

Red River Rationalist

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Old Books; New Books

Davis Cope

[Reviews books or anything else interesting to Cope]

Michael Gates Gill. *How Starbucks Saved My Life: A Son of Privilege Learns to Live Like Everyone Else*. 2007. Brendan Gill was a well-known writer for the *New Yorker* and a bon vivant who frequently declared "It is better to use up your money while you are alive". He did. So much for the family fortune. But money was not an immediate problem for his son, Michael Gates Gill. Shortly after graduating from Yale in 1963 and before he had even started to look for a job, a fellow member of Skull & Bones got him a job at J. Walter Thompson, the prestigious New York advertising company. JWT only hired one or two copywriters per year, and Michael was offered the job that year. He worked hard, did well. After a while, he had a big house, a wife, four kids, and did a lot of traveling and mixing with the big accounts. Then a Brit did a semi-hostile takeover. "I like young people around me," says the Brit. Mike is fired after 25 years with JWT. He tries setting up his own advertising business. But fewer and fewer contacts return his calls. Life is not so good. He has an affair with a lady he met at the gym. They have a child. Mike's wife gets a divorce. Mike is getting a little pressed for cash. No clients return his calls. The gym lady is no longer interested in him, and his new son has now started school. It's ten years since he was fired. He's 63 and has a buzzing in his ears (a slight buzzing). Well, it's a brain tumor (acoustic neuroma, "very, very rare, only one in ten million Americans"). An operation right now would be best, says the doctor. But not absolutely and 100% immediately necessary, Mike pushes him into agreeing, it might be a slow-growing tumor, a few months can be allowed as long as we keep monitoring it. "I got up quickly, shook his hand, left his office, ... " and started contemplating a situation of no cash, no savings, and no health insurance.

That is Michael Gates Gill, as he sits in the Starbucks at the corner of Lexington and 78th in New York. He was too depressed to notice the "Hiring Open House" sign in the window as he entered. He gets his coffee and contemplates. An "attractive young African-American wearing a Starbucks uniform" at the table next to him asks him, "Would you like a job?" Michael is struck numb. He never had had to look for a job and does not know how to go about it, but he really, really, really would like a JOB if it had HEALTH INSURANCE and would PAY THE RENT on his cheap, one person apartment, an hour-and-a-half subway commute from downtown Manhattan, where he is sitting (three hours both ways). Mike replies, "I would love to work for you." The young woman is Chrystal, the store manager at Lexington and 78th, who takes a chance on hiring this old white guy as a new Starbucks barista. And that's the setting for this delightful book, a wonderful Christmas gift for any Scrooge that likes coffee and likes to read.

Mike weaves memories of his early years (a slow learner about reading, not the best way to relate to his father), his JWT job (many famous people, from rap artists to Queen Elizabeth), and his days on the job, where he masters toilet cleaning and handling the register (succeeding-eventually-at making change accurately), discovers a natural flair for greeting customers, takes his turns at trucking out the garbage (stairs are involved), learns to handle the opening (checking and arranging the day's pastries, etc. so that things will be where his co-workers need them when they need them), gives coffee seminars to encourage new customers (another natural flair discovered!), handles the closing and the possibility of people knifing him while making sure everything is in place for tomorrow's opening, together, of course, with the daily three hour commute total. There is also the worry of whether

Chrystal, and Kester, and Charlie, and Anthony, and Tawana, and so on, all young black folk, will accept him and let him KEEP THE JOB, which not only has excellent health insurance but, for a modest addition, provides health insurance for your children as well! (Initial interview: How many kids do you have, says Chrystal. Five, says Mike. You've been busy, says Chrystal. Yes, says Mike.)

Here's a sample. Mike, naturally, starts the new job at the most menial level, mopping the floors and cleaning the toilets. The next step up is taking orders at the cash registers, which means taking payments and making change. Mike has no head for figures and is terrified of this step. So he decides to put it off as long as possible by doing such a GREAT JOB of mopping and toilet cleaning that everybody will want to keep him doing just exactly that! ("[Chrystal] smiled. 'Mike, I've got to say that I've never seen anyone clean like you.' She did not know I was betting my whole future at Starbucks on getting good at some job nobody else wanted.") Which leads us to the following story that anyone who has ever cleaned for a living, or really worked for a living, or can imagine working for a living, should be able to appreciate:

"One afternoon, I had just finished 'detailing' the bathroom, and it was sparkling. I saw an old African-American man who was clearly a homeless person heading for the bathroom. I intercepted him and explained that it was closed for cleaning--a lie I made up because I was afraid of the mess he might make. Chrystal overheard me and gestured for me to follow her back to her office--never a good sign. I had learned that she never criticized anybody in front of the Guests [customers], or even other Partners [co-workers]. She would take you aside--one-on-one--in her office. 'Mike, never refuse the bathroom to anyone,' she said in a low angry voice. 'But that old guy wasn't a customer, he couldn't afford--' 'He might not be a customer, but everyone who walks in that door is a Guest. That's what makes Starbucks different from anyplace else in New York. Haven't you noticed there are no public bathrooms in this city?' For some reason, perhaps because I had just worked so hard to clear up such filth, I argued with her. 'But it's not Starbucks' job to provide toilets for the homeless.' Chrystal did not say anything ... for about thirty seconds. I could see she was furious. Her eyes seemed to enlarge with rage. I shut up. ... 'Look.' Her words were spaced; I could tell she was fighting herself not to yell at me. 'In my store, in our store, we are ... welcoming. Don't refuse that toilet to anyone, especially someone who really needs some welcome and not another person putting them down.'

A lesson for Michael, a lesson for all of us. This book is not only a great book, it may be telling us about a great business. Maybe we all need to drink more coffee.

- **Davis Cope**

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*"In practice, all men are
atheists; they deny their faith
by their
actions."*

*Ludwig Feuerbach
(German philosopher)*

Critical Thinking

In the November, 2007 *Red River Rationalist* our worthy editor Chuck Crane suggests that we be all-round rationalists. I'm sure we can all agree on that but we may differ when we consider specifics.

Chiropractic began more than a century ago in Iowa when a grocer, one D D Palmer, manipulated the spine of a neighbor who felt discomfited. The neighbor thought this helped, told his friends, and soon the grocer had more patients than he could accommodate. Astutely, he established a school for what he called chiropractic, got rich, then sold the school to his son. Later his grandson took over the family goldmine.

I think the founder came up with the term "subluxation," defined poorly enough that two chiropractors seldom independently locate the same one.

For many years the AMA campaigned against chiropractic as having no scientific basis but in the 1970s the chiropractic association won a restraint-of-trade law suit which forced the AMA and MDs in general to hold their tongues.

Some 30 years ago I visited the chiropractic school in Minneapolis, then located in an abandoned grade school building. I identified myself properly as the Dean of the Science and Math Faculties of Moorhead State University, and said, truthfully, that my son was undecided about his future. When I asked the president about research he admitted that that was a weakness but that he hoped to get a faculty member in the fall who would start a research program. The president showed me around and then left me to explore on my own. Without going into detail, the school was pathetic as an educational institution. For instance, the tiny library, without any filing system, had some tattered novels and a few dozen ancient textbooks of economics, general science, biology, chemistry, physics, earth science, carpentry, cooking, textiles, etc. There were bound volumes of a chiropractic magazine going back several decades. I examined fully one full month in each of several years at about six-year intervals. I found not a single article reporting any research but there were many helpful papers on how to ingratiate oneself into the influential levels of the local community, how to set up records, and how to collect from slow-payers.

Prospective chiros can now get federal student loans and other help. I'm told the school now has a large campus with many new buildings in one of the suburbs. Perhaps someone can bring me up to date. If I were younger I'd go for another look. I have often wondered if there is any way chiropractic could become intellectually and scientifically respectable. I think that during the past half-century or so, the osteopaths have achieved this.

Chiros fall into two camps: the straights and the mixers. The straights remain true to the Palmer doctrines; the mixers add some fragments of modern medicine.

For the most part medical education in the US and Canada was sadly deficient, largely controlled by proprietary schools, until after being exposed in 1910 by the Flexner Report. [interestingly, the preliminary two-year medical program at UND met with Flexner's approval.

Perhaps because it is cheaper, some health insurance providers and medicare will pay for chiropractic treatment. Maybe on the principle of giving the customer what is wanted, some medical clinics have added chiros to their staffs. Perhaps chiropractic will improve by association. Meritcare in Fargo has a chiro; he is a trained physical therapist who later got a DC degree. I think most physical therapists have trouble getting patients without being employed by medical clinics. If so, one can easily imagine their envy of the independent DC's, many of whom are rich.

Perhaps the best hope for the future of chiropractic is that PTs will get chiropractic degrees, forget

what they learned in getting them, and then practice and do research for publication in scientific journals.

A decade ago a chiro school in Canada, seeking prestige and recognition, sought affiliation with York University. The administration was attracted by the potential for more money; the science faculty was adamantly opposed; the non-science faculty was inclined to approve, labeling the scientists as narrow-minded. The last I heard, this Trojan horse was still just outside the gates. Update, anyone?

Is conventional medicine above criticism? Far from it - but at least it is based on the scientific attitude and has a long history of careful research.

Money can trump medical science. Consider the profit-motivated political efforts of small hospitals to discourage ambulance systems from carrying victims of heart attacks directly to primary angioplastic centers rather than to the nearest hospitals where usually only the less-effective use of clot-busting drugs is available

- Bill Treumann

The Holy Business Empire

Business Enterprise has become the new religion, spanning the globe. Our civilization has conflated religion and economics. As a civilization, our purchase against Death has become "the economy." People measure their worthiness by the size of their paycheck, not by their pious acts. The transgressions of the pedophile priests has been dealt with exactly as the society dealt with the transgressions of Enron's economic rapists: trials were held and penalties were levied. These were business transactions. Nowhere, that I am aware of, was the subject of the consequences for the priests' souls or the victims' discussed.

The only difference between Republicans and Democrats concerns where to set the "burdensome bar." Both worship Business, but like the early Christian sects they disagree as to the details of the contract between the Deity and the People. No one dares question the "holiness" of Business Enterprise or the "godliness" of The Economy. Money, The Economy, and Business Enterprise are respectively, the Son, the Father, and the Holy Ghost of the new religion. All discussions of whatever kind are carried out in the context of the new religion. Brazilian officials complain that efforts to stop burning the Amazon Rain Forest will slow the nation's economic growth. Bush says expanding health care for children would be bad for business.

The prayers of people, usually men, who utterly devote their wills and their lives to worshipping the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost of Business Enterprise sometimes are heard and rewarded. These people are called hedge fund managers, CEOs, arbitragers, and bankers. The reward, in the form of stock options, cash, and arcane monetary manipulations understandable only by the high priests of Business Enterprise, provides both a medical and a psychological defense against death. The wealthy can afford the best health care, which is the medical defense. Securing the favor of Business Enterprise can delay physical death by a score of years over the national statistics. The psychological defense against death consists of endowing an academic chair in one's name or financing a university building or a museum in one's own honor. The illusion of life after death is supplied by having the title "CEO and Founder" after one's name in the history of the corporation that gained the favor of Business Enterprise. The illusion is perpetuated in the engraved marble or the wrought bronze letters proclaiming the Louise M. Davies Hall, or the Rockefeller Medical Center.

The Corporatocracy comprises the high priests of the Holy Business Empire and the vast interlocking religio-economic structure that has seized control of the planet. Fanning out from the Bildenbug Group and Trilateral Commission to the World Bank and the neuronal network of banks, corporations, governments, NGOs, and bureaucracies in every nation of the world, the Corporatocracy has ruthlessly enforced global control. Europe, China, the U.S. & U.K., and South America are far less independent, competing regional power centers than they are business bishoprics controlled by satraps who owe their primary allegiance to Business Enterprise. The Corporatocracy can be understood by the metaphor of the Catholic Church. The Bilderburg Group is analogous to the College of Cardinals. The various "business bishops" from around the globe compete for the highest position, which is analogous to election as Pope, the President of the Bilderburg Group.

- John Omaha

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"<http://www.corporatocracy.blogspot.com>"

Books of Interest

Here are a couple of paperbacks readers might be interested in: Brooke Allen, *Moral Minority: Our Skeptical Founding Fathers*. The book refutes the claim, frequently found in places like the letters column in *The Forum*, that the United States was founded as a Christian nation and that the founding fathers were Christians. Allen gives a chapter each to the religious views of Franklin, Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison and Hamilton followed by a chapter on the aftermath and a chapter on the political and religious history of 17th and 18th Century England and France. Concisely and clearly written, the book relies largely on primary sources.

Less edifying, though more entertaining, is Joseph Minton Amann and Tome Breuer, *The Brotherhood Of The Disappearing Pants: A Field Guide To Conservative Sex Scandals*. As the sub-title indicates, this is a necessarily incomplete catalog of examples of what Burns called "the rigidly righteous" caught sometimes quite literally with their pants down. Each malefactor gets about two sarcasm laden pages. Do not read this book too soon after eating, as some of those holier than the rest of us are pretty sick puppies.

- John Sherman

The Candidates on "Faith"

As we go into the long, long period of political debates and polls and ads, etc., etc., it is interesting to see the role "faith" plays in the equation. As that great philosopher Mikko Cowdery said, "In order to run for president, not only must you proclaim your superstitious beliefs, you must prove that you are more superstitious than any of the other candidates."

This seems to be working -- as we go to press, two of the candidates leading in many polls are Mitt Romney (a Mormon) and Mike Huckabee (an evangelical), both of whom are on record as not "believing" in evolution. Romney is to make a statement on his Mormon beliefs in the next day or two. For any who would like to know more about the LDS, I recommend reading *No Man Knows My History, the Life of Joseph Smith* by Fawn Brodie. The idea of con-man Joseph Smith founding a religion is only slightly less laughable than the founding of Scientology by L. Ron Hubbard, a science fiction writer. Another excellent read on some of today's rogue Mormons is *Under the Banner of Heaven* by John Krakauer.

- Chuck Crane

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For most of you, your memberships to Red River Freethinkers for 2008 are due this month.

Your contributions are the only source of income for this organization.

Without your continued support, we will no longer be able to continue producing and distributing this newsletter.

Individual Membership \$30/year

Family Membership \$45/year

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Newsletter only \$10/year

Send dues, along with name, address, phone number, and e-mail address

to: Red River Freethinkers, P.O. Box 405, Fargo, ND 58107-0405

_____ **Your membership for 2008 has been paid.**

_____ **You are not yet a member for 2008**

*"I believe that the scientist is trying to express absolute truth
and the artist absolute beauty, so that I find in science and art,
and in an attempt to lead a good life, all the religion that I want."*

- J.B.S. Haldane (British Scientist)

The Red River Freethinkers is organized by freethinkers to be a nonprofit educational organization. We are a group of nonreligious people skeptical of religious dogma. We advocate Intellectual Freedom and the use of Reason. Articles and letters in this newsletter present ideas and opinions of individual writers and do not necessarily reflect those of the Red River Freethinkers organization.

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Red River Freethinkers Calendar

Regularly scheduled meetings are held at 2:30 p.m. on the third Sunday of each month at the Fargo Unitarian Universalist Church at 121 9th Street South in Fargo.

This month's meeting will be our Winter Solstice potluck and will be at 2:30 p.m. on December 16 at the Rogne Farm near Kindred, ND.

Thanks again to Katherine & Leslie Rogne and Gail and Trana Rogne for their generous hospitality. Directions to the Rogne farm are: On I-29, take Exit 48W onto Hwy 46. (Exit 48 is roughly 15 miles south of Fargo.) On Hwy 46, go about 2.5 miles west to Richland County Road 1, turn south. On Richland County Road 1, go about 1/2 mile south to the first farm (blue house on west side of road).

BECOME A MEMBER!

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