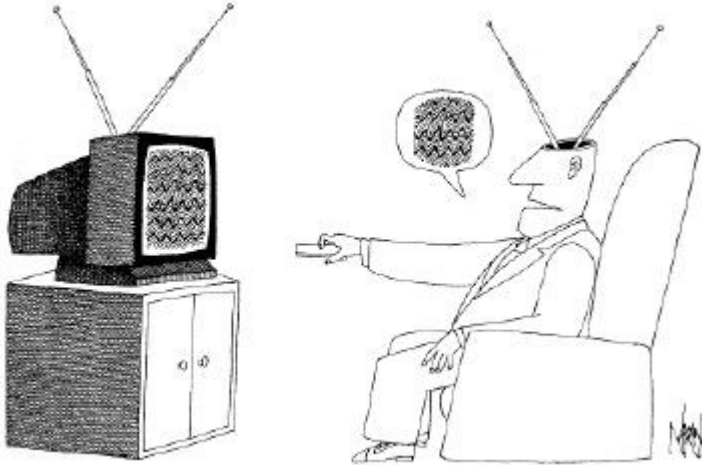


Century Marks

Century Marks in the [July 10, 2007](#) issue



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True friends: Richard Rorty, perhaps the best-known American philosopher of his generation, died last month. The grandson of Walter Rauschenbusch, who was the father of the Social Gospel movement, Rorty was an atheist who revived American philosophical pragmatism. He believed that there is no such thing as absolute truth. Fuller Seminary president Richard Mouw recalls Rorty declaring, in delivering a philosophic paper, that truth is merely “what my friends let me get away with saying.” The philosopher Alvin Plantinga responded by saying that he had “asked a bunch of Rorty’s friends if they would let him get away with that definition of truth and they all said no.” Rorty clung to a secular gospel of sorts: near the end of his life, when asked about the “holy,” he said, “My sense of the holy is bound up with the hope that some day my remote descendants will live in a global civilization in which love is pretty much the only law” (www.signandsight.com).

Feels so good: A team of economists and psychologists at the University of Oregon have discovered that giving money to charity activates parts of the brain that have to do with the experience of pleasure. The researchers see this as evidence that there is such a thing as pure altruism—people will take actions that help others when to do so is not in their own best interests (*Chicago Tribune*, June 15).

Saint Franz? Franz Jagerstatter, a German Catholic conscientious objector during World War II, was beheaded in 1943 for his refusal to cooperate with the Nazis. The Vatican recently recognized him as a martyr for the faith, opening the way for his beatification and possible canonization. Jagerstatter, the father of three, came to his anti-Nazi stance through participation in his local parish, despite the fact that his parish priest and local bishop advised him to serve in the army for the sake of his family (www.catholicpeacefellowship.org).

Shoot the messenger: The army assigned the task of investigating the Abu Ghraib prison scandal to Major General Antonio M. Taguba, a Filipino-American known for his integrity. Since his retirement from the army in January, Taguba told journalist Seymour M. Hersh that early on in the investigation he realized he had become a problem for the Pentagon because he refused to cover up for military brass. Taguba was reassigned to a position in the Pentagon, then forced to retire—without a reason given. “There was no doubt in my mind that this stuff”—the explicit images of abuse at the prison—“was gravitating upward,” Taguba told Hersh. “The president had to be aware of this.” He added: “I know that my peers in the army will be mad at me for speaking out, but the fact is that we violated the laws of land warfare in Abu Ghraib. We violated the tenets of the Geneva Convention. We violated our own principles and we violated the core of our military values” (*New Yorker*, June 25).

American roulette: The fate of inmates on death row rests more on sheer luck and politics than the merits of their cases, according to a study by the Cincinnati Enquirer. The Enquirer staff analyzed every death penalty appeal since 2000 in the Sixth Circuit Federal Appeals Court, which has jurisdiction over Ohio, Kentucky, Michigan and Tennessee. In 85 percent of the cases in which the majority of the three judges on the randomly selected panels were appointed by a Republican president, the appeals were denied. In 75 percent of the cases in which the majority of the three judges on the panels were appointed by a Democratic president, at least part of the inmates’ appeals were approved (*Washington Monthly*, June).

Plain box: Ruth Graham, wife of evangelist Billy Graham, was buried last month in a casket made by Richard Liggett, a convicted murderer in the Louisiana State Penitentiary. Made of birch plywood with a cross on the top and brass handles on the sides and lined with a fabric-covered foam mattress, the casket cost a mere \$215. Liggett, who was serving a life sentence for second-degree murder, found God while in prison. He often made caskets for other prisoners. He died of cancer in March and was buried in one of the last caskets he made (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, June 18).

Little eyes: Sixty-five percent of parents claim that they closely monitor their children's media use, according to a Kaiser Family Foundation survey. Parents are especially confident about monitoring their kids' use of the Internet, with 73 percent saying they know a lot about what their kids are doing online. Still, many parents are worried about their children being exposed to inappropriate media (language, sex, violence); two-thirds of the parents surveyed favor government regulation of TV content during early evening hours (www.kff.org).

Revised unstandard version: "And Jesus said unto them, 'And who do you say that I am?' They replied, 'You are the totaliter aliter, the vestigious trinitatum who speaks to us in the modality of Christo-monism. . . . You are he who heals our ambiguities and overcomes the split of angst and existential estrangement; you are he who speaks of the theonomous viewpoint of the analogia entis, the analogy of our being and the ground of all possibilities. . . . You are the impossible possibility who brings to us, your children of light and children of darkness, the overwhelming roughness in the midst of our fraught condition of estrangement and brokenness in the contiguity and existential anxieties of our ontological relationships. . . . You are my Oppressed One, my soul's shalom, the One who was, who is, and who shall be, who has never left us alone in the struggle, the event of liberation in the lives of the oppressed struggling for freedom, and whose blackness is both literal and symbolic.' And Jesus replied, 'Huh?'" (atentativequaker.blogspot.com).

Program your PDA: A display in Jerusalem of manuscripts by Sir Isaac Newton indicates that the great scientist saw no conflict between science and religion. Among the three-centuries-old papers is one in which Newton, using the book of Daniel, concludes that the world will end in 2060. "It may end later, but I see no reason for its ending sooner," Newton said. Ironically, his calculation was intended to end speculation about the end times (AP).

Icon you not: In June, an image of Jesus could be seen on a car window in Texas, the word *Allah* was visible in a sliced tomato in Britain, the face of God could be seen on the ceiling of a Tennessee church and Elvis's profile was sighted on a rock in Colorado (*Chicago Sun-Times*, June 19).