0 6 2 6 16 18 22 28 ...

Note: The sequence is indexed on the primes.

If you'd like to submit an answer, please email our conundrumer, Bradley Weaver, at Weaver-BR1@gcc.edu. There will be a \$15 prize for the first correct answer.





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THE QUAD | AUTUMN 2011



Volume 4 ♦ Issue 3

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