

Blish's "Conscience" vs. Wolfe's "Fifth Head"

The Usenet list — 51 messages, 20 voices, 28 Dec 2005

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galt_57 at hotmail.com — 28 Dec 2005, 14:55

Contrasting the stories "A Case of Conscience" and "The Fifth Head of Cerberus" on the topic of religious redemption and inherent mortal flaws I am dismayed that Wolfe seems to want to hide a rather ignorant religious opinion under layers of elaborate blather.

westprog — 28 Dec 2005, 16:37 · in reply to galt_57 at hotmail.com

Contrasting the stories "A Case of Conscience" and "The Fifth Head of Cerberus" on the topic of religious redemption and inherent mortal flaws I am dismayed that Wolfe seems to want to hide a rather ignorant religious opinion

An ignorant opinion?

under layers of elaborate blather.

One person's elaborate blather is someone else's wonderful writing.

J/

galt_57 at hotmail.com — 28 Dec 2005, 18:36 · in reply to westprog

westprog wrote:

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An ignorant opinion?

Cloning and the genetic improvement of humankind is purely evil and doomed to failure.

under layers of elaborate blather.

One person's elaborate blather is someone else's wonderful writing.

Ok, it is wonderful writing but there is a dead skunk buried in the middle of it.

Dan Goodman — 28 Dec 2005, 19:51 · in reply to galt_57 at hotmail.com

galt_57 at hotmail.com wrote:

westprog wrote:

<galt_57 at hotmail.com> wrote in message

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An ignorant opinion?

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You've given no evidence that the opinion is ignorant.

I do hope you don't mean that 1) the opinion is wrong and 2) anyone who is not ignorant will realize that it's wrong.

Dan Goodman
Journal <http://www.livejournal.com/users/dsgood/>
Clutterers Anonymous unofficial community
http://www.livejournal.com/community/clutterers_anon/
Decluttering <http://decluttering.blogspot.com>
Predictions and Politics <http://dsgood.blogspot.com>
All political parties die at last of swallowing their own lies.
John Arbuthnot (1667-1735), Scottish writer, physician.

galt_57 at hotmail.com — 28 Dec 2005, 20:42 · in reply to Dan Goodman

Dan Goodman wrote:

galt_57 at hotmail.com wrote:

westprog wrote:

<galt_57 at hotmail.com> wrote in message
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Oh no, I believe that very, very intelligent people can and are hoodwinked by religion and accept its presumption of moral authority. I also accept that being hoodwinked is not the same thing as being ignorant.

Dan Goodman — 28 Dec 2005, 21:12 · in reply to galt_57 at hotmail.com

galt_57 at hotmail.com wrote:

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So, what leads you to the conclusion that Wolfe's opinion is an ignorant one?

Dan Goodman
Journal <http://www.livejournal.com/users/dsgood/>
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http://www.livejournal.com/community/clutterers_anon/
Decluttering <http://decluttering.blogspot.com>
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All political parties die at last of swallowing their own lies.
John Arbuthnot (1667-1735), Scottish writer, physician.

james.t.williams — 28 Dec 2005, 21:15 · in reply to galt_57 at hotmail.com

I have read "Fifth Head" several times, and I never saw it as condemning cloning itself.

In the case of the story, an aberrant personality attempts to improve himself through successive generations of clones. But improvement means change, and I don't think he really wants to change himself. So he ends up repeating the same mistakes, and never getting better.

Don't get me wrong- I am all for physical immortality. But I also don't see the point of being physically immortal if you end up being essentially the same person for all time.

Gary Thompson — 28 Dec 2005, 22:01 · in reply to Dan Goodman

Dan Goodman wrote:
galt_57 at hotmail.com wrote:

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galt_57 at hotmail.com wrote:

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So, what leads you to the conclusion that Wolfe's opinion is an ignorant one?

Perhaps that it's not an objectivist one.

galt_57 at hotmail.com — 28 Dec 2005, 22:57 · in reply to Dan Goodman

Dan Goodman wrote:

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galt_57 at hotmail.com wrote:

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So, what leads you to the conclusion that Wolfe's opinion is an ignorant one?

Because clones are evil, you see. They just are.

Dan Goodman — 28 Dec 2005, 23:06 · in reply to galt_57 at hotmail.com

galt_57 at hotmail.com wrote:

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galt_57 at hotmail.com wrote:

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galt_57 at hotmail.com wrote:

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So, what leads you to the conclusion that Wolfe's opinion is an ignorant one?

Because clones are evil, you see. They just are.

That makes sense if 1) Wolfe himself puts it that way, or 2) you have inside knowledge that Wolfe is not basing that opinion on reasoning and/or evidence which he has not shared.

And, of course, it's also possible that you're misunderstanding what he wrote as thoroughly as the people who believe(d) that Animal Farm was a defense of capitalism.

Dan Goodman
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All political parties die at last of swallowing their own lies.
John Arbuthnot (1667-1735), Scottish writer, physician.

galt_57 at hotmail.com — 29 Dec 2005, 00:12 · in reply to james.t.williams

james.t.williams at gmail.com wrote:

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Don't get me wrong- I am all for physical immortality. But I also don't see the point of being physically immortal if you end up being essentially the same person for all time.

Well, I see it as basically a statement that mankind can't be improved. You see we were made the way we are by our "creator" and this is the only way we can be (ie Biblical viewpoint). Any attempt at improvement is "evil" and goes against the will of our "creator." Clones are unnatural and evil. Blah, blah, blah. But this is all so stupid and lame that I'll hide these ignorant sentiments as the unstated underlying basis of a story.

Howard Brazee — 29 Dec 2005, 00:38 · in reply to galt_57 at hotmail.com

Cloning and the genetic improvement of humankind is purely evil and doomed to failure.

Why is it purely evil?

Why is it doomed to failure? If it was impurely evil, would it be doomed to failure?

Howard Brazee — 29 Dec 2005, 00:44 · in reply to galt_57 at hotmail.com

Because clones are evil, you see. They just are.

Especially natural ones.

Wayne Throop — 29 Dec 2005, 00:48 · in reply to Howard Brazee

:: Because clones are evil, you see. They just are.

: Especially natural ones.

Xref "Split Heirs".

Wayne Throop throopw at sheol.org <http://sheol.org/throopw>

james.t.williams — 29 Dec 2005, 01:17 · in reply to galt_57 at hotmail.com

There is no indication in the story that cloning/clones are evil. Certainly the uses to which cloning is put by the protagonist are a little creepy, but I don't see how that could condemn the technology itself.

A major point of the story is that the protagonist is not improving- but that seems to be due to an error in his particular methodology (and that he seems to have started out extremely flawed to begin with), rather than from the fact that mankind cannot be improved at all.

Howard Brazee — 29 Dec 2005, 01:24 · in reply to galt_57 at hotmail.com

Well, I see it as basically a statement that mankind can't be improved.

You see we were made the way we are by our "creator" and this is the only way we can be (ie Biblical viewpoint).

No, that isn't a Biblical viewpoint. Lots of fundamentalists have strong beliefs in things that they figure the Scriptures *should* say.

All physicians "play God", making decisions on how long we should live and what conditions our bodies should be.

Lawrence Watt-Evans — 29 Dec 2005, 05:58 · in reply to Wayne Throop

On Thu, 29 Dec 2005 00:48:17 GMT, throopw at sheol.org (Wayne Throop) wrote:

:: Because clones are evil, you see. They just are.

: Especially natural ones.

Xref "Split Heirs".

Well, we don't know for sure whether anyone there's actually clones -- certainly Arbol isn't.

The real rule that applies there (and which we were going to base the sequel on) is that all uncles of young rulers are evil.

My webpage is at <http://www.watt-evans.com>

Wayne Throop — 29 Dec 2005, 06:23 · in reply to Lawrence Watt-Evans

:::: Because clones are evil, you see. They just are.

::: Especially natural ones.

:: Xref "Split Heirs".

: Lawrence Watt-Evans <lwe at sff.net>

: Well, we don't know for sure whether anyone there's actually clones -- : certainly Arbol isn't.

True; I was unclear. I mean, that if there were natural clones in that setting, they would be considered "evil" in some sense. Or at least a Bad Thing To Have Happened. Didn't mean to imply the siblings were genetically identical.

No other setting came to mind in which twins/triplets/etc are considered a Bad Thing. Well... there was a Dilvish where if twin's are sorcerers, they are each only half-strength, leading to some... er... sibling rivalry.

: The real rule that applies _there_ (and which we were going to base : the sequel on) is that all uncles of young rulers are evil.

Also a good rule of thumb.

Wayne Throop throopw at sheol.org <http://sheol.org/throopw>

westprog — 29 Dec 2005, 14:20 · in reply to galt_57 at hotmail.com

....

Well, I see it as basically a statement that mankind can't be improved. You see we were made the way we are by our "creator" and this is the only way we can be (ie Biblical viewpoint). Any attempt at improvement is "evil" and goes against the will of our "creator." Clones are unnatural and evil. Blah, blah, blah. But this is all so stupid and lame that I'll hide these ignorant sentiments as the unstated underlying basis of a story.

He hid them pretty well. He'd have gotten away with it...

J/

Gerry Quinn — 29 Dec 2005, 14:55 · in reply to galt_57 at hotmail.com

I have read "Fifth Head" several times, and I never saw it as condemning cloning itself.

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Sounds like a lot to read into a story involving clones that don't improve.

The second part features humans who disimprove (in most ways anyway, though they develop psychic powers), and aliens who do improve (at least if emulating man is considered better than emulating rocks and trees). So maybe you are on to something with the 'improvement' theme. But you read too much of your own obsessions into it.

You see we were made the way we are by our "creator" and this is the only way we can be (ie Biblical viewpoint). Any attempt at improvement is "evil" and goes against the will of our "creator."

One attempt at improvement that fails hardly says that all attempts are evil. Nor, if it is evil, does it indicate *why* it is evil. Nor, if man cannot be improved, *why* man cannot be improved.

In the novel, cloning is banned on Earth, hence the experiments can only be conducted on a frontier planet. Presumably cloning tends to cause problems. That is hardly an exceptional premise for a SF novel. Nor is it especially religious, or even technologically or socially unlikely.

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unnatural and evil. Blah, blah, blah. But this is all so stupid and lame that I'll hide these ignorant sentiments as the unstated underlying basis of a story.

I think you are the one with strange issues. I suspect you would dislike most of Wolfe's work even more, though, since he does value the religious impulse - something that appears to enrage you.

- Gerry Quinn

DougL — 29 Dec 2005, 17:00 · in reply to Lawrence Watt-Evans

Lawrence Watt-Evans wrote:

On Thu, 29 Dec 2005 00:48:17 GMT, throopw at sheol.org (Wayne Throop) wrote:

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: Especially natural ones.

Xref "Split Heirs".

Well, we don't know for sure whether anyone there's actually clones -- certainly Arbol isn't.

The real rule that applies there (and which we were going to base the sequel on) is that all uncles of young rulers are evil.

Sequel?

In any case it was obvious that the Uncle was going to be evil and try to take over himself.

DougL

Lawrence Watt-Evans — 29 Dec 2005, 17:21 · in reply to DougL

On 29 Dec 2005 09:00:47 -0800, "DougL" <lampert.doug at gmail.com> wrote:

Lawrence Watt-Evans wrote:

On Thu, 29 Dec 2005 00:48:17 GMT, throopw at sheol.org (Wayne Throop) wrote:

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Sequel?

Putting On Heirs. Never written because Tor handed down an edict from on high, "funny fantasy doesn't sell anymore so we aren't publishing any more."

No exceptions. Pointing to sales figures for Split Heirs (which were excellent) didn't help.

My webpage is at <http://www.watt-evans.com>

Mark — 29 Dec 2005, 17:37 · in reply to [galt_57](#) at hotmail.com

An ignorant opinion?<<

Cloning and the genetic improvement of humankind is purely evil and doomed to failure.<

The story is about epistatic drift, only in this case is moral drift rather than genetic. Also, a bit of transactional analysis thrown in--people follow "scripts" sometimes with incredible fidelity, often to their own detriment. He mixed a bit of Rousseau's "Emile" in as well...it's by no means a simplistic concoction Wolfe came up with and it doesn't reduce at all to a one-line condemnation.

Mark

author of:

THE SECANTIS SEQUENCE

REMAINS

www.marktiedemann.com

westprog — 30 Dec 2005, 16:59 · in reply to Mark

An ignorant opinion?<<

Cloning and the genetic improvement of humankind is purely evil and doomed to failure.<

The story is about epistatic drift, only in this case is moral drift rather than genetic. Also, a bit of transactional analysis thrown in--people follow "scripts" sometimes with incredible fidelity, often to their own detriment. He mixed a bit of Rousseau's "Emile" in as well...it's by no means a simplistic concoction Wolfe came up with and it doesn't reduce at all to a one-line condemnation.

Wolfe is the SF author who is least liable to be summed up in a couple of sentences. Indeed, his work is so dense that an anyway complete summary would probably be twice as long as the original story.

J/

Mark — 30 Dec 2005, 17:29 · in reply to westprog

Got that right. He's one of the few on my read and reread shelf.

Mark

author of:

THE SECANTIS SEQUENCE

REMAINS

www.marktiedemann.com

jerry_friedman — 30 Dec 2005, 21:15 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

Gerry Quinn wrote:

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One attempt at improvement that fails hardly says that all attempts are evil.

True.

Nor, if it is evil, does it indicate **why** it is evil.

In this case, because it's egoistical, I think.

Nor, if
man cannot be improved, **why** man cannot be improved.

Because Wolfe is a Roman Catholic and believes in original sin, a human flaw that can't be cured.

In the novel, cloning is banned on Earth, hence the experiments can only be conducted on a frontier planet. Presumably cloning tends to cause problems. That is hardly an exceptional premise for a SF novel. Nor is it especially religious, or even technologically or socially unlikely.

I think it is religious. Our hero lives at 666 Rue du Saltimbanque, after all. (I'm not sure about the street name, but I'm sure about the Number.) Another hint is that this gene wolf's name is quite possibly Gene Wolfe. I don't know whether the real Wolfe was saying that all human cloning is evil--though if anyone interviews him, I think the question would be a good one to ask, now that he probably could be cloned--but I think he was at least saying that the Beast or the Antichrist or whatever is that close. Someone much like the author could start a project to create it now by making people who are removed from the natural process of reproduction--does that mean removed from Christian redemption? The day when "they'll want us" is the beginning of the Christian Eschaton. Rather chilling, even for a non-Christian like me if I apply some WSOD. So I think Galt_57 is on the right track, except...

ones are
unnatural and evil. Blah, blah, blah. But this is all so stupid and
lame that I'll hide these ignorant sentiments as the unstated
underlying basis of a story.

...it's not stupid or ignorant. I see no reasoning Wolfe is incapable of and nothing he doesn't
know that leads him to it. It's just based on beliefs that you and I don't share, John.

I think you are the one with strange issues.

There is no chance that he takes it personally because he's the 57th clone of John Galt. Right?

I suspect you would
dislike most of Wolfe's work even more, though, since he does value the
religious impulse - something that appears to enrage you.

Not only that, he believes in a very specific religion.

Jerry Friedman

Gerry Quinn — 31 Dec 2005, 14:06 · in reply to jerry_friedman

Gerry Quinn wrote:

One attempt at improvement that fails hardly says that all attempts are
evil.

True.

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Because Wolfe is a Roman Catholic and believes in original sin, a human
flaw that can't be cured.

Even if that is why (and I don't know that it was necessarily the reason), having a flaw that
cannot be cured does not prove that one cannot at least improve!

[And you don't have to be a Catholic to believe in original sin - one might draw a similar
conclusion from the study of Darwin!]

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only be conducted on a frontier planet. Presumably cloning tends to
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Christian redemption? The day when "they'll want us" is the beginning
of the Christian Eschaton. Rather chilling, even for a non-Christian
like me if I apply some WSOD. So I think Galt_57 is on the right
track, except...

Interesting. I lent my copy, and I want it back! Of course Wolfe plays with lots of things, and not all the clues need add up to a single answer.

- Gerry Quinn

westprog — 31 Dec 2005, 15:09 · in reply to jerry_friedman

....

I suspect you would
dislike most of Wolfe's work even more, though, since he does value the
religious impulse - something that appears to enrage you.

Not only that, he believes in a very specific religion.

That's not uncommon.

J/

galt_57 at hotmail.com — 01 Jan 2006, 15:16 · in reply to galt_57 at hotmail.com

galt_57 at hotmail.com wrote:

Contrasting the stories "A Case of Conscience" and "The Fifth Head of
Cerberus" on the topic of religious redemption and inherent mortal
flaws I am dismayed... [...]

Also when you consider the likely (or at least predictable) decline of Western civilization simply due to the differential birth rates, the hidden religious morality in this story further annoys me. Considering that the least educated (and perhaps least intelligent) of the worlds population are vastly out-reproducing those who probably are more intellectually capable. How many children did Einstein have? Two? How many children per typical welfare mom? What does this lead to by geometric progression over the next few thousand years? Then it pains me to remember that the Church may understand this and like this just fine. After all the Church reached its maximum power during dark times of turmoil and decline. Why shouldn't the Church promote beliefs which could actually help to usher in such times and thus enhance its power and authority?

Mark — 01 Jan 2006, 15:25 · in reply to galt_57 at hotmail.com

How many children did Einstein have? Two? How

many children per typical welfare mom?

Two. (Less, really, but I've never quite figured out how to feel about half a child :>) That's a myth about welfare moms, an exaggeration based on very local stats and media attention. In countries where the term 'welfare mom' has no meaning, birth rates tend to fall within similar limits top to bottom. It has much more to do with infant mortality rates and available resources. When the infant mortality rate drops, the birth rate drops.

The decline of Western birth rates seems more tied to environmental factors than anything else. Fertility rates are demonstrably lower, even among people who desperately want children (hence the geometric growth of the medical fertility industry, centered in the very countries that can afford it--which is the industrialized West).

Mark

author of:

THE SECANTIS SEQUENCE

REMAINS

Gerry Quinn — 01 Jan 2006, 17:34 · in reply to galt_57 at hotmail.com

Contrasting the stories "A Case of Conscience" and "The Fifth Head of Cerberus" on the topic of religious redemption and inherent mortal flaws I am dismayed... [...]

Also when you consider the likely (or at least predictable) decline of Western civilization simply due to the differential birth rates, the hidden religious morality in this story further annoys me.

Perceived religious morality.

Considering
that the least educated (and perhaps least intelligent) of the worlds population are vastly out-reproducing those who probably are more intellectually capable. How many children did Einstein have? Two? How many children per typical welfare mom? What does this lead to by geometric progression over the next few thousand years? Then it pains me to remember that the Church may understand this and like this just fine. After all the Church reached its maximum power during dark times of turmoil and decline. Why shouldn't the Church promote beliefs which could actually help to usher in such times and thus enhance its power and authority?

I have not heard of the Church exhorting intellectuals to use contraception!

Though I suspect that the idea of cloning an intellectual master race (if that is the platform you propose) would be abhorrent to her.

- Gerry Quinn

jerry_friedman — 01 Jan 2006, 18:39 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

Gerry Quinn wrote:

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True.

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Because Wolfe is a Roman Catholic and believes in original sin, a human flaw that can't be cured.

Even if that is why (and I don't know that it was necessarily the reason), having a flaw that cannot be cured does not prove that one cannot at least improve!

Of course not. I think Galt is right to say that Wolfe is against this attempt at improvement, and that he probably is against many like it. He's certainly in favor of the traditional method of doing one's best to live up to one's values, and the Christian method of trying to accept God's grace (which he presumably believes in). Galt left that out of his sweeping statement. I suspect Wolfe's extremely dubious about other methods.

[And you don't have to be a Catholic to believe in original sin - one might draw a similar conclusion from the study of Darwin!]

Similar, but not the same. For one thing, in sf, the flaws we inherit from our ape ancestors are conceivably curable.

In the novel, cloning is banned on Earth, hence the experiments can only be conducted on a frontier planet. Presumably cloning tends to cause problems. That is hardly an exceptional premise for a SF novel. Nor is it especially religious, or even technologically or socially unlikely.

I think it is religious.

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Interesting. I lent my copy, and I want it back! Of course Wolfe plays with lots of things, and not all the clues need add up to a single answer.

I certainly can't claim I know what everything in the original novella adds up to, and I understand even less about the other two (which Wolfe apparently didn't have in mind when he wrote the first one).

Jerry Friedman

Tim McDaniel — 01 Jan 2006, 18:44 · in reply to Lawrence Watt-Evans

[in re _Split Heirs_]

The real rule that applies _there_ (and which we were going to base the sequel on) is that all uncles of young rulers are evil.

Counterexample in the Deryni books: Nigel Haldane, duke of Carthmoor, uncle to King Kelson, and utterly devoted to him.

Quasi-counterexample: Uncle Brinker in _A College of Magics_. Plotting and scheming, yes, but as I recall he really did want good for the duchy and his niece. Not quite evil enough. Semi-evil. Quasi-evil. The margarine of evil. The Diet Coke of evil, just one calorie, not "evil" enough.

"Me, I love the USA; I never miss an episode." -- Paul "Fruitbat" Sleight

Lawrence Watt-Evans — 01 Jan 2006, 18:59 · in reply to Tim McDaniel

[in re _Split Heirs_]

The real rule that applies _there_ (and which we were going to base the sequel on) is that all uncles of young rulers are evil.

Counterexample in the Deryni books: Nigel Haldane, duke of Carthmoor, uncle to King Kelson, and utterly devoted to him.

I knew there was some reason I didn't like the Deryni stories! What nonsense.

My webpage is at <http://www.watt-evans.com>

Mike Schilling — 01 Jan 2006, 19:13 · in reply to Lawrence Watt-Evans

[in re _Split Heirs_]

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Counterexample in the Deryni books: Nigel Haldane, duke of Carthmoor, uncle to King Kelson, and utterly devoted to him.

I knew there was some reason I didn't like the Deryni stories! What nonsense.

Richard III was a kindly uncle in Blackadder. (I don't recall if it explained what happened to Edward V, but Richard III was succeeded by Edward's brother Richard.)

Malcolm — 01 Jan 2006, 21:25 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

"Gerry Quinn" <gerryq at DELETETHISindigo.ie> wrote

I have not heard of the Church exhorting intellectuals to use contraception!

Until the Reformation all the universities were run by the church. Most of the academic staff were clergymen, and of course celibate.

David T. Bilek — 01 Jan 2006, 22:21 · in reply to Lawrence Watt-Evans

[in re _Split Heirs_]

The real rule that applies _there_ (and which we were going to base the sequel on) is that all uncles of young rulers are evil.

Counterexample in the Deryni books: Nigel Haldane, duke of Carthmoor, uncle to King Kelson, and utterly devoted to him.

I knew there was some reason I didn't like the Deryni stories! What nonsense.

The fact that the prose in at least the earlier Deryni books is painfully stilted and amateur may also have something to do with it.

I loved _Deryni Rising_ when I was a kid. I re-read it at about 20 and laughed at my younger self.

-David

westprog — 02 Jan 2006, 00:29 · in reply to David T. Bilek

....

The real rule that applies _there_ (and which we were going to base the sequel on) is that all uncles of young rulers are evil.

Counterexample in the Deryni books: Nigel Haldane, duke of Carthmoor, uncle to King Kelson, and utterly devoted to him.

I knew there was some reason I didn't like the Deryni stories! What nonsense.

The fact that the prose in at least the earlier Deryni books is painfully stilted and amateur may also have something to do with it.

I loved _Deryni Rising_ when I was a kid. I re-read it at about 20 and laughed at my younger self.

The idea behind the Deryni books seems to have been that it was a good idea to use paranormal powers to fake supernatural events, and that this was OK if you were one of the good guys. Couldn't read a Deryni book now - but at the time, there was hardly any fantasy around.

J/

Gerry Quinn — 02 Jan 2006, 12:14 · in reply to jerry_friedman

Gerry Quinn wrote:

[And you don't have to be a Catholic to believe in original sin - one might draw a similar conclusion from the study of Darwin!]

Similar, but not the same. For one thing, in sf, the flaws we inherit from our ape ancestors are conceivably curable.

Not really. Our self-interest and our socialisation will always be at war, so the flaw is inescapable.

- Gerry Quinn

Gerry Quinn — 02 Jan 2006, 12:20 · in reply to Malcolm

"Gerry Quinn" <gerryq at DELETETHISindigo.ie> wrote

I have not heard of the Church exhorting intellectuals to use contraception!

Until the Reformation all the universities were run by the church. Most of the academic staff were clergymen, and of course celibate.

Until the Gregorian reforms of the late eleventh century, including the period I assume the OP to refer to, celibacy rules were largely ignored.

- Gerry Quinn

galt_57 at hotmail.com — 02 Jan 2006, 18:38 · in reply to galt_57 at hotmail.com

Omixochitl wrote:

Also when you consider the likely (or at least predictable) decline of Western civilization simply due to the differential birth rates, the hidden religious morality in this story further annoys me. Considering that the least educated (and perhaps least intelligent) of the worlds population are vastly out-reproducing those who probably are more intellectually capable. How many children did Einstein have? Two? How many children per typical welfare mom? What does this lead to by

From what I've heard, the typical welfare mom actually has about as many kids as the typical middle-class educated couple has (in both cases, the ones who have 7 or 8 instead of 1 or 2 are atypical). Perhaps you're confusing the typical welfare mom with the typical housewife of a subsistence farmer?

Perhaps the statistics don't actually support the concern I voiced above -- I don't know. Urban legend would suggest that NBA stars tend to father far more children than any intellectual, but this again could be bogus. My central claim however is that humankind is not getting any more intelligent, may be getting less intelligent, and really isn't very intelligent. I just don't believe we are going anywhere. SF tends to posit a grand future, or at least an interesting one, but humankind seems to me to be too stupid to make anything happen. Heck, half the US population thinks that Noah's Ark really happened and that we need to wait patiently for the return of Jesus. I don't believe that this is an encouraging sign. Going forward I question whether we will have the "grey matter" to make the grand technological breakthroughs that

would be necessary. In fact we have found that physics has become incomprehensible. We aren't smart enough to grasp it. As a result the general population has become increasingly Luddite. What good is rational thinking if it only leads to incomprehensible topics such as String Theory? Might as well believe in New Age pseudo-science or mystical junk such as holistic healing or Feng Shui. The only hope might be to utilize genetic engineering advancements to improve our mental capabilities before humankind self-destructs over some idiocy, but any move in the direction of genetic engineering is very much opposed by fundamentalist religion. Eugenics is a very ugly word because it was applied in some very ignorant and evil ways. Still that doesn't change the fact that we are here and that we got here through a very slow process.

Mike Stone — 02 Jan 2006, 18:50 · in reply to galt_57 at hotmail.com

Perhaps the statistics don't actually support the concern I voiced above -- I don't know. Urban legend would suggest that NBA stars tend to father far more children than any intellectual, but this again could be bogus.

Whether bogus or not, it's irrelevant, unless the women he fathers them _on_ refrain from getting pregnant (in or out of wedlock) by someone else.

Mike Stone - Peterborough, England

"To be good is noble.

To teach others to be good is yet nobler - and far less trouble."

Mark Twain

Mark — 02 Jan 2006, 19:42 · in reply to galt_57 at hotmail.com

Heck, half the US

population thinks that Noah's Ark really happened and that we need to wait patiently for the return of Jesus.<

Well, two centuries ago probably more than 70 or 80 percent believed both, ardently. There have been dips and peaks in the stats since then and will be again, but I'm not too discouraged if only half the general population buys into mystical claptrap. That means the other half doesn't.

My central claim however is that humankind is not getting any more intelligent, may be getting less intelligent, and really isn't very intelligent. I just don't believe we are going anywhere. SF tends to posit a grand future, or at least an interesting one, <

Given that our "future" (ala SF) began to be imagined in, roughly, 1926 (I'm using the launch of Amazing Magazine as the beginning), I'd have to say we live in a surprisingly interesting, far more advanced, and less parochial future than most of our writers up to the Fifties or even the Sixties imagined. Along the way, we've more than doubled the planet's population, and are now on an almost daily basis (if we wish) far more informed about vast segments of the global population that were rarely considered prior to the second world war. Advancements in medicine (including the "dreaded" genetic sciences), information systems, transportation, communication, physics, and on and on and on argue persuasively that we've pretty much built and even surpassed many of the futures predicted along the way. Bear in mind that a lot of our best writers thought we would be either in a nuclear-war-induced stone age by now or in the throes of massive economic depression leading to dramatic returns to 19th and even 18th century conditions. One may quibble around the edges, but neither of those have happened. Many other writers didn't even both talking about this part of the future, by-passing it for a

rather broader interplanetary or interstellar civilization--but the assumption was made that we'd get there. The only thing we seem to be lagging on is the space effort, but China may yet realize that for us.

Depending on which news you imbibe, I can see how one can get the impression that somehow we're getting collectively dumber--but an awful lot of circumstantial evidence also argues to the contrary. Take your choice--hopeful or hopeless. I'll go with hopeful.

Mark
author of:
THE SECANTIS SEQUENCE
REMAINS
www.marktiedemann.com

Malcolm — 03 Jan 2006, 00:35 · in reply to [galt_57](#) at [hotmail.com](#)

"Omixochitl" <[omixochitl2002 at yahoo.com](mailto:omixochitl2002@yahoo.com)> wrote

From what I've heard, the typical welfare mom actually has about as many kids as the typical middle-class educated couple has (in both cases, the ones who have 7 or 8 instead of 1 or 2 are atypical). Perhaps you're confusing the typical welfare mom with the typical housewife of a subsistence farmer?

You're probably right.

Welfare moms are trotted out in discussions of "evolutionary morality" - the idea that there is an ethical imperative to be adaptively successful.

The point is that all evolution cares about is how many genes you get into the (grandchildrens') generation. It doesn't care whether you do that by exterminating inferior races, doing company accounts, or cashing welfare cheques.

Omixochitl — 03 Jan 2006, 04:59 · in reply to [Mike Stone](#)

Perhaps the statistics don't actually support the concern I voiced above -- I don't know. Urban legend would suggest that NBA stars tend to father far more children than any intellectual, but this again could be bogus.

Whether bogus or not, it's irrelevant, unless the women he fathers them _on_ refrain from getting pregnant (in or out of wedlock) by someone else.

Also, whether bogus or not, it sidesteps the whole nurture factor. After all, part of the urban legend seems to be that these athletes don't know of, let alone support and encourage, all their kids.

Now if an intellectual behaved the same way, would his kids be much better off? Or is the kid of a single mom and a professor who totally ignores them no more likely to succeed than the kid of the same woman and a ball player who totally ignores them?

Gerry Quinn — 03 Jan 2006, 11:02 · in reply to [galt_57](#) at [hotmail.com](#)

The only hope might be to utilize genetic engineering advancements to improve our mental capabilities before humankind self-destructs over some idiocy, but any move in the direction of genetic engineering is very much

opposed by fundamentalist religion. Eugenics is a very ugly word because it was applied in some very ignorant and evil ways. Still that doesn't change the fact that we are here and that we got here through a very slow process.

Attitudes like yours go some way towards explaining why non-religious intelligent conservatives increasingly tend to find themselves allied with religion-oriented groupings.

Evolution IS a slow process - witness your adherence to the notion that man is perfectable by technology.

What's especially bizarre is your notion of increasing intelligence by inserting mutated genes into the human genome. Assuming, reasonably enough, that intelligence is somewhat heritable, a conventional breeding program that favoured the reproduction of high-IQ individuals would at least run little risk of creating a biological disaster for humanity, even if it promotes - as it probably would - racial tension, terrorism and a world war or three.

(And if it works, I suspect that the main effect on the human race will be that the sudokus in the newspapers will be slightly harder, and the news surrounding them much the same.)

You talk about humanity "self-destructing over some idiocy". But you're the one promoting such an idiocy.

- Gerry Quinn

Chris Thompson — 04 Jan 2006, 22:31 · in reply to jerry_friedman

Gerry Quinn wrote:

[...]

Nor, if it is evil, does it indicate **why** it is evil.

In this case, because it's egoistical, I think.

For some reason, I am reminded of Ethan's description of why the Athosian religion considers cloning a sin. Specifically, the sin of Vanity.

("That's a sin?", Terrence says bemusedly, IIRC.)

Chris Thompson
Email: cet1 [at] cam.ac.uk

Howard Brazee — 05 Jan 2006, 00:29 · in reply to Chris Thompson

On 4 Jan 2006 22:31:23 GMT, cet1 at cus.cam.ac.uk (Chris Thompson) wrote:

For some reason, I am reminded of Ethan's description of why the Athosian religion considers cloning a sin. Specifically, the sin of Vanity.

("That's a sin?", Terrence says bemusedly, IIRC.)

The Catholics got these sins from the Greeks - but sins are popular with fundamentalists as well - even if not supported by the Bible.

jerry_friedman — 05 Jan 2006, 01:30 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

Gerry Quinn wrote:

Gerry Quinn wrote:

[And you don't have to be a Catholic to believe in original sin - one might draw a similar conclusion from the study of Darwin!]

Similar, but not the same. For one thing, in sf, the flaws we inherit from our ape ancestors are conceivably curable.

Not really. Our self-interest and our socialisation will always be at war, so the flaw is inescapable.

Well, that comes from being individual members of a species, not from ape ancestry. And one could still imagine "curing" it, at least by arranging for more of us to be satisfied living alone.

Jerry Friedman

Gerry Quinn — 05 Jan 2006, 12:52 · in reply to jerry_friedman

Gerry Quinn wrote:

Gerry Quinn wrote:

[And you don't have to be a Catholic to believe in original sin - one might draw a similar conclusion from the study of Darwin!]

Similar, but not the same. For one thing, in sf, the flaws we inherit from our ape ancestors are conceivably curable.

Not really. Our self-interest and our socialisation will always be at war, so the flaw is inescapable.

Well, that comes from being individual members of a species, not from ape ancestry.

But our species evolved to be social, with all the tensions that implies.

And one could still imagine "curing" it, at least by arranging for more of us to be satisfied living alone.

A species of hermits happy to live in synthetic cocoons would hardly be Man. Killing the patient doesn't count as a cure.

- Gerry Quinn

Karl M. Syring — 05 Jan 2006, 13:07 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

Gerry Quinn wrote:

A species of hermits happy to live in synthetic cocoons would hardly be Man. Killing the patient doesn't count as a cure.

But social contacts are only required to keep the interleukin-6 level low!

Ups, that was to nerdy

Karl M. Syring