

Harrigan drove up the Freund's flower-edged driveway and parked behind their five-year-old minivan. He wondered why Mannie did not get himself a sedan – and a bigger house; he paid him more than enough! Freund came out to greet him and they strolled to his study at the rear of the house where the entrance was also strewn with toys and screaming kids.

"Want some breakfast, Kevin? It's still hot."

"No thank – Well, yes. Thanks."

Gertrude greeted him warmly. She placed two meals on a folding table between a pair of reading chairs and left.

Pictures of family members, friends, and scenes of mountainous southern Germany covered plain white walls. The desk alcove, enclosed floor and ceiling in polarized windows, and admitted sunlight. Atop the computer, a rosary of green stones hung from the Pietà, a statue of Jesus, derelict upon his disconsolate mother's lap.

Freund preempted his long-time buddy. "This is our home now, Kevin. We thought last year of moving back to Germany but decided to stay. The kids and Gertrude have friends. We're involved in the Lutheran-Catholic ecumenical program. Beyond that..." Freund's face tightened with concern. "I cannot participate in genetic manipulation or creating – then discarding – human embryos. God might very well bring good out of evil, but we can't do evil to create good."

"That 'manipulation' will take place whether you join us or not."

"That doesn't make it licit to do."

"But, Mannie, if you don't come, you'll never get to discover the genetic basis of behavior and instinct. You'll never be the one to discover what enables personality. And don't forget the pay bump." Harrigan could see no change in Freund's expression. "Mannie, look: I really need you with me on this. As a researcher and as a friend."

"I appreciate that. I know that zygotic and fetal research is inevitable. But I can't participate. It's against everything I believe; everything I know."

"Look, Mannie, all this Christian indoctrination clouds your scientific and ethical thinking. It's unethical to let religious rules hamper research on fetal stem cells and RNA that could cure disease and advance our understanding of the human animal."

"You want to talk ethics and reason, Kevin? Fine! Dismissing the faith-based argument for respect for human life is, itself, a fallacy. As a scientist, you must be open to the possibility that your tools cannot explore the mystical or moral. There's tons of evidence."

"Such as?"

"The Incorruptibles."

"Mannie, come on! Somebody in the middle ages made a secret flesh preservative."

"The fact that the Resurrection was recorded with female witnesses. In those days, women's testimony was dismissed, so if the story was merely invented, the witnesses would've been men."

"Tenuous. Nothing else?"

"The phenomenal spread of the Church despite vicious oppression; records of the martyrs."

"People get fascinated with whatever's forbidden."

"Sure, Kevin, sure. What about testimonies and interviews of *tens* of thousands who saw Marian apparitions and miracles at Fatima in 1917, and *hundreds* of thousands – of all faiths – at Zeitun in the 1970s."

"Old news; mass hysteria."

"Thousands of exorcisms and miraculous cures, scientifically and medically

substantiated.”

“They just missed the real causes.”

“There’s Fanti’s carbon dating of Shroud of Turin fibers to Jesus’ day. Others dating it to the middle ages used sections tainted by repairs. Plus, it’s scorched by unknown radiation.”

“Even if it was his shroud, the dating and scorch marks are not proof of divinity. Maybe if he or his mom got in my face...”

“Talkin’ evidence, Kevin, not proof! And you might be surprised! How do you explain away thousands of testimonies of spiritual experiences and conversions?”

“Psychological affects. Any serious evidence, Mannie?”

“Kevin, listen to yourself: You’re rationalizing. You’re making scientific proof the standard when the evidence is vast and science’s tools are, themselves, limited. It’s arrogant to assert that only science can find all truths.”

“I’m – not – arrogant!” Harrigan protested.

“Oh, sorry. Since I lack the scientific tools to prove you are, that’s proof that you’re not.”

“You are such a *dick!*” Harrigan chuckled.

“Look, Kevin, science can find the ‘how’ in physics or biology, but never the ‘why.’ Ask yourself why the universe was created and then evolution set in motion. Religion and philosophy are the tools for that. Faith and morality are God-given; ethics is a human construct. But if you want to look at this with reason – ethics – try a thought experiment.”

“A thought experiment? Come on!”

“Focus, Kevin. Would killing a baby the day of normal birth be murder?”

“Uh. Obviously. Is there a point?”

“Walk with me here. What about the day before?”

“Sure. It would be. Just a day less developed.”

“Another day prior?”

Harrigan’s mind raced ahead – rather, backward – uncomfortably. “Human. And the day before, and so on back to conception. Mannie, you’re going to say we can’t find the day it’s clearly not human, so we cannot find the day when its killing is licit. That where you’re goin’?”

“Yes. Faith and morals shed more light than ethics. But ethical reasoning works here.”

“Wrong! There *is* a point when it’s not human. This is settled in courts and law around the world. When babies can survive on their own, that’s when they become human.”

“If survival on one’s own is the test of humanity, it would be licit to kill invalid adults. Exercising power to make law is not the same as finding truth.”

“What of a zygote, as we’d work with in our research? No consciousness, only potential.”

“Kevin, you’re right! So, it’s okay to kill a mangled person in a coma who doesn’t *look* human and who has only *potential* to recover, as long as you do it before he wakes. Of course! A zygote’s fair game since it doesn’t *look* human, and it hasn’t *yet* attained the ability to think.”

Harrigan, stumped, could only switch gears. “Mon says I can choose staff, but he’ll fill vacancies with his own people. The remote possibility that FGR could have military potential worries me. I talked with the U.S. embassy. You can’t know any of this, by the way. Their people want me to minimize the number of Iraqi researchers on the team. I need you, Mannie.”

“I see.” Freund stood and paced, then frowned and sat again.

Harrigan continued. “If there is a God, don’t you think he wants humans to improve and understand themselves? Don’t you think he would want us to advance our genes, alleviate suffering, prolong life – maybe even find evidence of a divine hand in our evolution?”

“Do you care about those questions, Kevin, or are they prepared for my recruitment? Do

you seek the Ancient of Days – the truth – or only what Mon called the ‘ancient of genes’?”

Harrigan felt inexplicably guilty. “I think about these things...sometimes. A scientist is open to evidence. Maybe there is evidence of God. This is your chance to show me.”

“God needs us to just accept the faith he offers. Once in a while, though, he’ll bonk someone like you in the head with a two-by-four, proof for one. Even if genetic engineering is a sin, it might actually serve his purpose. I don’t know.”

Harrigan looked absorbed in thought. “It’s odd.”

“What’s odd?”

“That’s what Tykvah’s father said yesterday.”

“You asked him to go to Iraq with you?”

“No, I mean...Oh, geeze, Mannie! I didn’t tell you: Tykvah’s pregnant. I’m glad, actually.”

“But the wedding isn’t until spring. Great wedding pictures!” Freund laughed until Harrigan’s humiliated look stopped him. “Sorry. Are you moving the date up?”

“Yes.”

“Well, what did he say, anyway?”

“He said the child is God’s will, even though we shouldn’t have been doing the deed.”

“He’s right. I met him once. He’s a devout man who’s found what you refuse to seek.”

“I thought Christians think Jews are going to hell – like me, the Buddhists, Muslims, and so on, for not accepting Christ?”

“Kevin, God speaks unrestricted by time or prejudice to everyone in every language, in every age. Even prehistoric humans. God still reaches for us. Question is, will you reach back?”

“Well,” Harrigan quavered, “I don’t feel him reaching for me.”

“People do, millions. Sometimes I do at Reconciliation and the Eucharist. Look, if you’re so scientific, why are you unwilling to investigate miracles?”

Harrigan started a reply, only to be immediately flooded by the memories of his hallucination at Ranger School, then the one outside the Boston cathedral. But he would not be defeated in debate. “Mannie, science has looked at these things. Every day there’s more evidence from chimpanzees that behaviors like theft, violence, even homosexuality are genetic and, hence, morally neutral. Not that I want to kiss you or rob a bank or something!”

Freund poured coffee on Harrigan’s eggs and smirked.

Harrigan blotted his eggs with a napkin, taking it correctly in jest. “Thanks, jerk!”

“You’re welcome. Look, Kevin, you can’t validly assert that if something occurs in nature, it’s morally neutral for humans. What if our genetic make-up is merely a way for God to challenge us to consciously choose to advance beyond a primal, selfish nature?”

“And what if pigs could fly? They’ve even found that sensations of a spiritual presence, like apparitions, can be induced by magnetic fields. That explains near-death experiences.”

“Kevin, Marian apparitions have a common message of crisis approaching, so that’s way beyond those experiments! Even if, one day, they can replicate physical reactions to spiritual experiences, that doesn’t prove that real spiritual experiences don’t happen.”

“You’re really into conjecture, now! Mannie, get a grip! You’ve got to admit that the New Testament contradicts itself. God’s nature is supposed to be loving. If so, how can it be that he demanded the cruel, protracted suffering and death of his own son?”

“Hey, one’s paradigm is the key here. You see a cruel death demanded by God as contradicting his nature. Has it never occurred to you that such a death was necessary to get our attention, to demonstrate love so strong he’d suffer for our wrongs?”

Harrigan sneered, dismissing Freund’s assertions with a toss of his hands. “Mannie, if

God loved us, his plan would be to help us here on earth and relieve our sufferings."

Freund's eyes widened. "God needs us to emulate his example of humility, self-sacrifice, mercy, and to use our gifts and talents to mitigate suffering."

"Mannie, if you really believed that man is supposed to use his 'gifts' to improve things, then you would come with me and explore any connection between the physical and the spiritual. You can study genetic transmission of behavior and personality. You could observe whether spirituality shows up where it won't be taught. This is your only chance to change *my* perspective or prove *me* wrong!"

Freund paused, frowning. "If I'm right, evidence of spirituality should be observable without it being taught." Then he smiled. "A fair challenge. I'll do it on three conditions."

"What?"

"I can fly back to my family and telecommute half the time."

"Fine."

"I won't create or doom any microscopic humans. Only study."

"But the tech is... Okay, I can work around that for your duties."

"And you have to be open to spiritual reality. You *can't* dismiss that there *is* evidence. Think about it when you witness death or birth...when you encounter what scientific tools can't explain."

"Plant a suggestion in my mind like that and I can't help but be reminded in the course of this work. But you promise not to lecture me. We'll both keep open, empirical minds. Gimme at least a year?"

They shook hands.

"Deal," Freund said. Then he glimpsed the statue on his computer and lowered his eyes.