Staff and writers of Dialogue

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"It's rather difficult to be real objective about a work of art when it's experienced in the bathtub."
—Steve Mulder, Dialogue, November 1985

'Ire: what he would do if his career flopped':
"I don't know—that's an interesting question. My lifestyle getting to be what it is—I mean, I have no choice...I may just end up being...a wealthy, bitter hack."
—Paul Shrader, Dialogue, December 1975

"No matter how stupid or bungling Christians are, no matter how many third-world countries they exploit, no matter how screwed up their marriages are or how much they resent their neighbor's dogs scattering their trash, Christians are right."
—Mark Van Wienen, Dialogue, November 1985

**CONTRIBUTORS**

**Angela Ajayi** is a senior at Calvin College. Her most pressing literary goal is to finish the memoir she began writing this summer.

**Aaron Breland** graduated from Calvin last spring with a B.F.A. He believes that flying squirrels are by far the best animals on the planet.

**Mike Byl** is an accomplished artist of the old school and friendly, too.

**Sarah Byker** is a sophomore English major. She thinks stickers are neat.

**D. H. Chung** quotes Thomas Howard, "...it is in the nature of childhood to live fully in the moment...withoutemasculating the sensation by worrying over what has just occurred or what is about to occur."

**Gary DeWitt** is almost a senior, but not quite. Although frequently spotted in the art department, he is in fact a geology major, but the department may deny this.

**Kelly Edwards** is a senior B.F.A. student. She spent this past summer in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where she painted various meteorological phenomena.

**Kelley Evans** is a collegiate nomad. Kelley does the muppet dance, and she is continually in a state of Oregon.

**E. J. Feddes** is currently protecting justice from evil forces and acquiring a harem in the process.

**Edward L. Hamilton** is a senior physics and chemistry double major and a frequent attender and contributor at the philosophy department's symposium.

**Rob Huie** is a true Renaissance man.

**Bruce James** is a senior again, and encourages you to take public transportation. He says, Don't forget that nothing ends without breaking, because everything is endless.

**Jane C. Knol** is a sophomore and a girl. She will be in Great Britain next term. She likes the first bite of a golden delicious apple.

**Benjamin Lipscomb** is currently working on a Ph. D. in philosophy at the University of Notre Dame. He was a regular in the Chimes office before he graduated.

**Salomon Orellana** could not be reached for comment. We suspect he has been taken up in the rapture.

**Julia Schickel** is a senior with the audacity to double major in art and art history and minor in psychology. She keeps plants. She speaks to them in gentle tones.

**Greg Scholtens** is a senior about to switch his major to a B.F.A. His favorite quote is from Rick Powell, the barefoot world trick record holder, “Always have castles in the sky.”

**Mike Shih** is an art major from East Brunswick, New Jersey. He has a fetish for belly-buttons.

**Elizabeth Tjoelker** is a sophomore art major from the Pacific Northwest, a.k.a. Utopia. She has lots of opinions but no answers.

**Susan Van Sant** is a senior art major. Her fascination with crows has gained her publication in the fan-club magazine for the Black Crowes.

On the Cover: *Falling* by Kelly Edwards. Acrylic on Canvas, 36x48"
Solitude
photograph
9x6 1/2"
Greg Scholtens
To hear, to engage, to listen

The word dialogue appears frequently in journals, books, and discussions. People talk about "dialogue," about "providing a place for dialogue to occur," about "encouraging dialogue" on a certain issue, about "continuing the dialogue." The underlying idea suggests that through dialogue diverse groups can understand one another.

This summer, at the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, USA, I noticed a lack of understanding despite the presence of dialogue. The Assembly had to make a decision regarding the ordination of practicing homosexuals. This issue divided the church, and, although I participated in and heard much dialogue, the final vote did not show a consensus or even an understanding. A slight majority affirmed the traditional position of the church, while a large minority expressed dissatisfaction.

Before going I puzzled over the issue and could not make sense of it. I decided to go and listen—really listen to what people were saying and what they weren’t saying—and from this listening, make hopefully a good decision. On the Assembly floor I noticed how little people listened to one another. Most people had pre-made decisions. They came to convince, not to be convinced or even to understand. One person after another stepped up to the microphones and spoke for or against, but no one reacted specifically to someone else’s view. We heard only what we wanted to hear. We had dialogue, but no understanding.

For dialogue to be fruitful, we must listen to each other. In talk about dialogue, the emphasis often rests on the number of views the participants represent and not on the listening the participants do. At the Assembly we formed small groups to discuss our beliefs about the ordination of practicing homosexuals. One after another we each gave our own perspective, but we lacked the time and inclination to listen, question, and understand one another. I could “participate” in this type of dialogue without doubting my own ideas. I could hear others and let their ideas slip into a nebulous void.

Throughout grade school my teachers gave listening comprehension tests to insure we weren’t letting their words slip in and out of our heads. No one ever took the tests seriously; they were games of circles and pencils. The teacher read a paragraph, and then we filled in the circle that corresponded to the right answer. It was easy because of the simplicity inherent in the questions and answers. But it was also easy because you knew that you really had to listen—you had to fix the words and their meanings inside your head.

Real listening—listening which engages both the speakers and their ideas—takes courage. In order to listen I must temporarily put aside my ifs, ands, and buts and evaluate the speakers’ ideas from their points of view. I must not only understand what they believe, but how they came to believe it. I must consider ideas that I wish did not exist. Although it is scary to put my own ideas and self in a vulnerable position, especially when the ideas are ones through which I define myself, my refusal to listen prevents me from effectively participating in dialogue.

Real listening is active, although the act feels passive. The imagined listener sits without talking, without moving. But the mind of the listener grasps the ideas, tears into them, and seeks their roots. Energy fills the listener. The engagement excites the mind and builds relationships. This type of listening fleshes out ideas, challenges the status quo, and creates more dialogue.

Historically, Dialogue has grappled with the meaning of its name. Editors have feared a monologue due to administrative censorship. They have commented on the popularity of the word. They have bemoaned apathetic students who do not submit material leaving Dialogue a monologue of the faculty, rather than a dialogue between the students and faculty. Despite these concerns, editors have created positive visions for Dialogue. One editor imagined Dialogue as the mythical phoenix which, once a year, burns and then rises out of its own ashes. As we rise out of the ashes this year, we hope to find listeners. We hope to listen. We hope to continue the dialogue.

—Sarah C. Vos
This summer, Calvin had the unusual opportunity of hosting a pair of faculty "professional development" seminars, funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts. For six weeks, 27 Christian scholars descended upon Calvin’s campus to do intensive work with one of two senior mentors. In connection with the seminars, the senior mentors both delivered public lectures. Dr. Merold Westphal gave the first of these lectures. An unusually powerful communicator, Westphal has been an academic all-star for years. Recently, he won popular acclaim for Suspicion and Faith, in which he argues that Christians should pay sharp, serious attention to the antireligious critiques of Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche. Now he’s "appropriating postmodernism"—taking a broadly atheistic and highly influential strain of contemporary philosophy and examining its implications for truth and knowledge. At Dialogue we have never shied away from the prospect of discussing the avant garde, so when Westphal sat down with 1996 philosophy grad Ben Lipscomb to talk about appropriation, we brought the tape recorders.

Dialogue: As we heard in your lecture earlier this summer, you’ve been at work "appropriating" first the work of some notable atheist moderns and now some notable atheist postmoderns. First of all, what about appropriation? Is it appropriate?

Westphal: Well, I don’t see why not. In the first place, it happens all the time. Thinkers encounter ideas in other thinkers and use these ideas to develop their own thought. And there’s a sense in which the content of ideas is not something that people can own.

D: Is it postmodernism any more when you get through with it?

W: Let me put it this way: once upon a time, everybody knew that there was a Christian existentialism as well as an atheistic existentialism—that Kierkegaard was the fountainhead of one, and Nietzsche the fountainhead of the other. And it seems to me that the same situation ought to pertain to postmodernism. It doesn’t now, but that’s what I’m trying to work on.

D: So you’re claiming that the defining elements of postmodernism could be given either a theistic or an atheistic construal?

W: That’s one of my central claims: that the central themes of postmodern philosophers are not intrinsically secular, and that these philosophers make a mistake when they suppose that the force of their arguments makes the world safe for atheists. I think the force of their arguments is neutral with reference to theism and atheism, and that many of them can be put to work in theistic contexts just as well or even better than in atheistic contexts.

D: O.K. For the benefit of the reading public, who didn’t hear the lecture, could you talk about the claims you see as useful for Christians, and the postmoderns whom you’re drawing on?

W: The postmodern philosophers I’m working with are Derrida and Foucault, and Rorty, and those aspects of Nietzsche and Heidegger that they have appropriated. The two motifs I find appropriate for appropriation are what I call the hermeneutics of finitude and the hermeneutics of suspicion.

The hermeneutics of finitude I take to be appropriate as a reflection on the meaning of createdness, and the hermeneutics of suspicion as a reflection on the meaning of falleness. I see these themes as having theological import, at least potentially. Both of them have, in the first instance, an
epistemological thrust. The hermeneutics of finitude is the denial of the possibility that human knowledge can attain the kind of clarity and certainty that philosophers have often hoped for. In that regard, the hermeneutics of finitude has a Kantian character.

The hermeneutics of suspicion doesn’t ask the question about the truth or adequacy of our ideas in relation to their objects but asks about the motives that lead people to certain beliefs and the functions that those beliefs serve in the lives of individuals and communities. It’s suspicious because it suspects that those motivations and those uses are dishonorable by the very criteria invoked by the people involved.

That’s a different kind of epistemological challenge. It doesn’t say, “Your ideas aren’t true.” It says, “You’re putting your ideas to uses that are morally problematic.” So at that point there’s an ethical dimension that joins the epistemological dimension, and my claim about the hermeneutics of suspicion, which is not uniquely postmodern, but has some very powerful modern forms as well, thinkers have developed.

**D:** Do you think that Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche, the three you treat in your book on suspicion, are either consciously or subconsciously in dialogue with these scriptures?

**W:** Sometimes call them plagiarists for rhetorical purposes, but I don’t think there’s a conscious drawing on biblical sources. Perhaps it’s not even unconscious. They may be, by virtue of their secularism, quite blind to what’s going on in the biblical text. But I think that the earliest version of their critique is found in the Bible.

**D:** Let’s pursue suspicion a moment. Where do you see the hermeneutics of suspicion at work in the Bible? And in what respects should this critique prod the people of God today?

I read the Bible through every year, and I read Amos I don’t know how many times before I noticed what was going on there in terms of socio-economic critique. It’s possible to stare it right in the face and not see it.

particularly in Marx and in Freud—my claim is that it originates in the Bible, and that in the Old and New Testaments, there is a sustained critique of the religious life of the covenant people of God which is the fountainhead of what later secular and the powerful rip off the weak and the poor. In the context of economic oppression—shameless economic oppression—the oppressors are coming to the temple and putting on great shows of piety and telling themselves

**W:** Let me give you two examples: the book of Amos gives one the impression that Amos has been reading Marx. He criticizes the religious life of Israel on the grounds that it serves to provide sanctity and legitimation for a social order in which the rich that they and the social order they are a part of have the favor of God. Look how religious they are! Amos says to them, “God can’t stand that kind of religion. It’s an abomination, because you have made the worship of God the cover for the breaking of God’s commandments.”

I don’t find anything new in Marx’s critique of religion after that, except—and this is why I think it’s important to read Marx as well as Amos—if you come to Amos having read Marx, you might see more clearly what’s going on in the book of Amos. I grew up in a context in which Amos was preached on; I read the Bible through every year, and I read Amos I don’t know how many times before I noticed what was going on there in terms of a socio-economic critique. It’s possible to stare it right in the face and not see it. It’s very hard to do that, if you come to Amos having read Marx.

**D:** If you’re acculturated not to
notice that sort of thing...

W: Yeah. But if you come to Marx having read Amos, what you'll see is how Amos's critique of ancient Israel would look if it were formulated under the conditions of the modern world, in which the structures of capitalist economy have replaced the economic life of ancient Israel. And so you get a currency in Marx that

debate or both sides of the debate between feminists and antifeminists, you'll find people who are convinced that they are in possession of absolute moral truth, and that those who differ from them are morally degenerate and deserving of scorn and abuse, at least verbally.

D: That moves us back toward the hermeneutics of finitude which seems

There's relativism and there's relativism... no human knowledge exists which is not relative to the limitations of human observers.

you can't, in terms of the nature of the social structures involved, find in Amos.

Here's another example: Jesus's critique of the self-righteousness of the Pharisees. Jesus saw something in the Pharisees that he thought was highly problematic: their very high moral standards functioned primarily to promote self-congratulation—to enable them to distinguish themselves over and against "sinners," and to see themselves as morally superior to other people. So their righteousness was a form of pride.

When I turn to Nietzsche, I don't find anything that improves on that analysis, just a restatement of the way in which, in the modern world, moralism often functions to enable some people to feel morally superior to other people—to feel good about themselves in spite of things that may be problematic about their personal and corporate lives. Such people feel good about themselves because they've found somebody they can look down on, morally speaking. And one doesn't have to be very sensitive to find that phenomenon in the modern world. If you look at both sides of the abortion to try to come up with language that's free from all ambiguity involves abstractions from the concrete realities of life.

Sometimes it's useful to do that: to develop formal systems of logic and mathematics in which terms are very precisely defined. But we're talking about real life—matters of existential import—and it seems to me that, just to the degree that we stay close to the concreteness of experience, we are working with meanings that are ambiguous and not fully determinate, not final or fixed.

With regard to truth, it seems to me that first of all, we should not make the claim to have final truth. The most we should be looking for is human truth that constitutes the way humans should look at things, rather than some absolute truth which would not be limited by either the finitude or the falleness of the human perspective.

I don't think we should ever claim to know things the way they really are, because we never understand them simply as God understands them. The gap between God's thoughts and our thoughts is one that we are not able to bridge and shouldn't aspire to bridge.

D: Does this push us in the direction of radical subjectivism? Doesn't one become a relativist if one says, "We can't be sure of anything"?

W: Well, there's relativism and there's relativism. The view I maintain is that no human knowledge exists which is not relative to the limitations of human observers. That's as it ought to be, and while that is an epistemological defect relative to the perfection
of God's knowledge, insofar as it's merely finitude, it's not a defect relative to us. I mean, that's what we're supposed to be. We are finite; we're supposed to be finite. Insofar as the problem is our fallenness, it's a defect in terms of what we ought to be. Let me use an example I used in the lecture: my three-year-old son is sucking on a quarter. I tell him he shouldn't. He asks, "Why?" He doesn't have any notion what bacteria or viruses are, so I tell him, "there are little, tiny, invisible bugs on it, and if they get inside you, they'll make you sick."

Now, his epistemic situation is fairly clear. In the strong sense of the term, with adult knowledge as the norm, he doesn't have the truth. His belief about the quarter is false. But in another sense, he is thinking about the matter precisely as he ought to: within the limitations of what he is able to think. He is thinking about it as well as is possible for him. Now that knowledge is relative to the limited framework of a three-year-old, but I don't see that as a subjectivism or a relativism to be afraid of.

D: What guarantees minimally loose correspondence between...?


D: Uh-huh. But how can we have confidence when dealing with, say, key religious beliefs or the rules of logic, that we're getting it right, or that we're doing things at the level that humans ought to be doing them? What are the criteria of good thinking within this tempered subjectivity?

W: There's no wholesale answer to that question. It would be nice if there were. It would be nice if we could say, "If we practice a certain methodology or, going back to Plato, a certain ascetic discipline, and thus free ourselves from dependence on things that make us finite, like the senses or tradition, we can ascend to the top of the Tower of Babel and see the world from the divine perspective. And we will know that we see things as they are. We will know, and we'll know that we know."

I'm starting with the assumption that we can never do that, and that we shouldn't pretend to do that. What that means is that we will never have the simple, direct, unmediated presence of reality to intuitive consciousness to guarantee that our understanding of it is right. In the absence of that, how do we go about distinguishing better beliefs from worse beliefs?

My three-year-old would have a worse belief if he thought that the reason he shouldn't suck on a quarter is because if he sucks on a quarter, the cat will die. That's not how he ought to think about it. How is he to determine which beliefs he ought to have? Well, for different kinds of beliefs, one has to give different answers. I think that for the kinds of questions we think of as scientific questions you give one kind of answer. If you're talking about which reports in the news you should accept, you give a different kind of answer. And when it comes to ethical beliefs, I don't think there's any simple recipe. The question of how one goes about determining the best way for humans to think is itself an important topic of philosophical debate. In fact, I think most of the interesting philosophical debates these days, in the epistemological realm at least, are debates about how to go about responsibly evaluating beliefs given that we don't have an absolute standpoint or self-evident, self-justifying criteria with which to work.

We always have criteria, but the criteria are relative to certain projects or certain points of view, and they can be put in question, and when you put the criteria in question, you don't have any meta-criteria which are the obvious ones to use. The discussion really gets interesting when it becomes a debate about the criteria.

D: Let me pose a Plantingian question: even if we can't just know things, or know that we know them, couldn't a theist argue that because God has set up our cognitive equipment, we can rest assured that we are, most of the time, thinking about things roughly as we ought to, that we can trust our senses and intellects, that we can believe that the sun's going to come up tomorrow?

W: Often a stronger claim is made than that. You've adopted my formula: thinking about things as humans ought to think about them. Often, the stronger claim is made that we can know things as they really are. But, if you make the weaker claim, then I would say, yes, insofar as we are created beings, we are given equipment which
a whole lot to do with the way people do mathematics. And when one goes back to the masters of the hermeneutics of suspicion, one doesn’t find Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud giving critical analyses of the ways in which people do mathematics, but the ways in which they do ethics and politics and religion.

I think Christian thinkers, by virtue of their understanding of human fallenness, are not in a situation where they can say, “we can just trust our intellectual equipment,” especially on the matters that are most important.

D: But they might have better reason than atheists to think that their faculties are trustworthy at all. Does postmodernism work better as a theism?”

W: I would say that the theist has a better reason for talking about how we can trust our equipment, and a better account of why we shouldn’t trust it. I have called the atheistic masters of suspicion, “The great modern theologians of original sin,” but I think Christians are better equipped to be theologians of original sin than atheists are.

D: Do you then regard Rorty’s, Derrida’s, Foucault’s atheism as dispensable to their systems for non-systems, as the case may be?

W: It certainly isn’t dispensable to their projects. Their projects have secularism built in. I’ll add the qualifier that that seems to be less clearly so, as you get closer to the present in reference to Derrida. But the early Derrida is as much a Nietzschean as the other two. So that’s an essential part of their project. What I want to say is that some of their most important insights are linked to that project only biographically, not conceptually, and that these insights can be lifted out of context and put to work in a theistic context.

D: Are there things we should affirm more strongly than others within this cloud of comprehensive doubt? For instance, how do we treat the authority of scripture? How do we treat creedal claims like, “Christ died for our sins”? Do we preserve a certain element of distance, or?

W: I don’t. I don’t see any need to. It’s simply a matter of fact—Quine calls our attention to this—that all of us have belief structures in which some beliefs are more deeply ingrained and central than others. That is to say, we’re less likely to change them, and more of the rest of what we believe depends on them.

So if you envision some sort of logical space encompassing all of my beliefs— if you think of them atomistically—some would be close to the center and some would be on the periphery, both with regard to how basic they are, and with regard to how confident I am about them. That’s just a matter of fact. Now the epistemological question has to do with whether or not I have warrant or justification or entitlement for holding the beliefs that I hold and for holding them with the degree of confidence that I do. But that will be an ongoing debate. That will be a discussion between believers and unbelievers and among believers as well, but the fact that we don’t have absolute guarantees doesn’t mean that we’re never entitled to hold very

epiphany

lying
half-naked half-covered cold
You wake up alone.
not even near me

here is how I remember nighttimes:

lying

tightly crumpled in myself
arms bent
as scalene triangles still. sensing
the two layers, sheet then comforter
stitches, folds, fabrics
just below my chin my fingers
warm and fragile
here is how I imagine morning:

when momentary sanity opens
those words, layered, lie loosely about me
and over the past—my viewfinder

You my undoing

-Sarah Byker
deeply some of our beliefs.

I'll give you an example I often use: I don't have any doubts that my wife loves me. I am absolutely convinced of that; I'm not the least bit uncertain. But I don't have any absolute guarantees, and it is in fact possible that she is part of a very sophisticated experiment that began at Stanford University two years before I met her, and that she has devoted most of her life to carrying out this experiment. That's a possibility that I cannot completely exclude and so, objectively speaking, I can't say I'm absolutely certain that my wife loves me. But subjectively speaking, I have absolutely no doubts, and I think I'm warranted in holding that belief with the degree of certainty I do. I would say the same thing about "Christ died for our sins."

D: What about the Bible, then? In light of the things you're saying about finitude, how should we approach scriptural authority?

W: Well, I like what one of my teachers, a very conservative theologian who insisted on biblical inerrancy, said many years ago—that the Bible is the

The problem is that we are not just finite, but also fallen, and the proper functioning of our intellectual equipment becomes highly problematic, especially as issues get closer and closer to being of existential import.

divinely revealed misinformation about God. I like that formula. The notion that it's misinformation is shorthand, as I understand it, for the finitude I'm talking about, for the notion that even biblical revelation doesn't elevate us to a divine point of view, but leaves us seeing things as humans are capable of seeing them. One could, in similar fashion, say that the three-year-old's belief about the little bugs on the quarters is the parentally revealed misinformation about coins.

I see us as being in a situation very similar to that of the three-year-old. On the other hand, if this misinformation is divinely revealed, it has normative force for us, and just as that three-year-old boy ought to believe what his father has told him, and is thinking about the matter as he ought to if he accepts his father's account, biblical revelation has a normative significance for us. It tells us how we ought to think about God and the world and ourselves. But the fact that it comes from God doesn't erase the gap between human understanding and divine understanding.

D: Some characterize postmodernism as faddish, as something less than serious philosophy. Is this stuff going to be significant in a hundred years?

W: There's no question that postmodernism has something faddish about it. This relates to the fact that it has its origins in France. The French are very, very excited about anything avant garde—if it's three weeks old, it's stale. The result of that mindset is a certain rhetorical overkill and gamesmanship that isn't always helpful to philosophical clarity.

On the other hand, there is substantial philosophical analysis going on in the philosophers I've mentioned. They are in serious dialogue with their predecessors—the whole philosophical tradition going back to Plato. What makes me think that postmodernism is not just ephemeral is that the issues at the heart of postmodern philosophy are at the heart of much other philosophy as well. Across the board, claims to absoluteness of knowledge have pretty much been abandoned. Certain high aspirations for clarity and certainty are regarded, across a very wide spectrum of philosophical analysis, as untenable, and so a great deal of philosophical conversation consists of two things: one, the attempt to give the most illuminating analysis as to why those ideals are not achievable; and second, the attempt to articulate what we should do once we abandon that project and give up those hopes.

I see the philosophers we've been talking about as part of a larger conversation regarding these two questions: what's the best analysis we can give, and what do we do now that the ideal is gone? Because postmodernism is engaged in the fundamental philosophical conversation of our time, and does so with considerable skill and philosophical power, I'm not inclined to think that it's just a fad, and just ephemeral.

D: You commented earlier, in passing, that the hermeneutics of finitude draws on Kant. In fact, as someone remarked at your lecture, the debt to Kant seems massive. Are you appropriating something distinctly postmodern, or are you appropriating something that's already been appropriated by Derrida, Foucault, and company?

W: Well, I think one can get a lot of what I'm saying, epistemologically speaking, directly out of Kant, and not worry about the others. But Kant is
an enlightenment thinker. He has a sense of the universality of the human perspective and an ahistorical analysis that seems to me inadequate. So I'm looking for, if you like, a pluralized and historicized, post-Hegelian Kantianism.

Among the most powerful post-Hegelian Kantians I know are the postmodernists. They aren't the only ones. There are some very powerful ones in the analytic tradition. I'm thinking of people like Goodman and Putnam and their anti-realist arguments which are, if I may put it perversely, Nietzscheanized Kantianism. What that means is, they're not so different from what's going on in the postmodern context.

D: How do you come into conversation with people who want to claim that their faith commitments represent certain, unassailable knowledge?

W: One of the ways I would do it is to turn to Kierkegaard. Recall the account of faith that his pseudonym, Johannes Climacus, gives. He says that faith is "an objective uncertainty held fast in the infinite passion of inwardness." He uses the word "appropriation" in this context. He doesn't mean "appropriating other people's ideas for my theories" but, rather, "enacting those ideas in my life." And he says that that is the life of faith. When the Bible says "we walk by faith and not by sight," he takes that to mean, faith is epistemologically speaking a leap. One way of expressing that is to talk about objective uncertainty. But the commitment to appropriate faith out of passionate inwardness, Climacus says, is not inappropriate.

Here I can once again use my relationship to my wife as a model. Objectively, it's uncertain whether or not she loves me, but I think it's appropriate for me to believe that she loves me and act in a commitment of faithful love with her, undiminished by the fact that I can't prove that she loves me. Now many people want to have more than that. They want the security that would come from being able to walk by sight and not by faith. I'll put it strongly: that longing is a faithless longing that needs to be overcome and outgrown.

I think there are two things that lead to it, neither of which is appropriate. One is the desire to be intellectually superior to everybody who disagrees with me. "I have the truth. You disagree with me. You're wrong. I'm O.K." The other is the desire to be completely at rest, to be at the part of the story where it says, "and they lived happily ever after." My understanding of the life of faith is that, epistemologically, as well as morally, we're never at that point of the story. We're still at the part where the trolls and the wicked witches are part of our daily experience.

It's a tricky business, because what one wants to say, and should say, is that the truth has laid hold of us, but it's so easy to reverse that and say, "We've got hold of the truth." But that's not the same thing, and it doesn't follow. The Christian community is like every other community. It likes to think that its beliefs and its practices are natural, essential, fundamental, final. "We have arrived. We are the people. Wisdom will die with us." The need for critique comes with every human community because that attitude is the natural tendency of every fallen human community. The church is not exempt from it.

D: Ideas like yours could, it seems, help forge a healthy public square, and enable authentic discussion, by killing off dogmatism.

W: Well, my former colleague Al Verhey has pointed out that, historically speaking, there have been occasions when the Christian church has been challenged by irreligious or other-religious sources with respect to its beliefs or practices, and has in the course of reflection discovered that it needed to learn from them. It wasn't that the church abandoned being the church in order to become something else, but it learned from people outside the church how better to be the church.

If one doesn't enter into discussions in the public arena with the confident assurance that one has arrived at the final truth, then that possibility of learning from others is always there, and one isn't in the position of simply instructing others from a position that needs no instruction. One can adopt the position, "we can learn from you," even if one believes that we have what they don't have, namely a divine biblical revelation. Maybe we haven't understood it as well as we should. If we're using it, for example, to defend slavery or apartheid, and unbelievers come along and point out how dehumanizing slavery and apartheid are, why shouldn't we learn from them what we should have known all along? God once spoke through Balaam's ass.
This is my fourth year at Calvin, but I will take an additional year to push myself further. I am a BFA concentrating on drawing and print making, with an interest in sculpture. I have lived in Grand Rapids all my life. Ever since I can remember I had a pencil in my hand. I am a figurative artist, using the figure to express and reflect on my inner feelings on life experiences. They are not happy images, but I think they are closer to the bleakness of the American landscape around us, not outside our window, but in the human soul. Yet in this ever darkening world there is always light.

In regard to the nude: we are all “naked” in God’s eyes. No doubt a discomfiting thought to some!
Burden Bearers  
Aquatint, etching, drypoint [artist's proof]  
8x10"
Jacob's Struggle with Angel
mixed media drawing
10x14"
Chords through a Paper Window

by Jane C. Knol

Ellis singing with pencils in her hair.

For me it is the first red windowpane of memory and for Shane it was the first drawing, in the smudge and swirl of oil pastels. Her hair is fallen like pleats ironed into a skirt wrong. It clamps down from the transverse lines of the pencils in her hair.

In the glass and in the picture, she looks slightly up, and her mouth is open in singing and there are coffee mugs weighting and ringing with stains the quarter lies around her. The cups and the reports come from the accounting firm where she works. Ellis’s thick-ended fingers make mistakes at the adding machine. The ticker tape comes out anyway looking like a perpendicular score of music that hangs from the spool of the kitchen table to the jean purse on the floor.

And Ellis singing.

Sitting between Shane and me, she even sang on the bus uptown.

His and my, in those days, favorite tiny storefront was awned with the upright bricks of the factories on East Davies Avenue. I swear we made Ellis bring us there every time we went uptown. Shane would promenade around the lamps, touching each welded fruit and swan and zinnia, knowing he would not break anything. And after the first visits, the owner knew too who he did not have to tell to be careful. Instead he walked around in front of Shane, pulling cords and turning knobs, turning rhythmically all the lamps to on.

Years later I thought of my brother. Like the round light shades perching on the elongated brass cylinders of their poles or swinging from the ceiling in fish wire, he followed a disordered and balanceless synapse of rainbowing light bulbs. His towing head always the fixture that mattered most; light was heavier than his body.

While Shane increased the lightness of his procession, though, I squatted on the remnant carpet in the dim back of the store. The fray rug was positioned as a welcome mat to the plywood dividers and the sheets of stained glass stacked and leaned heavily between them.

They did not remind me back then of the sorted stacks of construction paper in the supply closet of Perseverance Elementary, where Shane and I went to school. But they were alike.

I knew about that supply closet only because one day I thought I was going to throw up in the second grade. Mrs. Perdon sat me down on this donated folding chair with a pail for washing chalkboards, or I guess vomiting in, on my lap. She stationed me right next to those shelves, all that paper stacked up flat like a spare rainbow. I was not too sick either to steal one piece of each color and tuck that spare pile in the waist of my blue jeans and up through my undershirt and ugly sweater to just lower than their twin V necks. It tickled like hell, but I made a hot-air-balloon mobile and two placemats out of those stolen construction papers. Also, knowing the truth about classroom buckets, I never volunteered to wash a chalkboard in school again.

Ellis again in the stained glass store would stand near the open sign, watching for the next bus to come through the pastel colors of the suncatchers on the window. And then she would thank Nolan the stained glass man, holding the door open for my brother and me.

As Nolan walked around his little shop turning lamps out and straightening carpets, Ellis back in the bus seat sang anyway, the rest of the way, to her parents’ house.

My grandparents’ names were Maxine Winona and Louie. Ellis visited them often. Every visit she would sit immediately down to their
four-leaf kitchen table. She surveyed the wallpaper and the coffee counter each week as though someone outside the family had come in to redecorate. She turned her windmill cookie over in the slab of her hand, told Shane and me not to play with our food, and hummed clarinet accompaniments.

My grandma would say words in front of us, Shane and me, that came out like staples without any papers between them. The children look healthy she would say or will spring never come.

It was in the springtime that Ellis always gave us one late picnic. For a late picnic, Ellis separated three green bottles, one a cheap blush and the other two sparkling white grape juice, in her purse. Between the bottles, she would make a snowman column of three tart green apples, and fill in the rest of the bag with honey and banana sandwiches and a cracker box of generic circus animals. Each year she forgot napkins.

She would sling her purse unclinking over her shoulder and at midnight we would walk the seven blocks to Adrian Park. Ellis would set everything out beneath the bullet shell shape of the jungle-gym and we would sit each next to each other, Ellis and Shane and me, eating the smashed buffers of sandwiches and crackers, and apples under the moon, and drinking what we each believed to be wine from the swollen lip of our own bottle.

"Did he ever beat you?" I remember my grandma asking, as though it were the first sentence I ever heard and not even sure.

Ellis laughed and said no.

I was under the four-leaf table that midmorning, winning the hide-and-go-seek game that Shane was in another room missing.

"But there was another woman," my grandma affirmed herself, "and that's almost just as bad. Why didn't you, Ellis, leave him sooner?"

"When I found out, Maxine," Ellis said, tiredly basic as tenor, "we were living on the floor above Allan Reilly's father's laundromat, and I was looking out the front window of that apartment the same as all night, and I saw him walk around that red car to kiss her through the driver window. I was pregnant for Sil at the time and wearing one of his work shirts and my panties and I came down to the street front just that way. I asked him what he was doing and he yelled at me and we stood yelling at each other in front of that damn laundromat, and Allan Reilly watching in the doorway and all the cars of Spring Lake slowing down before the stoplight to watch us. But what it came down to, Maxine, is that you can't leave a man when you are wearing his last clean work shirt.
because your own don’t fit you anymore.”

My grandpa’s small grey pant legs never moved and neither did my eyes.

Ellis used to say that on a cloudy day if you can find a patch of blue as big as a man’s pair of pants, things will clear up.

Ellis

Days like today the sky is so low. It hangs around your calves like cheap grocery nylons. I am as old as I am likely to get and tired of being womanly, the low slow-pitched softballs of my chest visible I suspect through the thin white linen of this button-down shirt.

It is what I wore to jail the night I got arrested.

I used to sit at the table in my parent’s kitchen and throw my eyes around the walls and objects of the room, not staring at anything. But I looked around so much with a reason; so that I could notice the windblown boy playing the piano in the window across the side lawn. He arched his fingers and playing the piano hunchback, hooked the toes of his shoes on the friction of the carpet underneath the piano bench. His limbs and spine made an amazing lowercase S in profile and past Shane and Sil’s chewing noises and past my mother’s department store voice, I replayed concert audio tapes in my mind.

My parents do not live anymore. I do not think I disgraced them by breaking into their old neighbor’s house to play the piano. It’s the nicest neighborhood, really, and the doorknob lock turned over easy as a sleeping child. It was the eve of my seventy-sixth birthday. Sil picked me up from the precinct for my birthday, but they didn’t even put me in a cell to begin with. The lady let me spend most of the night drinking coffee from styrofoam cups in the lobby; anyway they all were real nice.

I used to sit at the table in my own first kitchen and throw paper plates and wine jars until Adrian came home. But early, I hitched the kids through the straps of my purse and duffel and rented another tinier apartment just down the street. Adrian moved away. He was the one that got to move, away to Palis, building prayer benches every day but Sunday.

The reason I had that night to play the piano was, whether or not they imprisoned me for it, I had to get so that I was not behind all these pairs of bars for a little while. And the only way I own to proceed past them is to find the music in the piano bench and play it until the end and then continue practicing my own scalloped chords. To continue playing past the double bars.

So that now I can lie here in this hospital bed with its guardrails and brackets, with the glossy picture of my parents standing there a couple on their wedding day and on my nightstand, with my Shane and Sil sitting there more than grown on their chairs, and with myself just a half of an old couplet lying here.

Like the wife of Noah, I endure the circus of paired animals even as it requires all these fences, because my life is a painted cell numbered two. I used to get a little drunk. I smoked too for a while, quitting on Independence Day, and restarting later, after taking hundreds of drags on my ink pen out of the magenta corner of my mouth.

Still the night, before my last birthday, I performed Beethoven and then past the coda, I played myself. I lie here, and last. I hum the pardoning, disabled music I used to sing.

Shane

I lie down at night, photographing my dreams, knowing they will not break.

When I was small, my favorite toy was the broken camera Sil found at the garage sale down the street. They called it a Viewfinder, and in the Hallmark envelope that came along with it were round disks of cartoon frames that were meant to show chronologically through the toy’s clear eye-window. I bought the whole package for seventy-five cents, threw the envelope of disks in the garage seller’s trash at the curb, and walked home further and further behind Sil’s secondhand bicycle.

From that time, I brought the Viewfinder to all places, and using its functionless button and lever, I photographed the shape of colors. People from the bus wore them on their face, and so did the balloons in the public garden and rows of parking meters cultivated with the drop and switch of dimes. This is the way I started to remember the lightness. In art class, I began drawing.
I hung fish lines across my apartment and safety-pin my drawings to them from the upper paper corners. I like how they float and weigh when the window is open and the screen is filled with cottonwood hair. My pictures seem heavy for the invisible filament that supports them. They are thick with charcoal and Cray Pas and fixative.

I learned to remember apart from the broken Viewfinder. I keep it on my nightstand.

At night I lie down, and I remember the dreams that I have. I used to write them, but I draw them now, compressing their framelessness onto newsprint, the same as before. And before I sleep, I remember how things were.

"What are you writing?" Sil asked out the shutters.

I told her nothing the same as before. I used to sit outside the building, after breakfast and before the bus, writing down my dreams out of my metal case of pencils in case they changed by afternoon. I had asked Ellis, time ago, for a notebook to write my dreams in. But coming in from her job in the building that looked like a funeral home, she didn't hold with that nonsense is what she said. I asked for a coloring book for my eighth birthday and I got it too. So I wrote my graphite dreams inside the bold outlines of the Disney characters smiling and jump roping through the wheaty pages. I sat in the courtyard of the apartments where the dryer vents were, puffing the smell of fabric softener and the sweetened uncondensed milky vapor of washing water.

The day that Sil came down from the shutters, she begged that I read her one dream.

I sat still in the grass for a little, watching the dragonflies moving like gyroscopes through untrimmed bushes. Then I began to read to her.

"It was in the woods," I read, and looked across our Indian-style laps at her opal face. I asked her.

"Do you remember the suncatcher at the stained glass store, the one with the tiny bird pasted to this very wilting branch, that's metal like blackness?"

"I don't know," she answered. "Is the bird very pretty?"

"Sort of. Sil," I told her, "if you can't remember the suncatcher, the dream can't get told to you because you wouldn't understand it anymore. Because the dream is overcast just like the stained glass. They're practically the same thing."

She cried a little until I sorted through the pages to read another.

"We all sit on the fire escape, Sil and me, and Ellis and Adrian. And the reason we're all sitting there, letting the fire escape imprint the backs of our legs, is that there is this huge round hot-air-balloon in the sky, very low, and big as the sun when it's setting over across the street. And then this hand comes out of the sky, not like God in Pearson Sunday School, just like a worker hand from anywhere, only big too. What it does is, this hand pulls the hot-air-balloon down onto the ground until it is all this heap of silk in colors with no boundaries, with just a few ripples of air left in it. The hand doesn't crush it down, like usually would happen. It just draws it down by the basket, gentle. And then it is out of sight, but I can still see it, except I am alone on the fire escape and no one answers."

Ellis didn't respond to us if we talked to her when she was singing. That was why I drew her first, her mouth open and gap-toothed, her hands wise in opera gestures over the calculator. I drew her first, beautiful at the kitchen table, because I knew she quit watching over across the street before the rest of us did.

Sil

Ellis sang with pencils in her hair all her life.

When I was small, she told me on her lap, "Sil, if you look on a cloudy day and you see a patch of blue as big as a man's pair of pants, things will clear up."

I am home from the funeral home. The sky is full and colorless. I stand underneath our old apartment and do not know who lives there now; but his navy blue overalls, large, hang from their straps on the laundry line over the alley between this building I lean against and the next.
Virga  watercolor  33x17"  Kelly Edwards
She lived before history. How do I know about her? Call it women's intuition. There was nothing between her feet and the earth; her flesh connected with the life-giving soil, the holy ground. She did not hear the curse when it was spoken, but her body heard the cry of the land: "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life." When she gave birth to her child, she screamed in unison with the earth which gave life to her first. In the pain of creation, they were one.

Her husband and she pleaded with the earth: "Create. Sustain us. We will cherish you." And the earth gave them food. And sometimes it did not. At times, her husband left her to dance with nature. The dance of the hunt was for himself and a partner, two animals. He listened to the earth for guidance in the dance. The earth taught him the sequence of steps, signs that led him to his partner. If he danced in his partner's tracks, he received life in death: his partner's life sacrificed for his. And when he returned he gave the earth's gift of nourishment to her and their child, and in so doing gave life back to the earth.

While her husband was gone, she carried her child in a dance of her own. The earth called to her to get down on her knees—"Taste the earth with your skin." She kneeled to gather the earth's abundance. With her child pressed on her back and the earth's heavy life gathered in her arms, she returned to share this nourishment with her husband.

This was in times of plenty. But once a year the earth forsook them; it turned into itself to rekindle its creative fire. During these times they hungered together on the earth's cold back. They waited and strained their ears to hear the earth call again. But they heard nothing until the earth let its fire seep out again, thawing and welcoming them into its breast.

The holy ground, the sacred earth, ruled over them.

* * *

I look out into the lobby. It's full. The dinner rush. Anxiety sweeps over me. My ears focus on the frenzied beeping of six different timers. Food must be taken from its respective cooking apparatus before it becomes carbon. Expectant faces wait for me to take their orders. "A regular hamburger, fish fillet sandwich, medium Coke, large french fry, and a coffee." I strain to see the tiny print on the buttons in front of me, hoping my fingers find the right one before I do. As I punch in each item, I think of where it goes in the proper sequence. I remember drinks are first, so I decide to pour the coffee. I choose between the stacks of uniformly shaped cups. "You should wait until the hot food is up before you pour coffee; it'll get cold," says an authoritative voice behind me. Mental note: all drinks except coffee are first. As coffee spurts out of the silver institutional coffee maker, a drop pierces my hand. I jerk back, the coffee spills, and my hands are scalded. I cry out in pain. The earth does not hear. My coworkers do not listen. The people packed in the lobby are indifferent. Tears welling up in my eyes, I finish the order and begin to take the next one. My soul gropes for compassion, but I receive none from the white counter, the tiled floor, the silver vat of coffee. The people in the line in front of me stare in different directions. They do not look at me, but their looks demand my efficiency. I am keeping them from dinner.

* * *

The prehistoric woman and I have something in common according to Simone Weil; we suffer from oppression. In fact, not only do we have it in common with each other,
THE RAPTURE

On that glorious day
When the trumpets
Blare in the sky
And the winged beings
Descend to
Harvest the wheat

I will unseasonably be
Too excessive a load
[My head
Rooted in abstraction]
For even
The brawniest of angels

—Salomon Orellana

but it is the thread by which we connect to society—past, present, and future—and to all of humanity.

Simone Weil was an intellectual, professor, philosopher, trade union activist and social thinker in pre-World War II France. Marxist in her critique of capitalism, Weil offered harsh new insight to this theory. She agreed with Marx that capitalism had brought about a new form of economic oppression. But through her studies and experiences she refuted Marx’s idea that capitalism would create its own downfall. The proletariat would not, as Marx predicted, rise up in revolution; the very forces of technology and production that Marx believed would liberate the working class actually destroyed any impetus for revolution. Her criticism of Marxist theory and her own analysis of society added a new dimension to academic, political, and social spheres.

In her essay “Analysis of Oppression” Weil explores the origins of oppression. The end of the article concludes: “It would seem the man is born a slave, and that servitude is his natural condition” [Weil 152]. Enslavement oppresses us, and since we are always enslaved we are always in a state of oppression. Nature first enslaved humans, and although oppressed, Weil contests that people had the most freedom when they served the earth [132]. What freedom we had began to diminish with the invention of agriculture. Its implementation prompted people to store up food resources for future use. This surplus of products enabled budding societies to assign parts of the labor process to individuals: some plowed the fields, some made tools to plow the fields, and some took care of the children. As innovations in technology were made, labor became increasingly specialized, alienating work and worker—an idea on which Weil and Marx both agreed.

As collectives grew larger, the dominating class became smaller. Humans replaced nature as the dominating force. Oppression took the form of enforced labor by humans, and the master/slave relationship perpetuated itself with a never ending quest for power. Feudal societies embodied this stage of oppression. Ultimately, societies expanded beyond their means, and this gave rise to new forms of power that more efficiently governed societies. With every new enlargement, labor was divided up between more people and in smaller pieces.

The division of labor crescendoed into today’s capitalism in which individuals perform extremely specific tasks that contribute the products demanded by society. Capitalistic factories put a premium on efficiency and maximum production over the needs of workers. The workers’ jobs require them to execute specific repetitive movements that are tedious and wearing on the body. They often do not know the final product, its use, or their role in the process of making the product. The alienation that technology generates between producer and product is the next form of oppression. It dehumanizes workers, rendering them a small meaningless parts of a gigantic whole.

Weil did not keep to the privileged intellectual and social circles in which
she grew up. She had an urgent desire to uphold people marginalized by oppression. She spoke for the unemployed of Paris in front of the mayor and laid out their demands 

When she shook hands with a "stonebreaker" she caused a scandal at the school where she was a teacher. In response to the outrage, she wrote an article entitled "A Survival of the Caste System" in which she criticized modern society for still believing that people in certain social classes were "untouchables." After writing "Oppression and Liberty," Weil decided to realize one of her dreams: to work in a factory. She wanted to experience the oppression of the working class first hand. She hoped to get practical insight on ways in which the factory could be humanized.

In her Factory Journal, as recounted by Petrement, Weil describes the humiliation of not being able to accomplish product quotas. Since she was uncoordinated and had small hands, she always fell short of the goals commissioned by her superiors. This put her in a constant state of anxiety. Orders were given to the workers arbitrarily and without notice, engendering in workers a sense of helplessness and futility. Machines constantly spat pieces at them at an inhuman rate; the manner in which they were expected to work allowed no pause for contemplation. Thus her conclusion was a confirmation of her theory—the modern factory worker is oppressed by technology.

Simone Weil ruthlessly deconstructed the basic principles of modern society, such as efficiency and maximum production. In her article "Factory Work," she offered constructive suggestions on how to humanize the workplace. Employers should teach workers about their role in the process, their final product, and its use. Workers can then offer suggestions. Communication between employers and employees encourages workers to feel pride in their piece of the whole and connection to their product. This would repair some of the dehumanizing alienation created by technology. In order that workers have a sense of control, employers should tell workers of new job assignments and production quotas—allowing enough time for physical and mental preparation. Finally, society should develop and implement machines adapted to human movement, not the other way around. Worker must be placed before machine.

If Simone Weil could see the way fast food chains operate today, she would be horrified at the further entrenchment of the capitalist system. Its feeble attempts to value the worker have failed to devalue the ideals of efficiency and productivity that damage the worker in the first place. Modern factories require inhuman speed for the production of that which nature intended to be made in a long, difficult process, such as the preparation of food. Anxiety results from the failure to accomplish the standards society has set out for us. Oppression by the machinery of society has gone beyond our control. The dance nature intended to have with us is interrupted. Our new partner forces us to move to a steady racing beat eerily reminiscent of the timer on a basket of french fries.

Works Cited


The Apparent Asymmetry of Time
by Edward L. Hamilton

Huw Price, Time’s Arrow and Archimedes’ Point, New York: Oxford University Press [1996], xiii & 306 pp., $39.95 [cloth].

Throughout the modern era, the study of physics has been concerned chiefly with developing a descriptive model of reality, and only secondarily concerned with probing deeper philosophical issues regarding the ontological significance of elements of such models. The inductive and empiricist traditions of assigning meaning to the fruits of the scientific method are essentially hostile to any conclusions that cannot at least in principle be verified observationally; if two theories are observationally equivalent under all conceivable tests, there can be no hard scientific basis for preference, and the simplest, most intuitively natural explanation is almost uniformly favored. Thus, for example, the question “What is space?” can be safely neglected, so long as the standard model of space as an array of Cartesian grid points [with appropriate allowances for general relativity] continues to produce an accurate simulation of physically observed processes. Terms like “space” and “time” are rarely themselves objects of study, but instead are implicitly assigned a set of properties that comport with the common experiences of the human mind. Time, in particular, remains mysterious in that it contains an apparent asymmetry: for the sort of everyday events human observers encounter with alarming frequency, changes associated with the flow of time backwards, into the past, seem nothing like those expected for the flow of time into the future. [Hereafter in my review, I will use the adjective “temporal” to denote properties pertaining to time.]

The Australian philosopher Huw Price, in a book that delicately straddles the boundary between impudence and inspiration, contends that it is precisely this tendency to treat time intuitively that has led the orthodox interpretation of thermodynamics, cosmology, quantum mechanics, and probably every other field of physical science disastrously astray. A relatively new arrival to the debate, Price has already displayed the audacity to conclude that such leading modern luminaries as Roger Penrose, Stephen Hawking, Paul Davies, and John Bell have all made faulty assumptions that contaminate their analyses of temporally asymmetric phenomena. More incredibly, Price invites physical scientists to re-evaluate several well-accepted interpretations of modern theory, ranging from the Second Law of Thermodynamics to the orthodox view of quantum measurement. Above all, he suggests that the very notion of causality has outlived its usefulness, and ought to be either reformulated in a temporally symmetric version or simply abandoned.

The Archimedean “point” alluded to in the title is a point of perspective, not a point of argumentation. The image Price presents is that of a “view from nowhen,” taking a point of view that sets the scientist/philosopher outside the framework of time, where he can serve as a neutral arbiter of temporal asymmetry, unbiased by any differentiation between the past, present, and future. This in effect amounts to an affirmation of what philosophers refer to as the “block universe view,” a school of thought that rejects any conception of a “flow” of time as hopelessly anthropocentric, and assigns a single invariant ontological status to all events in the timeline of a universe. This structure has wide-ranging philosophical and theological implications [its apparent incompatibility with free will not least among them], but these are set aside in favor of a discussion that focuses almost exclusively on issues within the jurisdiction of physics.

The basic project of the critical portion of the text is to reduce any apparent asymmetry in the structure of the universe to a product of boundary...
conditions alone; that is, if it were not for extraordinarily unique circumstances prevalent at some single instant in what we refer to as the past, the past and the future would be indistinguishable. As a relatively trivial example, consider a film recorded of the motion of gas molecules in a box. Suppose that the film can be fed into a projector starting from either end. How might one be able to ascertain which end depicts the proper starting condition, and which records the final state? If the initial state is highly disordered and close to thermodynamic equilibrium, the situation is hopeless; the system will remain disordered despite the dynamic contribution of molecular collisions, due to the statistical improbability of collisions correlated in precisely the right way to decrease disorder. If the initial conditions of the system can be manipulated to produce a highly ordered state, however, it is highly improbable that the final state will exhibit the same low entropy arrangement [entropy is a statistical measure of the ordering of a system], and this serves to differentiate the two ends of the film. In effect, this asymmetry is not the result of any temporal directionality, however, but is merely the blind assertion that the initial state can be constrained by events preceding the film in a causally deterministic way, but the final state cannot be constrained by events following the film. The film displays a temporal gradient [a directional change] only because it explicitly incorporates an asymmetric assumption. Thus, the final conclusion that all asymmetries can be explained by boundary conditions redirects attention to the radical improbability of the entropy minimum associated with the Big Bang, rather than the manifestation of any time-directional entropy changes since that moment. In other words, the question we must ask is not "Why does the order and structure of the universe diminish over time?" but "Why was the universe ever so ordered and structured in the first place?"

Price's book, which might loosely be taken as a challenge issued to physics by philosophy, is both impressive in its scope and disappointing in its detail. He begins with the basic idea that all physical laws ought to be treated as unbiased with regard to the direction of time [an idea disturbing to the layman but broadly accepted by physicists], and applies it like a wrecking ball to every example of a purported temporal gradient he encounters. At the same time, he consistently reduces complex theoretical constructs to radically simplified summarizations, with the effect of casting doubt on his objections. For example, Price summarizes the core argument for the Maxwellian distribution by saying that it "assumes that the number of collisions between molecules of given velocities will simply be proportional to the product of the number having one velocity and the number having the other velocity"; in actuality, the probability must be adjusted to reflect the higher chance of collision for more rapidly moving molecules. This is not so far wrong that it undermines the force of his argument, but it is faulty enough to reduce his credibility when he discusses more sophisticated theories, like Hawking's hypothesis concerning non-linear perturbation modes in the early inflationary universe.

Additionally, Price's discussion of cosmology assumes throughout that the universe is closed, possessing sufficient mass to halt its present expansion and to begin a period of contraction terminating in a "Big Crunch." Although he acknowledges that this may be theoretically prohibited, he seems to argue that the regional collapse of matter back into a singularity [a point in space for which matter density is hypothetically infinite], in the form of a black hole, accurately reproduces the sort of behavior that would be associated with a universal collapse. This leads to a series of counter-arguments on the part of Roger Penrose, each of which Price addresses. The objection that matter falling into a black hole would be forced to undergo a reversal of its entropy gradient is cleverly resolved. However, the basic conception of a black hole as a terminal stage in stellar evolution seems oddly neglected. The destruction or creation of structures entering or exiting a black [or "white"] hole may itself be physically allowable, but the idea that a structureless singularity can behave consistently as a one-sided terminal end product of stellar evolution is not so obviously permissible. In some sense, a singularity must "remember" which direction denotes its past, and which indicates its future, in order to ensure that it does not spontaneously uncollapse or re-emit absorbed matter in any way.

One may also constructively note that, while rejecting any possibility of unidirectional causation, Price leaves other assumptions associated with correlated interaction intact. Probability of interaction, for example, still must be evaluated within a time-variable
Several Very Bad Sonnets by E.J. Feddes

ERIC IDLE’S NOT MY DAD
Sad but true: Eric Idle’s not my dad.
I’m not a product of this Python’s seed.
I have to admit (twould not be so bad,
If he’s been the one who taught me to read.
We would push the dead cart all around town.
The other kids in school would be so green,
when Brave Sir Robin, with his hair of brown
would come pick me up: Boy, that would be keen.
Life would be great if I were Idle-spawn,
with here a nudge-nudge, and there a wink-wink.
No “Turn off T.V. and go mow the lawn,
and on your way out, go fetch me a drink.”
If Eric raised me, there’d be just one rift:
Instead of ‘elevator’, I’d say ‘lift’.

WOULD YOU LOVE ME MORE IF I WERE BATMAN?
Would you love me more if I were Batman?
By day I’d be wealthy playboy Bruce Wayne.
Would you love me more if I were that man,
fighting crime with my prodigious brain?
Catwoman with her whips and fetish gear,
the evil schemes of Riddler and Two-Face;
I’d take on them all, all for you my dear,
Were I the Dark Knight, and Gotham my place.
For Joker and Penguin, I’d lose no sleep.
From Robin and I, in terror they’d flee.
And even guys like Mr. Freeze, that creep,
with all his schemes would be no match for me.
As I am now dear, I love you, it’s true.
But Batman could do much better than you.

As a final criticism, and one which Price downplays but readily admits, one must remember that all physical laws are not time symmetric, although they may be nearly so. In particular, one sub-atomic particle, the neutral kaon, for reasons still not adequately explained by any modern theoretical model, distinctly violates time symmetry. If the properties of the kaon can be wholly described in terms of quantum mechanical laws of nature, then scientists must admit that temporal symmetry is only a useful approximation, not an absolute principle. Price feels that this case is “small” enough to be safely neglected, an attitude which perhaps reflects the control beliefs of a philosopher; physicists demand more rigorous justification for excluding such “exceptional” phenomena.

The only point at which Price departs from a mere plausibility/consistency argument and identifies an experimentally verifiable means of distinguishing his conception of causality from the traditional asymmetrical view is in the final two chapters addressing the Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen thought experiments, in which quantum mechanical measurements can be correlated with other measurements in ways that seemingly require faster-than-light [in fact instantaneous] transmission of information. His proposition for the resolution of this apparent paradox rescues Einstein's confidence in an objective, complete physical reality independent of observation, without recourse to any "hidden variable" hypotheses, theories which require the existence of some variable not describable by quantum mechanics alone. Price allows a quantum mechanical particle to assume a state that can be influenced itself by a future measurement, in effect, giving the function determining its behavior some measure of prescience. Thus, a particle's properties cannot be treated as quantum mechanically indeterminate prior to measurement but well-defined after such an interaction, as per the orthodox Copenhagen interpretation; instead, the very act of choosing to measure one...
property, rather than another, extends causally backward in time, perturbing the particle prior to the act of measurement.

Price’s contributions to the field of the philosophy of time are worthy of respect and have already generated serious interest and gained support, chiefly among philosophers. However, his critical skills clearly exceed his scientific abilities, as he himself would probably admit, and one is left to ponder exactly how the demonstrations of logical consistency he provides would translate into a new paradigm of physics. The relative scarcity of events that seem to require backward causation and the overwhelming success of science without reference to a unique philosophy of time both argue for caution and skepticism in evaluating Price’s appeals to reject the orthodox interpretation of quantum mechanics. If anything, this book provides an exercise in the value of periodically reassessing deeply held epistemological prejudices and maintaining a disciplined and coherent understanding of the fundamental, irreducible concepts undergirding the laws of physics.

Slowness and Pleasure
by Angela Ajayi


These days too many people want to move faster. Very few, if any—and I think Milan Kundera, the author of the novel, Slowness, would agree—can move slower. Or even if they do, a world in which the rise of technology has promoted the idea of much speed as a symbol of true progress will not allow them to cultivate the desire for less speed, or, what Milan Kundera has appropriately used to title his most recent novel, slowness. But what is it about any kind of speedy motion that attracts us? And why is it that once we’ve experienced it we continue to want it, thus forfeiting the desire to return to the “pleasures of slowness”?

In his novel, Milan Kundera defines speed as the form of ecstasy the technical revolution has bestowed on human beings. He suggests that without this technological revolution or the influence of machinery, such as motorcycles on our lives, we enter into a state very similar to that experienced by runners. The runner—unlike the motorcyclist to whom speed is more accessible—is always critically aware of his or her situation; he or she is, if not constantly, then frequently, reminded of the fatigue of his or her own body, the beating of his or her heart, “his weight, his age” and is “more conscious of himself and of his time of life.” Within the confines of a machine, however, the motorcyclist’s body remains “outside the process,” and he or she succumbs to the feeling of speed which is “noncorporeal, nonmaterial, pure speed, speed itself, ecstasy speed.” This, Kundera later suggests, is the reason why speed attracts us. It moves us away from our bodies, from ourselves and allows us the “privilege” of forgetting, of a so-called state of unconsciousness similar to what the motorcyclist experiences as he focuses “only on the present instant of his flight” and is, in somewhat of an abstract sense, “wrenched from the continuity of time.”

Furthermore, Kundera introduces what he calls the “secret bond” between slowness and memory and also between speed and forgetting. Using what he calls “existential mathematics,” he comes up with an amazingly simple but striking discovery. First, he urges the reader to consider the situation in which a man walking down a street tries to remember something. If “the recollection escapes him,” he will immediately slow down. However, if this same man remembers a situation that he wants to forget, he will speed up, “as if he is trying to distance himself from a thing too close to him in time.” Then, with this simple example, Kundera formulates these two equations: the degree of slowness is directly proportional to the intensity of memory and the degree of speed is directly proportional to the intensity of forgetting. Later, he incorporates these relationships into the two main plots within the novel, thus giving us examples of how “existential mathematics” can affect important aspects of human existence.

One of the two main plots in the novel is revealed through the narration of a brief love affair that occurs in a chateau sometime in the eighteenth century. Although the identities of the lovers...
Fallen Troy [which I created]  
graphite  
15 x 21”  
Mike Shih
are kept secret throughout the novel, we are told that the affair is between Madame de T. and a young Chevalier. Much of what occurs between these two individuals is narrated by another character within the book—his name is not given—who has come with his wife, Vera, to visit the chateau, which is now a hotel. The narrator—whose "voice bears a strong resemblance" to that of Milan Kundera's—stands by a window in his bedroom, and gazing at the chateau's beautiful gardens and terraces, he recollects the contents of a novella he once read by Vivant Denon. It is in Vivant Denon's story that the encounter between Madame de T. and the young Chevalier is told. The narrator imagines its actual occurrence in the setting he sees outside his window. There is slowness involved in this scene for Madame de T., the narrator tells us, "possesses the wisdom for slowness and employs the whole range of techniques for slowing things down." Later, we find out that the seduction of the young Chevalier by Madame de T., who has willingly transgressed social and moral boundaries in order to "regain" her husband's trust. This, however, does not ruin the experience for the Chevalier. It is the slowness of the night and most especially, the absence of speed that has left a beautiful mark on the Chevalier's mind: he will never, or rather cannot—as the equations suggest—easily forget the night.

The second plot in the novel involves the world of politics, and it is here that we experience Kundera's true ability to write irony. Unwilling to suppress his intolerance for the games politicians play for public approval, Kundera introduces two French politicians who despite their despicable natures are able to become successful and influential. These men are "dancers," Kundera concludes. Dancers, as we come to understand through the words of Pontevin, one of the most interesting of the French intellectuals who meet regularly at the Café Gascon, and his student Vincent, are those who engage in a battle called "moral judo"; their prime objective in life is to "steal" the "moral spotlight" so that they can appear more moral than anyone else around them. In the novel, it is the politician, Berck, who most readily adopts this way of life. He is portrayed by Kundera as loathsome, as a man with little regard for honesty. He, like most politicians of his time, has an unhealthy "obsession with seeing his life as containing the stuff of art." Berck, as Kundera says rather emphatically, doesn't preach morality, he dances it. Thus, he is a dancer—a politician gone astray—and an indecent one too.

Whether or not the two major themes mentioned above—slowness and memory as being directly proportional to each other and "dancers" in the world of politics—"come together" within the novel is questionable. Is there a connection? And if there is one, where is it? Unfortunately, Kundera dwells in the world of subjectivity, of polyphony, so that the answering of these questions seems almost impossible. He tends to wander—as if lost—through different plots and themes, connecting and disconnecting them at various times as they appear in the novel. Initially, this might confuse the reader. He or she must remain alert to sudden changes in plot and time.

If one persists long enough, however, and survives the wanderings of Kundera's mind and pen, then the link between the two major themes in Slowness could be discovered. This link appears to be the young aspiring intellectual, Vincent. According to Kundera, Vincent is the man on the motorcycle. Like so many of us, he desires to forget the aspects of his life which he sees as humiliating and unfortunate. As one of the important characters in the novel, Vincent is involved in both the world of politics and brief romances. At a gathering of entomologists, Vincent experiences Berck's true nature and it repulses him. That same night he meets Julia, a beautiful young woman, with whom he spends a rather bizarre and fast-paced evening. Later, at the end of the evening, he finds himself in need of motion, fast motion. He turns to his motorcycle and to the speed that promises to rid him of his humiliation, to allow him to forget the past [and perhaps, the future too?].

Before Vincent takes off on his motorcycle, however, he encounters the young Chevalier who is returning from the chateau and making his way slowly towards his carriage. What we observe here is the sudden intersection of two time periods—the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries—and of two lives that have assumed different paces. This encounter is almost comical, but it is here that Milan Kundera's secret bond between slowness and memory is acted out and reinforced. Both men recall having spent "completely marvelous" nights—the young Chevalier with Madame de T. and Vincent with Julia. But what is most interesting to observe
is that Vincent, whose night lacked slowness, will soon embark on a journey of much speed during which he will forget his so-called marvelous night. The young Chevalier, on the other hand, will proceed slowly toward his carriage and when he is in it, will move slowly toward his destination. He is—as Kundera finally concludes in *Slowness*—the happier man for he—unlike Vincent and so many of us—has chosen slowness.

Although the theme of slowness and its ability to intensify the pleasure of our experiences appears rather obvious throughout the novel, it is still uncertain—even by the end of the novel—what Kundera’s reasons for writing this novel really are. Are they also political? And if they are, how do these political views tie into the theme of slowness? Inevitably, one will also wonder what kind of reaction Kundera wants from his readers. Does he want us to laugh, to smile, or maybe to cry at the way he portrays the absurdity of our lives, our constant desire for forgetting, for speed? One could very easily speculate that Kundera would expect all of these reactions from his readers, for he readily combines philosophy and humor in this novel, making the reading of *Slowness* a challenging as well as emotional experience.

What Kundera says about speed and slowness, however, is very applicable to our society today and hardly debatable. We cannot argue against the constant presence of technology in society and the effect it has on the way we choose to live our lives. Isn’t it unfortunate that we can embrace speed so readily, so easily that slowing down—walking instead of driving—is hardly an option? The lack of slowness in our lives cannot be ignored; we must learn to recognize our need for it and become conscious of the way we spend our time. In *Slowness*, Kundera urges us not to let go of slowness so readily, not to give in to the rapid rise of technology in our lives. Slowness—Kundera says time and time again throughout his novel—is "a pleasure" that can lead to far more important and satisfying experiences than speed can and will ever allow us.

**Postmodernism**

Mapping a bewildering landscape

by Rob Huie


"What is Postmodernism?" is a question to which any brief answer must be unsatisfactory; the adjective "postmodern" has been applied to many disparate aspects of contemporary life. Happily, two recently published works provide a window for the Christian into the bewildering landscape of the "postmodern."

Stanley Grenz presents an introduction to the ethos known as "postmodern," its place in Western intellectual history, and its expression in philosophy, art, and popular culture. The same subject is considered by Gene Edward Veith, Jr., and approached within the categories of philosophical thought, art, society, and religion. Though both authors set out to construct an adequate portrait of postmodernism, neither purports to give an exhaustive definition; each ultimately seeks to resolve a more immediate matter in asking, "How is the Christian to engage the postmodern?" Both books are thus written for the educated Christian who is unfamiliar with postmodernism, and both acknowledge postmodernism as a force which demands critical engagement by Christians.

Grenz attempts to conduct his inquiry with openness, contending that the emerging postmodern ethos must first be thoroughly and fairly understood if one is to embody and proclaim the gospel convincingly in a culture that is increasingly suffused with postmodern ideas.

Despite the fact that Grenz writes from a Christian perspective, the book provides an introduction to the subject worthy of the attention of the person of non-Christian faith or the non-believer. The Primer comprises seven chapters, of which only the final, "The Gospel and the Postmodern Context," is plainly and prominently "Christian" in orientation. The preceding material begins with an explanation of the general qualities of the postmodern ethos and its cultural expressions. Because Grenz initially defines...
postmodernism as entailing "a rejection of the modern mind-set, but launched under the conditions of modernity" [2], he must backtrack to a presentation of the modern philosophy in which the postmodern is rooted. His history culminates in a look at three prominent philosophers, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Richard Rorty. Grenz also presents postmodernism as a cultural force expressed in the varied media of the visual arts, architecture, theater, fiction, film, and television.

Grenz identifies postmodernism as assailing the foundational concepts of modern thought: "world," "metanarrative," and "science." The idea of an objective world is abandoned for the view that explanations of reality are potentially useful but ultimately cannot be "true." Postmodernism attacks the modernist illusion that the world as it exists in itself is a proper object of rational exploration. The "metanarrative" of the primacy of rationality is unmasked as legitimating ultimately irrational mental processes. Without the legs of the reliability of reason and the existence of objective truth, the natural sciences can have no claims to reality. Science must look to "performativity" rather than "truth," and seek usefulness over rigid adherence to traditional rationalistic methodologies.

Grenz facilitates the reader's comprehension of postmodernism by introducing postmodernism's own terms and catchphrases. These are usually found in opposition to other terms describing modernism, reinforcing Grenz's claim that postmodernism largely defines itself in opposition to modernism. The Primer immerses the reader in postmodern vocabulary: univalence
versus multivalence [22-3], an aesthetic of presence v. one of absence [27-8], objectivist v. constructivist [40], real v. symbolic [42], performativity v. truth [48], universe v. multiverse [20], and Rorty’s opposition of systematic and edifying philosophy [6].

Grenz casts light on the applicability to postmodernism of terms such as pastiche and bricolage [both of which describe a juxtaposition of disparate images or phenomena] [20-21, 26], and “heterotopia,” the term Foucault uses to denote a decentered postmodernist universe [20].

The presentation and use of the vocabulary of postmodernism highlights Grenz’s commitment to openness and his conviction that a thorough and fair understanding will provide opportunities for the Christian to construct a perspective and mode of conduct appropriate to a postmodern era. His attitude makes for delightful reading, especially in conjunction with what seem to be his own attempts at giving postmodernism a try. In the style of thinkers such as Derrida, Grenz emphasizes intertextuality by sprinkling his book with quotations from representative postmodern works. Another Derrida-esque tactic is found in the title of his third chapter, “The Postmodern World.”

A different attitude is adopted by Gene Edward Veith, Jr., who sets upon an ambitious critique of postmodernism and contemporary culture. Veith’s goal, as he describes it in his preface, is to focus on the assumptions, ideas, art forms, and social configurations of the contemporary landscape. He is more concerned with postmodernism in its cultural totality rather than as a static system of thought. Because his book is intended for the church as a whole and not for academic specialists, he opts to leave out the more “technical” aspects, namely the specific contributions of individual thinkers. Whether this approach is helpful, as far as critique is concerned, is doubtful. Many of Veith’s attacks on postmodernism, while rhetorically aggressive, are aimed at a vague and generalized enemy rather than anything specific, and thereby seem to lack critical precision at times. At no point in his book does Veith make a pretense of sympathy for postmodernism; the tone of a critical and sometimes sneering Christian is pervasive in his descriptions and evaluations.

About half-way through the book, Veith presents a relatively faithful, basic picture of postmodernist ideology [158]. In Veith’s account, postmodernists hold that meaning, morality, and truth are constructed by society and have no objective existence. Individuals are wholly shaped by contingent cultural forces, especially language, and individual identity is rejected in favor of the view that people exist primarily as members of groups. The values of humanism, or the emphases on the creativity, autonomy, and priority of human beings, can therefore be discarded. Moreover, all transcendent absolutes are denied. All institutions, relationships, moralities, and other human creations can be reduced to structures of power; among these constructions is the exaltation of reason, a faculty which should therefore not be granted priority among human faculties nor counted as reliable because it is “scientific.” These characteristics highlight the fact that while postmodernism does offer answers, they are few; it appears largely as a reactive and destructive or rather deconstructive movement.

A prominent and recurring point for Veith is his distinction between “postmodern” and “postmodernism.” In his view, the former properly refers to a period of time and nothing more, while the latter points to an ideology. This distinction, which does not seem to be widely used at the moment, is nevertheless helpful in that it calls attention to the fact that not all nonmodernists are “postmodernists.” Veith points out that many postmodern artists [i.e., artists of today] react against modernist art by bringing back past styles and returning to representational art and premodern conceptions of beauty.

Another recurring theme is Veith’s analogy of the Tower of Babel. The Tower can be compared to the

if i were a star in the night sky,  
said the all-day sun,  
 i’d be less observed and more named. 
not just Sun, but Pegasus or Andromeda, 
or Star That I Look at Each Night  
While Remembering Lost Love.

—Bruce James
modernist project, which in its hubris exalted reason and science and left no room for God. As punishment, God brought the self-deification of Babel to ruins by depriving the people of their common language. Veith sees the human race in the postmodern situation as splintered into mutually inaccessible groups, among whom he numbers communities of feminists, gays, African-Americans, neo-conservatives, and pro-lifers. He advises Christians to agree with God's judgment and rejoice in the fall of Babel and look to a time when the curse of postmodernism will be removed, just as the curse of Babel was reversed during Pentecost.

The Babel analogy repeated periodically throughout the book demonstrates some of Veith's underlying assumptions about postmodernity in particular and intellectual history in general. Veith is convinced that "modernism has failed across the board" [177], although elsewhere he admits that the modernist perspectives are well entrenched in

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**each night there is a moon**

more intense than Jefferson, the man in the flat nickel moon.

i'd go swimming in his big eye, his wide, smoky mouth, and in the sea of tranquility

and when i slept, he would cloister me: loitering

in the tin can of his incandescent orbit.

man says the Moon would never act like this.

she, gasping beautiful, to the straightener of bookshelves

is the invited, glowing ulcer: hindering

without weeping his phosphorescent stature.

the nightclouds, lavender and steel-eyeshadow-grey, are the lampshade of the moon.

they ravine and lighten, making photofilm negatives

for the lily eyelids and the creased lips of the moon.

the sky is reciprocal as our yield and yearning toward the other.

["darling, i would keep our purple night house

and you would keep the bookshelves perfect:

lining the luminous volumes up, and above,

the moon would be our mantelpiece"]/

but inbetween us instead of over us, the moon cradles itself smiling and glimmering certainly in the intermittent sky.

i tiptoe on the rocking chair, kissing the ceiling goodnight

and you goodbye, as it will be, each night there is a moon.

each night, there is a moon.

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*Jane C Knol*
everyday society [175]. He refers to the history of modern thought as "a succession of foundations" [225], from rationalism through emotionalism and to will-power, the touchstones of the Enlightenment, romanticism, and existentialism, respectively. Veith continually repeats his conviction that the fall of the Soviet Union, a state which he considers the paradigm of many modernist principles, is a patent refutation of modernism itself.

Veith's view of history as a succession of combating "-isms" leads to oversimplification and misrepresentation. His intellectual universe consists of a set of reified world-pictures, one of which is good or right [Christianity, not including liberal theology] and the rest of which are bad or wrong. In bundling the opponent theories into neat, two-sentence systems, Veith makes them easy targets but often misses their points. Utilitarianism, for example, is reduced to an ideology whose sole concern is to make "the system run more smoothly" and to facilitate "the economic functioning of society" [33]. In like manner, multiculturalism is transformed into eating at Taco Bell and listening to reggae on a Japanese CD player [143]. Pro-choice advocates are not defending what they perceive as a woman's right over her own body, but are acting as existential ethicists who exalt the notion of "choice" beyond the reaches of reason or common sense [38].

At times the text seems to seethe with hostility. At one point Veith remarks: "It is little wonder that the TV generation has a hard time distinguishing between truth and fiction and that intellectuals raised on TV argue that there is essentially no difference between the two" [81-2]. He likewise muses, "It is little wonder that children whose parents have divorced and who have to adjust to a completely different family [or families] when parents remarry grow up to be relativists" [144]. In the same manner, one might argue that objectivists believe what they do as a result of their family lives; such charges are unfair and unhelpful.

Despite the injections of bitterness, Veith rigorously exposes many of the inconsistencies of postmodernism; it is on these points that his critique reaches its zenith. He points out that while postmodernist ideology describes morality as something socially constructed and without objective existence, the repeated railing against oppressive power structures implies the moral principle that "it is not good to oppress people." Postmodernists laud cultural diversity, but as Veith remarks there is little reason to respect people from other cultures if there is nothing resembling universal humanness. Veith brings to light the hidden assumptions which operate in postmodern thought, and finds them to contradict its manifest tenets. Of course, these inconsistencies often result from viewing postmodernism as a unified ideology; there are certainly postmodernists who acknowledge that there is ultimately no good reason to respect others or to refrain from tyranny. Veith is at his strongest in the constructive lessons he takes from postmodernism, for example in his advocacy of a Christian "hermeneutic of suspicion" which judges opposing points of view as fallen and is methodologically no less legitimate than the suspicions of Marx, Freud, or Nietzsche.

Veith is exhaustive in his critique, continuously scrutinizing and evaluating postmodernism with a sense of purpose. A consequence of his unrelenting defense of conservative Christianity within a culture that daily bears more marks of postmodernist ideology is at times an overzealousness which leads him to make claims that are difficult to support. In contrast, Grenz selects an approach of representing the testimony of postmodernists, placed within a background of Western philosophy, to introduce the Christian to an intellectual and cultural phenomenon which the Christian may see either as a threat, or as an opportunity for edification. Grenz concludes his work with a suggestion for a postmodern articulation of the Gospel that is "post-individualistic, post-rationalistic, post-dualistic, and post-noeticentric," which corrects the modernist emphases on the radically isolated and autonomous individual, whose most exalted faculty is that of a disembodied reason. Whether Grenz is too optimistic in his employment of postmodernist styles of thought for Christian purposes, or whether Veith is inaccurately hypercritical in his description and confrontation of postmodernist ideology, is a matter for the reader to decide.
Evan  
oil on glass  
5x3 1/2x3 1/2  
Aaron Breland
The Polls Are Open

We at Dialogue realize the busy lives of students and at the same time the importance of making an informed decision in the upcoming election. In order to help facilitate the decision-making process, we have formulated a quiz guaranteed to help you make the right choice, given your heritage and personality. Add up the points that match with each answer to discover the decision that's right for you!

1. I believe that politicians are:
a. Good, upstanding people who always get it right. [2]
b. Losers. We need someone who's out of the loop. [1]
c. Depraved, like the rest of us. [3]

2. The poor are poor because:
a. They don’t watch Barney. [2]
b. Of Reaganomics. [3]
c. It's their own damn fault. [1]

3. While walking on the commons lawn you see a person of the opposite sex whom you wish to ask out. You:
a. Duck [1]
b. Say suavely, “Want to do the Macarena?” [3]
c. Whistle loudly and say, “Let’s go fulfill our cultural mandate.” [2]

4. When someone says gun control I think:
a. Oh, goodie, I can shoot my neighbors. [1]
b. Oh, goodie. The commies’ll come and get us now. [2]
c. Oh, goodie. [3]

5. When someone says Hillary Clinton, I think:
a. Feminazi. [2]
b. What a feisty little filly! [1]
c. She is smarter than Bill! [3]

6. When my RA told me about the dorm date:
a. I went and spied on the floor we’d be dating. [2]
b. I put in my request to live off campus. [3]
c. I bought water guns. [1]

7. When someone says Bob Dole, I think:
a. The generation gap is already big enough. [3]
b. He’s an army veteran? I love a man in a uniform! [2]
c. Wimp. [1]

8. I grew up in:
a. West Michigan. [2]
b. Canada. [1]
c. Somewhere else, thank God. [3]

9. When I call my mother on the phone the first thing she asks me, is:
a. Are you walking your walk and talking your talk? [2]
b. Did you hear that your father shot himself in the foot again? [1]
c. How’s school, honey? [3]

10. I think this quiz is:
a. Refreshingly unbiased. [1]
b. Slightly partisan. [2]
c. Obviously and completely biased to the left. [3]

Scoring: add up the numbers in parentheses for each answer you chose.
30-24: Vote for Clinton. Your answers show an obvious political maturity rarely found in the Calvin student body. Your grasp of the issues at hand is positively incredible. You should talk to Professor Lugo about a Political Science degree.
17-23: Vote for Dole. While your grasp of the issues at hand is fuzzy, your answers express the predictable, typical Republican mind set. You should think about working for your local NRA.
10-16: Vote for Perot. Lose all respect for yourself as a free-thinking individual. Accuse aliens of ruining your sister’s wedding. Go back to high school.