

Letters

Fowl Word

The winter issue of your magazine had an article on “Translator of Geek” (p. 25). The word “geek” halfway turns my stomach. It’s an example of word-meaning change with the generations.

I am a child of the Great Depression, when jobs were scarce. There were derelicts and drunks at that time who would do *anything* for a few coins. With no TV, carnivals and traveling road shows were prevalent. They featured men who would bite off the heads of live chickens. These men were called “geeks.” I wonder what geek gave the term its modern meaning. It still makes my stomach quiver each time I see or hear it.

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Bad Science

The two letters in the Winter 2006 issue about your “Creative license” article (Fall 2005) deserve a response. John Shirk, C’83, says that “Macro-evolution remains an unproven theory” because there are no known intermediate forms such as a “fish-with-legs fossil.” There are a great many intermediate fossils, including some marvelous whales with legs. Albert McGlynn, C’67, supports intelligent design over a long time but says that “If natural phenomena show complexity that is, at this point, ‘irreducible,’ acknowledging there might be a creator seems to be the intelligent approach.” He again uses the term “at this point” about “life forms that ... appear to be irreducibly complex ... where natural

selection will not preserve functional intermediates.” The term “at this point” relates only to what we know now; it presupposes we will never learn how intermediates could have functioned. This is an abdication of reason and a regression to “God of the Gaps” theology. It is not science, and not even good theology.

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Legendary Lecturers

The column on professor Alfred Rieber (“Story Time,” p. 6) in your recent issue caused me to think: Over the years, how many other professors in Arts and Sciences gave “legendary” lectures? How about John La Monte, the Henry C. Lea Professor of Medieval History, whose lectures on the third floor of College Hall back around 1950 drew standing-room-only crowds. Even friends from the Wharton School would drop in. Professor La Monte, unfortunately, died far too early. Maybe you could write about other legendary lecturers.

*Bill Steltzer, C’51, GE’57
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Do you have a story about a legendary lecture or lecturer? Send us a letter. —Ed.

Uncritical Acceptance

Letters in your winter issue criticizing “Creative License” (Fall 2005) ignore difficulties in arguments favoring intelligent-design creationism. Never mentioned by critics of evolution is the real source of their belief: uncritical acceptance of the Bible. They seem unaware that some of its passages advocate conduct repugnant to modern Western society, while others demand faith based on uncritical reading. The Ten Commandments, for example, demand the death penalty for failure to observe the Sabbath (Exodus 31:14-15, 35:2 and Numbers 15:32-36). Similar punishment is required for any number of infractions, like adultery and homosexuality (Leviticus 20:10-16), that are no longer regarded as offenses. And what would become of Original Sin, if someone were to point out how few of us earn our daily bread by the sweat of our brows in these days of air-conditioning or the ever-decreasing number of women who bear children in pain and suffering? Criticism of the lack of fossils illustrating key points in evolution is ridiculous in comparison to the lack of evidence for supernatural forces, beings and events fundamental to belief in creationism. Have any of its advocates ever witnessed someone rise from the dead or similar phenomena? Letters like those cited above only show how difficult it is to achieve a well-rounded education in a few short years, even at an institution as progressive as Penn.

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