

Daily Nebraskan

Since 1901

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Pot and kettle

NU uses loophole to get out of offering benefits

Another benefit to UNL professors. Another benefit gay partners can't get their hands on.

When NU President L. Dennis Smith proposed to extend tuition benefits to spouses and dependent children of professors, those who have domestic partners—some of whom are gays disallowed from legally marrying in the United States—weren't included in that package; that is, unless they had dependent children.

Considering the past behavior of the university, it doesn't surprise us that such a policy would have excluded domestic partners.

It doesn't matter that this university needs all the good faculty it can get, and that it may be losing some by implementing a policy like this. It doesn't matter that when prospective professors look into a university, they ask about benefits, as they can be just as valuable as the pay itself. It doesn't matter that if these inquiring minds happen to be professors who want domestic partner benefits, they aren't likely to come here. UNL wants what it wants.

As if that weren't distressing enough, a statement from NU spokesman for Smith, Joe Rowson, seemed to indicate that UNL would kowtow to the interests of the state of Nebraska because its voters passed Initiative 416.

"In Nebraska, the prevailing policy is that benefits are not provided for same-sex couples," Rowson said in a Daily Nebraskan story on Friday.

While such a statement gets Rowson in no technical hot water, it does make one wonder about other academic endeavors in which UNL might partake, and how afraid the establishment might be to counter a conservative, Christian voting base. While policy is not opinion, opinion through voting makes policy, and if UNL toes the line and doesn't budge, well, this university won't grow as it says it wants to.

What about, for example, fetal tissue research? We hear the cries of "academic freedom" every time the possibility of stripping it is brought up, and yet, if Rowson's statement is carried out to its logical conclusion, the University of Nebraska shouldn't be conducting research of this type, as it goes against the prevailing will of the state.

For that matter, why even teach any subject matter that might be offensive to the will of the state?

One must wonder: Do UNL officials actually believe that offering domestic partner benefits would bring on a lawsuit from the state? What else could be the difference between policy and opinion in this case?

Even without 416, UNL faces the possibility of losing funding over a domestic partner plan (not that it should, but it could). Additionally, long-time supporters and alumni could raise ire. So what other consequence would UNL face? What is this onus of "prevailing public policy?"

As this state is pro-death penalty, should UNL not teach the ills of the death penalty or hire professors who may be anti-death penalty? This type of list can go on.

It seems UNL would like to use 416 as a crutch in this latest matter, when it is, in fact, business as usual. Nothing has changed except one excuse has been added to the list.

As UNL English professor George Wolf said in Friday's story, this may be the last straw. It may hurt recruitment of minorities overall. It may hurt UNL's funding. Soon, the tides may have to change in regards to domestic partner benefits. How many more professors must we possibly miss out on?

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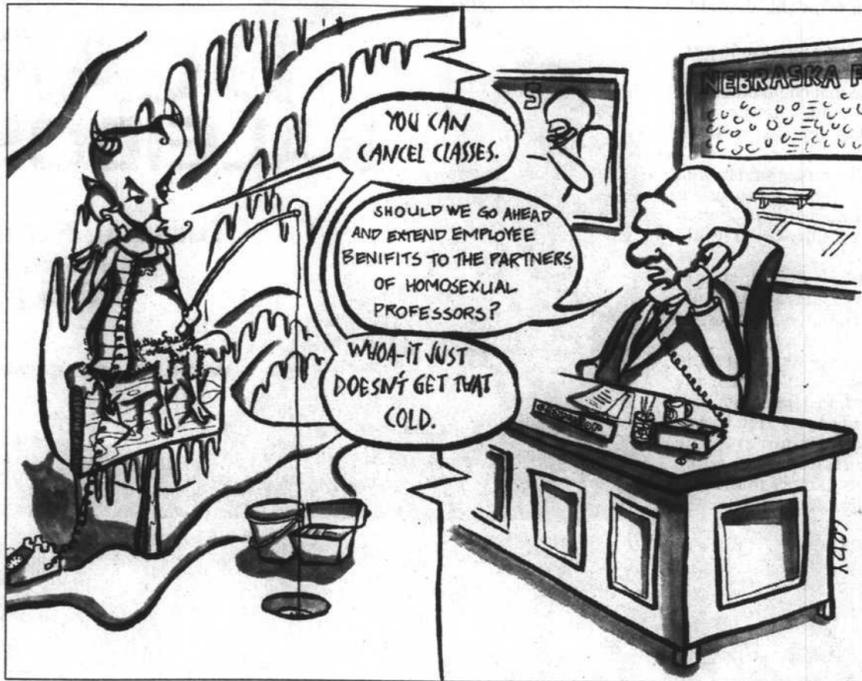
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Megan Cody/DN

Paradox of (un)intelligent design

"A habit of basing convictions upon evidence, and of giving to them only that degree of certainty which the evidence warrants, would, if it became general, cure most of the ills from which the world is suffering."

— Bertrand Russell, from "Why I am not a Christian"



Jeremy Patrick

Like zombies in a horror movie, some ideas are slain repeatedly only to rise from the grave for yet another try at success.

Creationism, the idea that the earth and every living thing on it was created instantaneously by God, is one such idea. Although the Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutional to teach Creationism almost two decades ago, supporters of the idea have not given up.

Kansas' removal of all mention of evolution from educational guidelines (though reversed in a recent election) is one example of their continuing power. A new movement is on the horizon, however, that promises to reinvigorate the controversy over science, religion and their respective places in our educational system.

The "intelligent design" theory holds that everything in the universe was designed by an intelligent being, not the result of natural processes. Like Creationism, intelligent design theory is embraced by only a tiny handful of scientists.

But unlike Creationism, the proponents of intelligent design avoid base appeals to religious fervor or references to the Bible. Instead, their position is argued on certain scientific critiques of evolution and other evidence they believe proves that our universe could not be the result of chance.

It's still too soon to decide the merits of this theory. Books like Phillip E. Johnson's "Darwin On Trial" argue that the fossil record fails to support evolution, and Michael Behe's "Darwin's Black Box" argue that the biochemical and genetic make-up of life is too complex to be the result of natural processes.

Both are fascinating reads and deserve consideration by evolutionists. On the other hand, the intelligent design movement has gained few followers in the scientific community and rarely succeeds in getting its ideas published in peer-reviewed journals.

Whether this reflects the scientific community's obstinacy to new ideas or simply its rational assessment of the merits of intelligent design theory only time will tell.

The most interesting thing about the movement, however, is the difference between its stated goals and its real motivations.

On its face, the intelligent design movement simply pursues scientific truth through the best evidence available. In reality, however, most proponents of intelligent design theory believe it is a way to cure the primary ill they associate with belief in evolution: loss of faith in God.

Design theorists are "overwhelmingly Christian." The 10-year-old Discovery Institute and its offshoot, the Center for Renewal of Science and Culture, "are at the center of the intelligent-design movement." (OWH, 1/22/01)

The Institute sponsors intelligent design conferences and its scholars write articles, which they publish in special intelligent design journals. According to its mission statement (entitled "The Wedge Strategy") the goal of the Institute is not the pursuit of scientific truth, but "to replace materialistic explanations with the theistic understanding that nature and human beings are created by God."

T.H. Huxley said, "Logical consequences are the scarecrows of fools and the beacons of wise men." Let us, just for a moment, assume that intelligent design theory is 100 percent correct and that the universe and everything in it was created by an intelligent being. What follows logically from this?

Will the Discovery Institute succeed in convincing rational people that God exists and, in turn, change their behavior? In a word, no. The Institute has placed its urge to proselytize over an objective scientific search for truth.

Even if we knew that there was a designer, we would have absolutely no information about this designer. We wouldn't know if the designer was a race of advanced extraterrestrials (which some intelligent design theorists believe), a sentient computer, a collection of gods, one god, a beneficent god or a malevolent deity.

David Hume, speaking through the voice of Demea in his "Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion," said, "While we are uncertain whether there is one deity or many; whether the deity or deities, to whom we owe our existence, be perfect or imperfect, subordinate or supreme, dead or alive; what trust or confidence can we repose in them? What veneration or obedience pay them? To all the purposes of life, the theory of religion becomes altogether useless."

Supporters of the intelligent design movement who simultaneously believe in the classic omnipotent yet beneficent God logically commit themselves to believing, like Voltaire's "Candide," that this is the best of all possible worlds.

In a world where millions of infants starve to death, a third of the world is engaged in war and natural disasters (like the recent earthquake in India) kill thousands of innocents everyday, this idea is laughable. Ironically, if the earth is the result of design, the designer appears either unintelligent or purposefully malevolent.

Bertrand Russell said it best: "Apart from logical cogency, there is to me something a little odd about the ethical valuations of those who think that an omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent Deity, after preparing the ground by many millions of years of lifeless nebulae, would consider Himself adequately rewarded by the final emergence of Hitler and the H-bomb."

The debate over evolution and intelligent design is important and deserves to continue. At the very least, it forces evolutionists to defend their belief with evidence instead of authority, and it may even lead to new understandings of our universe.

For now, however, I tend to agree with Russell: "The world in which we live can be understood as a result of muddle and accident; but if it is the outcome of deliberate purpose, the purpose must have been that of a fiend. For my part, I find accident a less painful and more plausible hypothesis."

Overpowering the navy blue ghost's past

There are ghosts stalking me in the shades of night, tracing my movements through the walls of the forest trees.



Dan Leamen

I am on the canvas. I feel it pressed against the side of my face, like the cold steel of the world if it were the barrel of a gun.

I feel as if I keep pulling myself up. I let the pain thump through me, inject itself inside of me. Self-sacrifice, love, heart, courage.

I am on my feet and circling through the ring again. My flesh toned in slow motion. The noise is a static fuzz and then it zips together as the world drops acid, and my senses are geared like a predator stalking its prey. I become my own fist clenched in the hue of the sapphire sky.

I want to break the arm of every man or woman that hits a child in public or hits a child at all. I want to get in the face of every Catholic that has ever told a Buddhist he or she was going to hell. I want to sink the teeth of my fist into the jaw of any man who beats his wife.

I want to wrap the cold, raw world around the neck of any corporate executive with more money than they could ever need and strangle them. I want to open the flood gates on the village people of the fertile plains below. I want to snap the limbs of the world's self-indulgent, self-induced orgasm. I am the intolerance of your intolerance.

These are the violent words that feel like hot steel in your side. These are the violent words that anger you. The same ones that make you feel better about yourself.

They are the mirror you look into each morning to feel good. The mirror that you have only because you are afraid to look into it.

This is what it is to be in the ring. I am the blinded rage of the ghosts. Deep in the recesses of me, I am incomplete. In the background of the grunting crowd that encircles the fight, a phone rings off the hook until it is answered and sat down. There will be a click on the other end, and then a woman's automated rant.

I cannot hang up on the ghosts of the past. I cannot, so I leave the phone off the hook and pull myself from the dirt of the canvas floor. I will lift my limp body and I will walk. Something pounds in me, telling me that it all will be worth something when the final bell is rung. Round two. Round three. Four ... six ... nine ... 15 ...

I twist in the air. Sweat on my brow. Blood on my knuckles. Well-oiled. Fine-tuned. I am a machine until I let the world roll back and around me. I am being stalked. I am weighted down by them.

As I dance side to side, there comes a point, a point at which I stay down on the rough canvas and walk away from myself. I walk away from all that I am fighting, and I find the place in this world where I am the happiest, where I feel the most content and comfortable. Smile more.

I find all the silent moments that don't feel silent. Like sunrises. Like the moments just before you kiss, when you hug, as your fingers are feeling their way into one another's.

I find all these things and go to them. I have to be with them because when it comes down to it, these are all that I have.

These are all that will lie with me. This person is the one that fills the silent moments with "us," not "you and I" but "us." The sunrise no longer just tips the scales of night and day, it feels its way across the world, drawing brushstrokes.

Purple, orange, red, pink—unfolding pedals of the flowering sky—Monet's pastels. Holding hands becomes the most poetic moment of your day. The single moment before we kiss echoes through my world like a finger rippling the waters of a still pond.

And when I hug you, it is as if I can't quite hold on tight enough, but I try because I wonder what would be if I ever let go of you.

This is love. Finding among the storm of the canvas the brushstrokes that seem to just let the rest of everything blur, bleed and run off down the drainpipes of the sky. The strokes that leave you floating in the great expanse of an ocean. Then I realize I am crying, tears bringing to life the still blood of the artist.

I run my hands softly along the sides of your cheeks and through your hair. Up the back of your neck. I am flooded as the moment seems to pick up speed. I close my eyes, begin to feel my way through the world that no longer is there and then I, us, you, we, kiss. Out in the dark, navy night.

And all my fears, all my regrets, the ghosts that haunt me, disappear in the deep blue night.

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