

Humans falling from grace

I was stopped between Andrews Hall and the fountain by a young woman who wanted me to answer some questions for a survey.

Besides my age (30) she asked me how long ago humans and dinosaurs coexisted on this planet.

I said never.

It never happened.

Our species never saw the dinosaurs; humans are pretty new around these parts — compared with mosquitos, for instance.

But the question got me thinking about our history as humans — and our possible futures.

Because even newer than humankind is the picture we, as humans, only now are forming: of ourselves as natural creatures ... like mosquitoes.

Blame it on Darwin if you have to, but he was just tooling around looking at things. Someone else would have come up with the idea sooner or later (and in fact several others did.)

Still, sometime in the last 150 years what we call Western Civilization lost a very old paradigm — one that has yet to be replaced.

What we lost may be hard to define, but we can get a handle on it if we think of it as a sense: of ourselves — that is, human beings — as divine animals.

Call this, then, the second fall from grace.

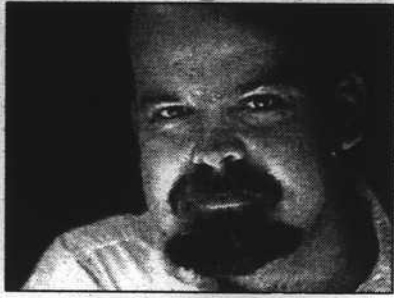
In the original fall, so the story goes, human beings became subject to the pull of the flesh; sex and death and the sweat of the brow. Painful childbirth, lost innocence.

We became, somehow, mortal, and clothed ourselves in animal skins.

But we also retained something of our "true" nature — we remained, however subtly, as we were made: in the image of God. Humans straddled the animal and the divine like acrobats.

If the second fall, the fall from that precarious tightrope, seems terrifying to us, it's only because we are still falling.

And after this fall we will wear, not the skins of animals, but their



Mark Baldrige

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very flesh.

We will become — are becoming — animals. Not in some narrow physiological sense, but in terms of our larger self-image.

We are coming to see ourselves as animals among our fellows: fish, birds, bugs. To interpret the glories of our past — our holy wars, empires and relentless expansion — as products of such mundane forces as population pressure and the intricacies of our own range behavior.

Some people don't like this dawning shift in perspective. Among other things, they feel it undermines our society.

They are quite correct in this. We are talking here about the passing away of a whole world of assumptions and connected ideas. In a way, the end of human history, given our old ideas about what it means to be human.

And no one knows what we are falling toward, where we will land. Having fallen thus far will we finally identify ourselves with mud?

I think so, eventually, with time — give it a thousand years or so.

I suspect that what we learn about the nature of nature — what we learn of biology and physics in the next century — will leave us with a profound sense of the "selflessness" of the world.

I suspect we will come to inhabit a world without a center — to feel at home in a universe which has no use for our convenient models of its essentially unknowable character.

That we will learn to shift perspective as easily as we change clothes — that we will think of the spirit, if we think in those terms at all, as informing all matter and energy, permeating all creation as the very ground of being, and not the sole property of Homo sapiens.

What will the world seem like to those who come after us?

I imagine human beings will come to see the universe as something like a boiling pot, with all the stuff at the bottom constantly recirculating to the top.

If this picture seems nihilistic to us, it's because it is, in a way. It's a concept at war with our concepts. It will end by destroying our world.

But as alien as it seems, it represents a direction we can follow, a linear progression from A to B.

We will get there from here.

In the meantime, nothing will be easy. As one world dies, or slowly turns into another, social upheaval and the deterioration of traditional values are inevitable.

The transformation is already under way and we who live now will suffer through it all our lives; the West will not die easy.

But we may take solace in knowing its death was prophesied long ago.

When humans identify with all things — even the mud of the earth — we will have come full circle from our very beginnings.

As our own myth has it; we sprang from the dirt and we will return to it.

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

Baldrige is a senior English major and the Daily Nebraskan Opinion Page editor.

Too many 'turned off' by TV

To the list of people who should be sacrificed to an active volcano — I propose to add those who think they're too good for television.

There is nothing quite so insufferable as some simpering pseudo sophisticated prurging. "Oh TV, I never watch it. I'm far too busy reading the collected works of Fyodor Dostoyevsky in his native tongue."

Give me a break.

I am not ashamed to say that I really like TV. And I would like to defend the millions like me by dispelling a few TV myths.

Myth No. 1: Everything on TV is crap.

This is absolutely not true. In truth, only most of what's on TV is crap. But that shouldn't be damning.

Most books and even more poetry is crap, but no one wears T-shirts that scream, "Blow up your books!"

On a similar note, I present ...

Myth No. 2: Watching TV is a waste of time. No, no, no. In truth, watching TV is usually a waste of time. Usually.

The beautiful aspect of television is this: If you have cable, you have a choice. Sure, you could (and many do) spend three hours watching back-to-back episodes of "Who's the Boss" (a Danza-extravaganza!) — but you don't have to.

You can always turn the channel and you can always turn it off, which leads me to ...

Myth No. 3: People who watch TV don't do anything but sit on the couch and eat honey-roasted nuts. Nonsense.

People who watch and enjoy television often lead healthy, fruitful lives. TV-watchers enjoy reading, listening to music and a variety of sports.

You might even have a TV-watcher in your home or office. Get to know one. You'll see that they're people just like you.



Rainbow Rowell

"I'm talking about about grabbing bad TV by the lapels and staring into its eyes until you understand its evil ways."

A practiced TV-watcher knows when to say when. Sometimes, there's nothing on or you have more important things to do.

People who say that TV is a waste of time are betraying their own weakness. Just because they can't handle it doesn't mean the rest of us aren't up to the job.

Myth No. 4: There's something wrong with sitting on the couch, eating honey-roasted peanuts.

Frankly, there is little more relaxing than vegging out in front of the television. No, you shouldn't do it all of the time, and no, you shouldn't do it at the expense of other parts of life like sleeping, working or caring for your small children.

But you should do it sometimes. As critics will tell you, when you are watching TV, you're really not thinking. And sometimes, it's darn nice not to have to think — especially when you've been thinking about work, financial aid and the meaning of life all week.

Besides, those honey-roasted peanuts are mighty tasty.

Myth No. 6: It's bad to watch bad TV. Now this is a subtle truth, and might sail over the heads of some TV haters.

I've already said that TV-watchers have the choice to avoid bad TV. But you also have the choice to seek out bad TV.

I don't mean watching it because you're too lazy to turn it off. I mean seeking it out and savoring it's badness. I'm talking about taking big gulps of bad TV, swishing it around your mouth like Listerine, just to appreciate how bad it really is.

I mean setting aside time to watch "Saved by the Bell" and "Welcome Back Kotter" and wincing with horrible joy at every excruciating joke, every eruption of canned laughter.

I'm talking about grabbing bad TV by the lapels and staring into its eyes until you understand its evil ways.

Some aspects of TV's bad reputation are well-deserved. There's way too much sex and violence. TV news is shallow and trite. TV treats women like so many slabs of meat, and children's shows are often 30-minute toy commercials.

All of those are reasons to exercise self control, but not reasons to throw your set out the window or look down your nose at TV-watchers.

I can't make you watch TV. But if you won't, it's your loss. If you have never seen "Sesame Street," "M*A*S*H" or "Mystery Science Theater 3000," never shared your living room with Capt. Picard, Kramer or Scooby, all I can offer you is my pity.

Rowell is a senior news-editorial, advertising and English major and the Daily Nebraskan Managing Editor.

Our special guest

Jeff Randall

More entertainment needed for teens

No matter where you're from, no matter how old you are now, and no matter how imaginative you are, you have a common bond with every former teen-ager.

At one point in your teen-age years, you uttered those timeless words, "There's nothing to do."

Having nothing to do is not a new problem. When kids get too old to sit at home on Saturday night, but not old enough to go bar-hopping, having nothing to do is all too common.

And this situation doesn't affect just the kids, or the parents who have to put up with their complaints of boredom.

When roving bands of teen-agers decide to take out a stop sign with their cars, throw keg parties while their parents are out of town, or harass paying customers at the local mall, it becomes everybody's problem.

If polled, the excuse for behavior displayed by most of these juvenile delinquents would be, simply put, "There's nothing else to do."

I'll admit that I went through a number of mildly destructive phases in high school as a result of sheer boredom. My friends and I were, for the most part, good kids.

But when Friday night rolled around and there weren't any good flicks playing at the \$1 second-run theater, we frequently were known to get desperate for entertainment.

Omaha didn't have enough to offer. And if we had to steal a few highway signs or t.p. a few of our classmates' trees to get that entertainment, tough. That was the price others paid for our boredom.

The thrill of the chase compensated for the lack of more acceptable forms of entertainment.

Not to say that we were within our rights to do such things. God, no. But in the hyperactive mind of a typical 17-year-old, pretty much anything goes.

Ever since I came to Lincoln for collegiate purposes last year, I've been able to get a pretty decent look at what this town has to offer in the way of entertainment. And as an under-21 member of society, I can't say that I have found very much.

When you're without a car and without a fake i.d., there just aren't too many options for entertainment in Lincoln.

It seems like all of the best concerts take place at bars (an ailment that was temporarily relieved by the now defunct rock shows at Le Cafe Shakes).

Sure, if I had some wheels, I could blast out to Shakers, that

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hot new juice bar in Waverly. But, for some reason, going to an 18-and-over strip club packed with lonely guys doesn't sound all that appealing.

I could go to the movies, but high-quality isn't necessarily a popular word in Hollywood these days, and for \$5 or more a ticket, I'd have a hard time justifying such an expenditure.

OK, so maybe I'm just being too picky. But the fact is that most kids my age agree.

The high attendance figures at any number of parties around campus can attest to that. Nearly every one of these events is full of kids who are having more fun than their parents or local authorities would approve of.

Alcohol has become the common diversion for most high school and college students.

And if it isn't alcohol, it's something equally likely to result in a criminal record. I'm pretty sure that this past weekend, there were a whole bunch of high school kids out in the streets of Lincoln doing the same things my friends and I did when we were their ages.

If the older generation in this city wants to solve the problems of underage drinking, vandalism and other juvenile ills, they are going to have to do more than offer up the occasional block party.

Sure, no amount of city-sponsored entertainment is going to put an absolute stop to these illicit activities. But the majority of kids don't want to break laws, they just want to have fun (forgive the inadvertent Cyndi Lauper reference).

Opening a dance club and providing local bands with easier access to all-ages venues would be a step in the right direction.

Just remember, kids are generally pretty resourceful. And they aren't really saying, "There's nothing to do," they are saying, "There's nothing legal to do."

Randall is a sophomore news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan senior arts and entertainment reporter.

BE OUR GUEST

The Daily Nebraskan will present a guest columnist each Monday. Writers from the university and community are welcome.

Must have strong writing skills and something to say.

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