



Willamette Freethinker



Volume 12, Number 8 — August 2005

A publication of Corvallis Secular Society

<http://css.peak.org>

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:

[NOTE: Today's column will break with tradition, and rather than addressing YOU, the rational humanists and atheists who are the only ones even slightly likely to actually read this, I will instead be addressing YOU. The rest of you out there. The uberChristians and ultra-religious wackos who are currently running the country and driving it into the gutter.]

OK, you ignorant bastards, you destroyers of everything the Enlightenment stood for. You win.

You want Intelligent Design taught alongside Evolution in the classroom? Fine. We'll even give you equal time. In fact, to do this really proper, we'll mandate a special year-long "Origins of the Diversity of Life on Earth" class to be required for all Junior High students, all across the country. One semester of Evolution, one semester of Intelligent Design. Couldn't be fairer than that.

As you have so stridently demanded, all flaws and weaknesses of evolutionary theory will be pointed out during the evolution semester. And of course, to be fair, all flaws and weaknesses of Intelligent Design will be pointed out during the ID semester.

You have also made it clear that students should be taught ALL theories of how the various species came to be, and allowed to make up their own minds; this is why you demand ID be taught in the first place. Again I say, fine.

During the evolution semester, all variants of evolutionary theory will be covered. That shouldn't be too hard. And during the ID semester, all variants of ID will be covered. (After all, you have repeatedly insisted that ID is not about any ONE Intelligent Designer!)

Therefore: half of the ID semester will be given over to supernatural Intelligent Designers, and half will be given to aliens from other planets, i.e. "natural" Intelligent Designers.

The "natural" half of the ID semester will be spent questioning the nature and motives of these alien Designers. Do they plan to come back and eat us, or are they benevolent? Did they, themselves, evolve? Or were they ALSO intelligently designed? Were THEIR Designers natural or supernatural? And so on.

(continued on page 10)

CSS Meetings and Events

Calendar:

Saturday, Aug 20th 2:00-4:00 CSS regular meeting
Saturday, Sep 17th 1:00-4:00 CSS potluck
Saturday, Oct 15th 2:00-4:00 CSS regular meeting

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).

CSS Member Wedding!

On Saturday, August 6th, CSS member Bonnie Windish married her partner, Debbie Barnhurst, in a beautiful outdoor god-free ceremony in Lincoln City, overlooking the Pacific Ocean. The wedding was conducted by Nancy Powell of United States Atheists (the woman who conducted the wedding of Reed and Angela Byers).

Bonnie joined CSS promptly after moving to Oregon three years ago. She is a doctoral student at Oregon State University. Debbie is an elementary school teacher in the Portland area.

I know I speak for all of CSS when I wish Bonnie and Debbie (who are changing their last names to "Jaron") all the best...

In this issue:

- From the President of CSS p.2
- Atheists in Foxholes p.3
- Voice of an Angel p.4
- Design for Confusion p.5
- A Time of Doubt for Atheists p.6
- Newspaper Letters p.8
- Einstein on God p.9
- Democracy Perfected p.10

From the President:

Spirituality: What is it, and Can it Describe Humanism?

The definition of spirit found in *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition*, includes the following: An animating or vital principle held to give life to physical organisms. The immaterial intelligent or sentient part of a person. A special attitude or frame of mind. Spiritual is of, relating to, consisting of, or affecting the spirit. Of or relating to sacred matters; concerned with religious values; of or relating to supernatural beings or phenomena. Spirituality is defined as: something that in ecclesiastical law belongs to the church or to a cleric as such; sensitivity or attachment to religious values; the quality or state of being spiritual.

Clearly, there is a strong religious source and connection for these words. But can they have a useful secular, Humanistic, meaning? Should we describe our worldview with these terms?

Richard Dawkins, professor at the University of Oxford, is perhaps the best-known popularizer of science, and defender of evolution, alive today. In *Darwin's Rottweiler: Sir Richard Dawkins: Evolution's Fiercest Champion, Far Too Fierce* (Stephen S. Hall, *Discover*, September 2005, pp 51-57), the author writes of Dawkins:

He is at his best when explaining the almost mystical richness of good science. Speaking at a meeting sponsored by the New York Institute for the Humanities last October, Dawkins drew a sharp yet dazzlingly poetic distinction between a science-based spirituality and the kind of religious literalism that, for example, esteems a biblical version of creation against the mass of geologic and paleobiological evidence that contradicts it. The former, he explained, is a kind of Einsteinian wonder at the precision and complexity of nature.

"Einsteinian religion is a kind of spirituality which is nonsupernatural," he hold the gathering at New York University. "And that doesn't mean that it's somehow less than supernatural religion. Quite the contrary....Einstein was adamant in rejecting all ideas of a personal god. It is something bigger, something grander, something that I believe any scientist can subscribe to, including those scientists whom I would call atheists. Einstein, in my terms, was an atheist, although Einstein of course was very fond of using the word *God*. When Einstein would use the word *God*, he was using it as a kind of figure of speech. When he said things like 'God is subtle but he's not malicious,' or 'He does not play dice,' or 'Did God have a choice in creating the universe? What he meant was things like randomness do not lie at the heart of all things. Could the universe have been any other way than the way it is? Einstein chose to use the word *God* to phrase such profound, deep questions.

"That, it seems to me, is the good part of religion which we can all subscribe to," he continued.

Clearly, Professor Dawkins, a fiercely secular defender of the scientific method and critic of religion, is willing to describe his (and Einstein's) worldview as "a kind of spirituality."

In *Humanist Network News* for 4 May 2005 (<http://www.humaniststudies.org/enews/index.html?id=190>), their Poll of the Week addressed the topic of spirituality and Humanism. It stated: "Some humanists are uncomfortable with the word 'spiritual,' feeling that its connotations are too religious, or just plain vague and indefinable. But not all humanists object to a concept of spirituality. Jeaneane Fowler, Ph.D., is the dean of religion and spirituality for the Continuum of Humanist Education, the online school of the Institute for Humanist Studies. In her course, *Developing Human Potential Without Religion*, Dr. Fowler maintains that spirituality should have a place in the lives of humanists. She defines spirituality as 'that which is experienced when an individual is moved to the heights or depths of his or her being in positive and meaningful ways.' Do you think Dr. Fowlers definition of spirituality should have a place in humanism?"

The responses were:

- Yes: 22.5%.
- Yes, but I have my own definition of spirituality: 16.3%
- No, but I have my own definition of spirituality: 2.5%
- No: spirituality is a supernatural religious concept: 24.4%
- No; even the above definition of spirituality is new age mumbo jumbo: 31.3%.
- Other: 3.1%.

Total votes: 160. (Thus about 58% said "no".)

Readers were also invited to send letters on the issue. The following week, these responses were available on the website. Selected comments follow.

HARD TO SAY "YES" OR "NO" ON SPIRITUALITY. I believe that an attitude of awe or wonder toward the universe, a sense of being part of something huge, which, for want of a better name, is often called "spirituality" is an important concept for human beings and therefore humanists and rationalists. It needs of course to be stripped of its supernatural connotations. In the recent poll on this issue, Jeaneane Fowler defines spirituality as "that which is experienced when an individual is moved to the heights or depths of his or her being in positive and meaningful ways." I think spirituality does involve this, but it also involves a lot more.... Hence I was unable to answer either "Yes" or "No" in the poll.

— Ian Robinson, the Gurdies, Victoria, Australia
Chairman, **Rationalist Association of Australia**
Editor Emeritus, **Australian Rationalist**

SPIRITUALITY COUNTER TO SECULAR HUMANISM. The word “spirituality” assumes that humans have a “spirit” in addition to a mind. The human mind (is) a function of the brain which is part of the physical body. To speak of the spirit of a person is similar to talking about the soul, which is purely a religious concept. I have a problem with thinking in terms of the soul or other supernatural concepts as being part of humanism, which for me is the very antithesis of the supernatural. I believe that humans have emotions and each individual has a unique personality, but to use the term spirituality seems to defeat the purpose of being a secular humanist.

— Jerrold V. Larson, M.D., Woodbury, Minn.

THE SPIRIT MOVES ME. Spirituality, and even religion, has a place in Humanism, for me. I’m a member of an Ethical Society, a humanist congregation. While many people find spiritual fulfillment in traditional religions, I find it among my fellow Humanists working day-by-day trying to make the world a little better. I think some people feel concern about the term spirituality because it describes an overwhelming emotional feeling, one that can give rise to irrational and indeed evil acts. But for me, hearing a musician perform at their peak, viewing images from the Hubble telescope, experiencing a thought-provoking movie, or being witness to an act of great human kindness elicits the same emotions in me than a religious experience would for others.

— C. Martin Centner, Reston, Va.
Northern Virginia Ethical Society

SPIRITUAL FRAUD. Humanism has a long history of trying to adopt and adapt existing religious terms to its own uses. The outcome of such attempts has, at best, been confusion and misunderstanding. The majority of people who hear a humanist use the word “spiritual” will continue to believe that the word refers to aspects of human existence that defy any description or understanding through the application of reason to honestly reported observations of material reality. To use the term to refer to “that which is experienced when an individual is moved to the heights or depths of his or her being in positive and meaningful ways” will only confirm to non-humanists that even humanists recognize that reality, intensely experienced, transcends any purely naturalistic understanding. Now, especially, when the “peak experience” of national grief that followed a terrorist attack has been used in an attempt to unite Americans in “spiritual” support for an unnecessary and fraudulently conceived war, it is irresponsible to promote such an invitation to further self-deception.

— Norman Hall, San Diego, Calif.
Humanist Association of San Diego

NOT SPIRITUAL. ...I have figured out what my spirituality is. It’s my emotions. Not God-given, not mysterious, not holy, not going to heaven or hell. I am just a human with emotions and I am glad to have them – exhilarating or terrifying. Just a human, with the ability to think for myself. Whew!

— Angie Cruise, Eupora, Miss.

TOO MANY MEANINGS = NO MEANING. The problem with the word “spirituality” is that it has so many possible meanings that it is useless. Unless the user includes his/her definition, the observer has no way of knowing what meaning is intended. Yet people use it all the time as if it had one universally accepted meaning – the one that they happen to intend.

— Joe Callahan, Longmont, Colo.

SPIRITUALITY IS A LOADED WORD. Re: Dr. Fowler’s definition of spirituality. I think that it has too many religious connotations. I’ve struggled to find a more suitable word and suggest that a word or words more directly describing the specific emotion felt (e.g. rapturous) should be used.

— Campbell Boyd, Scotland, U.K.

So the question remains for the reader to ponder: “Can we Humanists logically call our secular, non-pseudoscientific, non-supernaturalistic worldview “spiritual”? *Should* we? Personally, I think we should avoid using “spirituality” and other words commonly associated with religion in describing Humanism. This helps to avoid confusion and presents our rational worldview more accurately to the religious majority. What do you think, and why?

John Dearing
President of CSS

Atheists in Foxholes

contributed by Jeff Lewis, CSS Member

The silly slogan of the religious right that there are no atheists in foxholes prompts numerous rebuttals. One such article from ‘American Atheist Newsletter’, July, 2005, was submitted by Peter W. Barber, Major (retired) U.S. Army, a highly-decorated Viet Nam veteran, ended with the following:

“In fact, chaplains visiting the units to which I was assigned were hard put to find much of a turnout for their services. As for me, I kept a bullet in my shirt pocket over my heart in case I was hit by a Bible. And it worked, as I am still here and still an Atheist.”

“I know it isn’t the fetus’s fault, but the mother shouldn’t have had an abortion if she didn’t want the baby to go to hell.”

— Jim Staal, net.fundie.idiot

Voice of an Angel

For the Children!

You hear it all the time. It's the battle cry of the Right who seek to uphold "traditional family values". I don't think I can go a day without hearing that tired phase: We're doing this "for the children"! It sounds so selfless when said aloud doesn't it?

One of my favorite recent examples is the Super Bowl "Boob" incident. People were appalled that children saw the flash of a breast on national television. I am always astonished at how these same people who get upset about the natural state of the human body have no problem letting their children watch the constant stream of violence on television — from wrestling to bloody gun battles. My goodness, what would the children think if they saw a breast instead of someone getting shot and killed!

I recently watched a report on CNN about a camp in the Bible Belt that sought to help "confused" teenagers who thought they were gay. Their parents sent them off to this happy camp run by a minister, who just a few years before had renounced his decade-long gay lifestyle. The program averages 4-6 kids at a time. They encourage kids to keep journals about their feelings and then they share them with the group. They are then informed why God doesn't approve of those sorts of feelings. The Minister in charge claims that doing this builds the kids' self-esteem. It's all done "for the children" so they won't suffer eternal damnation. It of course has nothing to do with the parents who, when interviewed, admitted they were forcing their kid to go to this camp, and said they would never accept their child unless they gave up the gay lifestyle.

The most recent case here in Oregon is the Gay Marriage issue. Over and over, the only two justifications that the religious right could offer was some Biblical quote or the claim they were protecting children from gay parents. After all, who would dare put children in danger? Actually, the fact is society does this daily. While they like to make the claim they are protecting children, the reality is they do very little to help those children who really need it.

So how do we REALLY show how much children mean in this country, especially here in Oregon? Well, the latest poverty numbers are in and Oregon ranks 30th among the 50 states on that issue. In Oregon, 41 percent of children are living in such conditions — compared to 39 percent nationally.

Thirty-six percent of Oregon children live in families where neither of their parents have found full-time, year-round employment. This is above the national average of 32 percent.

Just this week we found out that Wal-Mart, which claims to uphold "traditional morals and values", has pretty much given up the idea of building a store here in Albany.

This is perhaps the best thing the city could have done for local children. In Georgia, more than 10,000 children of Wal-Mart employees are in the state run health-care program, which costs that state's taxpayers nearly \$10 million a year. A *New York Times* report found that 31 percent of the patients at a North Carolina hospital were Wal-Mart employees.

If people really gave a damn about the children, we would have all the money needed for education. We would have medical coverage not just for children, but for their parents on who they depend. We would have companies that hired full time, not 29-hours-a-week in an effort to get around paying benefits. Companies like Wal-Mart would be made to care about their employees as much as they claim they do in their commercials.

If people were really interested in "the children" they would care more about them being adopted into loving families and not care about what the parents did in the privacy of their bedroom. These people would rather see children languish in group homes rather than have a gay couple adopt them.

Wouldn't it be nice if people truly did do things "for the children" and not use these young innocents as a rallying cry for their greed and bigotry? Talk is cheap — let's see these people start putting their money where their mouth is! Let's see these people stop complaining when schools ask for more money. Let's see these people stop shopping at Wal-Mart and demand they start paying benefits. Let's see these people start supporting loving relationships between gay couples. Let's REALLY start doing things "for the children"!

[Some of the above data comes from *Kids Count Data Book* released by the Baltimore-based Annie E. Casey Foundation. Their information comes from the 2000 Census and other Census Bureau data, along with state records.]

Angela Byers

CSS Treasurer & Webmaster

Let us remember that those who have sought nature's truths have not persecuted their neighbors. The astronomers and chemist have forged no chains and built no dungeons. The geologist have invented no instruments of torture. The philosophers have not demonstrated the truths of their theories by burning others. The great infidels, the thinkers have lived for the good of humankind. Intellectual liberty is the fresh air of the universe and the sunshine of the soul. Without it, the universe is a prison.

— Robert G. Ingersoll

Design for Confusion

by Paul Krugman, *New York Times*, 8/5/05

contributed by Ev Sherr, CSS Member

I'd like to nominate Irving Kristol, the neoconservative former editor of *The Public Interest*, as the father of "intelligent design." No, he didn't play any role in developing the doctrine. But he is the father of the political strategy that lies behind the intelligent design movement — a strategy that has been used with great success by the economic right and has now been adopted by the religious right.

Back in 1978 Mr. Kristol urged corporations to make "philanthropic contributions to scholars and institutions who are likely to advocate preservation of a strong private sector." That was delicately worded, but the clear implication was that corporations that didn't like the results of academic research, however valid, should support people willing to say something more to their liking.

Mr. Kristol led by example, using *The Public Interest* to promote supply-side economics, a doctrine whose central claim — that tax cuts have such miraculous positive effects on the economy that they pay for themselves — has never been backed by evidence. He would later concede, or perhaps boast, that he had a "cavalier attitude toward the budget deficit."

"Political effectiveness was the priority," he wrote in 1995, "not the accounting deficiencies of government."

Corporations followed his lead, pouring a steady stream of money into think tanks that created a sort of parallel intellectual universe, a world of "scholars" whose careers are based on toeing an ideological line, rather than on doing research that stands up to scrutiny by their peers.

You might have thought that a strategy of creating doubt about inconvenient research results could work only in soft fields like economics. But it turns out that the strategy works equally well when deployed against the hard sciences.

The most spectacular example is the campaign to discredit research on global warming. Despite an overwhelming scientific consensus, many people have the impression that the issue is still unresolved. This impression reflects the assiduous work of conservative think tanks, which produce and promote skeptical reports that look like peer-reviewed research, but aren't. And behind it all lies lavish financing from the energy industry, especially ExxonMobil.

There are several reasons why fake research is so effective. One is that nonscientists sometimes find it hard to tell the difference between research and advocacy — if it's got numbers and charts in it, doesn't that make it science?

Even when reporters do know the difference, the conventions of he-said-she-said journalism get in the way of conveying that knowledge to readers. I once joked that if President Bush said that the Earth was flat, the headlines of news articles would read, "Opinions Differ on Shape of the Earth." The headlines on many articles about the intelligent design controversy come pretty close.

Finally, the self-policing nature of science — scientific truth is determined by peer review, not public opinion — can be exploited by skilled purveyors of cultural resentment. Do virtually all biologists agree that Darwin was right? Well, that just shows that they're elitists who think they're smarter than the rest of us.

Which brings us, finally, to intelligent design. Some of America's most powerful politicians have a deep hatred for Darwinism. Tom DeLay, the House majority leader, blamed the theory of evolution for the Columbine school shootings. But sheer political power hasn't been enough to get creationism into the school curriculum. The theory of evolution has overwhelming scientific support, and the country isn't

ready — yet — to teach religious doctrine in public schools.

But what if creationists do to evolutionary theory what corporate interests did to global warming: create a widespread impression that the scientific consensus has shaky foundations?

Creationists failed when they pretended to be engaged in science, not religious indoctrination: "creation science" was too crude to fool anyone. But intelligent design, which spreads doubt about evolution without being too overtly religious, may succeed where creation science failed.

The important thing to remember is that like supply-side economics or global-warming skepticism, intelligent design doesn't have to attract significant support from actual researchers to be effective. All it has to do is create confusion, to make it seem as if there really is a controversy about the validity of evolutionary theory. That, together with the political muscle of the religious right, may be enough to start a process that ends with banishing Darwin from the classroom.

Creationists failed when they pretended to be engaged in science, not religious indoctrination: "creation science" was too crude to fool anyone. But intelligent design, which spreads doubt about evolution without being too overtly religious, may succeed where creation science failed.

A Time Of Doubt For Atheists

by Gina Piccalo, *LA Times*, 7/18/05

contributed by Virginia Fillingim, CSS Member

It's been years, decades even, since the Almighty was so hot.

The evidence is everywhere. President Bush rallied the faithful to hold on to the White House. A book by an Orange County preacher extolling God's purpose in our lives stays a bestseller for more than two years. And Hollywood, frequently seen as a den of iniquity, is courting a more spiritual audience in movies and TV.

Faith is the new must-have, evident when a major leaguer points skyward after his base hit, when a movie star credits the Big Guy for his Oscar, when the Justice Department backs the display of the Ten Commandments at two state capitols, and when it defends the Salvation Army's requirement that employees embrace Jesus Christ.

So where does that leave the fraction of Americans who define themselves as godless?

Although the percentage of Americans who claim no religion is about 14%, less than a quarter of them identify themselves as atheists, according to recent polls.

Some are using humor to cope, such as actress Julia Sweeney in her one-woman play "Letting Go of God," which ran in Los Angeles for several months this year. "It's really because I take you so seriously," she tells an imaginary God, "that I can't believe in you."

Others see the future as a time when nonbelievers are outcasts and religion dictates law, social protocol, even private life.

"The McCarthy era is the last time this climate existed," says Simi Valley resident Stuart Bechman, co-president of Atheists United, a local affiliate of Atheist Alliance International.

Although the comparison sounds melodramatic, atheist activists believe the climate to be so perilous that they're considering something drastic: unity.

Atheists aren't by nature of one mind. There's a godless organization for every wrinkle of nonbelief — the prayer-never-hurt-anyone, live-and-let-live atheists; the prove-the-God-fearing-world-wrong, keep-America-secular atheists; and the contrarian I-don't-believe-in-God-but-don't-call-me-an-atheist atheists.

Fear, however, is a great motivator, and politically active atheists know that they need an advocate in government to be heard. Unfortunately, as one activist noted, most politicians are as eager to align with the godless ranks as

they are to lobby for pedophiles. Hence the need for an image makeover.

Keen to cast off stereotypes of immorality, atheists are stressing their integrity, patriotism and respect for the faithful while staying true to their age-old commitment to the separation of church and state. Some even bristle at the terms "atheist" or "nonbeliever." Others have begun raising funds, lobbying politicians and building online communities.

There have been larger-scale actions as well. The first godless march on Washington drew thousands in fall 2002, and a few months later the Godless Americans Political Action Committee was formed. This year, an Inauguration Summit of 22 like-minded groups was held in Washington to stimulate cooperation days before Bush's swearing in. And this Veterans Day, so-called foxhole atheists (servicemen and women who are nonbelievers) will be honored in the capital.

If all goes as planned, says Ellen Johnson, longtime president of American Atheists, at least one presidential candidate will be courting their vote in 2008.

"We can't complain about what the religious do," she says. "All we have to do is copy their strategy."

Best or Worst of Times?

Some among the nonbelievers say life is pretty good compared with decades past when violence was a common threat and professed nonbelievers were driven from their jobs and homes.

"I actually think it is getting better for atheists in the U.S., despite the religiosity of the current administration," Las Vegas atheist Clark Adams writes in an e-mail. "Many celebrities are on record as nonbelievers, and it's not too uncommon to see an atheist positively portrayed on TV or in movies."

Others, though, label this argument "denial." They're quick to reference the many atheists who so fear harassment that they join atheist groups anonymously and others who are cast out of their families, refused positions involving children or relieved of jobs because of their nonbelief.

It's this group that pushes the separation of church and state, a debate energized during the 1960s by legendary atheist activist Madalyn Murray O'Hair, who proclaimed herself "the most hated woman in America."

Atheists aren't by nature of one mind. There's a godless organization for every wrinkle of nonbelief — the prayer-never-hurt-anyone, live-and-let-live atheists; the prove-the-God-fearing-world-wrong, keep-America-secular atheists; and the contrarian I-don't-believe-in-God-but-don't-call-me-an-atheist atheists.

They reject the argument often cited by Christian activists that the nation's government was founded by Christians. They argue that although some of the authors of the Constitution may have been religious men, they consistently maintained a clear boundary between their faith and their government. They note that until the communist scare of the 1950s, "In God we trust" wasn't the national motto, nor did it appear on paper currency, and "under God" was absent from the Pledge of Allegiance.

They point out that Bush — who as Texas governor declared April 17, 2000, Jesus Day — has awarded religious "armies of compassion" and other faith-based groups more than \$3 billion in public funds since 2003. And they feel the steel in remarks by former California Supreme Court Justice Janice Rogers Brown, now on the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, who told Roman Catholic legal professionals in April that people of faith were embroiled in a "war" with secular humanists.

"I have been threatened with damnation so many times it's stupid," says Dave Silverman of Piscataway, N.J., communications director of American Atheists and founder of NoGodBlog.com. "The amount of intolerance in this country is staggering."

Atheists often keep quiet about their worldview. Some say that to volunteer their atheism offends believers.

"We have a social idea that it's rude," says Bobbie Kirkhart, Los Angeles-based president of Atheist Alliance International.

Others say it instantly taints society's perception of them.

Silverman says his 8-year-old daughter, who he says is also an atheist, has been taunted as a Satanist by some of her Christian playmates. Atheist United's Bechman says he usually receives hate mail or prank calls after he takes a stance on church-state issues. Los Angeles acting teacher and Thomas Jefferson impersonator Dale Reynolds says he's sometimes consoled by believers saddened by his lack of faith.

"It is the kind of thing that if you bring it up, there are ramifications," Reynolds says.

Still, there are those outspoken nonbelievers doing their best to influence the masses.

American Atheists' Johnson, whose national organization claims 2,200 members, is a regular on news talk shows. She is also executive director of the Godless Americans PAC, and meets with politicians to build awareness and support for church-state separation legislation. She helped organize the 2002 march on Washington and is organizing November's Atheists in Foxholes parade and ceremony. Yet, she acknowledges, atheism is a hard sell.

"The candidate is in an awkward position," she says. "They're wary to be endorsed by an atheist.... We have to be able to deliver the votes to get them into office. I can't do that yet."

Mynga Futrell and Paul Geisert of Sacramento hope to change that with a new name and an online community. They founded the Brights' Net (the-brights.net) in 2003 to

create a place for people who share "a worldview free from supernatural and mystical elements." They chose the term "brights" because, unlike "godless," "atheist" and "nonbeliever," it did not define them in religious terms. By creating this label, Futrell and Geisert hope to "level the playing field" and recast members of their community as independent thinkers who celebrate knowledge without identifying themselves as vociferous anti-theists.

They want to build a large, influential community, similar to MoveOn.org, to sway public opinion. So far, they say, there are Brights in more than 115 countries.

"There's this tremendous feeling of being a second-class citizen when you know you're patriotic and working for all kinds of good things for the country, and yet you're ranked with the pedophiles," Futrell says. "You have to have political influence in order to get cultural change of any kind."

Celebrity Heroes

If the politicians don't come, it doesn't hurt a cause to have a celebrity.

In 1999, then-Minnesota Gov. Jesse Ventura became a hero for the movement when he refused to endorse the National Day of Prayer and told Playboy magazine that organized religion was "a sham and a crutch for weak-minded people who need strength in numbers."

Actress-writer Sweeney emerged this year as a sort of amiable advocate for nonbelief. "Letting Go of God," which played at a small Hollywood theater, proved so popular that Sweeney is recording a CD of the performance, writing a book based on it and has plans to release it as a film.

Her show aims to entertain and disarm audiences as it traces Sweeney's path away from Catholicism.

In one scene, a Bible study class causes her to find the book outrageous and disturbing. She asks herself, "Is this one big practical joke?" Her skepticism isn't limited to one religion; after a journey to the Far East and a run-in with Deepak Chopra, she chooses science over faith because "for the first time, knowing too much didn't ruin it."

Breaking the news to her devout Catholic parents, however, didn't go well. Her father forbade her from attending his funeral. Her mother complained that "at least being gay is socially acceptable.... Why can't you just say you're still searching?"

Sweeney didn't respond to interview requests, but on her blog at juliasweeney.com, she described the fallout of the recent publicity.

The mail was so voluminous and, she writes, "so outraged and so filled with hate" that on June 13 she decided to stop blogging for a while and has considered moving.

"I think I tried really hard not to be hateful in my monologue," she writes. "I tried to make a case for faith and show the struggle with compassion to all sides.... I think I have a lot in common with Christians ... because I think it's majorly important if someone is religious or not. Only I think it should be on the 'not' side."

Newspaper Letters

Corvallis Gazette-Times, 7/20/2005

Court safeguards our basic liberties

The last liberals on the U.S. Supreme Court were Thurgood Marshall, Justice William J. Brennan Jr. and William O. Douglas.

Centrists who started from the right, such as David Souter, have been called "liberal" because they have not bought into the radical right-wing judicial activists, exemplified by Justice Antonin Scalia. Interpreting the Constitution — and safeguarding the role of the Supreme Court — has pushed justices such as Sandra Day O'Connor to the center.

Guarding equal access to the law and opposing unjust barriers to equal participation for American citizens has been the "liberal" contribution of the recent Supreme Court. Their decisions defending corporations against the people and their unconstitutional appointment of George W. Bush in 2000 may offend true conservative advocates of due process and corporate greed, but to call this court "liberal" is to stretch the term beyond meaning.

What the Supreme Court has refused to do is to declare religious war by coercing the consciences of women who choose to have an abortion. We are not going to submit to the violation of conscience from the "theo-cons," and how civil the struggle remains will depend upon whether our political institutions still work. Otherwise, the words of the Declaration of Independence call true Americans to stand up against tyranny at home in the name of "liberty and justice for all" and "the decent opinion of human-kind."

Don Caughey, Corvallis

Corvallis Gazette-Times, 7/22/2005

Minnis wrong to quash SB 1000

Karen Minnis, Speaker of the Oregon House, is using the power of her office to subvert the Oregon Constitution. She is personally preventing a vote on Senate Bill 1000 (civil unions for same-sex couples), even though the majority of Oregonians, including the Republicans in the House, support civil unions.

Her dishonesty in her expressed reasons would be laughable, if it were not so serious. She is saying that Measure 36, the ban on marriage equality, also was a vote against civil unions.

Here's what Tim Nashif, head of the Oregon Family Council Director and an organizer of the Measure 36 campaign, told the Bend Bulletin on Aug. 20, 2004: "Same-sex couples should seek marriage-like rights through another avenue, such as civil unions." Throughout the campaign last year, M36 supporters had the same

message: Ban gay marriage because they can always seek civil unions (see <http://www.trackthelies.com> for a full listing of these citations).

Oregonians believe in fairness. We believe in the right to vote. We refuse to let our political and social choices be made for us by any person or group that thinks it's not only more powerful but morally superior.

Karen Minnis does not seem to understand this. By blocking a fair vote on SB 1000, she is pandering to a small minority of religious bigots in the mistaken belief they will get her elected governor next year.

Phone Speaker Minnis' office and tell her to let our elected representatives vote on SB 1000. She is not the Lord High Chancellor; she's just one vote, like the rest of us.

Todd Barnhart, Corvallis

Eugene Register-Guard, 7/21/2005

Don't let jihadists convert us

I have recently read several letters that either defend outright the abuse and torture of Muslim prisoners at Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib or suggest that it is unpatriotic to worry about that because of what "they" have done to us.

What is obviously true is that the majority of those prisoners are innocent people caught in the Bush administration's phony game of appearing to fight terrorism when in fact it is failing miserably. How else do you explain the administration's foot-dragging and outright refusal to file charges or provide legal counsel? Obviously, they have no valid charges to file and fear exposure through a legitimate legal process.

But what disturbs me as much is the implication that abuse and torture are legitimate tools for us to use against terrorism. In fact, the jihadists would like nothing more than to have us descend to their level, to legitimize their methods. This is a battle for the hearts, minds and consciences of us all, and when we succumb to the temptations to abuse, torture and murder, then we will have become like them. The jihadists will have won — they will have converted us.

And it appears to me that the Bush administration is doing everything in its power to help them win that battle.

Peter Straton, Eugene

Some people are like Slinkies... Not really good for anything, but they still bring a smile to your face when you push them down a flight of stairs.

Einstein On God

Source: Positive Atheism's Big List of Quotations
<http://www.positiveatheism.org/hist/quotes/qframe.htm>

I cannot imagine a God who rewards and punishes the objects of his creation, whose purposes are modeled after our own – a God, in short, who is but a reflection of human frailty. Neither can I believe that the individual survives the death of his body, although feeble souls harbor such thoughts through fear or ridiculous egotisms.

— Albert Einstein, obituary in *New York Times*, 19 April 1955, quoted from James A. Haught, "Breaking the Last Taboo" (1996).

I do not believe in immortality of the individual, and I consider ethics to be an exclusively human concern with no superhuman authority behind it.

—Albert Einstein, 1954, from *Albert Einstein: The Human Side*, edited by Helen Dukas and Banesh Hoffman, Princeton University Press.

A man's ethical behavior should be based effectually on sympathy, education, and social ties and needs; no religious basis is necessary. Man would indeed be in a poor way if he had to be restrained by fear of punishment and hope of reward after death.

—Albert Einstein, "Religion and Science," *New York Times Magazine*, 9 November 1930.

It seems to me that the idea of a personal God is an anthropological concept which I cannot take seriously. I also cannot imagine some will or goal outside the human sphere.... Science has been charged with undermining morality, but the charge is unjust. A man's ethical behavior should be based effectually on sympathy, education, and social ties and needs; no religious basis is necessary. Man would indeed be in a poor way if he had to be restrained by fear of punishment and hope of reward after death.

—Albert Einstein, "Religion and Science," *New York Times Magazine*, 9 November 1930.

Scientific research is based on the idea that everything that takes place is determined by laws of nature, and therefore this holds for the action of people. For this reason, a research scientist will hardly be inclined to believe that events could be influenced by a prayer, i.e. by a wish addressed to a Supernatural Being.

— Albert Einstein, 1936, responding to a child who wrote and asked if scientists pray. Source: *Albert Einstein: The Human Side*, Edited by Helen Dukas and Banesh Hoffmann.

I cannot conceive of a personal God who would directly influence the actions of individuals, or would directly sit in judgment on creatures of his own creation. I cannot do this

in spite of the fact that mechanistic causality has, to a certain extent, been placed in doubt by modern science. [He was speaking of Quantum Mechanics and the breaking down of determinism.] My religiosity consists in a humble admiration of the infinitely superior spirit that reveals itself in the little that we, with our weak and transitory understanding, can comprehend of reality. Morality is of the highest importance — but for us, not for God.

—Albert Einstein, from *Albert Einstein: The Human Side*, edited by

Helen Dukas and Banesh Hoffman, Princeton University Press.

I cannot conceive of a God who rewards and punishes his creatures, or has a will of the kind that we experience in ourselves. Neither can I nor would I want to conceive of an individual that survives his physical death; let feeble souls, from fear or absurd egoism, cherish such thoughts. I am satisfied with the mystery of the eternity of life and with the awareness and a glimpse of the marvelous structure of the existing world, together with the devoted striving to comprehend a portion, be it ever so tiny, of the Reason that manifests itself in nature.

—Albert Einstein, *The World as I See It*.

It was, of course, a lie what you read about my religious convictions, a lie which is being systematically repeated. I do not believe in a personal God and I have never denied this but have expressed it clearly. If something is in me which can be called religious then it is the unbounded admiration for the structure of the world so far as our science can reveal it.

—Albert Einstein, 1954, from *Albert Einstein: The Human Side*, edited by Helen Dukas and Banesh Hoffman, Princeton University Press.

"Both deism and traditional Judeo-Christian-Islamic theism must also be contrasted with pantheism, the notion attributed to Baruch Spinoza (d. 1677) that the deity is associated with the order of nature or the universe itself. This also crudely summarizes the Hindu view and that of many indigenous religions around the world. When modern scientists such as Einstein and Stephen Hawking mention 'God' in their writings, this is what they seem to mean: that God is Nature."

—Victor J. Stenger, *Has Science Found God?* (2001), chapter 3.

From the Editor

(cont. from page 1)

The “supernatural” half of the ID semester will cover all of the known creation myths (oops, I mean, “stories”) from all of the cultures and religions of mankind, through the ages. I’m afraid there’s quite a few of them, and only half a semester to cover them all, but I’m sure our fine teachers are up to the challenge.

Children will be taught about Indian Bear Gods, Greek and Roman Gods, and the Great Green Arkelseizure. They will be carefully tested on such diverse Intelligent Designers as Ra (the Egyptian Sun God), Odin (the Norse God-fatherer), and of course, the Invisible Massless Purple Unicorns.

Indeed, I suspect that the ID semester will be much more popular with the kids than the Evolution semester, as their teachers encourage them to use their imaginations and develop their very own Intelligent Design theory (which, of course, in all fairness, would then have to be added to the curricula for the NEXT year’s ID semester).

I think this is more than generous of me, capitulating to your demands of equal time in the classroom so thoroughly, in such a “fair and balanced” way. And so, with all due humility and respect, I’d like to ask for a little something in return.

You see, I’ve noticed that many of you Intelligent Design advocates are leaders in your various churches — and those tax-exempt churches are only teaching one view of religion...

Reed Byers

Editor, *Willamette Freethinker*

Democracy Perfected!

[Editor’s Note: *What you are about to read sounds just like every other BS quote, usually attributed to Nostradamus, that some idiot made up and circulated on the web. But this quote has been VERIFIED ACCURATE by the extremely reputable SNOPE.COM — so read and enjoy!*]

<http://www.snopes.com/politics/quotes/mencken.asp>

The larger the mob, the harder the test. In small areas, before small electorates, a first-rate man occasionally fights his way through, carrying even the mob with him by force of his personality. But when the field is nationwide, and the fight must be waged chiefly at second and third hand, and the force of personality cannot so readily make itself felt, then all the odds are on the man who is, intrinsically, the most devious and mediocre — the man who can most easily adeptly disperse the notion that his mind is a virtual vacuum.

The Presidency tends, year by year, to go to such men. As democracy is perfected, the office represents, more and more closely, the inner soul of the people. We move toward a lofty ideal. On some great and glorious day the plain folks of the land will reach their heart’s desire at last, and the White House will be adorned by a downright moron.

— Henry Louis Mencken (prominent newspaperman and political commentator during the first half of the 20th century), “Bayard vs. Lionheart”, *Baltimore Evening Sun*, July 26, 1920.

To Join or Subscribe:

If you enjoy reading this newsletter, and are concerned about the growing threat to the principle of Separation of Church and State in this country, then please consider joining Corvallis Secular Society, subscribing to this newsletter, or making a donation:

Newsletter subscription: \$18/year (\$1.50/month)

Full CSS membership: \$30/year (\$2.50/month)

(includes newsletter)

PLEASE MAKE CHECKS OUT TO “CSS”, AND MAIL TO OUR TREASURER (SEE BOTTOM-RIGHT SECTION).

Memberships and newsletter subscriptions are on a calendar-year basis (i.e. they always expire in December), and we prefer they not be renewed for more than one year at a time. People subscribing mid-year only need to pay for the remaining issues for that year. This is to keep our bookkeeping as simple as possible.

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

Contacting Us:

President

Use this address for comments or questions about CSS.

Please do NOT send payments here.

John S. Dearing
126 NW 21st St.
Corvallis, OR. 97330
(541) 754-2557

president@css.peak.org

Vice President / Editor

Use this address for newsletter submissions.

Reed H. Byers
3035 SE 24th Ave.
Albany, OR. 97322
(541) 924-9128
editor@css.peak.org

Treasurer / Webmaster

Use this address for membership and subscription payments, or for comments about the CSS web page.

Angela C. Byers
3035 SE 24th Ave.
Albany, OR 97322
(541) 924-9128
webmaster@css.peak.org

Disclaimer: This newsletter contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available in our efforts to advance understanding of humanist, environmental, political, human rights, economic, democracy, scientific, and social justice issues, etc. We believe this constitutes a ‘fair use’ of any such copyrighted material as provided for in section 107 of the US Copyright Law. In accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107, the material in this newsletter is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving the included information for research and educational purposes. For more information go to: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml> If you wish to use copyrighted material from this newsletter for purposes of your own that go beyond ‘fair use’, you must obtain permission from the copyright owner.