

Chicago Area Christ College Alumni Reading Group, Spring 2002

Faith and Skepticism in 2002

Since the events of September 11th, a number of pundits have announced the Death of Irony. But is it true that our culture is no longer dominated by irony? Is the postmodern moment—with its emphasis on postures and poses, spectacle and spin—over? Have we resurrected the God that Nietzsche declared dead at the turn of the twentieth century? Many would argue that skepticism still reigns supreme, a legacy of the Western intellectual tradition and perhaps a necessary part of religious faith.

Philosopher Richard Rorty traces the evolution of skepticism as follows:

Once upon a time we felt a need to worship something which lay beyond the visible world. Beginning in the seventeenth century we tried to substitute a love of truth for a love of God, treating the world described by science as a quasi divinity. Beginning at the end of the eighteenth century we tried to substitute a love of ourselves for a love of scientific truth, a worship of our own deep spiritual or poetic nature, treated as one more quasi divinity. . . . [and now we have arrived at] the point where we no longer worship *anything*, where we treat *nothing* as a quasi divinity, where we treat *everything*—our language, our conscience, our community—as a product of time and chance. (*Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Cambridge UP, 1989)

Rorty's description should hold significance for people of faith as well as people who do not believe in God, but who nevertheless believe that questions about faith matter. After all, what kind of belief is possible in a culture dominated by irony and skepticism? How does that belief manifest itself? How is it sustained and nourished? What is the role of doubt in relation to faith? How do religious practices help faith? How do they hinder it? These are a few of the questions that will guide our reading and discussions.

List of Readings:

Mark Salzman, *Lying Awake*
Andrew Delbanco, *The Real American Dream*
Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*
Paul Tillich, *The Essential Tillich*
Flannery O'Connor, "Parker's Back" (to be distributed)

Discussion leader Jana French is a former CC faculty member, who specializes in contemporary fiction. She holds a PhD in English literature from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and lives in Hyde Park.

Schedule of Sessions for CC Alumni Reading Groups:

Loop Group—Meets Fridays at 12:30 p.m. (January 25, February 22, March 22, April 26), location TBA

Hyde Park Group—Meets Tuesdays at 8:30 p.m. at the home of Jana French, 5550 South Blackstone Avenue (January 29, February 26, March 26, April 30)

Western Suburbs Group—Meets Mondays at 8:00 p.m. (January 28, February 25, March 25, April 29), location TBA