One argument, seldom stated very bluntly any more, is that the greater virtue of women must be protected. It does not matter that men's dorms have no hours, for after all, 'Boys will be boys,' but the virtue of our women is sacred. The other argument is that girls, after all, are the source of all the problems. 'If the girls are locked up for the night the boys won't get into any trouble.' I have heard a peculiar variation of this argument from several girls, who are so afraid they will 'give in' if not restrained, that they need hours as 'an excuse' to go back to the dorms at night. So great, evidently, is the urge to carnality within them, and so weak their defenses, that they would be unable to remain virtuous if on their own.

—David VandeVusse, Dialogue, December 1970

New mind expanding and mind-obliterating drugs are easily available. Most still have horrible side effects and may cause death, but they are widely used. The college campus is the scene of a continual experiment with drugs. The government has invested interests in the pharmaceutical profession and is advocating tranquilizers and sedatives in an attempt to keep the populace in control.

—James M. Vanderploeg, Dialogue, September 1970

CONTRIBUTORS

Amy Anderson is a junior majoring in Studio art and art history. She has nothing more to articulate in words.

Mike Byl says, "In our concentrating on the end product, we have lost what the very essence of art is about, and they continue to work in blindness."

Barbara Carvill is a professor of German who has a photographic epiphany only every other year.

Gary DeWitt would like to be an engineering major, but he's too lazy.

The Dialogue staff had members on five continents this Interim.

Brenna Geehan says there's something better in every beginning.

Anna Greidanus Probes quotes Barbara Stafford, "Understanding, imagined as a combinatorial and synthetic physical function, has the potential for taking into account a broad range of multisensory endeavors."

R.L. "Tex" Hillmer is a junior philosophy major from Texas. He encourages everyone to eat more rattlesnake.

Jane C. Knol is distancing herself. Her favorite object is the moon.

Timothy Lillis is a English/philosophy major who thinks that the person who refuses to stand for anything, will sit though everything.

Matt Miller's favorite disease is scurvy. (C. O'Dell) doesn't think people should make a lot of fuss about "starving artists." They aren't starving. Everyday at 4pm, they get old donuts from the Spoelhof coffee shop.

Carin Palsrok quotes C.L. Rawlins, "There's a yearning that can be expressed as a place more simply than as a feeling: for beauty, rest, purity, transfiguration."

Joel Schickel hopes one day to dwell under the Big Top of Being.

Sometimes Amy Sitar wishes she wasn't.

Julia Schickel used to make prints of fish, but they kept dying on her, so she switched to plants.

Abram Steen, SWM, 6'3",180, brown hair/green eyes looking for SF, 15:50, to seek out the cowboy's life. Call 957-7079.

M.B. Smith says, roughly in the words of cummings, buds are smarter than books don't grow.

Gregory Veen is a junior majoring in English and CAS. His is from a town near L.A. and likes to conclude arguments with, "You don't like these ideas? I got more."

Timothy Veltman could not be reached for comment.

On the Cover: Oh to You, by Brenna Geehan, photography, 8 1/2x11 1/2"
DI4LOGUI

body of water
by Jane C. Knol
Gravemarker
by Amy Sitar
When I Walked in Heaven
by Timothy J. Veltman
Modern Judas
by Timothy Lillis

ESSAY
On the Reality of Tables and Atoms
by Joel Schickel
Scientific realism and common sense realism have often been portrayed as mutually exclusive. Schickel examines Bas van Frassen and Thomas Reid in hopes of finding an acceptable middle position.

GALLERY

Three Doors
by Carin Palsrok
Moment of Grace
by Barbara Carwill
Quiet Musings
by Amy Anderson
Portfolio: Marie O'Dell
D.H.
D.H.
D.H.
Amy
Thrown and Altered Bulbous Vessel
by Anna Greidanus Probes
Ephemeral Vessel Study No. 5
by Anna Greidanus Probes
The Fallen and Broken
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Untitled
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FICTION
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ROUND TABLE
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Random Doodles

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Clinton's Pluralist Nationalism

On January 20, Bill Clinton was inaugurated for his second term as President of the United States. Amid the celebration, journalists noted that the festivities were not as gallant as they had been four years before. Some speculated that the Clintons and Gores knew, this time, that the term to come would not be easy. Clinton's inaugural address did not express the skepticism the journalists felt.

In a transcript of Clinton's speech, I found expressions proclaiming the United States' glory: "mightiest industrial power," "strongest economy on earth," "the world's greatest democracy." The U.S.A. became the "land of new promise," with a "rich texture of racial, religious, and political diversity." As citizens, we enjoy "the blessings of liberty...opportunity, and dignity."

There is no doubt that Bill Clinton is a gifted public speaker. Had I heard the address, instead of reading it along with numerous commentaries, it might have moved me, or perhaps eased my cynicism so that I could believe in a bridge to the twenty-first century.

Reading the address, I noticed a tension. Clinton called for government to stand up for "our values and interests around the world," and declared that America's diversity would lead us into the next century. He referred to a curious mix of nationalism and pluralism. I am not so sure these two "ism's" can mix.

Nationalism cannot help things. As a nation, we are beginning to experience the horror of misplaced nationalism. The White Aryan Resistance, the Klu Klux Klan, and the Michigan Militia advocate nationalism for an America of white protestants. These fringe groups pursue their agenda through violence and terror. While President Clinton did not mean to refer to these sorts of groups, he played with their rhetoric. The line between mainstream, acceptable nationalism and fringe nationalism is not as clear as we would like to believe.

Groups like the Christian Coalition advocate a nationalism that calls for "Family Values," or, more specifically, "Middle Class, White, Heterosexual Family Values."

Nationalism easily shifts into individualism and racism. It wants us to identify with our nation, but our nation has too many ethnicities, too many religions, too many values to allow for easy identification. Instead, we identify those in our nation as people like us...as white, as Muslim, as black, as Hindu. We fight for the America that we have conceived, not the America that is.

Nationalism counteracts pluralism. Nationalism calls for a narrow identification with "our own kind," while pluralism calls for a recognition of differences. Despite the tension in this community with the notion of pluralism, for our nation and for the world, pluralism is a fact. We live in a diverse nation, in a diverse world. This is not to say a person must respect all beliefs equally; that is impossible. Pluralism acknowledges diversity. It acknowledges that we do not feel the same, believe the same, or live the same. While pluralists cannot find the best action for another party, pluralists can accept that their solution is not everyone's solution. A nationalism that provides concord between diverse groups without reference to ethnicity or religiosity might encompass the pluralism Clinton calls for. However, what can provide the concord is not clear. Only the most idealistic of us can believe that equality and liberty can form the basis of concord. It is easier to declare that all human being are equal than to treat them equally. It is easier to defend the liberty of those with whom you agree than those you oppose.

Even given Clinton's pluralist nationalism, we must still tread carefully. On the global level, we must not only address the diversity of our nation but also the diversity of our world. Bringing nationalism to world politics, even in the benign form of "our values and interests," seems dangerous. The United States of America has a curious role in world politics. For years, balance meant a balance in power between the democratic and the communist. Or, as I remember, between "the good" and "the bad." With the end of communism, the good appeared to win. Democracy had proved itself against the big bad wolf. The
cold war was over.

Unfortunately, the end of the cold war left the U.S.A. as the world power, a position easy to abuse. Decisions made in the United Nations need our backing in order to be carried out. When the U.S.A. decides that we don’t like the way the U.N. is run, we withhold funds and demand that things change. Our demands take into consideration our needs and interests, but never fully consider the needs and interests of others.

Balance must be restored.

Clinton is right. We do need to build a bridge to the twenty-first century. We need to build a bridge of balance and consideration: a foreign policy that includes the interests of the Global community, a nation proud of itself without being nationalistic, and a nation that provides all its members with the "blessings of liberty."

How we accomplish this, I do not know.

-Sarah C. Vos
Real Women’s Lives

In her newest book, *Feminism Is Not the Story of My Life*, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese reveals through interviews that the feminist movement does not speak for all women. Listening to the stories of American mothers, daughters, sisters, and wives, Dr. Fox-Genovese—the Elizabeth Raoul Professor of the Humanities and Professor of History at Emory University—discovers a new kind of feminism, a “family feminism,” based on the facts of women’s lives. She describes this new feminism as drawing women together based on the things they have in common, as promoting their rights while taking into account their responsibilities, and as trusting women to set their own priorities.

Unfortunately, treacherous weather prevented Elizabeth Fox-Genovese from speaking at *The January Series*. However, *Dialogue* secured the following phone interview before her scheduled visit. [Call it foreknowledge.]

The interview, conducted by Amy Sitar, pertains directly to Fox-Genovese’s book.

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**Dialogue:** The subject and method of your book affirm the necessity of narrative. At one point you wrote that “we rely heavily on stories to make sense of our lives.” To what extent does what you perceive as the feminist movement fail to make sense of women’s lives?

**Fox-Genovese:** As I argue in the book, I believe that the feminists—at least the elite feminist group, the most visible spokespersons for feminism—do fail to make sense of women’s lives. This is primarily because they don’t pay very much attention to marriage and children. They want to present a vision of rebellion against oppression, rather than a positive sense of what women want to do with their lives.

**Dialogue:** In your opinion, what is the story behind the feminist movement? Can you view this group which you criticize in narrative terms as well?

**Fox-Genovese:** Yes. I think Betty Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* was extremely important in expressing the frustrations of well-educated middle class women who, after marrying and bearing a few children, found themselves pretty much trapped in the suburbs and domestic life, unable to make use of the very fine education they had received, or to use their talents to contribute to the larger world. Men were off doing supposedly important and exciting things, and the women were left carpooling children. I think that’s where it originated.

But it really has been, above all, a story of rebellion against oppression: against the fact that men control women’s bodies, men control women’s lives, and there’s a glass ceiling. Whatever it is, the primary message has been one of tearing down barriers. Obviously women want to earn as much as men for the same work. They want to be able to get credit in their own name; they want to be able to do a great many things that they were not able to do in the early 1960’s. But as those barriers begin to fall, and most of them have fallen, you need a different kind of story.

**Dialogue:** Has the form of feminism to which you subscribe “written” your life?

**Fox-Genovese:** I would say very much so, but it intertwines with other stories. I certainly was a part of the generation who wanted my talents to be recognized, who wanted equal pay for equal work, who wanted to get credit in my own name for all those things, who wanted to be able to combine marriage and family responsibility in some way, and who wanted to enjoy my strengths as a woman. But like many other women, I have also drawn on what we might call more traditional stories of what it means to be a woman, that might include responsibilities for other people.
There is a strong Christian element in the way I view the world. All of us have to make sacrifices, and some of the goals to which we aspire may be related to service rather than to immediate gratification or self-realization in the narrow sense.

Dialogue: So you are criticizing the feminist movement because of their isolation of stories? Their stories have become monolithic in nature?

Fox-Genovese: I think I’m actually pretty clear about that in the book. I do say very explicitly in the beginning that there are myriad forms of feminism these days. You have mentioned some important strands but there are eco-feminists, separatist feminists, and so forth. There are vast members of feminism; tell the story of all women’s lives. However, in today’s postmodern society, there exists a range of feminism from radical feminism to conservative feminism to Womanism. Why did you choose to ignore these forms of feminism?

Dialogue: What do you think keeps other groups of feminists from challenging politically prominent groups? Is it their social position?

Fox-Genovese: It’s partly that. It’s partly their access to the media and their ability to present their position as if it stood for everybody. But I think it is also that, in the old days, left-wing movements used to have a phrase, “No enemies to the left.” It’s the sense that you have to maintain solidarity at all costs. You refuse to challenge these groups when they simply disagree with your one or two issues. By the time they end up taking positions, the majority of which you don’t actually agree with, you have become accustomed to not challenging them because that would hurt the feminist movement. So they have managed to claim the moral high ground, “If you disagree with us you are hurting women.” Do you see what I’m saying?

Dialogue: I do. Which is why...[Feminists] don’t pay very much attention to marriage and children. They want to present a vision of rebellion against oppression...

...
you wrote your book.

Fox-Genovese: Exactly.

Dialogue: You acknowledge the similarities which exist between the sexes \[\text{women and men share an equal capacity for knowledge and moral sense}] and also the differences \[\text{women have the ability to bear children and experience sex differently than men}]. Radical feminists and the religious right, you claim, settle the paradox by denying its complexity. Do you think...

...If we wait for or expect total equality between women and men, so that women no longer have any special bonds to children, we are going to leave a lot of women with some pretty miserable choices.

the postmodern movement, with its wider acceptance of complexity and narrative, will contribute favorably to the discussion?

Fox-Genovese: That remains to be seen. At least at the level of the Academy the postmodern movement has been radically anti-authoritarian and has launched a full-scale attack on nature which it sees as just another form of authority. It is also not very sympathetic to established religion. You can have postmodernists who claim that they believe in God, but who insist on doing it their own way and who do not necessarily accept the authority of tradition or of churches. So, I'm not a bit sure of that, at least within the Academy—and I'm not very aware of a postmodern movement outside of it, except sometimes in the churches, but that is related to intellectual work as well. I don't see those movements as standing up in defense of, say, a pro-life position, traditional religious authority, or even the need for sacrifice. I think the emphasis on diversity may be a little bit misleading because some diversities are good and others aren't.

Dialogue: So you believe that there will be a presentation of views but not a commitment to any one.

Fox-Genovese: Exactly. And I'm not convinced that all views will get equal time in presentation.

Dialogue: Given our postmodern situation, what do you think of feminist fears that acknowledging differences between men and women will necessarily lead to inequality, as it did in the past? Has the postmodern movement ushered in an appreciation for diversity that the feminist movement can model?

Fox-Genovese: The postmodernist movement is not very coherent in its celebration of diversity. I don't think that postmodernism has taken a very clear position on whether diversity stems from individual attributes or group membership. What I do know is that the majority of postmodernists are deeply suspicious of any recognition of differences between men and women as groups, as members of sexes. And without that recognition you aren't going to get policies to benefit women as members of a sex.

Dialogue: So that the political movement won't recognize that women and men may be separate but equal, so to speak.

Fox-Genovese: Exactly. It is very resistant to that.

Dialogue: I would like to continue with the subject of differences between women and men. Given the obvious fact that women have the ability to bear children, do you think women have a natural connection to the child? If this connection exists, is it imposed societally rather than biologically?

Fox-Genovese: Both psychologists
Moment of Grace  photography  7 7/8 x 10"  Barbara Carvill
and psychiatrists these days would tell you that the line between nature and nurture is very permeable. I would say there is a biological foundation for it, but biology is always shaped and understood through the lenses of culture. Both elements come into play.

Yes, I believe there is a hard biological pull, which doesn’t mean that women can’t reject it or rebel against it. Women are capable of killing their young. In general, to bear a human life within your own body, and to have the immediate exposure to that extraordinary fragility... Most women naturally develop a sense of connection and responsibility to the life that has been part of them.

Dialogue: Excepting abortion, and considering as you said that a natural connection between women and child may exist, what do you think about restructuring Felice Schwartz’s “mommy track” proposal to include men, thereby supporting a “parent track” which would give equal opportunity for men’s leave from work?

Fox-Genovese: I don’t have much problem with that—with a few serious reservations. That equal opportunity exists in Sweden, I think, and one of the stories we hear is that a surprising number of men take advantage of it to finish their books so they can get tenure—for their own purposes, rather than for the full responsibility of child-rearing. So it is not clear that in practice it has always benefited women. But individual couples always work it out. My main reservation concerns women’s unique ability to live the pregnancy. Men don’t. And I’m quite open. I think the choice of whether mother or father gives more time to young children should be up to individual couples. I don’t think it should be imposed upon them by the state. I’m resistant to doctrinaire solutions. But I think we must protect pregnancy and somewhere between nine months and two years after delivery.

Dialogue: And after pregnancy...?

Fox-Genovese: We all know that for a child to come into the world is like the experience of freefall. You have been enclosed. You have absorbed your food while completely protected. And suddenly you are in the world and everything is something you can fall off of.

For the woman who has had the child within her, it’s different, but she also has been living that extraordinarily close physical connection. Just as the child needs some time to adjust to being out in the world, so the woman needs some time to adjust to having that connection outside of her instead of inside of her. And I would say that is what we call psychosomatic. It is both psychological and biological, and these are too closely tied together to be separated. That’s simply not true for men.

Dialogue: If, in your words, “Children, by their nature, restrict the freedom of their parents,” why is women’s freedom solely sacrificed?

Fox-Genovese: The easy and unfair answer is that no one said that nature was fair. Women’s freedom is sacrificed, but women also get something that a man will never get

Jane C. Knol

body of water

your music used to be stone water; it used to be still as Pungent Sound. i mean, you used to be certain of some things, your playing was composed. but now in your circulatory system swim, in timorous laps, a choir of tiny mermaids; whose motion glows, lighting your capillaries with a neon termor of red and blue. they represent the felicity and fear, the counterpoint to a heartbeat canon. your body is the echo of such incertitude: the quavering hand on the arm of the violin.
it’s like taking the pulse of a weeping willow.

so surely, the violin is like the skeleton of woman, but a better dance partner, swaying from your collarbone in buoyant minuet, even while your jaw’s skin sinks against her clavicle. flesh capsizes into sound.

to be first violin is to be a body of water: a personification, the aural wetness of a sound.

Jane C. Knol
Quiet Musings  charcoal on paper  16 1/2 x 20 1/2"  Amy Anderson
in the same way.

Dialogue: This is true.

Fox-Genovese: That is the short answer. The longer answer asks how and by what standard we judge the value of and nature of freedom. Do you know for sure that a woman whose freedom is sacrificed by giving birth to a child, nursing it, and being with it, doesn't in the long run end up doing better work or bringing more energy to her work or more sense of renewal than the man who goes straight on working? I think we are very quick to judge what we want, what is good for us, and what freedoms we should have. We tend to think of freedom as "freedom from" instead of "freedom for."

Dialogue: You would say, then, that the feminist movement doesn't see motherhood as a joy or a gift but as a burden?

Fox-Genovese: Exactly.

Dialogue: Now I would like to ask you some general questions. How has your own story as a woman and a feminist evolved throughout your life? To what do you attribute these transformations?

Fox-Genovese: That's a very long one. We all change as we get older and mature. Also, I started in a world in which opportunities for women were very restricted and have lived to see a world in which opportunities for women have vastly expanded. I would say that I have become less concerned with the barriers we face as women and more concerned with what we do with the opportunities we have gained. So the emphasis has changed.

But also because I am a teacher—although I teach men and am devoted to my male students—I tend to train a disproportionate number of female graduate students. My personal story has been modified and enriched by my sense of the aspirations and problems of my students.

Dialogue: You have benefited from the reforms of the 60's and 70's, but do you now see a need for a different order and manner of reform to accommodate the gains that have been made?

Fox-Genovese: I deeply believe that, partly because I believe that some of the persisting problems women face are increasingly not problems that respond to legislation. Women's situations have improved so rapidly. There is no working group or social group in history that has improved its situation as dramatically as middle class and upscale women in the last thirty years. It is absolutely breathtaking.

And I think we are long overdue for a period of assessment, reflection, and reconsideration of what we really want and what we are really striving for, because the logic of radical feminism is to free women from everything, including men and children and binding commitments and all the rest of it. That logic leads to a real unraveling of the social fabric. And then if you put women out there alone without binding ties to other people, they tend to be exposed to higher risks than when they are a part of community, of families or whatever.

Then if you try to protect them against those risks through rules and legislation—speech codes, sexual harassment codes, date rape, all of it—you end up restricting everybody's freedom and moving from an emphasis on the importance of internalization and of self-regulation to an emphasis on the importance of external control. The notorious one was the Antioch sexual code that required that you had to ask permission for every button you unbuttoned on a woman's blouse. That restricts everybody's freedom.

Dialogue: So you would say that the political movement has reformed the upper and middle class situation, and now it is time to reform women of the lower social classes?

Fox-Genovese: Yes, looking very closely at their lives.

Dialogue: What do you see as the weaknesses of your view? That is, how would you critique your own critique?

Fox-Genovese: One might say I am too optimistic about the possibilities for relations between women and men within marriage. We all know spouse abuse exists. There are inequalities of power which usually, but not always, favor the man. Women still need more support to be independent, to stand up to the pressure of men.

I think that is a reasonable criticism, but I would still come down on my side of the issue and argue that we have no place to go other than chaos unless we work on supporting families and accept that we may not have some things in our own lifetimes. But we are building a foundation for what our students or our daughters will have in the next generation.
It was not until relatively recently that drawings have been accepted as completed works in their own right. Previously, drawing was used primarily in preparation for works to be finished in another medium. While graphite might not have the monumentality of marble or the color spectrum of oils, I enjoy working with this medium. Like students taking a scan-tron exam, it is my weapon of choice. "Weapon? Artist will tell you they have done battle with their canvas or stone or recycled-100%-acid-free-18x24" sketch pad. My most common battle cry, as of late, has been; "Argh! I made his nose too big AGAIN!" And I’m not even going to mention my paper cuts.
D.H.  graphite drawing  23 1/2 x 18''
D.H.  graphite drawing  18x23 1/2"
Amy
graphite drawing
18x23 1/2"
On the Reality of Tables and Atoms

by Joel Schickel

From the way many contemporary Christians construe the word "anti-realism," it would seem that this philosophical position were completely incompatible with Christian belief. There is an old German saying: "Whoever wants to breakfast with the devil must have a long spoon." For these Christians, being too heavily influenced by anti-realists is like eating breakfast with the devil, and Christians should only approach such thinking if they are very careful. This attitude overgeneralizes about what positions an anti-realist in science would have to assume about the reality of the world in general. It too quickly casts anti-realist views of science into the garbage bin without considering how such thinking could be helpful for Christians in understanding science.

At first glance, it seems that Christians should view the external world as being real in some sense. Views about realism and anti-realism can be placed on a continuum. On the one extreme would be everyday realism. According to this view, reality consists of that which can be known on the level of everyday life. The questions that science and reason attempt to answer are irrelevant. Human faculties such as memory, sensory perception, and other cognitive faculties give human beings some degree of knowledge about the world as it is in the absolute without considering the contribution of human subjects to their knowledge humans have about the world. On the other extreme would be those who take the discoveries of science to be getting at reality. For them, the questions addressed in the humanities are not questions about reality but about values. This I call physicalism.

Both of these extremes are dissatisfying. Everyday realism does not account for the legitimacy of science, nor does physicalism account for the reality of tables and chairs, morality, human freedom, or human minds. Given that both of these positions could lead one into beliefs that are quite harmful to a Christian view of the world, it seems that a Christian would best avoid both extremes.

Hilary Putnam, professor of mathematical logic at Harvard, warns us about the dangers inherent in the physicalist position. The distinction he makes between two kinds of realism can help nuance the realist view that we develop. Putnam's first type of realist—the physicalist that I identify above—claims that only the scientific picture of the world is real and that our everyday awareness of the world is a projection of the mind. Putnam's second kind of realist, whom I will call a holistic realist, considers both scientific entities and everyday objects like tables and chairs to be real. As Putnam shows, physicalists fall into the trap of materialism. If one ascribes reality only to the entities of natural science, then thoughts and minds have no reality outside of the biological and physical processes that contribute to the brain's activity. The difference between physicalists and holistic realists can serve as a touchstone for evaluating the differing realist views of the world. The major criterion in this evaluation is whether one's realism accounts for the reality of human thoughts and
human agency in a way that is not derivative of natural science.

A realism that satisfies this condition could be achieved by first securing common sense reality and then confronting the issue of realism in science. Thomas Reid's epistemology suggests that we can have knowledge of the world of everyday experience without having to justify common sense by converting it into science. For Reid, there is no reason to doubt that one's sensations can be trusted to yield knowledge of the world. The problem that had so perplexed Hume—whether it was right for human beings to trust the concepts formed by the mind from sensory impressions—is no longer central. Reid overcomes this problem by getting rid of what he sees as a false dichotomy: the difference between the mechanism by which the concept of an object is formed in the mind and the actual experience of an object. In other words, sensory experience gives direct, but not altogether infallible, knowledge of object of experience. Human beings do not have direct knowledge of things as they are "in themselves" but they can trust the faculties of their minds to give reliable knowledge about the world. The human faculties of which Reid speaks are what he called principles of common sense: three of which—veracity, credulity, and induction—are modified by experience as one grows older, and two—perceptions and memory—are not. The principles of common sense work together to assure us that our senses give us reliable knowledge of the world.

Reid's approach tells us that we are right in trusting our senses on the level of everyday experience. Yet Reid does not support the idea that the senses give us unmediated knowledge of a world-in-itself—of some kind of purely objective Reality. It is not the case, for instance, that when I see a table, I have unmediated experience of a Table in the absolute. Such a thing cannot be conveyed to me through the senses. Nevertheless, I do not need to ground the reliability of my common sense experience of the world in my ability to reason, as Descartes had done, nor do I have to derive my experience of the table from some scientifically verified fact.

Reid's epistemology saves the world of everyday experience without resorting to everyday realism. The question now remains, "What is the status of scientific realism?" To a certain point, we can extend Reid's analysis to scientific knowledge. In so far that our observations of the world are reliable and in so far that our science is based on such observations, we can trust science to give us knowledge just like everyday experience does. Thus, we can trust the observations that we make when looking through a microscope, and inductive inferences about causes and effects tell us something about reality. Since the time of Reid, however, science has become more complicated. No longer is the possibility of induction the central question in scientific epistemology. Skepticism in science

Gravemarker

The evergreen's grown fuller now, you know—its branches reel shadow tides over your stone.
The granite's icy and permanent to the touch.
Roots burrow beneath our mounted tokens:
seashells from our travels,
daffodils from our gardens—petty sacrifices to the past.

“Our connection is organic,” I think, as the shell-hollow nuzzles my earlobe, my fingers spread like a starfish—like the roots which strain for life and find nothing.
Our connection rests in the disunion of a shell and its sound—an echo displaced, promising ever-green.

-Amy Sitar
today is much more sophisticated, given the advent of such seemingly counterintuitive paradigms in physics as quantum mechanics and relativity theory.

One of the major opposing positions to the view that science provides knowledge of reality is the constructive empiricism of Bas van Fraasen, a Christian. Constructive empiricism, as van Fraasen conceives of it, is the practice of constructing theories to explain observable phenomena. For example, when two theories are equivalent with respect to the empirical results that they predict, which theory to endorse is determined on purely pragmatic grounds. According to van Fraasen, the pragmatic value of a theory says nothing about the reality of the entities about which the theory speaks. For instance, acceptance of the atomic theory of matter does not mean that atoms actually exist. Theories are evaluated solely on pragmatic criteria such as the ability of a theory to accurately predict observable phenomena, to integrate with other theories, and to be expressed clearly and simply. None of these standards tell scientists anything about absolute Reality. Although there is such a thing as Reality in the absolute, science cannot discover it.

It is tempting to quickly dismiss constructive empiricism because it is an “anti-realist” view. In denying that scientific theories and concepts should be taken to be real in any absolute sense, however, constructive empiricism points to a thorny epistemological problem—the difficulty of knowing reality “as it really is” by means of sense data and observable phenomena. Whereas realists consider non-observable phenomena to be valid explanations for observable phenomena, M. Burian and J. D. Trout, argue that a major barrier to conceiving of the real ontological existence of scientific entities is the tendency to identify theoretical entities too closely with the theories of which they are a part. We can apply Burian’s and Trout’s analysis to the history of atomic

Everyday realism does not account for the legitimacy of science, nor does physicalism account for the reality of tables and chairs, morality, human freedom, or human minds.

It is not the case, for instance, that when I see a table, I have unmediated experience of a Table in the absolute. Such a thing cannot be conveyed to me through the senses.
Thrown and Altered Bulbous Vessel  porcelain  10"  Anna Greidanus Probes
Sometimes later observations modify one's conception of theoretical scientific entities and the relationships between them. This is the case when molecular investigations of cells enhance our understanding of the inheritance of traits via entities called genes.

The current conclusions of science are always in a state of formation. Scientific pictures of the world can move closer to or farther away from the Truth. Nevertheless, we can be confident that entities such as DNA and atoms really exist. Their existence is confirmed by the correlation between theories in a number of different disciplines and the ability to manipulate such entities by a diverse number of techniques [Burian and Trout 1987].

The biggest merit of approximate realism is that it recognizes that there are inherent limitations on the scientific account of Reality. Approximation or abstraction seems to be built into the methodology of science. For instance, when one measures the speed of falling bodies to verify Galileo's observation that the rate of fall is mass independent, one does not ask about the color of these objects. The color of the objects is judged to be superfluous to the goal of the experiment. Science is an activity in which a particular facet of an entity is isolated and observed. Information that is not considered to be important to the question at hand is ignored entirely.

Despite its advantages, approximate realism fails to overcome the empiricist's challenge to realism. To say that a description of a theoretical entity is an approximation to the way the entity is "in the absolute" presupposes that one knows Reality from an ahistorical standpoint. For example, to say that the current conception of the atom is a better approximation than Thompson's plum-

Science is always carried out from a scientist's particular conceptual standpoint; the way that scientists characterize theoretical entities such as atoms depends, in part, upon the fundamental assumptions that scientists make...

If one considers it to be a virtue of theories that they provide purely natural descriptions of the world, then one will fall into the trap of methodological naturalism. Methodological naturalists exclude attributions of supernatural agency from proper scientific practice. Given the subjectivity of the virtues for evaluating scientific theories, however, there is no reason that scientists should exclude their religion from science— for instance, the belief that God can act as an agent in the universe. Belief in God as creator of the universe would be a legitimate part of a scientific theory about the origin of life. Despite this endorsement of supernatural considerations in science, caution must be taken that such considerations do not lend a theory a certainty that it does not deserve. A Christian offering a view of biology which starts with the creation of the world by God is still offering a metaphysically contingent theory that is subject to future revision or rejection.

Whether or not science provides "realist" or "anti-realist" descriptions of reality, it cannot be denied that the tensions between science and common sense are all but unresolvable. Moreover, in the history of science, the gap between scientific theory and everyday, human experience gradually widens. Quantum mechanics and relativity theory are examples of theories which seem arcane to one's common sense; yet, they are the ruling paradigms in physics today. These theories cannot easily be, if they can at all be, subsumed by a common sense understanding of the world.

According to holistic realism, tables are real, but electrons and atoms are also real. The totality of our experience consists of various forms of interpreted...
Ephemeral Vessel Study No. 5
ink drawing
19x25"
Anna Greidanus Probes
experience. Holistic realists do not deny the reality of any one type of experience—whether scientific or otherwise. For isn’t a table also a collection of atoms and elementary particles that is mostly empty space, and isn’t it, according to quantum mechanics, definable by a wave-function that tells us that the table exists at all points in the universe at once? Yet I perceive the table as existing in a finite portion of space. And isn’t the table, just as much equipment for working and eating? Each of these descriptions is just as true as the others.

Let me finish with a sample case from chemistry/physics. Everyone who has taken a chemistry course has likely encountered the ideal gas equation for the behavior of a gas in a closed container, \( PV = nRT \), where \( P \) is the pressure of the gas, \( V \) is its volume, \( n \) is related to the number of gas particles, \( T \) is the temperature, and \( R \) is the gas constant. The equation is based on an idealized model of gases in which gas molecules are taken to be tiny, volumeless spheres whose collisions are totally elastic and governed by classical mechanics. The ideal gas equation fails to predict actual measurements of temperature, volume, and pressure in almost every case. Over the years, the equation has been modified so that it yields results that are closer to measured values. Among the more famous of these modifications is the Van der Waals equation. The equation can be written:

\[
\left( P + \frac{a}{V^2} \right) (V - b) = RT.
\]

\( P \) is the pressure of the gas, \( V \) is its molar volume, \( R \) is the gas constant, and \( T \) is the temperature. The constants \( a \) and \( b \) are correction factors added to the equation to account for the volume of the gas molecules and the inelasticity of their collisions.

Experimentation has shown, however, that even this model of gas behavior cannot provide accurate predictions of phenomena, and under certain conditions, its predictions diverge considerably from experimental values. The Van der Waals equation has, on the whole, been replaced by the virial equation of state as a tool for calculating certain physical properties of a gas. Mason and Spurling single out the virial equation as being "the only equation of state known which has a thoroughly sound theoretical foundation. There is a definite interpretation for each virial coefficient in terms of molecular properties. The second virial coefficient represents the deviations from perfection corresponding to interactions between two molecules, the third represents the deviations corresponding to interactions among three molecules, and so on". Although the Van der Waals equation is less accurate at predicting data than the virial equation, its relationship to the molecular model of gases is more apparent. One can see clearly how the correction factors \( a \) and \( b \) relate to the volume and attractiveness of gas molecules, whereas the derivation of the coefficients of the virial equation has less to do with molecular theory.

In the case of the molecular theory of gases, evidence from a variety of sources supports the claim that gases are made up of molecules that behave according to physical forces acting between them. Scientists will use either the Van der Waals equation or the virial equation of state, depending on which provides the more accurate results. The virial equation seems on the whole to provide more accurate results, despite the fact that its origin is farther removed from the molecular theory of gases than is the Van der Waals equation. Are we to conclude from this that neither equation is a description of reality or that each approximates reality to a greater or lesser extent? Human beings will probably never discover, on their own, the answer to this question. What the evidence does suggest, though, is that the theoretical entities that we call molecules themselves might simply be theoretical constructions that are imperfect interpretations of some unknown Reality. There is no conclusive evidence that the world of unknown Reality contains anything like molecules as a scientist conceives of them. Unmediated experience of a gas molecule in the absolute, to which the picture of gases that we currently have can be compared, does not exist.
become better at predicting measurements, we cannot say what this reveals about Reality in the absolute.

The word "real" has become an equivocal term. To say that a Christian world view necessitates scientific realism does not acknowledge that many forms of realism are reductionistic and are contrary to a Christian understanding of the world. For example, the reduction of mind to biological function undermines the reality of human minds and human agency. A holist approach to realism would affirm that science, everyday experience and moral teaching get at the reality of different kinds of human experience; nonetheless, each is governed by a different kind of methodology or first principles. This approach could overcome the apparent conflict not only between the scientific and common sense understandings of the world but also between belief in contemporary physics and belief that humans are moral agents.

Scientific anti-realism in van Fraasen’s formulation of it is not necessary to the position of holist realism. Nevertheless, there seems to be good evidence to support the claim that theoretical scientific entities do not deserve the status of Real objects and are not comparable to any kind of absolute Reality. At worst, such a view is not inherently contrary to a Christian world view. It should, therefore, not be dismissed without due consideration.

Works Cited:


When I Walked in Heaven

I walked on stars
when I was fourteen,
passing single
and shadowy beneath
the white and yellow streetlights
reflecting soft-shelled light
on the frost
fallen out of the air.

The dark ground
was the field of heaven
and I sailed ghostly
through the blackness,
watching the
flat sharp stars of snow
pass me,
clouded over only by
the wraiths of my breath,
instantly solid as they left my mouth,
and clung around my head.
And I,
I left their grasping hands.

-Timothy Veltman
The Fallen and Broken  bronze and soapstone  5 1/2x7x7 1/2  Mike Byl
In the hazy glow of halogen lamps and flashlights, men examined blueprints and pointed at the landscape. A curved gray structure, covered with tangled scaffolding, partially obscured the moon, which hung low and orange above the eastern horizon.

Dwarfed by tractor tires twice his size, Ralph walked among several idle machines. The light on his hard-hat bobbed in the darkness, and the red toolbox he carried brushed against his coveralls. As he whistled, his breath condensed in the air.

Ralph approached the stepladder of an earth-mover. The thing loomed before him as he grasped its metal handrail, which the hands of countless other men had rubbed smooth and bare. He lifted his boot-clad foot and positioned it carefully on the first step. The identification card clipped to the front of his coveralls clicked against a rung of the ladder. As he lifted his body from the ground he grunted in pain, his eyes squinting tightly. He stepped down and gazed toward the top of the machine, beyond the end of the ladder and the maze of grease-covered machinery and engine components. He saw the tiny cab perched near the front of the machine, crammed in among hydraulic cylinders and crisscrossing oil lines.

He heard a voice behind him. "C'mon Ralph, could ya hurry it up a little!"

Ralph stepped away from the machine and turned around. "Sorry, Jack," he said. He raised his toolbox to chest-level. "I was just gonna make sure it was working right, before I-"

"Yeah, it's fine... I had Johnny fix it before his break." Jack pulled his blue jeans up, stuffing rolls of fat below his belt. "Get a move on, now," he said, walking past Ralph toward a pickup truck. "Drive that thing over to section 8A. I'll follow ya."

Ralph watched him walk toward the pickup. Jack's boot's stumbled over dirt clods made stiff by the cold.

Ralph turned back toward the ladder and hoisted himself onto the first step. Balancing the weight of the toolbox in his left hand, he paused. His right hand held the ladder firmly, and he began to climb. As he rose, he looked from side to side, surveying the construction site.

"Not much progress since I've been here," he thought. "Makes you wonder if we'll finish her up by '98."

To his right Ralph saw the beginnings of a sprawling dam. Large lamps eerily illuminated several sections of the structure.

His chest level with the top of the tractor, Ralph carefully set his toolbox down. He looked downward and momentarily tightened his grasp on the ladder — he had climbed over twenty feet from the ground. He pulled himself up, grabbed his toolbox, and walked toward the cab. His boots pounded on the yellow metal surface as he wove through a wilderness of rubber tubing and cast iron.

"M7 to S3," Ralph said into his radio. "I'm ready. Over."

"I copy that, Ralph." The radio in Ralph's calloused hand squawked out Jack's voice. "Let's do it. Over."

Ralph jumped into the cramped cab, setting his toolbox on a rusted ledge next to the window. His legs pressed up against a panel of controls. Before him Ralph saw dozens of knobs, gauges and buttons. Several joystick-like handles protruded from the center of the panel. He pulled his ID card from its clip, inserted it into a slot on the lower right of the control panel, and pressed a button labeled "IGNITION." The earth-mover coughed and sputtered as he adjusted dials and flipped switches. Then the engine roared to life, and the little cab shook.

He put his hands on two of the joystick controls and pushed the one in his right hand forward. The machine's wheels began to turn, defiantly breaking free from the dried mud which had encased them. Ralph pushed the other control handle to the left, and the earth-mover lunged in that direction, crushing dirt clods and crawling over little ridges of earth.
Ralph bounced around inside the cab. His eyes squinted and his face grimaced. He let go of the controls and grabbed his neck.

"Oowh, shit!" Ralph wailed. He rubbed his neck several times, his fingers tangling with locks of dark brown hair. He took a quick deep breath and held the air in tightly as he straightened his back. His back popped and his arms and legs shook as if he was shivering. He put his hands back on the controls.

Ralph drove the mammoth vehicle to section 8A, carefully bracing himself in the seat. After parking the machine, he grabbed his toolbox and pushed open the cab's door. As he cautiously lifted his leg to step out of the cab, Jack's voice blurted from the radio.

"53 to M7. You copy?"

Ralph closed the little door and repositioned himself in the seat. He reached for his radio. "M7 here. Go ahead 53-"

"Say, Ralph... Maybe you should double check that hydraulic problem. You know, just to be safe." Jack's voice paused for a second. Then he said, "That unit's got a long job ahead of it. Over."

"I copy that, Jack. M7 clear."

"53 clear."

Ralph picked up his toolbox and reopened the cab's door. He stepped out and walked toward the back of the machine. Halfway there he paused for a moment. The work lights below illuminated his tall figure as he raised his shoulders and arched his back.

His shoulders slumped back down and he headed toward a bank of thick yellow cylinders.

Ralph stood leaning toward one of the dusty front windows of Rob's Airport Cafe examining cards people had posted there advertising planes for sale. The curved bill of his blue baseball cap tapped against the glass. The buzz of a Cessna's engine droned in the distance, and ranch hands from nearby farms smoked cigarettes, leaning against the yellow building's crumbling stucco finish. A man in brown cowboy boots emerged from the cafe's front entrance twisting a toothpick in his mouth with his plump fingers.

Ralph turned around when he saw movement in the reflections on the window. An old gray Ford sedan pulled into a parking space in front of him. The car's door opened, and a man stepped out.

"Ralphie!" said the man excitedly. He swung his head up to throw blond strands of hair out of his eyes. "Man, Ralph, it's nice to see you! I've been looking forward to this since we spoke on the phone." He walked forward, extending his right hand.

Ralph grasped the smooth, pale hand and shook it vigorously. "Hey, hey, there John. It sure has been a while, hasn't it?" Ralph glanced at John's hand, noticing a gold band wrapped around his ring finger. "You didn't go and do a dumb thing like getting married, did ya?" Ralph raised his head back up toward John's face.

"Actually..." John let go of Ralph's hand. "Actually, I did, man!" John slapped his hand onto the shoulder of Ralph's red sweatshirt. "We gotta lot of catchin' up to do, ol' Ralphie!" he said. "C'mon, let's get some breakfast and tell each other what we've been up to since high school."

John stepped forward, leading Ralph toward the cafe's entrance.

"Hope ya didn't forget how good Rob's is since you've been gone," said Ralph. He watched John's slender arm reach for the door handle.

"No way man...there's no way I'd--" He glanced over his shoulder at Ralph. "It's still the best breakfast in town, ain't it?"

"Of course!" Ralph answered. "Always has been, always will be." He followed John through the door.

They sat at the counter and ordered coffees. Ralph set his elbows on the greasy surface and turned toward John.

"Need a menu?" Ralph asked. He laughed. "I'm sorry. Of course ya do. It's just that--" He waved at a blond-haired waitress as she passed.

"Hey, Pam. Could my friend have a menu?" He pointed at John.

Pam smiled. "Of course!" she answered. She pulled a green-bordered
John's eyebrows were raised in surprise.

"By the way, John. "It's just that I eat here so often... I mean, I come here each morning after work."

"After work?" John cocked his head. "Man, you didn't tell me you were working nights. Where are you working?"

"At the Elsinore Reservoir Project." Ralph took a sip from his coffee. "Out in the desert there, near Wilson."

"Wow... What's your job out there?" John's eyebrows were raised in curiosity, and a few wrinkles appeared on his forehead.

"I work with the machinery - you know, the really, really big tractors. I don't operate 'em, really. Just fix 'em when they're broke and move 'em around the site."

Pam appeared with a pen and order form. She looked at Ralph.

"Your usual, Ralph?" she asked, shifting the gum in her mouth.

"You got it," Ralph said. She turned toward John.

John looked up from his menu. "A stack of pancakes, please." He handed Pam the folder.

"Those machines, though," continued Ralph, "I'll tell ya, they are huge!" He lifted his hand toward the ceiling. "Got tires twice as tall as a man... Impressive things, John. Yeah, the whole project's pretty damn impressive. They wanna finish it up by '98. Got guys workin' round the clock." He looked at his coffee cup. "But they treat ya good. Real concerned about safety... We got hard hats and coveralls, the whole bit. And they give ya gloves for free. And if ya ever need batteries for your helmet-light, they got 'em just layin' around all over the place. Ya can just take whatever ya need."

John nodded his head slowly, listening. "So, are you liking it, then?"

"Oh, sure. It pays good, and it's steady work... I'm on contract 'till it's done," Ralph answered. "But, man, the other night..." He looked at John's eyes. "The other night it was pretty cold and it had rained earlier, so there was ice all over the place. I was climbing up an earth-mover and I slipped. I was almost to the top, too. Trying to set down my toolbox and I just fell." He shook his head. "My head hit the ladder or the side of the thing - I'm not sure - but it nocked my hard-hat off. And I landed on my back. Damn, that ground was hard... Frozen, I guess."

"My God! What happened?" asked John. He straightened up from his slouched position against the counter.

"Well, I just laid there for awhile, looking up at the stars. I didn't feel much, but I knew I was hurt. I was thinkin' 'aw shit, I'm really messed up this time.' I thought for sure I'd broken something. I didn't know if I'd be able to get up."

"Oh, man," said John.

"But you know how I always was, John." Ralph made a fist and nicked John's chin playfully. "Can't stay down. Gotta keep on movin'." He smiled, revealing yellow-stained teeth. "I made myself get up, and I just worked the rest of the night like nothin' had happened. But, wow, it hurt man. I was glad to get home that morning!"

"Aww, jeez, man." John shook his head. "Well... Well, are you okay, or what?"

"Well, I... I don't..." Ralph looked toward the floor. "Actually, my back's been killin' me. And my neck, it feels twisted or something." He paused. "Oh, and then there's... Well...

"What! What!" John's voice rose in concern.

"I've been, uh..." He adjusted his baseball cap. "I've been seein' blood in the toilet when I..." He looked away from John.

"Ralph! Why didn't you say something at work... ask them about a doctor, or... Man, you could be seriously hurt!"

"Naw. I'll heal up all right." "What?!"

"Listen, man." He looked back up at John. "The project is on a tight schedule and an even tighter budget. They don't wanna employ guys who get in accidents. There's plenty of other guys out there who'd jump at the chance to have my job, you know what I mean? I just work real hard and always show up on time."

"Man, I've even got my watch set right exactly to their site clock. That's my thing - I haven't been late once since I've been working there."

"No, Ralphie, listen to me. They've got to do something about that sort of thing. Man, this isn't the nineteenth century or some third world country. You work on a modern day construction project. They've got to help you out. It's workman's comp, man."

Pam arrived with their breakfasts. "Let's see," she said. "You had the cakes, and... oh, of course. Here's your bacon and eggs, Ralph."

"Thanks a lot, Pam," Ralph said. He watched Pam walk off toward the kitchen.

"Listen, Ralph," said John. "Look, I demand that you see a doctor."

"No, man. That'll cost 'em money and they'll--" "No, Ralph. I'm telling you it won't, because they've got to have insurance for this type of thing," John insisted.

"You mean I can go to a doctor and
it won’t cost the project anymore than what they’re already paying?”

John nodded. "It’s the law, man."

They started eating their breakfasts. John chewed slowly, appearing uninterested in the food. Ralph ate quickly. He looked like a dog at its food bowl.

"I’m going to be in town for a couple of weeks," said John. "You want to catch a movie or something next week?"

Ralph looked up from his plate. "Yeah, that’d be great. I have Saturdays off."

"Good. I’ll call you on Saturday."

He looked up at Ralph. "But Ralph... You’re going to ask them about seeing a doctor, right? Do it, man. This is serious."

"Yeah... Yeah, I’ll ask ’em."

"Promise me, Ralph."

"Yeah, I promise."

John looked at the piece of paper Ralph had given him. Beneath the name "Ralph," scrawled in blue ink, a number had been written. John picked up his phone and dialed the number. He heard a couple of rings.

"Yeah, hello?" It was Ralph.

"Hey, Ralph! It’s John."

"Hey, John! How’s it goin’?"

"Oh, it’s good, man. So how’re you doing? How do you feel?"

Ralph waited a second to answer.

"Stomach’s healin’ up, I think."

"What... Did you see a doctor?"

"No, I—"

"Well did you ask about it at work?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I did. But, uh..." His voice trailed off so that John had to strain to hear.

"But what, Ralph?"

"Jack – that’s my supervisor – he told me they’d send me a notice with all the information I’d need. But the next day..." He paused again. "The next day they told me I was fired."

"They what?!" John nearly screamed. "Why?"

"They said they were tired of me showin’ up late all the time. They said they’d given me too many warnings and that they’d have to let me go." Ralph’s voice was calm.

"But you said you always showed up on time! And your watch, Ralph. What about your watch? It was synchronized—" John paced back and forth while he spoke.

Ralph sighed. "Yeah, I know. I tried to tell them, but they said they had my time cards... They said they couldn’t afford to keep me on."

John stood in silence.

"I figure I can get a job with my Uncle Bill up north."

John shook his head slowly as Ralph spoke.


Cormac McCarthy is something of an anomaly in the world of contemporary American writing. He avoids book-signings, lecture tours, interviews, and other forms of self-promotion, preferring, instead, to remain holed up in his little stucco house in El Paso, Texas. What is more, he has stubbornly refused to alter his elaborate style in order to become more accessible and sell more books. His oddness is also manifest in his choice of subject matter. At a time when serious, relevant writing is usually seen as representing or confronting the political and intellectual issues of the postmodern present, McCarthy has chosen, instead, to look back and commemorate a distant, premodern time that is passing from memory. These irregularities have done much to prevent him from being read and recognized by a large portion of the reading public, but he has, nonetheless, managed to produce a handful of important novels during the past thirty years that are just now receiving long overdue attention.

McCarthy’s emergence as a writer of real distinction, which has been confirmed by the popular and critical success of his last two novels, *All the Pretty Horses* [1992] and *The Crossing* [1994], has been a relatively recent occurrence. He began his career as a southern writer in the tradition of Faulkner. His first four novels [*The Orchard Keeper, Child of God, Outer Dark,* and *Suttree,* which have recently been reissued by Ecco Press in their "Neglected Works of the Twentieth Century" series] are grim tales about misfits, deviants, and low-lifes in the hills of eastern Tennessee, written in a strange and disconcerting style. They earned him a few grants and awards and a small following of admiring critics and academics, but real success came only when McCarthy brought his talents as a writer to bear on the land and legends of the old Southwest. The vast, barren desert landscape was the perfect stage for McCarthy’s violent imagination. What is more, the West provided him with a dark history to explore and to draw on in his writing. As he writes in *The Crossing,* his most recent work,

A good deal of what could be seen in the world has passed this way. Armored Spaniards and hunters and trappers and grandees and their women and slaves and fugitives and armies and revolutionaries and the dead and the dying. And all that was seen was told and all that was told was remembered.

McCarthy first tapped into this memory in 1985 with the release of *Blood Meridian,* a wild and unsettling account of an actual American scalp-hunting expedition in Mexico in the 1840’s. Destroyed in this nightmarish vision of the west are both the romantic cowboy-and-Indian images and more recent political revisions of this history that present Native Americans as innocent victims of white expansion. It becomes very clear in this novel that there are no heroes in this blood-soaked chapter in human history.

Reviewers were awed by the book’s violent lyricism and portentous philosophical ruminations [people called it a "metaphysical western"], but McCarthy clearly needed to present a kinder and more sympathetic portrait of humanity if he wanted to win a wider audience. This happened with the publication of his two most recent novels, described as the first two volumes in a "Border trilogy." *All the Pretty Horses* [which won the National Book Award in 1993] and *The Crossing* are still set in the unpopulated, scuffed-up terrain of the Southwestern desert, but they are very different novels from *Blood Meridian.* The natural world is still a fierce and uncompromising force, a metaphor for the violent nihilism that McCarthy sees as an undeniable part of reality, but it also becomes something against which humans struggle nobly. In *All the Pretty Horses* we see this struggle most clearly and movingly in the life of sixteen-year-old
John Grady Cole. The year is 1949 and the West Texas that Cole knows and loves is slowly being domesticated by the modern world. As the ranches close and the age of great horsemen comes to an end, Cole sees himself being cut off from the wild, rugged life that he has always wanted for himself. But it is not in his nature to stand by and watch his dream die, for as McCarthy writes,

what he loved in the horses was what he loved in men, the blood and the heat of the blood that ran them. All his reverence and all his fondness and all the leanings of his life were for the ardenthearted and they would always be so and never be otherwise.

If the Border Trilogy can be said to be about any one thing it is this quality of "ardentheartedness." It is a youthful, hard-headed idealism that compels John Grady to pick-up with his friend Lacy Rawlins and ride off to Mexico in search of a place untouched by the complications of modern life. In doing this, McCarthy connects himself to a major archetype in American literature. His hopeful young cowboys are the literary descendants of Twain's Huck Finn, and their story begins where Huck's ended—with the irrepressible urge to "light out" for some new and uncorrupted territory. It is the fate of this distinctively American brand of innocence to which McCarthy has turned his attention in these two remarkable novels.

For John Grady Cole and Lacy Rawlins, Mexico initially seems to be a land of almost dreamlike beauty and wonder; they find the ancient place of good life at a hospitable horse ranch, the Hacienda de Nuestra Senora de la Purisima Concepcion, where they happily work. They even fall in love here and live in a kind of blissful paradise. But this Mexico is also cruel and violent, and dreams must be paid for in blood. Fate conspires against them and they are eventually expelled from this Edenic garden. They encounter death, bandits, betrayal, and the horrors of a Mexican prison. Their experiences are truly harrowing, and by the end we find ourselves agreeing with a kindly old Mexican cafe proprietor who says, "It is good that God kept the truths of life from the young as they were starting out or else they'd have no heart to start out at all."

John Grady is certainly sobered by the gratuitous tribulation that he undergoes, but what is remarkable is the absence of any indication of defeat or cynicism. It has been revealed to him that there is nothing in either culture or nature that he can rely on for help, but he is still able to believe in a numinous value at the heart of existence. As McCarthy beautifully puts it near the end of the novel:

He felt a loneliness he'd not known since he was a child and he felt wholly alien to the world although he loved it still. He thought that in the beauty of the world were hid a secret. He thought the world's heart beat at some terrible cost and that the world's pain and its beauty moved in a relationship of diverging equity and that in this headlong deficit the blood of multitudes might ultimately be exacted for the vision of a single flower.

Finally, then, the novel ends where it began, with its protagonist still searching, riding off stoically "into the darkening land, the world to come."

Other writers have, of course, dealt with very similar themes, and a few writers have probably even matched McCarthy's skill as a writer of this brand of rugged, outdoor fiction [Hemingway and London come to mind], but All the Pretty Horses and its sequel, The Crossing, stand out, finally, as a result of McCarthy's breathtaking style. His highly inventive prose—with its esoteric vocabulary, its lack of punctuation, its concrete sense of the physical, quirky syntax, and occasional use of an inflated, sonorous rhetoric—is an odd mixture of modernist sparsity and precision and Faulknerian grandeur. It is well suited for the dramatic declamations he likes to make at more explicitly thematic moments in his books, but it also allows him to write carefully and movingly about the natural world. The following passage is an instance of the latter from The Crossing, in which a young boy watches a pack of wolves:

They were running on the plain harrying the antelope and the antelope moved like phantoms in the snow and circled and wheeled and the dry powder blew in the cold moon-light and their breath smoked palely in the cold as if they burned with some inner fire and the wolves twisted and turned and leapt in silence such that they seemed of another world entire.

Another delightful feature of
Untitled  oil on canvas  60x48"  Gary DeWitt
McCarthy's writing, particularly in *All the Pretty Horses*, is his use of a laconic, western dialect. His inarticulate cowboys are capable of wonderful, dry dialogue that is both comic and profound. Here John Grady and Lacy meditate on one of life's great mysteries:

Rawlins leaned and tipped the ash from his cigarette into the fire and leaned back.

You ever think about dying? he said.

Yeah. Some. You?

Yeah. Some. You think there’s a heaven?

Yeah. Don’t you?

I don’t know. Yeah. Maybe. You think you can believe in heaven if you don’t believe in hell?

I guess you can believe what you want to.

Rawlins nodded. You think about all the stuff that can happen to you, he said. There ain’t no end to it.

You fixin to get religious on us?

No. Just sometimes I wonder if I wouldn’t be better off if I did.

John Grady nodded. The force of McCarthy’s prose, when all these factors are considered, is wholly unique in contemporary writing. In *The Crossing*, the second volume of the series, McCarthy alters his technique and focus only slightly. His new hero, Billy Parham, another sixteen-year-old kid living in southern New Mexico in 1950, also leaves his home and rides off to Mexico on a romantic quest. Once again, a primal longing to escape civilization and discover in the natural world a more pure and intense form of existence lures him. In *The Crossing* this elusive realm of experience is symbolized by a large wolf that has wandered out of the Sierra de la Madera and has begun to kill cattle. In the flaming eyes of this creature, Billy sees a world burning on the shore of an unknowable void. A world construed out of blood... When those eyes and the nation to which they stood witness were gone at last with their dignity back into their origins there would perhaps be other fires and other witnesses and other worlds otherwise beheld.

But they would not be this one.

Billy catches the wolf in a steel trap, but, seeing that it is pregnant, cannot bring himself to kill it. Instead, he muzzles it, puts a collar and leash around its neck—all of this written in stunning detail and suspense—and attempts to return it to its home in the Mexican wilderness. This quixotic mission ends, as we might expect, tragically, and the readers find themselves emotionally ravaged. If there is a flaw or weakness in the novel it is that this opening episode, which makes up the first third of the book, is so riveting that the power of what will follow can only seem like a whimper. But we read on, for McCarthy has much more to tell us about the cruel passage from innocence to experience and the mythic shape of our own lives.

Billy returns to his home only to find his mother and father killed by thieves and their horses stolen. After Billy fetches his younger brother Boyd and their now throat-slit dog, McCarthy sends the boys back into Mexico in search of their horses. The merciless assault on innocence continues and violence, loss, heart-stopping adventure, and harsh landscape are, again, the central component of the somewhat loosely structured narrative that follows.

Revisiting this now familiar material does not, however, become redundant. McCarthy widens the scope of the trilogy and expands upon thematic concerns that have already been raised. The picaresque style in which the second half of the book proceeds allows him to introduce a variety of world-wearied characters into the story who know something of “the vast tragedy not of fact or incident or event but of

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**Modern Judas**

I know too much;  
A lonely man;  
Dies in the cold.

I know nothing at all.  
Our sweet mom;  
Dies happy and old.

The wicked will succeed;  
A savage priest;  
Lives without truth.

The righteous will fall.  
A refined priest;  
Lives in a booth.

A small Indian boy;  
A message for them;  
Believers had hope.

Holds out his hand.  
A message for us;  
Judas had rope.

A stout American;  
Timothy Lillis

Acquires more land.

A rape victim;  
A tune in the park.

Alone in the dark.

A rapist whistles.

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the way the world was made,” and have something to say to the innocence that the two youthful travelers stubbornly cling to as they try to discover their fate. Billy runs across an old caretaker of a broken down church who interrupts the narrative with a recondite sermon on the inscrutable mystery of God’s sovereignty:

The path of the world is one not many and there is no alter course in any least part of it for that course is fixed by God and contains all consequence in the way of its going.

Later, a wretched old man who lost his eyes in the revolution, presents Billy with this grim picture of life and the forces controlling it:

the light of the world was in men’s eyes only for the world itself moved in eternal darkness and darkness was its true nature and true condition and in this darkness it turned with perfect cohesion in all its parts but that there was naught there to see... It was sentient to its core and secret and black beyond men’s imagining.

These stunning, metaphysical outbursts are tempered by the simple but profound wisdom of a peasant farmer whom Billy sees from the road plowing his fields with an ox:

The old man said that the ox was an animal close to God as all the world knew and that perhaps the silence and rumination of the ox was something like a shadow of a greater silence, a deeper thought... He looked up. He smiled. He said that in any case the ox knew enough to work so as to keep from being killed and eaten and that was a useful thing to know.
Billy [and, by extension, the reader] must sort through this cacophony of advice and prophetic insight. There are no clear answers here to the profound questions that his quest has prompted. The mysteries of fate, existence, and evil persist until the end. Billy must, finally, travel through the world facing its potential malice and listening to its competing philosophies, comforted only by the conviction that, as he says near the end, "there ain't but one life worth livin' and I was born to it. That's worth all the rest." What seems to matter most to McCarthy is not so much a destination, but the struggle or quest itself. It is by persisting in this struggle that Billy achieves his heroic status and provides us with a compelling image of what it means to live in a seemingly unaccommodating world. He is maybe understood best by the traveler in the novel who stops and makes the following observation about him:

He said he contained within him a largeness of spirit which other men could see and that other men would wish to know him and that the world would need him as he needed the world for they were one.

Indeed, we should feel fortunate to have kept company with this character, experiencing something of the cruel, beautiful world to which he belongs; we should be grateful to McCarthy, who has retrieved these remarkable people and places from the past, offering them to us with timeless eloquence. He is a vital writer, for at his best he allows us to see with alarm and wonder a world that we can only wish we knew.
Science and Crisis  
by R.L. Hillner

John Horgan, *The End of Science: Facing the Limits of Knowledge in the Twilight of the Scientific Era*, Reading, Ma.: Addison-Wesley [1996], 308pp., $24.00 [cloth].

One of the trends in late 20th century thought is to always be signaling "the end" of some well-founded intellectual tradition. There are a number of books and conferences under such names as "the end of philosophy," "the end of history," and "the end of physics." Whenever someone speaks about "the end" of a discipline this can be taken in two different senses. In one sense, "the end" of a field of study can denote the goal, aim, or intent of that particular discipline. In another sense, "the end" can signify a crisis state, a limit, or a sense of untimely closure within a field of study. It's this latter sense of the phrase which has come into popular use, and it is this latter sense which John Horgan is concerned with in his book, *The End of Science: Facing the Limits of Knowledge in the Twilight of the Scientific Age*.

Horgan's book explores the possibility that "pure science" might be over. By "pure science," as opposed to applied science, Horgan means the search for absolute knowledge of the universe and our place within that universe. Pure science searches for "The Answer: the secret of life, the solution to the riddle of the universe." Horgan carries out this inquiry in survey fashion with a collection of interviews with such "block buster" scientists [and philosophers of science] as Penrose, Popper, Weinberg, Witten, Gell-Mann, Gould, Chomsky, Feyerabend, and Kuhn.

Horgan extracts a wide variety of answers, solutions, and criticisms to a number of issues and questions surrounding the possibility and impossibility of science progressing indefinitely. On the one hand, there are those scientists who believe that science will one day arrive at a "final theory" which would serve as the culmination or completion of "pure science," leaving nothing but some final "mopping up" and "puzzle solving." On the other hand, there are those who believe that science will go on indefinitely. To quote Freeman Dyson "No matter how far we go into the future, there will always be new things happening, new information coming in, new worlds to explore, a constantly expanding domain of life, consciousness and memory." Science, in other words, is "infinite in all directions." And then there are those like Paul Feyerabend who believe that science has no more claim on truth or progress than witchcraft or astrology.

Although through the course of these interviews Horgan confronts almost every possible scenario for the future of science, he abandons journalistic objectivity and argumentatively singles out one possibility as being more plausible than all the others; that pure science is, in fact, coming to an end.

Horgan cites Gunther Stent as the pioneer "endologist." Stent’s 1969 publication of *The Coming of the Golden Age: A View of the End of Progress* heralds much of what Horgan considers to be "a matter of fact" regarding the end of scientific progress. Stent offers roughly three main arguments for the end of scientific progress. First, Stent maintains that the decline of scientific progress is due, in part, to the fact that science works so well. Unlike endlessly speculative fields such as philosophy, history, and literary criticism, science has the ability to answer the questions it poses for itself. After the discovery of DNA, for example, Stent maintains that biology has only three major questions left to explore: "how life began, how a single fertilized cell develops into a multicellular organism, and how the central nervous system processes information." These answers, Stent concludes, will complete the "pure science" of biology. Horgan continues, explaining that science has managed to map out physical reality from the microrealm of quarks and electrons to the macrorealm of planets, stars, and galaxies. Physics has shown that all matter is governed by a few basic forces: gravity, electromagnetism, and nuclear forces. Cosmologists have constructed a detailed narrative of how the universe and everything in it came to be, via the big bang. What more is there for science to do?

In spite of these achievements there still seems to be plenty left for science to do. In physics, for example, there are a number of additions or
interpretations to quantum mechanics which are still being explored, such as superstring theory and "multiple-worlds" theory. Yet, these theories raise their own problems for the possibility of new discoveries. Many of these new theories lie beyond any empirical testing and are increasingly difficult to comprehend, even for specialists. This raises Stent's second argument that often these theories are accepted or rejected simply on "aesthetic" grounds. Steve Weinberg, for example, argues that superstring theory is, mathematically speaking, too beautiful not to be true. Yet, whenever science reaches this mode of "incomprehensibility," it enters what Stent calls a state of "diminishing practical returns." Stent argues that society may fund physics as long as there are "practical returns," such as "powerful new technologies", weapons, computers, electric razors, etc.

Unlike Horgan and others, Chomsky does not believe that our finite capacities somehow pose a threat to scientific progress. Chomsky maintains that there is "plenty of physics, plenty of biology, [and] plenty of chemistry" left to do. Yet, Horgan accuses Chomsky, and many of the other scientists he interviews, of a kind of "self-defiance" regarding the end of science. Scientists who maintain that scientific progress can go on indefinitely are really just succumbing to their own "wishful thinking" because they cannot imagine a world without science.

Horgan goes on to liken the modern scientist to the modern poet. They are both under the "anxiety of influence." Horgan adopts this phrase from the literary critic Harold Bloom to denote a sense of "latecoming." Originally Bloom intended this term to describe the modern poet's struggle to "define" herself in the shadow of such greats as Shakespeare, Dante, and Milton. The modern poet is a tragic figure because her efforts to live up to the perfection of her forebears is futile.

Horgan maintains that modern scientists are "latecomers" as well. Yet, he describes their burden as being much greater than that of the modern poets. The modern scientist finds himself in the shadow of the virtually immovable paradigms of Newton, Darwin, Einstein, and Crick.

The modern scientist reacts to this condition in a number of ways, according to Horgan. First, he may concede to the impossibility of superseding the contributions of his predecessors and resign himself to mere "puzzle solving," reinforcing the prevailing paradigms. Next, he may play a more subversive role and attempt to expose the dominant theories as "flimsy social fabrications." Finally, he may engage in what Horgan calls "ironic science." Ironic science is "speculative" and "postempirical" in its approach. Ultimately, the goal of ironic science is not to "get it right" but rather to provoke further comment. It focuses on questions of meaning: Why is the universe here? What does quantum mechanics really mean? These questions and inquiries tend to be a kind which cannot be empirically verified. According to Horgan, ironic science will probably not enjoy the satisfaction of introducing a "scientific revolution." Rather, the value of ironic science consists not in its ability to give us the Answer but in its ability to preserve in us the miracle of wonder.

Overall, Horgan's book is provocative and entertaining—though many readers will not find his position well argued. The book is, at least, worth the interviews. Horgan has a gift for portraying these "larger than life" scientists as the quirky and eccentric people that they are. One surprise worth noting are the interviews with Karl Popper, Thomas Kuhn, and Paul Feyerabend [three pioneer philosophers of science], all of whom died shortly after these interviews were conducted.
Gestural Study of Michelle  ink drawing  25x38"  Mike Byl
Every January, several overzealous professors succumb to the tantalizing prospect of creating new and stimulating interim courses. Although certainly born from good intentions and a healthy intellectual exuberance, these courses were destined for the Registrar's trash can—until Dialogue rescued them. So here it is—the best of the worst rejected interim courses.

**ENGL W11 Obscenity, Vulgarity, Defamation, and Slander.**
In this interim, participants will examine the etymology of our most vulgar expressions and four-letter words. In addition to extensive sentence diagramming, participants will also engage in weekly field trips to downtown Grand Rapids to pick fights and flex their new rhetorical muscles.

**EDUC W15 Beating children for fun and profit**
Students will learn standard offensive moves [backhand, forehand, etc.] and also receive instruction in maximum use of the paddle, the ruler, and the dowel rod.

**ENGL W09 Bad Movies Interim**
This interim will take a serious look at the box office bomb through in-class discussion and daily response papers. Specifically, students will watch *Encino Man, Plan Nine from Outer Space,* and the collective works of Keanu Reeves.

**IDIS W18 Interim in the Eastown 7-11**
In this course students will learn the art of the counter clerk. Participants will be required to work 40 hours a week and attend workshops in slurpee machine maintenance, crass behavior, and fire arms. Prerequisite: ENGR W14 Liquid Petroleum Engineering.

**MUSIC W12 Interim in the Music Computer Lab**
On January 6, 1997 we will lock you in the Fine Arts Center Computer Lab with ten gallons of water, 12 IBMs, and a dozen Krispy Kreme donuts. The door will be unlocked at 8:00 p.m. on January 24, 1997. Enjoy composing music as you struggle with the debilitating effects of malnutrition. This interim is limited to 12 students.

**ART W15 Taking pictures of beetles**
Students will photograph beetles. Every day.

**FREN W12 Interim in Paris, TX**
Students will spend three weeks in “total submersion” as they explore the rich culture of Paris, Texas. Students will improve their fluency in French through small group discussions and daily interactions with native Parisians. Oh-la-la!

**PHIL W11 WHY?**
What? Are you asking me? Do I look like I know the answers? What the #!@! kind of question is that anyway? Why?! Why, my derrière! I’ll tell you why, you lousy #@!$#@ ...! Students participating in this interim will be working closely with the students in ENGL W11 Obscenity, Vulgarity, Defamation, and Slander.

**IDIS W17 Searching for God**
Unlike Searching for God in the Movies and Searching for God in Modern Literature, in this interim students will simply search for God. Field trips to Zeeland, Hudsonville, Holland, Lansing, and Kalamazoo have been planned. If we haven’t found God by January 20, we’ll head out to Chicago or something. We might even build a tower. [I’m pretty sure though that He lives in Hudsonville.] Money has been allocated to defray some of the field trip costs, but students will need to pay for food and gas.

**PE W10 Spitting for Distance**
Students will practice spitting everything from sunflower seeds, to chewing tobacco, to plain ol’ mucus. Students will keep a daily log of their spitting and grades will be based on margin of improvement.

-Matt Miller

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