
Youth Truth



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Foregone Conclusions

Jeremy Hollings

On the new Comedy Central show *The Colbert Report*, host Stephen Colbert sometimes performs a segment in which he debates an issue with the most “formidable opponent” he knows—himself. The outcome is predetermined; one of the two Colberts (the one taking the “liberal” position) is an ineffectual debater, and is invariably persuaded by the other Colbert. The routine is a satire of the “debates” we often see in American media today.

In contrast, the *Saudi Gazette* reported in September¹ on the controversy being discussed by some scholars and public officials over whether children should be allowed to witness the public execution of Shariah penalties, such as “beheading, stoning to death, amputation or lashing.” A professor at King Saud University feared that “the experience could deeply affect children, and plague them all their lives.” A council member disagreed; viewing the public punishments, he said, would “curb the violent tendencies in many students who attack their teachers and smash their cars,” going on to say, “Such deeds were not there in the past.”

Now *there’s* a debate. Who knew Saudi Arabia had Democrats and Republicans? Putting aside whatever one may think of Shariah penalties themselves, something is still missing from this report—facts.

The scholar wants to protect children from “negative effects ... in the same way as some countries that prevent children

from watching films with horrifying scenes.” Well, the supposed evidence of harm to kids from computer-generated, special-effect gore in movies or video games—while widely embraced by every U.S. psychologist, politician, and reporter who doesn’t want to be out of work—is hardly definitive, as a few brave souls have pointed out. But this is not fantasy violence; this is a real potential consequence of being found guilty of a crime in the society where these children live. Isn’t it important for them to know what these penalties are, and understand that they are actually imposed on people? Leaving them ignorant could be riskier than exposing them to potential trauma.

Further, even if fantasy violence *were* proven to affect children (or perhaps people of any age) in a certain way, can we assume that seeing a real execution would affect them the same way? There are indeed studies of children who have witnessed domestic violence, but that is different. Here we have a punishment imposed, after due process, by a governing body on a convicted criminal. That context might cause the event to have a very different impact on witnesses than a lawless attack by one person on another.

On the other side, concerned mainly with stopping crime, other facts are lacking. Have students really become more violent? At what point in “the past” did this change take place, and can it be connected with a change in the practice of

children viewing Shariah punishments? Did any other societal changes occur that might be responsible instead?

What’s good about this report, meager as it is, is that the debate is presented as having two sides, both of which are worthy of a hearing, worthy of respect. As the debate goes on, more facts may emerge to support one side or the other.

In reporting on children and youth, that kind of even-handedness rarely appears in *this* country. Our news sources all too often present only one side, ignoring or ridiculing any arguments on the other side. And when only one side of an argument is accepted as valid, no facts are needed to support it.

One recent example: on December 12, an organization called The Century Council issued a press release² with the results of a survey they conducted on attitudes and awareness of mothers about their daughters’ drinking habits. The press release said, in every age group, fewer mothers thought their daughters drank than the percentage that actually *did* drink, and that a substantial minority of mothers felt that underage drinking of alcohol was okay in certain circumstances.

Articles reporting this story appeared all over the country, including nothing more than was contained in the press release.

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Redirect

Columnist Evelyn Pringle takes issue with “Danger Signs,” a December 4 *New York Times* article on early mental health intervention for youth, for repeating the CDC’s unbelievable claim that 8% of high school students attempted suicide in the past year. Such outrageously false statistics, she maintains, are being used to justify the treatment of more and more young people with the drugs that companies want to sell ... and which, ironically, can also *increase* suicidal tendencies in their users. The article is at <http://www.opednews.com/articles/opedne_evelyn_p_051217_teenscreen___new_yor.htm> (that’s *three* underlines after “teenscreen”).

Columnist Michelle Chen interviewed some new survivors of gulag schools who were willing to describe their experiences at Montana’s Mission Mountain School and other facilities; their horrifying stories, and news of recent efforts to stop the abuse, appear at <<http://www.alternet.org/story/28832/>>.

“Helicopter parents,” who try to run their kids’ lives even after they’ve moved out or gone to college, may be a problem for some kids, but kids in foster care, once they turn 18, are often entirely on their own—and many are quite unprepared for independence. Efforts to provide more ongoing assistance to former wards of the state are described at <http://pittsburghlive.com/x/tribune-review/trib/tribeast/s_398585.html>.

After twenty years of guilt and shame, Kyle Zirpolo, a former student at the McMartin Preschool, has come forward to tell how he was induced to lie about sexual abuse by the school’s staff, which, as far as he knows, never happened. He knew all along that he was lying, but no one—not even his mother who promised to believe whatever he told her—believed him when he told the truth. His story is at <<http://www.latimes.com/travel/destinations/pacific/la-tm-mcmartin44oct30,0,285518.story?coll=la-home-magazine>>.

Should teacher training programs be allowed to require their students to espouse politically-correct attitudes? The schools say all teachers should have a “professional disposition” and a dedication to “social justice,” but students are increasingly coming forward to complain that teachers in their education departments encourage them to discuss their political beliefs, only to discriminate against them because of it. Some of their cases are ending up in court. Read their stories at <<http://www.thefire.org/index.php/article/6578.html>>.

On August 29, New York became the sixth state to pass some kind of ban on thimerosal, the mercury-based preservative in vaccines which many parents believe causes autism. The bans were all opposed by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and other medical associations, although the parents’ groups point out that, in the 1990s, the AAP held the *opposite* position on the additive. Is the medical profession losing its position of authority? That question is discussed at <http://www.sciencedaily.com/upi/index.php?feed=Science&article=UPI-12_0050831-17480200-bc-ageofautism.xml>.

An article on how humans develop and internalize concepts of morality—“universal” moral concepts as well as culturally-specific ones—presents evidence that even infants, not yet able to speak, can distinguish between “nice” and “mean” (or “right” and “wrong”) actions by certain cartoon characters toward others. And when presented with moral dilemmas, young children generally give the same answers as adults do. Maybe “teaching” morality to children is not as necessary as we think. This long and interesting discussion appears at <<http://bostonreview.net/BR30.5/saxe.html>>.

An alumnus of the class of 1966 of a Long Island high school heard that there would be no prom next year at his old school (due to the belief that proms had become “orgies of excess”), and responded with memories of his own senior prom, nearly forty years ago, which wasn’t so innocent either, at <<http://www.newsday.com/news/opinion/ny-opcla184556878dec18,0,5822282.story?coll=ny-viewpoints-headlines>>.

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News Links

High Court Urged to Hear *Hosty*

A June 20 decision in *Hosty v. Carter* has the potential to subject college student newspapers to the same restrictions that can be imposed on high school papers. In October, over 30 groups submitted three separate briefs urging the Supreme Court to hear their appeal, according to <http://www.splc.org/newsflash_archives.asp?id=1105&year=2005>.

Too Much “Protection”

It’s no news to us, but now a university library director has presented a paper on all the perfectly legitimate web sites—like the Motion Picture Association of America, the National Collegiate Athletic Association, and the American Medical Association—that you *can’t* view on a filtered computer. An article appears at <http://www.splc.org/newsflash_archives.asp?id=1102&year=2005>.

Censorship Abounds

The Student Press Law Center has added many items to its news site in the past few months. The *Kodak*, a high school paper in Washington state, is under fire for criticizing the hiring procedure of the school’s new principal. The *Oak Leaf* of Tennessee had articles on birth control and tattoos censored. The *Dialogue* of California is in trouble over sexy photos. A North Carolina school paper, the *Nighthawk*, may not use any photos of students in attire not conforming with the school’s dress code. And an Ohio student is prohibited from distributing his independent paper, the *Blowhard*, apparently ‘cause it’s just too outspoken.

Two other items of interest *don’t* involve school papers: students at Virginia’s Hampton College have been forbidden from distributing flyers on campus, and a private high school in New Jersey has prohibited its students from blogging or posting personal profiles on web sites. Reports on these and other stories are at <http://www.splc.org/newsflash_archives.asp?year=2005>.

What’s Good About Alito

Bush’s nominee for the Supreme Court, Judge Joseph Alito, may or may not be your cup of tea, but he seems to be an across-the-board free speech supporter. In July 2004, a three-judge panel struck down a state law banning college papers from accepting advertising from alcohol purveyors; Judge Alito wrote the panel’s opinion. This and a few of Alito’s other free speech decisions are described at <http://www.splc.org/newsflash_archives.asp?id=1113&year=2005>. Alito is almost certain to be confirmed. If he continues to rule as he has in the past, the future looks brighter for appeals against “harmful to minors” laws against advertisers and web sites, if nothing else.

Policy Mutes Students

“Bring ‘em on,” said a school board member in Central Columbia, Pennsylvania, referring to lawsuits against the district’s new policy of restricting students’ off-campus speech. The policy, approved August 17, lets its schools punish kids for “disruptive” speech *outside* school, even including “profanity in any form.” See <http://www.splc.org/newsflash_archives.asp?id=1093&year=2005>.

Suspension Pays Off

Watch out, Central Columbia censors! A policy like yours just cost a New Jersey school \$117,500, after Ryan Dwyer, suspended in 2003 for creating a web site criticizing his school, won his lawsuit. See <http://www.splc.org/newsflash_archives.asp?id=1093&year=2005>.

France for the French

French underground rappers got more airplay as a result of rules limiting the playing of big name U.S. or U.K. music. Now the French government is accusing the rappers they helped to promote of stirring up anger and inciting youth to riot. The story appears at <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/arts/main.jhtml?xml=/arts/2005/12/08/bmfrance08.xml&Sheet=/arts/2005/12/08/ixartleft.html>>.

Suspension for Murder Fantasy

According to two California high school students, their teacher swore that no one would ever read their private journals, so they tried to outdo one another, writing the most bizarre and gruesome murder fantasies they could. Suspended on October 20, they’re now in court, says <<http://www.msnbc.com/id/10294412>>.

Same Old Story

Rachel Boim of Georgia wrote a story in a private journal a couple years ago about killing someone in a *dream*. In October she finally filed suit against the school, to wipe that suspension off her record before she starts applying to colleges. See <http://www.splc.org/newsflash_archives.asp?id=1097&year=2005>.

Swearing Fine

The penalty for swearing in two high schools in Connecticut is a \$103 fine, says <<http://www.abcnnews.go.com/US/wirestory?id=1361742>>.

Surprise, Surprise

Why would schools make a big deal out of swearing? Maybe because there isn’t enough *other* bad behavior in schools to punish. School crime rates, steadily declining for the past decade, now stand at about *half* of what they were ten years ago, says an article at <<http://www.cnn.com/2005/EDUCATION/11/21/schools.crime.ap/index.html>>.

Paddles Put Away

As of December 3, corporal punishment is illegal in Pennsylvania public schools, says <<http://www.abclocal.go.com/wpvi/story?section=local&id=3694333>>.

Testing Goes to College

A federal panel on higher education likes standardized testing so much, they want to impose it on college students, too, according to <<http://ethics.tamucc.edu/article.pl?sid=05/12/09/164202>>.

News Links

Homeschoolers Can Join In

In November Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell signed a bill giving the state's home-schooled students equal access to public school extracurricular activities, such as sports, clubs, bands and theater. Pennsylvania homeschoolers number approximately 25,000, says <<http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/05315/604686.stm>>.

Reading Roughly Even

The 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy found that Americans can read about as well as they did in 2002; see <<http://www.iht.com/articles/2005/12/15/news/reading.php>>. Among college graduates, the percentage of "proficient" readers fell from 40% to 31%, reports <<http://www.wtopnews.com/index.php?nid=114&sid=650862>>. (That's probably because more of us are going to college.) Strangely, this study of "adult" literacy included 16- and 17-year-olds too, according to <<http://nces.ed.gov/naal/>>.

Keeping Up With the Times

Texas high schools must soon include "personal finance" in their curricula, we learn at <<http://www.chron.com/cs/CDA/ssistory.mpl/metropolitan/3461368>>. And in Michigan, high school graduation requirements will soon include one *online* course, reports <<http://chronicle.com/free/2005/12/2005/121301t.htm>>.

SAT An Ordeal?

The College Board is considering complaints that the new SAT is just too long, says <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/12/18/AR2005121800897.html>>.

School Lawbreaking Exposed

It's seldom enforced, but Title IX (passed in 1972) requires gym to be co-ed (with some exceptions, like wrestling). Some schools defying the law are described at <<http://www.fortwayne.com/mlld/fortwayne/news/local/13435962.htm>>.

Monkey Business

November 8 was a day to remember in the history of evolution, as the Kansas Board of Education approved science standards that include the teaching of "intelligent design" alongside evolution in science classes; a report appears at <<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/11/08/tech/main1026220.shtml>>. On the same day, Dover, Pennsylvania voters unseated all eight "intelligent design" supporters from its 9-member school board, according to <http://www.mcall.com/news/nationworld/state/all-a4_dovernov09,0,4865048.story>. The new board didn't immediately overturn the controversial curriculum decision—they waited for a judge to do it. On December 20, federal district judge John E. Jones III declared "intelligent design" a "repackaging" of creationism and an unconstitutional endorsement of religion by public schools; read the judge's opinion at <http://www.pamd.uscourts.gov/kitzmilller/kitzmilller_342.pdf> or an article at <<http://chronicle.com/free/2005/12/2005122001n.htm>>.

On December 15, the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals heard arguments on another "Bible vs. Darwin" case. Last January, a federal judge ordered schools in one Georgia county to remove "disclaimer" stickers they'd put on science textbooks warning students that evolution is "a theory, not a fact." Will the school's case be affected by the Dover decision? See <<http://msnbc.msn.com/id/10466990>> for history and discussion of this case.

Coach Sues to Pray

New Jersey high school football coach Marcus Borden quit his job when he was told to stop praying with his team, but asked for the job back once he realized that resigning would leave him without "standing" to sue the school district. He got his job back, and says he'll abide by the school rules while preparing his case. See <http://ebs.gmnews.com/news/2005/1201/Front_Page/007.html>.

"No Child" Law Fights Challenges

On November 23, Chief U.S. District Judge Bernard A. Friedman threw out a lawsuit by the National Education Association (and school districts in three states) against the No Child Left Behind act, ruling that the federal government *can* require states to meet its standards in exchange for "significant" federal funding. The NEA will appeal, says <<http://www.cnn.com/2005/EDUCATION/11/23/education.lawsuit.ap/>>. On December 2, the U.S. Department of Education filed a motion to dismiss the *other* lawsuit against the No Child Left Behind act—the one by the state of Connecticut—for reasons similar those given by Judge Friedman. See <<http://www.courant.com/news/education/hc-nochild1204.artdec04,0,6123796.story?coll=hc-headlines-education>>.

Spellings Bends Again

If No Child Left Behind is *not* overturned, may it simply be whittled away? This summer, U.S. Education Secretary Margaret Spellings said "failing" school districts could waive the requirement to hire outside tutors for students (reported in our last issue). Now on December 14, she announced that learning disabled students can be given *modified* versions of required tests. An article appears at <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/12/14/AR2005121402336.html>>.

Florida School Deletes Days Off

Forced to choose between designating *all* religious holidays as school vacation days or *none* of them, a Florida school board chose *none*, and eliminated Good Friday and Yom Kippur as official days off. Since the change was prompted by a Muslim group's request, the board's decision is viewed by many as an anti-Muslim move, although kids will still be excused on their own religious holidays. A rather one-sided article appears at <http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=47063>.

News Links

A Tale of Two Governors

In November, the governors of Illinois and South Carolina took major—and very different—steps to provide health coverage for all the kids in their states. Their different approaches are covered at <http://www.latimes.com/news/politics/la-na-outlook21nov21,1,1634012.column?coll=la-utilities-politics>.

Ah, Blagojevich

That crazy Illinois governor. One minute he's trying to make sure kids can go to the doctor; next minute he's banning video games and yo-yo balls. This fall Gov. Rod *vetoed* the bill lowering the "tattoo age" from 21 to 18, but the state legislature (yay!) *overrode* his veto, says http://www.herald-review.com/articles/2005/11/28/news/local_news/1011532.txt. Now he's backing a new definition of "junk food" in which baked Cheetos are fine for schoolkids, but whole milk is a no-no, explains <http://www.nbc5.com/news/5504438/detail.html>.

Live Free Before You Die

New Hampshire State Rep. Jim Splaine introduced a bill to lower the drinking age for military personnel to 18—'tho he'd really like to include all young people, says <http://www.bgnews.com/vnews/display.v/ART/2005/12/06/4396ea99edf84>. Arguments on both sides are outlined at <http://www.seacoastonline.com/news/12052005/news/76450.htm>.

Prosecutor Harsh on Gay Sex

In 2000, 18-year-old Matthew Limon of Kansas got a 17-year prison sentence for consensual sex with a 14-year-old fellow resident of a Kansas group home for developmentally disabled youth; if his partner had been female, the maximum sentence would have been 15 months. Ordered released on November 3, Limon has been charged again; the prosecutor now wants him placed under supervision of the Department of Corrections. The story is at <http://www.kansas.com/mld/kansas/news/state/13205323.htm>.

High Court Hears Abortion Case

Arguments to the Supreme Court began in late November on New Hampshire's parental notification law, which forces doctors to give written notice to parents 48 hours before performing an abortion on a minor. Some of the questions and answers are quoted at <http://www.cnn.com/2005/US/11/30/abortion.cases>.

Teenage Husband a "Victim"?

In Georgia, a minor can marry without parental consent if the bride-to-be is pregnant. That was true of 37-year-old Lisa Clark and her 15-year-old groom, but now the new bride is charged with molesting her young husband. Clark says she's always preferred older men, but her new husband won her over by claiming to be 17 and being "so nice and sweet." See <http://www.nbc10.com/news/5523398/detail.htm>.

A Few of the Real Victims

An 8-year old Texas girl beaten for bad grades, homework errors, failing to obey quickly; see <http://www.borderlandnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20051216/NEWS/512160351/1001>. Twelve kids in Michigan, deprived of food, whipped, and sexually abused by siblings; see <http://www.mlive.com/news/grpress/index.ssf?/base/news-26/1133458835211550.xml&coll=6>.

Mayor Wants Cruel Punishments

In a televised November 2 panel discussion, Las Vegas Mayor Oscar Goodman supported sentencing minors to be whipped (and amputation of thumbs for graffiti artists), according to <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/9927522/>.

Suspected Suicide Over Son's Death

Nearly six years after her 12-year old son Michael was crushed by a 300-pound employee of a camp for "troubled boys," Linda Ibarra and her 7-year-old son were found dead in the garage of their Florida home, reports <http://www.wesh.com/news/archive/5433173/detail.html>.

Norway Affirms Spanking Ban

In November, Norway's Supreme Court upheld the law against spanking by *anyone*, says <http://www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article1168291.ece>.

Reporter Remembers

After nearly a yearlong investigation, it seems that no one will be criminally charged in the death of Roberto Reyes, who died at Thayer Learning Center, a Missouri facility for "troubled teens." *Kansas City Star* reporter Steve Rock followed up on October 2 and wrote a long new article with the latest details on the cause of Reyes' death and many new allegations of abuse. Please read it, at <http://www.nospank.net/n-p18r.htm>.

Teen "Treater" Responds

Ken Kay, president of the World Wide Association of Specialty Programs and Schools (WWASPS), said people who want to regulate "teen treatment" centers are "wackos" and "out of control," says a *Salt Lake Tribune* article posted at <http://www.nospank.net/n-p22r.htm>.

Some Justice Long Delayed

For over 70 years, about 80,000 native Canadian children were taken from their families and sent to residential boarding schools (for their own good, of course). On October 21, the government and the United Church of Canada were found liable for the brutal abuse some of these children suffered in the Alberni Indian Residential School from 1948 to 1968. See <http://www.indiancountry.com/content.cfm?id=1096412049>.

A Sad Short Life

"Mikie" Garcia of Texas died at age 12, suffocated at Star Ranch, a residential treatment facility, by a staffer trying to keep him from injuring himself, says http://www.mysanantonio.com/news/metro/stories/MYSA120805.01B.kerr_death.17c14ef5.html.

Sue's Review

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"Children haven't a care in the world," we are told by a recent commercial for some insurance company. From reading books about battles over school—Jonathan Zimmerman's 2002 *Whose America?* (reviewed in Youth Truth, volume 5, no. 2), and now *The Fourth R*—you could certainly believe that's true. The thoughts and feelings of kids about the practices and teachings in their schools go almost entirely unmentioned. It is as if the children are not the ones affected at all.

Maybe exposure to religion in school really doesn't matter to kids as much as it does to parents. But one brief story at the beginning of *The Fourth R* mentions one child's view: at a fiftieth elementary school class reunion, the controversy over school prayer came up. Amid general agreement that their prayers had never caused *them* any problems, one alumnus vehemently disagreed. To everyone's surprise, he said that, to *him*, the prayers and bible readings felt like a daily accusation and condemnation. But he'd kept silent for fifty years.

And that kid was from a Catholic family. His objection was to "the exclusive use of Protestant prayers, hymns, and bible-readings." Imagine how marginalized kids feel when their beliefs don't even have the support of their parents. I wonder if there is any book that collects reminiscences of kids like that, fearful of causing trouble for their families, of being ridiculed or punished, of being labeled deviant. Wondering if any other kids are pretending and going along, or if they really are all alone. Of course, a book like that could include kids' beliefs on topics other than religion, too—like youth rights.

Adults, too, tend to keep quiet about their beliefs when they know they belong to a tiny minority, but as their numbers grow they begin to form groups and assert themselves. And that is the continuing story of school prayer in America.

It's a long, repetitious, and frustrating story, and author Joan DelFattore tells it in all its agonizing detail. The coverage is comprehensive, except that it only includes a "sampling" of the numerous court cases at the state level. The focus is on prayer, but related topics (religious dress, holiday songs and displays, religious student clubs, etc.) are discussed along the way. The subject of evolution is omitted entirely (probably to keep the book from getting too long); "evolution," "creationism" and "intelligent design" don't even appear in the index.

DelFattore, Joan. *The fourth R : conflicts over religion in America's public schools*. New Haven : Yale University Press, 2004.

I learned why the use of the King James Bible and "Protestant prayers" were so offensive to Catholics. I learned that riots and other violence had occurred over school prayer, causing twelve deaths in Philadelphia in 1844. I read about many court cases, including an early one in which prayer in public schools was banned by the Supreme Court of Ohio in 1872. (No cases reached the U.S. Supreme court until the 1960s.)

And it gives a good picture of the arguments and strategies used by both sides. The concept of "court-stripping," and its justification in Article III of the constitution is explained:

The only way to give the states total control over school prayer would be to move all such cases into the state courts and prevent the Supreme Court from deciding them on appeal. Advocates of court-stripping claim that it would indeed be possible to do this because Article III's statement that the Supreme Court has the authority to hear appeals "with such exceptions, and under such regulations as the Congress shall make" means that Congress could tell the Court not to review any decisions involving a particular topic, such as school prayer (p. 147).

Sometimes school officials used students to deliver prayers:

For as long as anyone could remember, high school graduations and football games in Santa Fe had included student-led Protestant prayers. At first there were no formal guidelines, but when the Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit upheld the Clear Creek policy in *Jones*, the Santa Fe school board adopted graduation prayer rules based on that model. Shortly afterward, two families ... challenged not only the graduation-prayer policy but the prayers at football games, which were usually delivered by an elected student called the "student council chaplain" (p. 269).

The writing is mostly clear and simple, but it's tiring to read about a fight that goes on and on with no rest or resolution. The author may have realized this, and tried to compensate with cutesy subheadings such as "Ring in the New" (for the *Ring v. Board of Education* case) and "The Suit Hits the Fan." It doesn't help. If anything, the subtitles are a distraction.

The very tiresomeness of the book helps one to realize just how difficult and troublesome this issue really is for schools and courts. In the end, the author suggests that it will never be resolved. She compares it to a lawn that needs mowing again and again; one never gets it to stay mowed "once-and-for-all." Probably so. I think now that this would be true even if school attendance were no longer compulsory—although it'd help!

Sue's Review

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Greenawalt, Kent. *Does God belong in public schools?* Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 2005.

As a law professor and former Deputy Solicitor General of the United States, author Kent Greenawalt is entitled to express his thoughts and opinions, and that's pretty much what he does in this book. *Does God Belong in Public Schools?* is a book of philosophy, more than anything else.

As background, the author does provide a "brief history" covering the entire period of *The Fourth R* in one chapter—and one of its chapters in a single *paragraph*. It does a pretty good job, for such an abridged version of history, although without the excruciating details and all the repetition, one doesn't really get a sense of the persistence of the issue.

In the philosophical discussion that follows, Greenawalt raises an interesting, seldom-raised point, which shows me just how far my views really are from the "mainstream":

If schools should not teach aspects of morality except those concerning civic virtue, they should not tell students that they should appreciate art and music or, for that matter, regard knowledge as intrinsically valuable ... (p. 25)

Of course, the author raised this point only to show the absurdity of trying to exclude morality from school teaching. (I was just happy he raised it at all.) But while I agree that such an exclusion is probably not possible or desirable, I wouldn't find it at all absurd for a student to contend that art, music, or even knowledge are worthless, nor to expect the teacher to *answer* such an objection, not merely deride or dismiss it.

Elsewhere, Greenawalt cites without comment the conclusions of author Amy Gutmann, in a way that would seem innocuous to most readers, but leaps out at a youth rights supporter:

After she contrasts approaches that emphasize the place of the state, of families, and of individual children, she proposes a division of responsibility between politically representative bodies, individual parents, and professional educators (p. 33).

In a section on the purposes of school, Greenawalt includes in the list the opportunity to give students "a sense of possibilities and perspectives, a basis to decide for themselves how to live, rather than conform to someone's preordained program." For kids in isolated families or communities, that can certainly be a benefit of exposure to school and the different people in it. He follows this up with a possible defense of "comparative religion" classes:

Most parents and affiliated private organizations, presenting their own religion as the truth ... are unlikely even to attempt to offer a detached, nonjudgmental account of various religions in historical context. Thus, what public schools could aspire to do differs qualitatively from what private sources usually provide (p. 28).

Most of what he writes are musings on both sides, without taking a position; in a few places in the book, the author does suddenly state his own personal position, which invariably seems jarring. Sometimes his opinion is so wishy-washy or confused it's not clear he's taking a stand at all:

Educators should not rely on their own religious perspectives, or those of parents, to prevent the teaching of material that standards of a scientific discipline definitely indicate should be included. Whether religious views should play any role in choices about what science to teach is more debatable, but modest influences may be all right. Religion may figure as one reason among many for major curricular decisions ... (p. 120)

There are other flaws. Sometimes the author belabors the simplest point; other times he seems to take for granted a point that is not simple at all. Long sections talk about "spillover effects" of religious education without ever defining what the author means by this. (After several readings, I think I have a fair idea of what he meant, but it's still not crystal clear.) At one point, he states it as a given, without explanation, that saying "We should all be grateful to God for our blessings" is not a "devotion" or a prayer—I can't see the difference at all.

But much of the book is interesting and even informative. In one place, discussing why "creationism" does not belong in a science class, the author notes that members of the Creation Research Society and the Institute for Creation Science—the "scientific institutes" of creationism—must swear an oath to support the biblical account of creation; no scientific society would make its members promise to promote a certain theory. That's something I never knew or thought about before.

Many of Greenawalt's proposals strike me as lukewarm and unsatisfactory, and his upbeat ending ("these problems ... are a small price to pay for the religious freedom we are fortunate to enjoy") seems weak, especially after reading DeFattore's book. But if you like philosophy, or if you're on the lookout for arguments, pro or con, on religion in schools, this book may have something for you.

Foregone Conclusions

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Thus, the reporters got their information from only one source—hardly a model of investigative journalism. One reporter did go so far as to interview the group’s chairwoman, former Congresswoman Susan Molinari, and was told that the Century Council’s mission is to “promote responsible decision-making regarding the use or non-use of alcoholic beverages and to discourage all forms of irresponsible consumption.” The web site of the Century Council expresses its mission a bit differently: “dedicated to fighting drunk driving and underage drinking.”

It is easy for journalists to write a story that is spoon-fed to them, but shouldn’t they make clear that the opinions are those of the organization being reported upon, not those of the newspaper or the reporter? Yet article after article used the word “alarming,” taken from the press release—not surrounded by quotation marks as part of a quotation, but in the writers’ own words. The reporters aren’t just telling us that the Century Council finds the survey results alarming, but that *we*, the readers, should be alarmed.

Regarding mothers who thought it was okay for their daughters to drink alcohol on special occasions (38% of mothers), or okay under parental supervision (21%), or who said that drinking alcohol is a natural part of growing up (20%), the press release quoted Molinari herself pronouncing such views a “disturbing misperception” of the seriousness of underage drinking. Many of the articles repeated the words “disturbing” and

“misperception”—again, not within a quote, but in the text of the article, even though the words were originally used as *part of a quotation* in the press release. The reporters took it upon themselves to echo and approve the Century Council’s characterization of those mothers who *didn’t* panic at the thought of their daughters doing what they’d probably done themselves when they were kids.

Clearly, there is another side to this story. If 20-40% of mothers believe that teen drinking isn’t the end of the world ... isn’t that a large enough minority to have a chance to be heard? There are reputable sources arguing that young people are better off if they have the opportunity to experiment with alcohol gradually, and discover its effects on them in safety, rather than learning about alcohol all at once on a binge on their 21st birthday. There is evidence from other countries with lower drinking ages and more relaxed attitudes about teen drinking. But we do not hear the other side; reporters have already made up our minds for us.

Another example: in two recent cases, an adult legally married to a minor is being prosecuted for statutory rape. The articles on these cases haven’t been *quite* so one-sided, but many use the word “victim” to refer to the younger spouse—not as part of a quote by a prosecutor, but in the reporter’s own words. Online articles sometimes include a reader poll, with choices such as (a) the marriage must be ended and the older spouse prosecuted, or (b) sending the older spouse to jail will only make an already dreadful situation worse. No choice is provided for the opinion that

such a marriage may not be a disaster at all, even though it wasn’t that long ago in our nation’s history that such marriages were readily accepted (and even encouraged, when pregnancy was involved).

Lately we have been told by people in the highest offices of our government that we should question a particular belief in a well-established scientific theory, the theory of evolution. Since a vocal and increasingly powerful minority of people don’t believe in evolution, we are all encouraged to view it “critically,” and the Kansas State Board of Education has recently decided to present “both sides” of the issue in science classes (even though one of those “sides” is not based upon science). Elsewhere, six states so far have acted upon the concerns of the minority and banned the mercury-based preservative thimerosal from vaccines given to children, over the objections of the medical community. If scientific and medical authority can be questioned—and its opposition listened to—on these issues, why is it so unheard of, so taboo, to question assumptions about youth?

Any suggestions that youth are capable of—and entitled to—greater autonomy and freedom, that their interests and needs are often not served by custody and protection, are met with a hostility similar to the reaction of racists to the notion of equal treatment of races. The idea of redefining youth as full citizens is extremely threatening to many adults. Overcoming such powerful resistance is no easy task. But attitudes can change. With time and persistence, perhaps the “other side” of this one-sided debate will eventually be heard.

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