

Carl Sagan's COSMOS (1980 book, + TV series now being used in public schools to teach "science") makes theism as utterly implausible as it makes "evolution" plausible. It exposes as an illusion the comfortable liberal assumption that you can have your cake (God) and eat it, too (let "evolution"-as-science go unchallenged). Sagan teaches that in addition to evolution's being comprehensive of reality, the evolutionary process is THE meaning of existence: "cosmos" (his holophrase) is, without remainder, both reality and meaning. To the multitudes who know nothing but PS "science," this sounds plausible (as it's the only paradigm they see/hear thoroughly explored in the media, which are controlled by nontheists), and thus respectable (the nonplausible being the nonserious and therefore patient of humor but not respectability), and thus acceptable (the nonrespectable having the social sanctions working against them and thus being unacceptable, moving at the next stage into the status of the impermissible)....I adduce two examples:

1. In the film "A Time to Live" (1985 television, with Liza Minelli), a family uses "love" as its only resource in facing, for a decade, the oncoming death of a muscular-dystrophy son, who dies at age 12 without benefit of clergy, church, religion, or community: the nuclear family as monad! Pop-Stoic, this preachment of the sufficiency of (1) "love" and (2) family and (3) self ends with the boy wanting to die "impudent," defying death, which he does as camera fades. It's a lugubrious soap, but the reviewers love it: it's so "real" (!), plausible, respectable, acceptable, and it avoids the impermissible, viz., religion (the transcendent)...2. This letter-to-the-editor exchange:

As an unbeliever, who has frequently debated believers on the question of faith, I have found one irrefutable argument on their side: the simple declaration of belief. "I believe because I choose to believe" is, standing alone, a statement impervious to logical attack. It is a refusal to play by my rules and therefore perfectly effective.

What is interesting, however, is how few believers can stop there. They feel compelled to offer rational arguments to be easily disposed of. The further they move from that original statement of faith, the weaker their position.

What then can be said about those who go beyond the need to rationalize to the need to legislate? How strong is a faith that must turn not just to logic for support, but to the Congress. How strong is a faith that fears high-school science teachers and Hugh Hefner? Just what sort of Supreme Being needs a political action committee? The same God, who, it is claimed, created the universe as a simple act of will, suddenly in 1985 cannot carry out plans without an army of censors and book-burners and fanatics to harass pregnant women and sad, dying homosexuals?

Grasping for political power and longing for the chance to punish and repress does not speak to me of faith. It is a sign of fear and insecurity. Faith does not not require compulsion or material power, it stands on its own. So when I see the fundamentalists and others reaching out for the power of the material world, this unbeliever smiles.

A man who would censor me fears me. A man who would force his faith on me has none.

CARTER C. CANNON
West Yarmouth

Letters

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CAPE COD TIMES

Unbeliever offers weak argument

Carter C. Cannon's "Power Grabbers Show Lack of Faith" (letter, Oct. 23) is obtuse. Unaware of his hypocrisy, he offers us his naive faith "as an unbeliever" and then says believers "offer rational arguments... easily disposed of."

Unaware of his own circular thinking, he accuses believers of refusing "to play by my rules."

Unfairly, he wants special privileges for unbelievers and decries believers for "reaching out for the power of the material world," i.e., political power. In the public schools of the U.S., he wants it to be as it is in the public schools of the USSR: unbelief is free; belief is gagged. He wants unbelieving teachers to be free to present themselves, heart and soul and mind, to their students; but he wants the same freedom denied to believing teachers. If in this matter the First Amendment applies to the former, why not also to the latter? And if to the latter at the higher-education level of public schools (as, in my case, teaching at the University of Hawaii), why not also in the lower-level public schools?

And isn't turnabout fair play? Cheaply, he accuses believers of acting from weakness and fear. If I were to stoop to his low level, I could easily nail him for acting from weakness and fear. No way to make progress together at this abysmal level.

He accuses believers of being "censors and book burners," while he himself — in opting for the present legal situation, vis-a-vis "prayer" in the public schools — implicitly favors censoring a believing teacher who wants to open the school day or class session with a brief devotion appropriate to the teacher's integrity, and implicitly agrees with forbidding Bible reading in connection with such devotion (an official book exclusion that amounts to undramatic but effective book burning).

After accusing believers of a solipsism approaching autism ("I believe because I choose to believe"), Mr. Cannon brings forth this specious claim: "Faith does not require... material power, it stands on its own." If faith is pathology, how can it "stand" at all?

And his arrogance gets to me: "This unbeliever smiles" when believers want in on political power, and "A man who would censor me fears me."

Further, I don't "fear high-school science teachers" when they're teaching science. But I complain when they teach metaphysics (such as "natural selection" and "spontaneous generation") as though it were science.

WILLIS ELLIOTT
Craigville