



Willamette Freethinker



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Corvallis Secular Society (CSS) is a Humanist and Freethought society for all nontheists of good will.

CSS is affiliated with the American Humanist Association (AHA) and the Council for Secular Humanism (CSH).

From the Editor:

Before we get started, let me just point out that there are two types of people in the world — those who divide everything into two types, and those who don't. ☺

That being said, I *WOULD* like to divide "potential gods" into two types for discussion: Interfering gods, and Non-Interfering gods.

I suspect that most Christians believe in an Interfering God. That is, having created the universe, He just can't stop tweaking it in one way or another. If you believe in angels, Jesus, miracles, or prayer as a way to influence reality, you believe in an Interfering God.

Of course, as I mentioned in my previous column, the presence of an Interfering God negates Science as a meaningful tool. How can you study anything if "God did it" is a valid explanation? (The world appears to be several million years old — but maybe God's just making it LOOK that way!)

Conversely, since Science DOES appear to work consistently, and is an excellent predictor of future events, it would seem that any God that DOES exist, doesn't Interfere all that much. (According to many Christians, God USED to Interfere much more often, but "cut back" right when humans began to gain the knowledge and technology to start questioning these sorts of things. Very convenient, if you ask me...)

Of course, the possibility exists that what we have is a Non-Interfering God. This version of God, I picture as the ultimate pool player, hitting the balls SO perfectly that everything falls into place precisely how He wants.

This God (in theory) would have started the Big Bang just EXACTLY right, knowing in advance how the laws of nature would work out, and how EACH and EVERY atom would move throughout time, such that Earth would form JUST so, humanity would develop JUST so, etc — and thus never need to Interfere afterward. Now THAT'S an impressive God!

Of course, this is also a POINTLESS God. A God who merely "meant for everything to work out this way" but has no actual involvement in the process, effectively may as well not exist in the first place.

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CSS Meetings and Events

Calendar:

Saturday, Feb 19th 2:00-4:00 CSS regular meeting

This month, we will have a guest speaker!

Sunday School Teacher John Gilman will explain his views on "Christianity, God and the Supernatural".

There will be time afterwards for discussion. ☺

Saturday, Mar 19th 1:00-4:00 CSS potluck

Saturday, Apr 16th 2:15-4:15 CSS regular meeting

The April meeting will start 15 minutes late, due to a conflict with another group's meeting at Corl House.

Regular meeting time:

Third Saturday of each month, from 2:00-4:00 pm.

Regular meeting location:

Corl House (3975 NW Witham Hill Dr, Corvallis).

There are now
three ways you can financially
support CSS online! See back page for
more details...



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From the President:

The Case for Atheism

"The theist must present an intelligible description of *god*. Until he does so, *god* makes no more sense than *unie*; both are cognitively empty, and any attempt at proof is logically absurd."

"The belief in eternal torment, still subscribed to by fundamentalist Christian denominations, undoubtedly ranks as the most vicious and reprehensible doctrine of classical Christianity. It has resulted in an incalculable amount of psychological torture, especially among children where it is employed as a terror tactic to prompt obedience."

"It cannot be emphasized too strongly that Christianity has a vested interest in human misery. Christianity, perhaps more than any religion before or since, capitalized on human suffering; and it was enormously successful in insuring its own existence through the perpetuation of human suffering."

"Just as Christianity must destroy reason before it can introduce faith, so it must destroy happiness before it can introduce salvation."

"Reason is not one tool of thought among many, it is the entire toolbox. To advocate that reason be discarded in some circumstances is to advocate that thinking be discarded — which leaves one in the position of attempting to do a job after throwing away the required instrument."

"I am arguing that faith as such, faith as an alleged method of acquiring knowledge, is totally invalid and as a consequence, all propositions of faith, because they lack rational demonstration, must conflict with reason."

—Selected quotes from: George H. Smith,
Atheism: The Case Against God.

Theists are people who believe that one or more gods really exist. *Atheists* are those that are without god-beliefs (*a*-theists): they are not convinced that gods exist. The burden of proof is always upon those who claim something exists (it would be absurd to have to believe everything one was ever told, except for those claims one could disprove). With reference to belief in god(s), there is then the *presumption of atheism*. If the theist is unable to make a persuasive case for the existence of any gods, then the atheist is justified in his atheism. The atheist's lack of belief in gods does not imply that he or she is certain that no god(s) exist; it is more of a "show me" or skeptical state of mind.

Some theists argue that they don't need to prove the existence of God (they just "know" God exists). If they're happy with that, fine. If, however, they want to counter the

arguments of atheists, this won't do. Also, if they have any sense of logic at all, they must realize that, until the existence of God is established, all other theological arguments and beliefs are meaningless. The question of the existence of God (or any god) is a factual question, and should be answered in the same way as any other factual question. The evidence must be presented and examined.

There is a confusion or awkwardness when discussing the term "god" or "God." Strictly speaking, "god" is a generic term, like "dog". You would probably not name your dog, "Dog." Yet Christians generally call *their* god, "God," rather than, say, "Yahweh," "Jehovah," or "Bob." They might argue that there is only one god (this is *monotheism*), so it doesn't matter. However, the Christian Bible mentions the existence of other gods several times, and many people have believed in other gods (at least 2,500 gods). Here, I'll use "God" (capitalized) to refer to the Christian god, and "god" (not capitalized) to refer to gods in general. What follows are just a few of the arguments in favor of atheism, and against theism: particularly against the Christian God, as Christianity is the dominant religion in this country, and is the most threatening to the rights of others.

God of the Gaps. Also known as the *Argument From Ignorance*, or as I prefer to call it, the *God Did It* argument. The explanation by religionists for everything that happens, if they don't know how something works or why something happened. (Does "God did it" really explain anything?) As science advances, explaining more and more, there is less for the "God of the Gaps" to do. Science seeks natural causes, while religion seeks supernatural causes, so this religious argument is the very essence of the inescapable conflict between science and religion.

According to George H. Smith, in his book referred to above, science seeks to make reality coherent; theology seeks to convince us that some aspects of reality are incoherent. To the extent that science succeeds, theology dies of strangulation. The basic conflict is between reason and theology. Anyone who advocates theism — the belief in the supernatural — simultaneously advocates irrationalism — the belief in the unknowable. Theology attempts to reduce man to a state of perpetual ignorance; as Spinoza put it, the concept of god is an asylum of ignorance. The tragic fate of Galileo is a paradigm case of the conflict between religion and science; imprisoned and threatened with torture, he was forced to retract his heliocentric theory of the solar system. The issue is not whether any scientific theory is right or wrong; it is "Why has Christianity found it necessary and desirable to suppress free inquiry with the threat of force?" If the Church is committed to rationality and truth, why has it subjected dissenters to torture and death? The person of reason, concerned with arriving at truth, supports his or

her ideas with reason and evidence — not with personal attacks. The conflict between reason and faith is immense and irreconcilable. We Rationalists view such incredible doctrines as virgin births, resurrections, and places of eternal torment as the products of a primitive and superstitious age — and since Christianity is predicated on these beliefs, it seems we must reject Christianity for the same reason.

First Cause Argument. “Everything we see has a cause. That cause in turn had a cause, and so on back through time. If we were able to follow this sequence far enough back, we would come to the First Cause — the uncaused cause. This we call ‘God.’” But if everything must have a cause, then God must have a cause. If there can be anything without a cause, it may just as well be the universe as God. There is no reason to suppose that the universe has not always existed; nor that, if it did not once exist, it did not come into existence by itself. In the 20th Century, we learned that the universe is actually ruled by quantum mechanics, which means that it is possible for events to have no cause. Objects can indeed appear out of nothing, and disappear back into nothing. The First Cause Argument really assumes that this First Cause, or God, exists. But that is precisely what it is trying to establish! This is “begging the question.” No fair.

The Design Argument (The Teleological Argument, or Intelligent Design [ID]). “Life is so complex that it must have had an intelligent designer.” (This is just slick, Madison Avenue *creationism*. Mention of “God” is meticulously avoided in hopes of getting ID taught in public school science classes. But no one is fooled who doesn’t want to be fooled.) It masquerades as science, but has no body of research to support its claims. Much of its effort is toward finding faults with the Theory of Evolution. However, even if ID proponents could *disprove* evolution, ID would not be established (even if it were a legitimate scientific theory, which it is not). Disproving one theory does not prove another: every theory must be proven or disproven independently. One argument against ID is that the human body is not a good “design.” For example, we each are born with an appendix, an appendage that serves no function. It can, however, become infected and burst, a potentially fatal condition. The existence of an appendix can be explained by evolution, but it certainly would not be there if humans were intelligently designed. Another criticism is that ID proposes that complexity (life) arose from greater complexity (God, or, if we must, “the Intelligent Designer”). But if complexity must come from greater complexity, then this being must have been designed by a still greater or more complex being; and so on. This infinite series is endless and absurd. The natural explanation of evolution posits that complexity arose over time from less complexity, which is not absurd.

The Second Law of Thermodynamics (the Entropy Law) doesn’t allow complexity to increase over time. This ID-related argument uses the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics, which states that “any closed system will tend toward disorder,” or, “energy spontaneously disperses from being localized to becoming spread out if it is not

hindered.” *Entropy* refers to the dissipated potential and the second law, in its most general form, states that the world acts spontaneously to minimize potentials (or equivalently maximize entropy). But it is only the over-all entropy of a complete, or closed system that must increase when spontaneous change occurs. In the case of spontaneously interacting sub-systems of a closed system, some may gain entropy, while others may lose entropy. (For a more thorough technical explanation, see <http://www.talkorigins.org/faqs/thermo/probability.html> . See <http://www.panspermia.org/seconlaw.htm> for even more on the confusing meanings of entropy.) Life on Earth can increase in complexity over time because of input of energy from Sol, our sun, which is losing energy in the process. Who can deny that a fertilized human egg can become a person: this is surely an increase in complexity! Of course, if increasing complexity of life were impossible because it really violated the Second Law, then Intelligent Design (*née* Creationism) would also be impossible, and we would not be here to contemplate the question.

The Moral Argument. “All people have moral values. The existence of these values cannot be explained unless they were implanted by God. Therefore, God exists.” There are simpler ways of explaining the origin of moral values without requiring the existence of a God to implant them. Besides, if moral values come from God, then all people should have the same moral values, which they do not.

The Argument from Life. “Life cannot originate from the random movement of atoms, yet life exists. Therefore the existence of God was necessary to create life.” If God is also “alive,” something must have created him. Life didn’t originate from the random movement of atoms, but was limited by the non-random laws of chemical reaction and of atomic physics.

The Argument from Revealed Theology (or from the Bible): “The Bible says that God exists, and the Bible is the inspired word of God. Therefore, what it says must be true. Therefore, God exists.” If the Bible were the inspired word of God, it would not contain self-contradictions or errors of fact. Also, this is a circular argument: it begs the question. It assumes the existence of the very thing we are trying to prove (God.)

Conclusion: The same basic arguments for the existence of God have been around for a thousand years. They all fail to actually prove the existence of any god. If the theist still resists giving up the comfort of his “god-beliefs,” then it is useless to argue with him further. It is best, perhaps, to share with him this quote by Thomas Paine: “To argue with a man who has renounced his reason is like giving medicine to the dead.”

References: The above-mentioned book and websites, plus the following: The essay, “Why Atheism?,” by Mark Thomas (<http://www.godlessgeeks.com/WhyAtheism.htm>). The article, “How to Argue with a Theist,” by Gordon Stein, Ph.D. (*The American Rationalist*, 1979.)

John Dearing
President of CSS

Our Godless Constitution

by Brooke Allen, *The Nation*, 2/3/2005

<http://www.thenation.com/doc.mhtml?i=20050221&s=allan>

It is hard to believe that George Bush has ever read the works of George Orwell, but he seems, somehow, to have grasped a few Orwellian precepts. The lesson the President has learned best — and certainly the one that has been the most useful to him — is the axiom that if you repeat a lie often enough, people will believe it. One of his Administration's current favorites is the whopper about America having been founded on Christian principles. Our nation was founded not on Christian principles but on Enlightenment ones. God only entered the picture as a very minor player, and Jesus Christ was conspicuously absent.

Our Constitution makes no mention whatever of God. The omission was too obvious to have been anything but deliberate, in spite of Alexander Hamilton's flippant responses when asked about it: According to one account, he said that the new nation was not in need of "foreign aid"; according to another, he simply said "we forgot." But as Hamilton's biographer Ron Chernow points out, Hamilton never forgot anything important.

In the eighty-five essays that make up *The Federalist*, God is mentioned only twice (both times by Madison, who uses the word, as Gore Vidal has remarked, in the "only Heaven knows" sense). In the Declaration of Independence, He gets two brief nods: a reference to "the Laws of Nature and Nature's God," and the famous line about men being "endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights." More blatant official references to a deity date from long after the founding period: "In God We Trust" did not appear on our coinage until the Civil War, and "under God" was introduced into the Pledge of Allegiance during the McCarthy hysteria in 1954.

In 1797 our government concluded a "Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the United States of America and the Bey and Subjects of Tripoli, or Barbary," now known simply as the Treaty of Tripoli. Article 11 of the treaty contains these words:

As the Government of the United States...is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion — as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion, or tranquillity of Musselmen — and as the said States never have entered into any war or act of hostility against any Mehomitan nation, it is declared by the parties that no pretext arising from religious opinions shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries.

Men like Franklin, Adams and Jefferson [...] had to be far more circumspect than the turbulent Paine, yet if we examine their beliefs it is all but impossible to see just how theirs differed from his.

This document was endorsed by Secretary of State Timothy Pickering and President John Adams. It was then sent to the Senate for ratification; the vote was unanimous. It is worth pointing out that although this was the 339th time a recorded vote had been required by the Senate, it was only the third unanimous vote in the Senate's history. There is no record of debate or dissent. The text of the treaty was printed in full in the *Philadelphia Gazette* and in two New York papers, but there were no screams of outrage, as one might expect today.

The Founding Fathers were not religious men, and they fought hard to erect, in Thomas Jefferson's words, "a wall of separation between church and state." John Adams opined that if they were not restrained by legal measures, Puritans — the fundamentalists of their day — would "whip and crop, and pillory and roast." The historical epoch had afforded these men ample opportunity to observe

the corruption to which established priesthoods were liable, as well as "the impious presumption of legislators and rulers," as Jefferson wrote, "civil as well as ecclesiastical, who, being themselves but fallible and uninspired men, have assumed dominion over the faith of others, setting up their own opinions and modes of thinking as the only true and infallible, and as such endeavoring to impose them on others, hath established and maintained false religions over the greatest part of the world and through all time."

If we define a Christian as a person who believes in the divinity of Jesus Christ, then it is safe to say that some of the key Founding Fathers were not Christians at all. Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and Tom Paine were deists — that is, they believed in one Supreme Being but rejected revelation and all the supernatural elements of the Christian Church; the word of the Creator, they believed, could best be read in Nature. John Adams was a professed liberal Unitarian, but he, too, in his private correspondence seems more deist than Christian.

George Washington and James Madison also leaned toward deism, although neither took much interest in religious matters. Madison believed that "religious bondage shackles and debilitates the mind and unfits it for every noble enterprize." He spoke of the "almost fifteen centuries" during which Christianity had been on trial: "What have been its fruits? More or less in all places, pride and indolence in the Clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, in both, superstition, bigotry, and persecution." If Washington mentioned the Almighty in a public

address, as he occasionally did, he was careful to refer to Him not as "God" but with some nondenominational moniker like "Great Author" or "Almighty Being." It is interesting to note that the Father of our Country spoke no words of a religious nature on his deathbed, although fully aware that he was dying, and did not ask for a man of God to be present; his last act was to take his own pulse, the consummate gesture of a creature of the age of scientific rationalism.

Tom Paine, a polemicist rather than a politician, could afford to be perfectly honest about his religious beliefs, which were baldly deist in the tradition of Voltaire: "I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life.... I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Turkish church, by the Protestant church, nor by any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church." This is how he opened *The Age of Reason*, his virulent attack on Christianity. In it he railed against the "obscene stories, the voluptuous debaucheries, the cruel and torturous executions, the unrelenting vindictiveness" of the Old Testament, "a history of wickedness, that has served to corrupt and brutalize mankind." The New Testament is less brutalizing but more absurd, the story of Christ's divine genesis a "fable, which for absurdity and extravagance is not exceeded by any thing that is to be found in the mythology of the ancients." He held the idea of the Resurrection in especial ridicule: Indeed, "the wretched contrivance with which this latter part is told, exceeds every thing that went before it." Paine was careful to contrast the tortuous twists of theology with the pure clarity of deism. "The true deist has but one Deity; and his religion consists in contemplating the power, wisdom, and benignity of the Deity in his works, and in endeavoring to imitate him in every thing moral, scientific, and mechanical."

Paine's rhetoric was so fervent that he was inevitably branded an atheist. Men like Franklin, Adams and Jefferson could not risk being tarred with that brush, and in fact Jefferson got into a good deal of trouble for continuing his friendship with Paine and entertaining him at Monticello. These statesmen had to be far more circumspect than the turbulent Paine, yet if we examine their beliefs it is all but impossible to see just how theirs differed from his.

Franklin was the oldest of the Founding Fathers. He was also the most worldly and sophisticated, and was well aware of the Machiavellian principle that if one aspires to influence the masses, one must at least profess religious sentiments. By his own definition he was a deist, although one French acquaintance claimed that "our free-thinkers have adroitly sounded him on his religion, and they maintain that they have discovered he is one of their own, that is that he has none at all." If he did have a religion, it was strictly utilitarian: As his biographer Gordon Wood has said, "He praised religion for whatever moral effects it had, but for little else." Divine revelation, Franklin freely admitted, had "no weight with me," and the covenant of

grace seemed "unintelligible" and "not beneficial." As for the pious hypocrites who have ever controlled nations, "A man compounded of law and gospel is able to cheat a whole country with his religion and then destroy them under color of law" — a comment we should carefully consider at this turning point in the history of our Republic.

Here is Franklin's considered summary of his own beliefs, in response to a query by Ezra Stiles, the president of Yale. He wrote it just six weeks before his death at the age of 84.

Here is my creed. I believe in one God, Creator of the universe. That he governs it by his providence. That he ought to be worshipped. That the most acceptable service we render to him is doing good to his other children. That the soul of Man is immortal, and will be treated with justice in another life respecting its conduct in this. These I take to be the fundamental points in all sound religion, and I regard them as you do in whatever sect I meet with them.

As for Jesus of Nazareth, my opinion of whom you particularly desire, I think his system of morals and his religion, as he left them to us, the best the world ever saw or is likely to see; but I apprehend it has received various corrupting changes, and I have, with most of the present dissenters in England, some doubts as to his divinity; though it is a question I do not dogmatize upon, having never studied it, and think it needless to busy myself with now, when I expect soon an opportunity of knowing the truth with less trouble. I see no harm, however, in its being believed, if that belief has the good consequence, as it probably has, of making his doctrines more respected and better observed, especially as I do not perceive that the Supreme takes it amiss, by distinguishing the unbelievers in his government of the world with any particular marks of his displeasure.

Jefferson thoroughly agreed with Franklin on the corruptions the teachings of Jesus had undergone. "The metaphysical abstractions of Athanasius, and the maniacal ravings of Calvin, tintured plentifully with the foggy dreams of Plato, have so loaded [Christianity] with absurdities and incomprehensibilities" that it was almost impossible to recapture "its native simplicity and purity." Like Paine, Jefferson felt that the miracles claimed by the New Testament put an intolerable strain on credulity. "The day will come," he predicted (wrongly, so far), "when the mystical generation of Jesus, by the supreme being as his father in the womb of a virgin, will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter." The Revelation of St. John he dismissed as "the ravings of a maniac."

Jefferson edited his own version of the New Testament, "The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth," in which he carefully deleted all the miraculous passages from the works of the Evangelists. He intended it, he said, as "a document in proof that I am a real Christian, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus." This was clearly a defense against his many enemies, who hoped to blacken his reputation by comparing him with the vile atheist Paine. His biographer Joseph Ellis is undoubtedly correct, though, in seeing disingenuousness here: "If [Jefferson] had been completely scrupulous, he would have described himself as a deist who admired the ethical teachings of Jesus as a man rather than as the son of God. (In modern-day parlance, he was a secular humanist.)" In short, not a Christian at all.

The three accomplishments Jefferson was proudest of — those that he requested be put on his tombstone — were the founding of the University of Virginia and the authorship of the Declaration of Independence and the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom. The latter was a truly radical document that would eventually influence the separation of church and state in the US Constitution; when it was passed by the Virginia legislature in 1786, Jefferson rejoiced that there was finally "freedom for the Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and the Mohammedan, the Hindu and infidel of every denomination" — note his respect, still unusual today, for the sensibilities of the "infidel." The University of Virginia was notable among early-American seats of higher education in that it had no religious affiliation whatever. Jefferson even banned the teaching of theology at the school.

If we were to speak of Jefferson in modern political categories, we would have to admit that he was a pure libertarian, in religious as in other matters. His real commitment (or lack thereof) to the teachings of Jesus Christ is plain from a famous throwaway comment he made: "It does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg." This raised plenty of hackles when it got about, and Jefferson had to go to some pains to restore his reputation as a good Christian. But one can only conclude, with Ellis, that he was no Christian at all.

John Adams, though no more religious than Jefferson, had inherited the fatalistic mindset of the Puritan culture in which he had grown up. He personally endorsed the Enlightenment commitment to Reason but did not share Jefferson's optimism about its future, writing to him, "I wish that Superstition in Religion exciting Superstition in Politicks...may never blow up all your benevolent and philanthropic Lucubrations," but that "the History of all Ages is against you." As an old man he observed, "Twenty times in the course of my late reading have I been upon the point of breaking out, 'This would be the best of all possible worlds, if there were no religion in it!'" Speaking ex cathedra, as a relic of the founding generation, he expressed his admiration for the Roman system whereby every man could worship whom, what and how he pleased. When his young listeners objected

that this was paganism, Adams replied that it was indeed, and laughed.

In their fascinating and eloquent valetudinarian correspondence, Adams and Jefferson had a great deal to say about religion. Pressed by Jefferson to define his personal creed, Adams replied that it was "contained in four short words, 'Be just and good.'" Jefferson replied, "The result of our fifty or sixty years of religious reading, in the four words, 'Be just and good,' is that in which all our inquiries must end; as the riddles of all priesthoods end in four more, 'ubi panis, ibi deus.' What all agree in, is probably right. What no two agree in, most probably wrong."

This was a clear reference to Voltaire's Reflections on Religion. As Voltaire put it:

There are no sects in geometry. One does not speak of a Euclidean, an Archimedean. When the truth is evident, it is impossible for parties and factions to arise.... Well, to what dogma do all minds agree? To the worship of a God, and to honesty. All the philosophers of the world who have had a religion have said in all ages: "There is a God, and one must be just." There, then, is the universal religion established in all ages and throughout mankind. The point in which they all agree is therefore true, and the systems through which they differ are therefore false.

Of course all these men knew, as all modern presidential candidates know, that to admit to theological skepticism is political suicide. During Jefferson's presidency a friend observed him on his way to church, carrying a large prayer book. "You going to church, Mr. J," remarked the friend. "You do not believe a word in it." Jefferson didn't exactly deny the charge. "Sir," he replied, "no nation has ever yet existed or been governed without religion. Nor can be. The Christian religion is the best religion that has been given to man and I as chief Magistrate of this nation am bound to give it the sanction of my example. Good morning Sir."

Like Jefferson, every recent President has understood the necessity of at least paying lip service to the piety of most American voters. All of our leaders, Democrat and Republican, have attended church, and have made very sure they are seen to do so. But there is a difference between offering this gesture of respect for majority beliefs and manipulating and pandering to the bigotry, prejudice and millennial fantasies of Christian extremists. Though for public consumption the Founding Fathers identified themselves as Christians, they were, at least by today's standards, remarkably honest about their misgivings when it came to theological doctrine, and religion in general came very low on the list of their concerns and priorities — always excepting, that is, their determination to keep the new nation free from bondage to its rule.

The Normalization of Horror

American Gulags Become Permanent

by Ted Rall, 1/11/2005

http://www.uexpress.com/tedrall/?uc_full_date=20050111

NEW YORK—A new documentary, “Hitler’s Hit Parade,” runs 76 minutes without narration. Comprised entirely of archival footage, the film prompts its reviewers to remark upon Hannah Arendt’s famous observation about the banality of evil. German troops subjugated Europe and shoved millions of people into ovens; German civilians went to the movies, attended concerts, and gossiped about their neighbors. People lived mundane, normal lives while their government carried out unspeakable monstrosities.

Sound familiar?

As Congress prepared to rubberstamp the nomination of torture aficionado Alberto Gonzales as the nation’s chief prosecutor, the Washington Post broke news that would have torn a saner nation apart. The Bush Administration, the paper reported January 2, is no longer planning to keep hundreds of Muslim prisoners currently rotting away in U.S. concentration camps at Guantánamo, Abu Ghraib and Bagram merely “indefinitely.” The Defense Department and CIA are now planning “a more permanent approach for potentially lifetime detentions” for these innocents.

We’re locking them up forever. Without due process.

Before gangsters like Alberto Gonzales seduced us into abandoning our values, a person was considered innocent before being proven guilty. Now we’re locking people away because “the government does not have enough evidence to charge [them] in courts.” And everyone, including Democrats, is OK with this.

Untold thousands of people are being held without charges, tortured and occasionally murdered in the system of gulags hastily strung together by the CIA, FBI, INS and Pentagon. According to the government itself, only a few dozen are former Al Qaeda officials. Most of these postmodern misérables were farmers, truck drivers, grunt militiamen and political enemies sold into bondage by Afghan warlords and similarly trustworthy souls for cash bounties on a no questions asked basis. We know they have no ties to terrorism, but they’ve already spent years getting beaten up. Releasing them would serve as a tacit admission that we were wrong to describe them as—in Dick Cheney’s words—“the worst of the worst.” They would sue our government, and eventually win. Worst of all, they have unpleasant tales to tell about systemic sodomy and countless other forms of horrific taxpayer-funded abuse. We can never let them out.

Bush plans to divide U.S. concentration camp victims into two groups. One set of “lifers” will end up in U.S.-run stalags like Gitmo’s new Camp 6, built to hold 200

“detainees who are unlikely to ever go through a military tribunal for lack of evidence, according to defense officials.” But not to worry: Camp 6 would “allow socializing among inmates.”

Others captured in the “war on terrorism” will be outsourced “to third countries willing to hold them indefinitely and without proceedings” in foreign-run gulags that pledge to make victims available for torture by American interrogators. This practice, some claim, is “an effective method of disrupting terrorist cells and persuading detainees to reveal information.”

People lived mundane, normal lives while their government carried out unspeakable monstrosities.

Sound familiar?

“The threat of sending someone to one of these countries [where they are likely to be tortured] is very important,” said Rohan Gunaratna, author of “Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror.”

But the so-called “ticking time bomb” rationale for torture is patently fallacious. We’ve heard the scenario repeatedly: wouldn’t it be worth torturing someone

who knew the location of a nuclear bomb that was about to destroy Manhattan? The short answer, to a moral person, is obviously no. Moreover, its logic is ludicrous.

Suppose we had captured Osama bin Laden on 9/10 and immediately gone to work on him with our Alberto Gonzales-approved psychotropic drugs and our Alberto Gonzales-approved “waterboard” dunking technique. It wouldn’t take long for Osama’s pals to notice that he’d failed to show up at the Terrorcave. They’d assume that we had him and were torturing him. They’d assume that he’d tell us everything he knew. So they’d delay 9/11 to 10/11 or 11/12 or 9/11/02. Or go to Plan B. Or develop a Plan C. No one in an underground organization, not even its top leader, is indispensable. Arrests are inconvenient, not debilitating.

The information a person possesses at the moment of his capture ages like a ripe cheese in hot sun. Even if what he told you at the beginning was true, anything you’d get out of him days and weeks and months and years later would be completely worthless.

Wait a minute.

Look at what we’re talking about. Consider the breezy way we Americans—Americans!—are debating the pros and cons of torture. Marvel at our moral bankruptcy. The liberal argument against torture used to be that it was wrong. Now it’s that it doesn’t work.

So.

Read any good books lately?

Fighting for the Work of the Lord

Christian fascism in America

by Gary Leupp, *CounterPunch*, 01/13/2005

Commentators right and left are talking about fascism in the U.S. of A. Libertarian conservative Lew Rockwell, in a recent article entitled "The Reality of Red-State Fascism," declares, "what we have alive in the US is an updated and Americanized fascism."

Fellow libertarian Justin Raimondo, in a piece called "Today's Conservatives are Fascists," calls the neocons shaping U.S. foreign policy "fascists, pure and simple." United Methodist minister Rev. William E. Alberts accuses some of Bush's followers of upholding a "super religion displaying tendencies similar to Hitler's super race with its fascist ideology of superiority."

Meanwhile the Revolutionary Communist Party circulates in the tens of thousands a statement declaring that "Bush and his people" are "Christian Fascists — dangerous fanatics who aim to make the U.S. a religious dictatorship and to force this upon the world." This is quite a wide spectrum of anti-fascist opinion.

I think it's good the f-word is out there, and the issue on the table. Fascism needs to be discussed. I thought so in October 2002, when I wrote an essay posted on CounterPunch, "Talking to Your Kids About Fascism." It was presented as a quiet talk one might have with preteens, delivered with the simple clarity and sobriety one might assume when talking with one's young about drug use or sex or any serious issue. My point at the time was fascism's not just a phenomenon unique to 1930s and 40s and defeated in 1945 but something that can recrudescence. One should be alert for warning signs.

That was over two years ago, before the criminal invasion of Iraq, based on lies, and the cynical exploitation of racist-based fear. It was before British officers complained that their U.S. counterparts in Iraq were treating the Iraqis like Untermensch (subhumans, a term the Nazis applied to various non-Aryan groups). It was before the Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo torture revelations, and the reorganization of the "intelligence community" to better disseminate disinformation in the service of ongoing war. It was before the Bush campaign to amend the constitution, for the first time to specifically prevent the expansion of liberties. It was before persons in and around the administration defended Japanese-American wartime concentration camps with an eye towards new camps for other groups in the future. The fascist tide has surged in the interim, as I thought, back in 2002, was very likely.

A Fascist Movement

I'm not suggesting that the state has become fascist. We remain a bourgeois democracy, in which you are free to vote for the corporate-sponsored Republican or Democrat

of your choice. You can still maneuver around as best you can in a marketplace controlled by ever fewer people. You can access a broad range of websites, protest in the streets (under carefully controlled conditions), and say what we think in emails and phone calls (although the authorities can legally monitor them as they please). You can still write and maybe have published letters to the editor criticizing the regime. The country itself remains pre-fascist.

Nor is there, a mass-based fascist party yet. The Republicans may morph into such, but there remain the occasional Ron Pauls. (I have to note, though, that the Texas Republican Congressman himself opines that "a total police state is fast approaching.") What we have is a fascist movement, even if its storm troops themselves do not, by

and large, conceive of it as such.

Many of them simply think they're God's Army, having nothing in common with Hitler's Brownshirts, whom they learned in school were bad people defeated by fine Americans. They will be insulted if told they resemble the Nazi supporters of the 1930s, but in many respects they do.

Fascism feeds on fear. Hitler's Reichmarshall Hermann Goering declared that "people can always

be brought to the bidding of the leaders. This is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked and attack the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same in every country." Question for discussion, ladies and gentlemen: How does this apply here? Are the myriad threats the movement has used to frighten all who will listen (weapons of mass destruction, mushroom clouds over New York, Muslims in general, liberal college professors, homosexuals) working to get people to do the bidding of leaders in this country?

Fascism also feeds on ignorance. "Good Germans" were truly persuaded that Jews, Slavs and Bolsheviks threatened them in 1939. Fascism is inherently anti-intellectual, deploying emotions (national pride, resentment at "outsiders," feelings of injury, millenarian hope) and targeting prominently among internal enemies those who challenge its self-validating myths. A key factor in the American variety is a frontal assault on whole fields of science, especially those challenging the Biblical depiction of the earth as merely 6000 years old.

A top Bush aide actually told the New York Times' Ron Suskind that administration officials disparagingly dismiss what they call "the reality-based community"—specifically, people who "believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality" as irrelevant. "That's not the way the world really works anymore," he declared. "We're an empire now, and when

What we have is a fascist movement, even if its storm troops themselves do not, by and large, conceive of it as such. Many of them simply think they're God's Army, having nothing in common with Hitler's Brownshirts, whom they learned in school were bad people defeated by fine Americans.

we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality — judiciously, as you will — we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors. . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do."

In other words, truth is for wimps; forget about it. We are the champions, the powerful, we make it up as we go along and if you want a piece of it, embrace the delusion. We will punish the French for rationally rejecting the attack on Iraq, and for that matter for inflicting the Enlightenment (with its emphasis on unmanly, unheroic rational empiricism) a few centuries back. We will punish the CIA for obnoxiously promoting reality-based intelligence over the requested, required disinformation before the Iraq attack. This is the sort of fascistic thought not only trumpeted by right wing talk radio, but from countless pulpits, cable news, and the White House — proudly irrational, fear mongering, sneering, creating its own reality with the calculated support of large sections of corporate America.

Gott Mit Uns

"Christian fascism," the Maoists call it, emphasizing its social agenda which presently includes reversing Roe vs. Wade, banning gay marriage, promoting school prayer, challenging science, and generally attacking the strict separation of church and state. The libertarians in contrast focus on the agenda of the neocons, who as it happens are primarily secular Jews highly supportive of Israel's Likud Party and influential in shaping foreign policy after 9-11, particularly as it pertains to what they've been calling "the Greater Middle East." Clearly the term "Christian fascist" doesn't describe these people, who may have mixed feelings about a movement currently useful to their foreign policy agenda but which could turn on them and make life uncomfortable for many people who reject fundamentalist Christianity. If fascists, they are of a different if kindred variety. Everyone applying the f-word agrees that the fascists have no regard for civil liberties and have used 9-11 to vitiate the Bill of Rights.

The question in my mind is this: Given that this fascist tide is so related to a post 9-11 foreign policy so shaped by non-Christians, can we indeed call the movement "Christian fascist"? If one does so, one acknowledges the obvious: that Bush's social base is largely a Christian fundamentalist one, committed to what it perversely terms a "family values" agenda. But Christian fundamentalists, who have been agitating for years for prayer in the schools, textbook censorship, public display of the 10 Commandments, etc., haven't from the grass roots been demanding U.S. military action to achieve regime change in the Middle East. The movement to achieve that central aspect of the fascist program comes from the elite, with the neocons in and out of government playing key roles. Their plans for the Middle East do happen to dovetail with the fundamentalists' "End Times" hopes and expectations for that region, such that even the collapse of the original justifications for the Iraq War doesn't daunt the latter in their support for what they see as God's plan. The neocons in power, in concert with their fundamentalist colleagues (Bush and Cheney among them) have played the Christian fascists at the grass roots like a harp.

Does calling the fascist trend in general "Christian fascist" send the wrong message to those Christians who reject it and find it irreconcilable with what they consider Christianity? Surely such believers are the majority among the 75-80% of the American people who identify themselves as Christians. Is it unfair to staunch Catholics, who follow their church's teachings on issues such as abortion and homosexuality and might, say, vote to ban gay marriage but who passionately oppose the war? Might we, noting the non-Christian input into this fascist trend refer to it merely as "religious fascism"? Or just "American fascism"?

Yes, you have at the summit Bush and Cheney, registered Methodists who may or not sincerely believe in the theology of John Wesley, which is not all that dissimilar to that of his contemporary Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, but derive support from the religious right, especially the less educated among them. But then you have the above-quoted Methodist minister Rev. William E. Alberts too. The problem is not any specific religion but the specific necessity of crisis-ridden capitalism to transform the world, exploiting religion whenever it's useful to do so. Hitler embarked on his world-transforming mission depicting himself as devout God-fearing man; in *Mein Kampf* he refers repeatedly to "the Lord," "the Almighty," and Jesus as "the great founder of a new doctrine." "I am fighting for the work of the Lord," he declared, and a whole lot of German Christians, Protestants and Catholics, believed him. Soldiers for the Wehrmacht wore belt buckles with the slogan *Gott mit uns* (God is with us).

Christian Anti-Fascism

On the other hand, some Christians rejected the exploitation of their faith. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Lutheran cleric who died in a concentration camp at age 39 in 1945, was the antithesis of the Christian fascist. In his book *Ethics*, he charged that fellow Christians failed to directly attack the specificity of evil in his time. Bonhoeffer was executed for his involvement in a heroic attempt to assassinate Hitler. He was, in the then-respectable view of the fascists, a terrorist. Martin Niemoeller, another Protestant pastor, was interned in a prison camp for eight years, freed in 1945. He had sermonized against aspects of the regime. After his liberation he suggested he and other Protestants hadn't done enough. Although the quotation is disputed Niemoeller is said to have stated, "First they came for the Communists, but I was not a Communist so I did not speak out. Then they came for the Socialists and the Trade Unionists, but I was neither, so I did not speak out. Then they came for the Jews, but I was not a Jew so I did not speak out. And when they came for me, there was no one left to speak out for me."

It is really for such Christians of today to reject and refute the unholy association between their faith and the "work of the Lord" that Bush claims he is achieving, and to speak out against fascist trends occurring here and now in the name of a man who counseled his followers, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you." Surely there is here the basis of a Christian anti-fascist movement.

Gary Leupp is Professor of History at Tufts University, and Adjunct Professor of Comparative Religion.

Students Don't Understand First Amendment: 1 in 3 say it 'goes too far'

by The Associated Press, 1/31/2005

WASHINGTON — The way many high school students see it, government censorship of newspapers may not be a bad thing, and flag burning is hardly protected free speech.

It turns out the First Amendment is a second-rate issue to many of those nearing their own adult independence, according to a study of high school attitudes released today.

The original amendment to the Constitution is the cornerstone of the way of life in the United States, promising citizens the freedoms of religion, speech, press and assembly.

Yet, when told of the exact text of the First Amendment, more than one in three high school students said it goes "too far" in the rights it guarantees.

Only half of the students said newspapers should be allowed to publish freely without government approval of stories.

"These results are not only disturbing; they are dangerous," said Hodding Carter III, president of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, which sponsored the \$1 million study. "Ignorance about the basics of this free society is a danger to our nation's future."

The students are even more restrictive in their views than their elders, the study says.

When asked whether people should be allowed to express unpopular views, 97 percent of teachers and 99 percent of school principals said yes. Only 83 percent of students did.

The results reflected indifference, with almost three in four students saying they took the First Amendment for granted or didn't know how they felt about it. It was also clear that many students do not understand what is protected by the bedrock of the Bill of Rights.

Three in four students said flag burning is illegal. It's not. About half the students said the government can restrict any indecent material on the Internet. It can't.

"Schools don't do enough to teach the First Amendment. Students often don't know the rights it protects," Linda Puntney, executive director of the Journalism Education Association, said in the report. "This all comes at a time when there is decreasing passion for much of anything. And you have to be passionate about the First Amendment."

The partners in the project, including organizations of newspaper editors and radio and television news directors, share a clear advocacy for First Amendment issues.

Federal and state officials, meanwhile, have bemoaned a lack of knowledge of U.S. civics and history among young people. Sen. Robert Byrd, D-W.Va., has even pushed through a mandate that schools must teach about the Constitution on Sept. 17, the date it was signed in 1787.

The survey, conducted by researchers at the University of Connecticut, is billed as the largest of its kind. More than 100,000 students, nearly 8,000 teachers and more than 500 administrators at 544 public and private high schools took part in early 2004.

The study suggests that students embrace First Amendment freedoms if they are taught about them and given a chance to practice them, but schools don't make the matter a priority.

Students who take part in school media activities, such as a student newspapers or TV production, are much more likely to support expression of unpopular views, for example.

About nine in 10 principals said it is important for all students to learn some journalism skills, but most administrators say a lack of money limits their media offerings.

More than one in five schools offer no student media opportunities; of the high schools that do not offer student newspapers, 40 percent have eliminated them in the last five years.

"The last 15 years have not been a golden era for student media," said Warren Watson, director of the J-Ideas project at Ball State University in Indiana. "Programs are under siege or dying from neglect. Many students do not get the opportunity to practice our basic freedoms."

Only half of the students said newspapers should be allowed to publish freely without government approval of stories.

END BUSH'S WAR

There is no light at
the end of the tunnel

Parents Challenge Weekly Bible Classes

by CNN, 2/12/2005

<http://www.cnn.com/2005/EDUCATION/02/12/bible.class.ap/index.html>

STAUNTON, Virginia (AP) — When Heather and Logan Ward's son entered public kindergarten this fall, they were shocked to discover that pupils were taken from class to a nearby church for weekly Bible lessons.

The Wards moved to Virginia's Shenandoah Valley from New York four years ago, and were unaware of the tradition that has remained in Staunton and other rural schools for more than 60 years.

"My reaction is exactly like the reaction of those who come here from a different place — shock and disbelief that we have Bible classes in public schools," Heather Ward said.

Now the Wards and other parents are asking the school board to eliminate or modify the program, which shuttles first-, second- and third-graders to churches during class time for voluntary half-hour Christian lessons and activities.

But the would-be reformers have run into staunch resistance. More than 400 people showed up to weigh in on the issue at a contentious school board meeting in December, and more than 1,000 signed a petition urging the school board to keep the classes.

The six-member school board is scheduled to decide the issue Monday.

Jack Hinton, president of the local private group that offers the lessons, attributes the opposition to a small minority, many of them newcomers to the valley. Without religious classes, he said, "kids get into trouble and have no moral structure on which to combat drugs, sex, pornography and all that."

But many opponents are Staunton natives. They argue that children who opt out are stigmatized and have little to do while their classmates are in Bible classes, taking away precious time for academics in the age of standardized testing.

The Bible classes began in Virginia in 1929 after a majority of students failed a simple Bible test.

The lessons were conducted inside public school classrooms until 1948, when the Supreme Court ruled that the lessons violated the principle of separation of church and state. A few years later, the court revisited the issue and approved classes held away from school premises.

Most towns have done away with the classes, but the 20 school divisions that have kept the classes generally stretch along Interstate 81 in western Virginia, known to some as the state's "Bible Belt." In the Staunton area, more than 80 percent of first-, second- and third-graders participate.

"The people in those communities still have strong Christian faith and want their children to learn this," said JoAnne Shirley, state director of Weekday Religious Education, the private group that offers the lessons.

Although no lawsuits have been filed, the local chapter of the group has hired a lawyer, Gil Davis, who once represented Paula Jones in her sexual harassment lawsuit against President Clinton. The group also is working with the Rutherford Institute, a Charlottesville center that defends Christian rights.

Rutherford President John Whitehead said the classes "are wholly consistent with the First Amendment and this nation's religious heritage."

But opponents argue the classes are divisive, and the schools already have character-education classes, which teach children about right and wrong without religion.

"Christians don't have a monopoly on morality," says Renee Staton, a Staunton native whose husband is Jewish.

Beverly Ridell, who grew up going to the Staunton schools, teaches first- and second-grade Sunday school at church and opposes religious classes during school time.

"I asked them whether Jesus was a Christian and they said 'yes.' When I said, 'Jesus was a Jew,' one girl said, 'But Jesus was a good person,'" Ridell said.

"If Christians are good people, what are Jews? These are 6- and 7-year-old kids. This is an age where what's right and what's wrong are clear and unambiguous."

In nearby Waynesboro, 71 percent of pupils in the second through fourth grades participated in the classes last year, learning the Bible's take on the creation of the world and the parable of the Good Samaritan.

"From a complete-education aspect, it's important to have a basic Biblical knowledge of what some of the stories are from literature you read when you're older," said local WRE President Pam Stoneburner.

Hinton acknowledged that the struggle to keep the Bible classes might be partly based on a desire to cling to tradition in the face of a changing community.

"Tradition has the ability to make you a better person, make you a better citizen, make you involved with the positive aspects of a community," he said.

But parent Heather Ward thinks tradition must evolve.

"Unless we build a wall around our city, we're going to have to deal with the changing demographics," she said. "That's just part of modern life."

"I asked them whether Jesus was a Christian and they said 'yes.' When I said, 'Jesus was a Jew,' one girl said, 'But Jesus was a good person,'" Ridell said.

Design for Living

by Michael J. Behe, *New York Times*, 2/7/2005

Bethlehem, Pa. — IN the wake of the recent lawsuits over the teaching of Darwinian evolution, there has been a rush to debate the merits of the rival theory of intelligent design. As one of the scientists who have proposed design as an explanation for biological systems, I have found widespread confusion about what intelligent design is and what it is not.

First, what it isn't: the theory of intelligent design is not a religiously based idea, even though devout people opposed to the teaching of evolution cite it in their arguments. For example, a critic recently caricatured intelligent design as the belief that if evolution occurred at all it could never be explained by Darwinian natural selection and could only have been directed at every stage by an omniscient creator. That's misleading. Intelligent design proponents do question whether random mutation and natural selection completely explain the deep structure of life. But they do not doubt that evolution occurred. And intelligent design itself says nothing about the religious concept of a creator.

Rather, the contemporary argument for intelligent design is based on physical evidence and a straightforward application of logic. The argument for it consists of four linked claims. The first claim is uncontroversial: we can often recognize the effects of design in nature. For example, unintelligent physical forces like plate tectonics and erosion seem quite sufficient to account for the origin of the Rocky Mountains. Yet they are not enough to explain Mount Rushmore.

Of course, we know who is responsible for Mount Rushmore, but even someone who had never heard of the monument could recognize it as designed. Which leads to the second claim of the intelligent design argument: the physical marks of design are visible in aspects of biology. This is uncontroversial, too. The 18th-century clergyman William Paley likened living things to a watch, arguing that the workings of both point to intelligent design. Modern Darwinists disagree with Paley that the perceived design is real, but they do agree that life overwhelms us with the appearance of design.

For example, Francis Crick, co-discoverer of the structure of DNA, once wrote that biologists must constantly remind themselves that what they see was not designed

but evolved. (Imagine a scientist repeating through clenched teeth: "It wasn't really designed. Not really.")

The resemblance of parts of life to engineered mechanisms like a watch is enormously stronger than what Reverend Paley imagined. In the past 50 years modern science has shown that the cell, the very foundation of life, is run by machines made of molecules. There are little molecular trucks in the cell to ferry supplies, little outboard motors to push a cell through liquid.

In 1998 an issue of the journal *Cell* was devoted to molecular machines, with articles like "The Cell as a Collection of Protein Machines" and "Mechanical Devices of the Spliceosome: Motors, Clocks, Springs and Things." Referring to his student days in the 1960's, Bruce Alberts, president of the National Academy of Sciences, wrote that "the chemistry that makes life possible is much more elaborate and sophisticated than anything we students had ever considered." In fact, Dr. Alberts remarked, the entire cell can be viewed as a factory with an

elaborate network of interlocking assembly lines, each of which is composed of a set of large protein machines. He emphasized that the term machine was not some fuzzy analogy; it was meant literally.

The next claim in the argument for design is that we have no good explanation for the foundation of life that doesn't involve intelligence. Here is where thoughtful people part company. Darwinists assert that their theory can explain the appearance of design in life as the result of random mutation and natural selection acting over immense stretches of time. Some scientists, however, think the Darwinists' confidence is unjustified. They note that although natural selection can explain some aspects of biology, there are no research studies indicating that Darwinian processes can make molecular machines of the complexity we find in the cell.

Scientists skeptical of Darwinian claims include many who have no truck with ideas of intelligent design, like those who advocate an idea called complexity theory, which envisions life self-organizing in roughly the same way that a hurricane does, and ones who think organisms in some sense can design themselves.

The theory of intelligent design is not a religiously based idea [...] Intelligent design itself says nothing about the religious concept of a creator.

— Michael Behe

And George W. Bush's theory on "reforming" Social Security says nothing about dismantling it entirely. But leaked documents from inside the White House tell us his TRUE intentions. Just as the Wedge Document, leaked from Behe's own Discovery Institute Center for Science and Culture (see page 15), tells us THEIR true intentions...

— Reed Byers

The fourth claim in the design argument is also controversial: in the absence of any convincing non-design explanation, we are justified in thinking that real intelligent design was involved in life. To evaluate this claim, it's important to keep in mind that it is the profound appearance of design in life that everyone is laboring to explain, not the appearance of natural selection or the appearance of self-organization.

The strong appearance of design allows a disarmingly simple argument: if it looks, walks and quacks like a duck, then, absent compelling evidence to the contrary, we have warrant to conclude it's a duck. Design should not be overlooked simply because it's so obvious.

Still, some critics claim that science by definition can't accept design, while others argue that science should keep looking for another explanation in case one is out there. But we can't settle questions about reality with definitions, nor does it seem useful to search relentlessly for a non-design explanation of Mount Rushmore. Besides, whatever special restrictions scientists adopt for themselves don't bind the public, which polls show, overwhelmingly, and sensibly, thinks that life was designed. And so do many scientists who see roles for both the messiness of evolution and the elegance of design.

Michael J. Behe, a professor of biological sciences at Lehigh University and a senior fellow with the Discovery Institute's Center for Science and Culture, is the author of "Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution."

Reponses to the *New York Times*

• To the Editor:

Re "Design for Living," by Michael J. Behe (Op-Ed, Feb. 7):

The basic principle of intelligent design is that life is just too complicated to occur by chance, and thus there must be some intelligent entity guiding the process.

A much more likely explanation is that our inability to comprehend these phenomena that appear "designed" merely reflects our own limitations as a species. We only recently discovered fire and the wheel and remain a basically savage society. Why not recognize our own limited capacity to understand complexity?

Our perception of complexity derives from our sense of scale in daily events. Is it any surprise that from this perspective, the evolution of life is beyond our grasp to comprehend? Intelligent design, like other creation myths, is just another way for us to make sense of our world.

A simpler alternative is to embrace our limited ability to comprehend and move on from there.

Richard W. Grant, M.D.
Boston, Feb. 7, 2005

• To the Editor:

I, like most working scientists, remain extremely skeptical that intelligent design can yet claim to be part of science. Writers such as the evolutionary theorist Richard Dawkins have pointed out the philosophical and scientific weaknesses in design arguments.

For me, the telling point is that the proponents of design cannot answer how it was supposed to have happened. Was it from divine intervention, visits by space aliens, magic?

Design will be a real science when we have testable answers for these questions.

Donald Terndrup
Columbus, Ohio, Feb. 7, 2005

The writer is an associate professor of astronomy, Ohio State University.

•To the Editor:

Michael J. Behe is right that the general public is free to accept intelligent design. This idea may be psychologically or spiritually attractive and even consistent with the world we see around us.

But the doctrine of intelligent design does not produce falsifiable (or disprovable) statements that are susceptible to testing. This rigorous testing process is the central element of the modern scientific method.

Assertions about intelligent design fall into an area of faith and belief outside the scope of science.

Karen Rosenberg
Newark, Del., Feb. 7, 2005

The writer is chairwoman of the department of anthropology, University of Delaware.

•To the Editor:

I must have missed the concept of "if it looks, walks and quacks like a duck, then, absent compelling evidence to the contrary, we have warrant to conclude it's a duck" in my studies of the scientific method.

Yes, scientists describe their observations, but this is not the scientific method. Employing experiments aimed at discovering the "compelling evidence to the contrary" is.

That is the trouble with the design — intelligent or otherwise — theory. Description is not enough in science. That is for religion.

Melissa Henriksen
New York, Feb. 7, 2005

The writer is a research assistant professor, Laboratory of Molecular Cell Biology, Rockefeller University.

•To the Editor:

Michael J. Behe demonstrates why the so-called theory of intelligent design should stay out of our science classrooms. His claims of physical evidence are spurious. We see clocks and outboard motors in cells not because they are clocks and motors, but because we have no better analogy.

A century ago, the astronomer Percival Lowell described water-filled canals on Mars for the same reason. When confronted with the unknown, we first perceive it in terms of the known. Perception, however, does not make it so.

Science alone cannot sustain our society; philosophical speculation like Dr. Behe's is vital to our understanding, too. But trying to pass one off as the other serves only to undermine them both.

Jon Sanders
Monterey, Calif., Feb. 7, 2005

•To the Editor:

Michael J. Behe argues that the elegantly complex and efficiently operating living cell cries out for intelligent design. He hastens to say that intelligent design says nothing about the religious concept of a creator.

But the designer, whoever she may be, must surely be infinitely more complex than the products of her creations.

One then wonders who designed the designer. And that line of questioning never ends. Nor does the ultimate mystery.

Voice of an Angel

[Editor's note: *OK, we admit it — Angela's got the World's Worst Luck.*

Angela started experiencing sharp pain in her lower side at 3pm Saturday the 5th. At 7pm we went to the emergency room, where we determined that she had appendicitis. She was admitted to Good Sam hospital around midnight.

*After delaying the start of the procedure *ALL* *DAY* Sunday due to other people's emergencies (and who cares about THEM, anyway, right?), they wheeled her down to the O.R. and laproscopically removed her appendix. The operation turned out to be as straightforward and uncomplicated as the doctor could have possibly wished for.*

It was all done in less than an hour (2+ hours, if you count recovery time), and she was back in her room sipping broth and doing fine. She was released the next day (Monday; two days after she first felt the pain), and has been recovering since.

As a result, she's not up to writing a column this month, but she ought to be able to attend the CSS meeting in a week...

Angela's generally the one in charge of scanning and cleaning up newspaper clippings for this newsletter — her overall health since the car accident 10 months ago is one of the main reasons why you've seen fewer clippings pages than we used to run. (That, plus the fact that there's just been SO MANY AMAZING

ARTICLES that have screamed out for inclusion!) We'll make extra effort to have clippings pages back by next issue.

So thanks for all your well wishes (and for Peggy Dearing's delicious specially-delivered home-cooked dinner)! And, assuming Angela's feeling up to it by then, after the CSS meeting on the 19th, we invite you to join us at Riley's Family Pool Room in Albany for delicious all-you-can-eat barbeque chicken and ribs!]



"There will never be world peace until God's house and God's people are given their rightful place of leadership at the top of the world."
 — Pat Robertson,
The New World Order, 1992

The Wedge Document

(Leaked from the “Center for the Renewal of Science & Culture” in 1999)

INTRODUCTION

The proposition that human beings are created in the image of God is one of the bedrock principles on which Western civilization was built. Its influence can be detected in most, if not all, of the West’s greatest achievements, including representative democracy, human rights, free enterprise, and progress in the arts and sciences.

Yet a little over a century ago, this cardinal idea came under wholesale attack by intellectuals drawing on the discoveries of modern science. Debunking the traditional conceptions of both God and man, thinkers such as Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud portrayed humans not as moral and spiritual beings, but as animals or machines who inhabited a universe ruled by purely impersonal forces and whose behavior and very thoughts were dictated by the unbending forces of biology, chemistry, and environment. This materialistic conception of reality eventually infected virtually every area of our culture, from politics and economics to literature and art

The cultural consequences of this triumph of materialism were devastating. Materialists denied the existence of objective moral standards, claiming that environment dictates our behavior and beliefs. Such moral relativism was uncritically adopted by much of the social sciences, and it still undergirds much of modern economics, political science, psychology and sociology.

Materialists also undermined personal responsibility by asserting that human thoughts and behaviors are dictated by our biology and environment. The results can be seen in modern approaches to criminal justice, product liability, and welfare. In the materialist scheme of things, everyone is a victim and no one can be held accountable for his or her actions.

Finally, materialism spawned a virulent strain of utopianism. Thinking they could engineer the perfect society through the application of scientific knowledge, materialist reformers advocated coercive government programs that falsely promised to create heaven on earth.

Discovery Institute’s Center for the Renewal of Science and Culture seeks nothing less than the overthrow of materialism and its cultural legacies. Bringing together leading scholars from the natural sciences and those from the humanities and social sciences, the Center explores how new developments in biology, physics and cognitive science raise serious doubts about scientific materialism

and have re-opened the case for a broadly theistic understanding of nature. The Center awards fellowships for original research, holds conferences, and briefs policymakers about the opportunities for life after materialism.

The Center is directed by Discovery Senior Fellow Dr. Stephen Meyer. An Associate Professor of Philosophy at Whitworth College, Dr. Meyer holds a Ph.D. in the History and Philosophy of Science from Cambridge University. He formerly worked as a geophysicist for the Atlantic Richfield Company.

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THE WEDGE PROJECTS

Phase I. Scientific Research, Writing & Publication

- Individual Research Fellowship Program
- Paleontology Research program (Dr. Paul Chien et al.)
- Molecular Biology Research Program (Dr. Douglas Axe et al.)

Phase II. Publicity & Opinion-making

- Book Publicity
- Opinion-Maker Conferences
- Apologetics Seminars
- Teacher Training Program
- Op-ed Fellow
- PBS (or other TV) Co-production
- Publicity Materials / Publications

Phase III. Cultural Confrontation & Renewal

- Academic and Scientific Challenge Conferences
- Potential Legal Action for Teacher Training
- Research Fellowship Program: shift to social sciences and humanities

FIVE YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN SUMMARY

The social consequences of materialism have been devastating. As symptoms, those consequences are certainly worth treating. However, we are convinced that in order to defeat materialism, we must cut it off at its source. That source is scientific materialism. This is precisely our strategy. If we view the predominant materialistic science as a giant tree, our strategy is intended to function as a “wedge” that, while relatively small, can split the trunk when applied at its weakest points. The very beginning of this strategy, the “thin edge of the wedge,” was Phillip Johnson’s critique of Darwinism begun in 1991 in Darwinism on Trial, and continued in Reason in the Balance and Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds.

Governing Goals

- **To defeat scientific materialism and its destructive moral, cultural and political legacies.**
- **To replace materialistic explanations with the theistic understanding that nature and human beings are created by God**

Michael Behe's highly successful Darwin's Black Box followed Johnson's work. We are building on this momentum, broadening the wedge with a positive scientific alternative to materialistic scientific theories, which has come to be called the theory of intelligent design (ID). Design theory promises to reverse the stifling dominance of the materialist worldview, and to replace it with a science consonant with Christian and theistic convictions.

The Wedge strategy can be divided into three distinct but interdependent phases, which are roughly but not strictly chronological. We believe that, with adequate support, we can accomplish many of the objectives of Phases I and II in the next five years (1999-2003), and begin Phase III (See "Goals/ Five Year Objectives/ Activities").

Phase I: Research, Writing and Publication

Phase II: Publicity and Opinion-making

Phase III: Cultural Confrontation and Renewal

Phase I is the essential component of everything that comes afterward. Without solid scholarship, research and argument, the project would be just another attempt to indoctrinate instead of persuade. A lesson we have learned from the history of science is that it is unnecessary to outnumber the opposing establishment. Scientific revolutions are usually staged by an initially small and relatively young group of scientists who are not blinded by the prevailing prejudices and who are able to do creative work at the pressure points, that is, on those critical issues upon which whole systems of thought hinge. So, in Phase I we are supporting vital writing and research at the sites most likely to crack the materialist edifice.

Phase II. The primary purpose of Phase II is to prepare the popular reception of our ideas. The best and truest research can languish unread and unused unless it is properly publicized. For this reason we seek to cultivate and convince influential individuals in print and broadcast media, as well as think tank leaders, scientists and academics, congressional staff, talk show hosts, college and seminary presidents and faculty, future talent and potential academic allies. Because of his long tenure in politics, journalism and public policy, Discovery President Bruce Chapman brings to the project rare knowledge and acquaintance of key op-ed writers, journalists, and political leaders. This combination of scientific and scholarly expertise and media and political connections makes the Wedge unique, and also prevents it from being "merely academic." Other activities include production of a PBS documentary on intelligent design and its implications, and popular op-ed publishing. Alongside a focus on influential opinion-makers, we also seek to build up a popular base of support among our natural constituency, namely, Christians. We will do this primarily through apologetics seminars. We intend these to encourage and equip believers with new scientific evidence's that support the faith, as well as to "popularize" our ideas in the broader culture.

Phase III. Once our research and writing have had time to mature, and the public prepared for the reception of design theory, we will move toward direct confrontation with the advocates of materialist science through challenge conferences in significant academic settings. We will also pursue possible legal assistance in response to resistance to the integration of design theory into public school science curricula. The attention, publicity, and influence of design theory should draw scientific materialists into open debate with design theorists, and we will be ready. With an added emphasis to the social sciences and humanities, we will begin to address the specific social consequences of materialism and the Darwinist theory that supports it in the sciences.

GOALS

Governing Goals

- To defeat scientific materialism and its destructive moral, cultural and political legacies.
- To replace materialistic explanations with the theistic understanding that nature and human beings are created by God.

Five Year Goals

- To see intelligent design theory as an accepted alternative in the sciences and scientific research being done from the perspective of design theory.
- To see the beginning of the influence of design theory in spheres other than natural science.
- To see major new debates in education, life issues, legal and personal responsibility pushed to the front of the national agenda.

Twenty Year Goals

- To see intelligent design theory as the dominant perspective in science.
- To see design theory application in specific fields, including molecular biology, biochemistry, paleontology, physics and cosmology in the natural sciences, psychology, ethics, politics, theology and philosophy in the humanities; to see its influence in the fine arts.
- To see design theory permeate our religious, cultural, moral and political life.

FIVE YEAR OBJECTIVES

1. A major public debate between design theorists and Darwinists (by 2003)
2. Thirty published books on design and its cultural implications (sex, gender issues, medicine, law, and religion)
3. One hundred scientific, academic and technical articles by our fellows
4. Significant coverage in national media:
 - Cover story on major news magazine such as Time or Newsweek
 - PBS show such as Nova treating design theory fairly

- Regular press coverage on developments in design theory
- Favorable op-ed pieces and columns on the design movement by 3rd party media

5. Spiritual & cultural renewal:

- Mainline renewal movements begin to appropriate insights from design theory, and to repudiate theologies influenced by materialism
- Major Christian denomination(s) defend(s) traditional doctrine of creation & repudiate(s)
- Darwinism Seminaries increasingly recognize & repudiate naturalistic presuppositions
- Positive uptake in public opinion polls on issues such as sexuality, abortion and belief in God

6. Ten states begin to rectify ideological imbalance in their science curricula & include design theory

7. Scientific achievements:

- An active design movement in Israel, the UK and other influential countries outside the US
- Ten CRSC Fellows teaching at major universities
- Two universities where design theory has become the dominant view
- Design becomes a key concept in the social sciences Legal reform movements base legislative proposals on design theory

[... portion deleted for space ...]

THE WEDGE STRATEGY PROGRESS SUMMARY

Books

William Dembski and Paul Nelson, two CRSC Fellows, will very soon have books published by major secular university publishers, Cambridge University Press and The University of Chicago Press, respectively. (One critiques Darwinian materialism; the other offers a powerful alternative.)

Nelson's book, *On Common Descent*, is the seventeenth book in the prestigious University of Chicago "Evolutionary Monographs" series and the first to critique neo-Darwinism. Dembski's book, *The Design Inference*, was back-ordered in June, two months prior to its release date.

These books follow hard on the heels of Michael Behe's *Darwin's Black Box* (The Free Press) which is now in paperback after nine print runs in hard cover. So far it has been translated into six foreign languages. The success of his book has led to other secular publishers such as McGraw Hill requesting future titles from us. This is a breakthrough.

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Television and Radio Appearances

During 1997 our fellows appeared on numerous radio programs (both Christian and secular) and five nationally televised programs, *TechnoPolitics*, *Hardball* with Chris

Matthews, *Inside the Law*, *Freedom Speaks*, and *Firing Line*. The special edition of *TechnoPolitics* that we produced with PBS in November elicited such an unprecedented audience response that the producer Neil Freeman decided to air a second episode from the "out takes." His enthusiasm for our intellectual agenda helped stimulate a special edition of William F. Buckley's *Firing Line*, featuring Phillip Johnson and two of our fellows, Michael Behe and David Berlinski. At Ed Atsinger's invitation, Phil Johnson and Steve Meyer addressed Salem Communications' Talk Show Host conference in Dallas last November. As a result, Phil and Steve have been interviewed several times on Salem talk shows across the country. For example, in July Steve Meyer and Mike Behe were interviewed for two hours on the nationally broadcast radio show Janet Parshall's *America*. Canadian Public Radio (CBC) recently featured Steve Meyer on their *Tapestry* program. The episode, "God & the Scientists," has aired all across Canada. And in April, William Craig debated Oxford atheist Peter Atkins in Atlanta before a large audience (moderated by William F. Buckley), which was broadcast live via satellite link, local radio, and internet "webcast."

Newspaper and Magazine Articles

The *Firing Line* debate generated positive press coverage for our movement in, of all places, *The New York Times*, as well as a column by Bill Buckley. In addition, our fellows have published recent articles & op-eds in both the secular and Christian press, including, for example, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Times*, *National Review*, *Commentary*, *Touchstone*, *The Detroit News*, *The Boston Review*, *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, *Christianity Today*, *Cosmic Pursuits* and *World*. An op-ed piece by Jonathan Wells and Steve Meyer is awaiting publication in the *Washington Post*. Their article criticizes the National Academy of Science book *Teaching about Evolution* for its selective and ideological presentation of scientific evidence. Similar articles are in the works.

From the Editor...

(continued from page 1)

Such a God doesn't really EXPLAIN anything. Evolution, and Science in general, are not threatened by such a God. Belief in this sort of God is essentially Deism, such as was practiced by many of America's Founding Fathers. It allows you to toss off an occasional poetic reference to "Nature's God", without having to actually mean anything by it.

A Non-Interfering God, like anything else with no measurable impact on the universe we perceive, may as well not exist. It is a mere assertion, with nothing to back it up.

And an Interfering God ought to be detectable in some way as a breakdown or large unsolvable hole in our scientific understanding of the universe.

Needless to say, this hasn't happened yet.

Reed Byers

Editor, *Willamette Freethinker*

Letters to the Editor

01/14/05

Mr. John Dearing:

Re that argument that “if someone could feed a child but didn’t, that would be evil” [“From the President” column, last issue]: the guy who said that wasn’t thinking! His “god”, per the usual Christian belief, has “omnipotency” — it could feed that child, but didn’t — thus, following his “logic”, his “god” is evil!

On the “I.D.” front: you can add the lousy **child-bearing system** to the list of flawed “designs”! If “god” did it, he is incompetent or sadistic, or both. Maybe “god” used 100% of chimp genes to produce “I.D.”-pushers! But that is kind of an insult to chimps.

On the “tsunami”: on NBC-TV, and CBS-TV, the nightly news reporters did **not** introduce any religious explanation that I noticed — which surprised me. It was the scientific explanation, from the first until at least last night. But I heard one report of Muslim priests trying to blame it on “idolators” (their pet term for non-Muslims). Today, the Indonesian gov’t, under pressure from Muslim priests, asked the foreign aid-workers to get out in another week or so. Some Muslim zealots had been claiming that some of them were pushing religion! Can you imagine a Christian missionary doing a thing like that? That, I think, is exactly why Bush is trying to get **private donations**, instead of using tax-money (or rather, **borrow** funds!) for aid: it can be channeled thru churches, with no limit on their religion-pushing.

Of course, the real cause of the tsunami was the election of Bush.

Charles M. Selby

Three ways to support Corvallis Secular Society online!



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Thank you for helping support freethought in Oregon’s beautiful Willamette Valley!

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Thank you for supporting our efforts to promote atheism, humanism, and freethought in Oregon’s Willamette Valley.

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