

mediocrity at the paper.) The Blair scandal brought staff members' unhappiness with Raines and his leadership to a head, and that discontent was at least as responsible for his downfall as the scandal itself.

The print version of the *Times* is the company's "economic engine." But ad revenues peaked at \$1.3 billion in 2000 and have since fallen to about \$1.1 billion. What Raines fears is that the Sulzberger family might eventually be tempted to sell

its controlling interest in the paper to an owner more interested in the bottom line than in journalistic quality. The *Times* "is the indispensable newsletter of the United States' political, diplomatic, governmental, academic, and professional communities. . . . And yet a harsh reality of our era is that if the *Times* ever ceased to exist, it would not be reinvented by any media company now in operation, in this country or in the world."

EXCERPT

The Newsroom's New Gods

Never so many newspaper investigations of newspapers: internal investigations, outside investigations, hand-wringing, soul-searching. All of it important. And yet, I'd like to suggest, there has been one investigation that has been left undone, one phenomenon left unexamined, even though it has reshaped the entire culture of newspapers—some might say the entire media culture itself. And might bear some responsibility for the mindset behind the scandals.

I'm speaking about the culture, indeed the cult, of management theory, about the management theory gurus who have become, as a rare outside study of the subject calls them, the "unacknowledged legislators" of American business culture. Who have been given a virtually free hand to "re-engineer" the way newspapers define their mission.

Could it be that little or no investigation of these consultants appears in newspapers because newspaper executives are so in thrall to consultant culture that reporters and editors fear to offend them by pointing out that the consultants have no clothes? Do newspaper management consultants enjoy the same immunity from examination that [former USA Today reporter] Jack Kelley's fabrications did?

—Ron Rosenbaum, columnist, in *The New York Observer* (May 3, 2004)

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Lingering Doubters

"'Godless Communism' and Its Legacies" by Stephen Bates, in *Society* (March–April 2004), Rutgers—The State University, 35 Berrue Circle, Piscataway, N.J. 08854.

Why are so many Americans so hard on atheists? In a poll last year, a majority (52 percent) took a dim view of those who deny God's existence, and—in the crucial symbolic test—more than 40 percent said they would not vote for an unbeliever for president. *WQ* literary editor Bates, who is writing a book about secularization in the United States, contends that Americans are suffering a hangover from the 1950s.

During that Cold War decade, he says, "a common enemy seemed to draw God and country closer together." Many Americans believed that what differentiated the Soviet Union from the United States was not the communist state's totalitarianism and terror, or its denial of basic freedoms, or even its command economy, but rather its rejection of God. Senator Joseph McCarthy warned in 1950 that the "final, all-out battle" would

be between “communistic atheism and Christianity.”

“If Cold War communism imperiled religion, then religion needed to be part of the counterforce,” says Bates. The 1953 presidential inauguration of Dwight D. Eisenhower featured a parade float depicting scenes of worship and a prayer composed and recited by the new chief executive (who was “the spiritual leader of our times,” at least according to the Republican National Committee). Ike scheduled the first “National Day of Prayer” for July 4, and declared belief in a Supreme Being “the most basic expression of Americanism.”

Before about 1950, few besides clergymen advanced religious arguments against communism. When *Look* magazine in 1947 gave

its readers nine characteristics by which to identify an American Communist, disbelief in God was not among them. But after the Communists won China in 1949, and the Soviets exploded an atomic bomb that same year, religious anticommunist rhetoric “crossed over to the secular culture.”

Today, the phrase “godless communism” seems as antiquated as the Edsel, and Americans are more tolerant of religious diversity. “Yet the antipathy toward atheists endures,” at least in part because atheists are assumed to be aggressively hostile toward religion. It may well be that they should seek to soften their image by adopting a new name. But the term “Brights,” recently adopted by some high-profile disbelievers, Bates notes, is hardly likely to do the trick.

EXCERPT

Doing Without Metaphysics

Plato argued along the following lines: Truth is a matter of correspondence to reality. Propositions are made true by things that are as they are, independent of human desires and decisions. This goes for propositions like “Kindness is better than cruelty” as much as for those like “Annapurna is west of Everest.” Relations of moral preferability are no more up to us to decide than are spatial relations between mountains. The claim about kindness is as obviously true as the one about Annapurna, and so there must be something out there (something metaphysical, something that philosophers know more about than most people) that makes it true. If you deny that there is anything like that, the Platonist argument goes, you are denying that there is a rational way to choose between Athens and Sparta. . . .

The most dubious premise in this argument is the one that says that truth is correspondence to reality. As everybody who has ever taken a philosophy class knows, it is hard to specify what the correspondence relation is supposed to be. What, for example, does “There are no unicorns” correspond to? What entities make “There are infinitely many transfinite cardinal numbers” true? If you do not believe in the mysterious things that Plato called “the Forms,” what exactly is it that you think moral truths are made true by? . . .

Nietzsche and Heidegger thought that once one rejected the Platonic claim to provide rational foundations for moral truth, all things would need to be made new. Culture would have to be reshaped. James and Dewey, by contrast, did not think that giving up the correspondence theory of truth was all that big a deal. They wanted to debunk it, and so help get rid of Platonist rationalism, but they did not think that doing so would make that much difference to our self-image or to our social practices. The superstructure, they thought, would still be in good shape even after we stopped worrying about the state of the foundations.

—Richard Rorty, a professor of comparative literature and philosophy at Stanford University, in *The Nation* (June 14, 2004)