



Willamette Freethinker



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<http://CorvallisSecular.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:

Something's different.

Can you tell what it is?

It's right here on this page. It might be a bit subtle, but it's a huge change nevertheless.

Go on. Take your time. Try to guess.

Too subtle, huh?

Well, after years of giving us a free ride as a nonprofit group, PEAK has been bought out and now expects us to pay for our web page. To which John, Angela and I said, hey, if we're gonna pay anyway, we might as well do this right.

So CSS now has OUR OWN domain:

CorvallisSecular.org

We are no longer connected with PEAK in any way. (They will, however, continue to forward people to the new website for six months.)

As a part of the switchover, we have revamped the web page, cleaning it up, clearing out the "deadwood", and — yes, it's true — bringing it up to date!

The page has been simplified to make it easier to maintain in the future. The biggest change is that, instead of converting the newsletter articles to HTML each month (a real pain in the neck), we are simply posting the PDF of each newsletter! You'll have to install the (free) **Adobe Acrobat Reader** software to view them, but what you will then see online is a perfect, page-for-page image of the printed newsletter!

(The PDF file is, in fact, what I send to Kinko's to print each month. So this makes keeping the newsletter section of the website up-to-date as easy as it can possibly be.)

I've even taken the time to go back and produce PDFs for our older newsletters, all the way back to 1997 when I first took over the old CSS newsletter from John!

This means our website can now serve as a primary source for the newsletter! Any issue you want, you can read online, or print a perfect copy of your own!

In theory, John and I could now toss out all of the "extra" printed newsletters we've always held onto for people who who turn up later asking for back issues! (But we probably won't — there's just something about the original printed copies...)

I must admit, though — the very perfection of the new newsletter section leaves us feeling some trepidation. Will we lose subscribers and/or members when they figure out they can just print their own newsletters off the web for free?

We hope not.

Anyway — enjoy the new website, and let us know if you have any thoughts for improvements...

Reed Byers

Editor, *Willamette Freethinker*

CSS Meetings and Events

Calendar:

Saturday, Nov 19th 2:00-4:00 CSS regular meeting
Saturday, Dec 17th 1:00-4:00 CSS potluck
Saturday, Jan 21st 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).

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From the President:

Kindness and Generosity

Kindness and generosity are inherently part of the Humanist worldview. While these commendable qualities are found in many religious individuals as well, religion by its nature puts certain beliefs or dogmas first in its ethical hierarchy. There are many cruel commands in the Christian Bible. For example, "Whoever does any work on [the Sabbath] must be put to death." (Exodus 35:3). The Islamic Koran is the same. For instance, "Kill the unbelievers wherever you find them." (9.5). Most religious believers, even fundamentalist, biblical- or koranic-literalists, do not follow such edicts. They are too kindly — humanistic — to do so. But their holy books are filled with such horrifying commands, and religious extremists, claiming (rightly!) to be following the directives of their sacred scriptures, can be very cruel and selfish indeed.

This state of affairs was well-described by Steven Weinberg (Nobel Laureate in Physics): "With or without religion, you will have good people doing good things, and evil people doing evil things, but for good people to do evil things, that takes religion."

Here are three letters that illustrate better than I can the importance of kindness and generosity:

Dear Editor: "As this time of year rolls around it helps me to focus on what's important in my life. The art of giving is so very easy. First of all, we can give to ourselves. We deserve rest, peace, hope and strength. If the present isn't working for us, there's always another day. To wake up in good health is something to be thankful for.

"I've found that an act of kindness makes me feel really good. Doing something for someone else who would least expect it. Being kind to family, friends, a neighbor and, most important, a stranger, is a true reward. It comes from the heart and the rewards are immeasurable. Takes a little effort and doesn't cost a thing. So, if gifts are the reason for the season, we have so many: caring, sharing, helping, hoping, smiling, laughter and kindness, especially to someone you don't even know. I believe this would make the whole world a better place to live.

"This is my holiday wish. May it find you and yours in good health. And for those who lost someone dear, may you find a place that is safe and warm in your heart to let them rest in peace. Love can be rekindled with kindness. A reason for the season. Shake it loose and pass it around."

— Aretha Meese, Philomath OR.
Corvallis Gazette-Times, 12/25/01

"Dear Abby: I was 8 years old and it was the last day of school. I was living in a less-than-caring foster home and

worried about the 50 cents I owed my school for several lost books. Unless I paid for the books, I would not get my fourth-grade report card. When I heard that news, I left school crying and running, and didn't see the tall man until I ran straight into his legs. He asked me what was the matter, and I told him about the 50 cents. He reached into his pocket, took out two quarters, and in a kind voice said, "Things will be all right now."

"Overjoyed to have the money, I paid for the books, got my report card, and shortly thereafter, my mother was able to take me back to live with her. The year was 1942; the world was at war. Our state of Florida was still in a depression, and that 50 cents was a lot of money in those days.

"Abby, to this day, every act of generosity I perform — every dime I give to a cause — is in honor of that man. I don't remember his face. I only recall his brown shoes, which I saw first when I ran into him. His kindness to a crying child made all the difference in my life.

— Marilyn Irlbacher, Nashua NH.
Published 12/2/02

Dear Editor: "It was the first Christmas after World War II. Germany had not yet recovered from years of devastation, and the store shelves were bare. I was 12 years old, and my older sister and I knew that we could not expect much for Christmas, but my mother had always been able to celebrate and create a warm holiday, even during the bleakest years.

"Our little sister was 6 years old, with a firm belief in Santa Claus, and I doubt that my mother's warnings that this was not going to be an easy Christmas — even for Santa Claus — spoiled the anticipation only a young child can feel. She was an athletic little girl, and I knew that she would love having a scooter. I had found my own discarded scooter in the attic. It was an inexpensive little model. Its wooden wheels had broken long ago. They never did allow me to go very fast or keep up with my playmates' fancier ones. Still, I had fun with it, and I knew that my sister would love it. All I had to do was find some new wheels.

"We had found refuge in a Black Forest village toward the end of the war, and I had lived there long enough to know all the stores. Unfortunately, none of them had wheels. I started going to some of the workshops I knew, but even the nice cabinetmaker in my neighborhood could not (or would not) help. I started to systematically canvass the village, but I seemed to be on an impossible mission.

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Voice of an Angel

Things My Mother Told Me: Tales from the Crib

I think the nicest thing I could say about my mother is she was a bit crazy. The honest thing to say is she was just plain wacko, nuts and insane. I know everyone thinks those things about their mothers, but I assure you, mine was the genuine article. She was raised Catholic and was obsessed with seeing to it that her children were as well — whether they liked it or not!

The Apocalypse — Now?

My mother was obsessed with the “End of the World”. This came in the form of many events from the Second Coming to Alien Invasion. Most of the time it was nuclear holocaust. She was obsessed with the world ending.

When I was around twelve she insisted that my dad build huge storage cabinets in the garage so she could fill them with food. We had huge cans of instant mashed potatoes, cases of tuna, hundreds of boxed of macaroni, bags of rice and beans. There seemed to be a nearly endless supply of food — my dad estimated it would feed our family for at least 2-3 years. You can imagine our surprise when while standing in the garage with a very satisfied look on her face my mother was heard to say “Well. That will last us about six months.” My father looked at her in shock. “Six months?! There’s enough here to last us and the kids at least two years!” My mother looked at him very puzzled. “Us and the Kids? No, no. This food is for my bothers and sisters and their kids.” Well, it was nice to know where her priorities were!

Around the same time, my mother announced she had a message from God, who told her the specific day the world would end and what she was to do. It seemed that God wanted her to take the family to the remote eastern Oregon desert and find a place called Anthony Lake. So for an entire day we drove old dusty roads through the desert, but we never found Anthony Lake. As the sun went down, my mom announced that God had spared the world and we could all go home. I guess God just loves a good prank!

At seemingly random times, my mother would give us advice on how to survive the Apocalypse. We would be eating dinner and she would say things that would blow your mind. “Now kids, remember when the Apocalypse happens we all probably won’t be together. So I want everyone to come back to the house and I will leave you a message on what to do next.” She would then point to the large dining room wall. “I’ll paint a message in big letters on this wall and you can do the same.” I always wondered where she was going to get the paint on such short notice. And just what color DO you pick to write your Apocalypse message? Blood Red? Green? Perhaps a nice pastel?

On other times she would tell us that when the Apocalypse came we all should head to my Grandparents ranch in Eastern Oregon. “Get there anyway you can — steal a car if you have to.” Steal a car? For cripes sake, I didn’t even know how to drive?! And why would I want to go to Eastern Oregon when all the food was back at our place?!

Cannibalism — It’s What’s for Dinner!

To this day I still cannot recall why this topic came up in the first place. I mean really, how many families sit around talking about cannibalism? On second thought, I’m not sure I want to know that! Yet, I think we can all appreciate my mothers’ advice on this issue. “Don’t ever eat human flesh because if you do you will crave nothing but human flesh for the rest of your life.” That got me to thinking — how would SHE know?! Was there a terrible family secret she was withholding?

Thou Shalt Not Kill — Much!

As a good Catholic girl I went to CCD class every Wednesday night at the church. One year my mother was our teacher and we spent several classes talking about the Ten Commandments, especially the “Thou shalt not kill” one. My mother told us the standard rhetoric that if you killed someone you would spend eternity in Hell. A few weeks later we were watching television and there was a story about a man who saved a woman from drowning. I heard my mother remark “he’s going straight to Heaven.” At this point my annoying logical thinking kicked in. “But mom, what if he’s killed someone? Wouldn’t that mean he’s going to Hell.” My mom thought for a moment and told me that saving someone’s life “canceled out” a murder that you did. So I asked her “If I become a lifeguard and save ten people’s lives, does that mean I have credit and I get to kill nine people and still go to Heaven?” She never did answer me.

Tongue Tied

About 10 years ago a group of folks at my mother’s Catholic church created a group where, among other practices, they regularly “speak in tongues” — seems pretty strange for a Catholic if you ask me. All I can say is that god’s standards in the messenger department have apparently been lowered, as he seems to be speaking through people like my mother. My mother has gotten so good at this that she will begin to do it at any given time, although it seems to occur more during stressful moments (such as conversations with her Atheist daughter). She’ll say that she is overcome by the “spirit” and it wants to speak through her, so she begins to babble. This often lasts for 10-15 minutes. I find it all very amusing, especially

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Inside a Master's Magical Mind

by Tom Hallman Jr., *Oregonian*, 10/17/2005

[Editor's Note: *Jerry Andrus is a long-time member of Corvallis Secular Society.*]

ALBANY — A blanket of ivy hides one side of the 100-year-old house not far from Albany's old downtown. Peeling stucco on one corner reveals a crumbling foundation. Sheets of plastic and old curtains block the windows, some shaped like keyholes. From the street, the place looks abandoned.

The only way into the house is through the back door, where a doorbell produces alien tones that summon the man of the house. With a great flourish, Jerry Andrus waves his arms toward the dark unheated interior.

"Welcome," the 87-year-old says in a gravelly voice, "to the Castle of Chaos."

The man one of the world's best-known magicians calls "the Thomas Edison of magic" has been up since dawn, puttering around the workshop he set up decades ago. The room is jammed floor to 10-foot ceiling with tools, electronic equipment, cords, switches, pieces of metal and gizmos that look as if they're from the set of a 1950s science-fiction movie.

No more than three people can fit in what once was the dining room of the house Andrus has lived in since childhood. Even then, they must walk single file along a 2-foot-wide trail worn into the hardwood floor. The path ends in a small clearing surrounded by mountains of debris. Buried somewhere is a manual typewriter Andrus last saw about 1970. Years ago, junk filled the living room of the house and blocked the front door, which hasn't been opened since the Kennedy administration.

Like a CD player on random shuffle, his mind bounces from one subject to the next. He makes up words and nonexistent medical conditions, writes them down and files them — he has more than 79 pages' worth so far. But mostly he obsesses about inventions, magic tricks, illusions, songs, poetry, prose and, above all, the complex nature of the human mind and the ways he can fool it.

Trying to explain him to the uninitiated is like trying to describe the color blue.

He never attended college. Yet he's lectured at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Harvard and Stanford. He's most comfortable in his workshop. Yet he's performed across the United States as well as in England, Spain, Chile, Germany, Japan, Finland, Belgium, France, Holland and Denmark.

For the past 30 years, Andrus has recorded his thoughts, sometimes minute by minute, on a tape player he carries in his pocket, and the total now amounts to more than 2 million words, many collected in four thick volumes titled "Some of the Scribulations of Jerry Andrus." He printed them on the press he used to keep upstairs, in his bedroom. The remainder are on the laptop he bolted to a treadmill in the middle of his kitchen. Andrus wraps a thick fabric belt around his middle to steady himself, turns on the treadmill and walks at a fair clip while pecking at the keyboard.

Always tinkering

Andrus steps over the treadmill and leads the way to his workshop. With his thick white wavy hair and metal-framed glasses that make his brown eyes appear large and intense, Andrus looks like what you might imagine when you think of an inventor working out of his house. He wears brown pants and a long-sleeve white shirt with four pens in the front pocket. His 1980s digital watch includes a 20-button calculator. "I haven't used the calculator in years," he says. "Somewhere around here, I have the owner's manual."

He worked as a lineman for a power company and retired at 53. A lifelong bachelor, he's devoted himself to creating and inventing. He can't leave well enough alone. Using his thumbs just to hit the space bar on his computer seemed inefficient. So Andrus rigged up separate keys that allow his thumbs to capitalize letters and make changes to the computer's programs.



He tore apart his lawn mower, moved the motor and installed a small bike wheel on the front and two more on the back so he could easily maneuver around trees. He devised a welder's helmet with a series of levers that allowed the operator to raise and lower the protective lenses by opening and closing his mouth.

On one wall in his workshop is a massive electric organ Andrus built from a kit. He outfitted it with dozens of switches and levers that allow him to play with his fingers, elbows and knees. He also installed an electric eye so he could play by moving his body through the beam.

An ex-soldier's dream

Andrus rummages under a table, looking for one of his optical illusions. He can't find it, of course. So he opens a battered briefcase and brings out a deck of cards. He shuffles while explaining that when he got out of the Army after World War II he wanted to join the Portland Society of Magicians. "To be admitted," he says, "I had to have a trick.

I was shy and uncomfortable on the stage. I had three minutes with a 50-cent piece. Halfway through, I dropped the coin. I picked it up but was too embarrassed to proceed. A year later, I came back and did OK."

Andrus watched magicians perform card tricks, and he eventually learned the shuffles and sleights of hand passed down through generations. But Andrus, always tinkering, set out to invent new card manipulations. And then — no longer the shy man on stage — he began performing.

"I was at a convention," he says. "All the best magicians were there, and I did a trick. The effect is where the cards are all mixed up, some face up, others face down. Typically, you do a slop shuffle, talking and misdirecting and then spread the cards out, and they are all face up. I did it but with no pass, no slop shuffle or misdirection. They were floored."

Rick Killion, a California magician, says Andrus' sleight of hand is "from another planet."

"He can make cards do what no one else can," Killion says. "He'll put four aces in the deck upside down, and they appear on top, right-side up without the standard shuffle. He can make an entire deck vanish. He fools other magicians."

Andrus is the most senior member of the Magic Castle, a private club for magicians in Hollywood. A couple of times a year, Milt Larson, the owner, brings Andrus down to perform close-up magic and illusions. "He's an absolute genius," Larson says. "People consider him the last of the living legends. Most tricks are based on old principles. He does things that are difficult to explain. You've got to see them. He pulled off an optical illusion where a giant mask that was on the stage suddenly appeared over the audience and scared the hell out of everyone."

Mindful of fooling the mind

Jerry Andrus shoves the deck of cards back into his briefcase and sets it on the workshop floor. He roots around the room, looking for one of his optical illusions. He pulls out a massive wheel with a three-dimensional spiral he created on a metal lathe. He spins the wheel, telling a visitor to stare at the center and then quickly turn and look at a photograph on the back wall. The images undulate.

"I'm fascinated by the way the human mind works," he says. "The mind is the most intelligent thing in the universe. The reason we can fool it is because we're on autopilot."

A book of his illusions was published in Japan. Others have been featured in science magazines. In past years, he's lectured at colleges as well as at the Hewlett-Packard research lab in San Jose, Calif. His subject was the mind, vision and the way the brain functions. His audiences were made up of experts studying cognitive science — how humans think. "Optical illusions violate the way the world works," he says. "In an optical illusion, the eye tells you one thing and the brain tells you another."

He pulls out other illusions he invented and explains them, one by one. Finally, he packs them away and leans back in his chair. He holds out his right hand. His thumb trembles. "Don't know how much longer I'll be able to do this," he

says. "That tremor isn't going away. And my memory isn't as good as it used to be."

He glances around his beloved workshop.

"I've never thrown anything out," he says. "I got that tripod over there for next to nothing. Never know when I might need it."

He pulls a deck of cards out of his battered briefcase. He shuffles in silence, lost in thought.

"When I die," he finally says, "all this will be hauled off to the dump."

He wipes his eyes. A cold, he says as he briefly turns away. Just a cold. He clears his throat and holds out the deck.

"Take a card," he says. "Please, take a card."

From the President...

(continued from page 2)

"I was getting desperate and was about to give up when I went to one more familiar place. At first, I got the usual negative response. But just as I was about to leave, I heard a voice call out, "Wait just a minute, young lady! The shopkeeper went to the back of the shop, scrounged around for quite a while and finally came back, grinning and carrying two wheels. They were metal; they were shiny; they had ball bearings, and they were the right size! He was as pleased as I was and sold them to me for the little money I had.

"I don't remember what kind of shop it was, nor do I remember what the owner looked like. (He may even have been rotund, with a long, white beard!) But I still remember what it felt like to find those precious wheels. My uncle helped me put them on securely and gave me some leftover paint. The new scooter was better and faster than the old one had been.

"I have come up with some pretty good presents since then, but nothing will ever compare to the joy I felt when my sister excitedly discovered the shiny new scooter under the tree. I don't remember what I received for Christmas that year, but although Santa Claus got all the credit, I remember the pleasure I felt for a long time, watching my little sister scoot around the neighborhood with glee.

— E. Doris Tilles, Corvallis OR.
Corvallis Gazette-Times, 12/24/04

As we enter this traditional holiday season, let us overlook both the crass commercialism and the crass religiosity with which we will be inundated, and instead remember the prime Humanistic principle of kindness and generosity to all others, and especially to those less fortunate than ourselves.

John Dearing
President of CSS

Kansas School Board Approves Controversial Science Standards

by The Associated Press, 11/8/2005

[Editor's Note: *The day after this was written, voters kicked out the Dover, Pennsylvania school board which was trying to do the same thing. See article on next page.*]

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — Risking the kind of nationwide ridicule it faced six years ago, the Kansas Board of Education approved new public-school science standards Tuesday that cast doubt on the theory of evolution.

The 6-4 vote was a victory for "intelligent design" advocates who helped draft the standards. Intelligent design holds that the universe is so complex that it must have been created by a higher power.

Critics of the new language charged that it was an attempt to inject God and creationism into public schools in violation of the separation of church and state.

All six of those who voted for the new standards were Republicans. Two Republicans and two Democrats voted no.

"This is a sad day. We're becoming a laughingstock of not only the nation, but of the world, and I hate that," said board member Janet Waugh, a Kansas City Democrat.

Supporters of the new standards said they will promote academic freedom. "It gets rid of a lot of dogma that's being taught in the classroom today," said board member John Bacon, an Olathe Republican.

The new standards say high school students must understand major evolutionary concepts. But they also declare that the basic Darwinian theory that all life had a common origin and that natural chemical processes created the building blocks of life have been challenged in recent years by fossil evidence and molecular biology.

In addition, the board rewrote the definition of science, so that it is no longer limited to the search for natural explanations of phenomena.

The new standards will be used to develop student tests measuring how well schools teach science. Decisions about what is taught in classrooms will remain with 300 local school boards, but some educators fear pressure will

increase in some communities to teach less about evolution or more about creationism or intelligent design.

The vote marked the third time in six years that the Kansas board has rewritten standards with evolution as the central issue.

In 1999, the board eliminated most references to evolution. Harvard paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould said that was akin to teaching "American history without Lincoln." Bill Nye, the "Science Guy" of children's television, called it "harebrained" and "nutty." And a Washington Post columnist imagined God saying to the Kansas board members: "Man, I gave you a brain. Use it, OK?"

Two years later, after voters replaced three members, the board reverted to evolution-friendly standards. Elections in 2002 and 2004 changed the board's composition again, making it more conservative.

The latest vote likely to bring fresh national criticism to Kansas and cause many scientists to see the state as backward.

Many scientists and other critics contend creationists repackaged old ideas in new, scientific-sounding language to get around a U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1987 against teaching the biblical story of

creation in public schools.

The Kansas board's action is part of a national debate. In Pennsylvania, a judge is expected to rule soon in a lawsuit against the Dover school board's policy of requiring high school students to learn about intelligent design in biology class. In August, President Bush endorsed teaching intelligent design alongside evolution



**All the ills from which America suffers
can be traced to the teaching of evolution.**

— William Jennings Bryan

**If the Bible had said that Jonah swallowed
the whale, I would believe it.**

— William Jennings Bryan

Comments on Kansas School Board Article

by Jeff Lewis, CSS Member

The vote was 6 Republicans versus 2 Republicans and 2 Democrats. I can't express how disgusting this ruling is, particularly the part where "...the board rewrote the definition of science, so that it is no longer limited to the search for natural explanations of phenomena".

While disgusting, this decision is not surprising given the current administration's 'rewriting' the definition of torture; 'rewriting' the definition of morality by accepting lying as a means to accomplish political policy; 'rewriting' the definition of education by keeping kids ignorant about sex and birth control; 'reinterpreting' basic human rights by narrowly defining who is covered under the Geneva Convention; and setting back the progress of civilization by unilaterally leading the invasion of a sovereign country against the express ruling the United Nations, the world's current institution for international consensus building.

The fault for this decision lies directly with the 'new' Republican Party which has made religion in this country a matter of 'majority rules' rather than the private matter of conscience it should be. Consider the remarks of Bill O'Reilly on the Fox network who opposed allowing school days off for Muslim holidays saying that this is a Judeo-Christian society and, while schools can close for Judeo-Christian holidays, they shouldn't close for other religious holidays. The Bill O'Reilly's and the religious right are the real traitors in this country when they attempt to set up a specific religion as the government-favored religion by using the fact that Christians outnumber others. They conveniently ignore that the U.S. is a republic, not a democracy, and its Constitution was specifically set up to preclude the majority from trampling on the rights of the minority in matters of conscience, as religion surely is.

Voice of an Angel (continued from page 3)

when she is driving down the highway and starts to do this. It's just like a carnival ride! One afternoon while she was driving me home from a doctor's appointment, she interrupted a bland conversation we were having and began to "speak in tongues". What I find interesting is that she was still able to drive the car, even stopping when she was supposed to. I guess the "spirit" that overtook her had a few Drivers Education classes! She claims that it is God who speaking directly through her. My usual reply to her is "If God had something to say to me or you, he wouldn't be babbling". That usually guarantees an end to the conversation — well, at least a conversation that I can understand!

Angela Byers
CSS Treasurer & Webmaster

'Intelligent Design' School Board Booted:

Eight of nine members lose reelection bid

by The Associated Press, 11/9/2005

DOVER, Pennsylvania (AP) — Voters came down hard Tuesday on school board members who backed a statement on intelligent design being read in biology class, ousting eight Republicans and replacing them with Democrats who want the concept stripped from the science curriculum.

The election unfolded amid a landmark federal trial involving the Dover public schools and the question of whether intelligent design promotes the Bible's view of creation. Eight Dover families sued, saying it violates the constitutional separation of church and state.

Dover's school board adopted a policy in October 2004 that requires ninth-graders to hear a prepared statement about intelligent design before learning about evolution in biology class.

Eight of the nine school board members were up for election Tuesday. They were challenged by a slate of Democrats who argued that science class was not the appropriate forum for teaching intelligent design.

"My kids believe in God. I believe in God. But I don't think it belongs in the science curriculum the way the school district is presenting it," said Jill Reiter, 41, a bank teller who joined a group of high school students waving signs supporting the challengers Tuesday.

A spokesman for the winning slate of candidates has said they wouldn't act hastily and would consider the outcome of the court case. The judge expects to rule by January; the new school board members will be sworn in December 5.

School board member David Napierskie, who lost Tuesday, said the vote wasn't just about ideology.

"Some people felt intelligent design shouldn't be taught and others were concerned about having tax money spent on the lawsuit," he said.

Intelligent design holds that the universe is so complex that it must have been created by some kind of higher force. The statement read to students says Charles Darwin's theory is "not a fact" and has inexplicable "gaps."

A similar controversy has erupted in Kansas, where the state Board of Education on Tuesday approved science standards for public schools that cast doubt on the theory of evolution. The 6-4 vote was a victory for intelligent design advocates who helped draft the standards.

Debating the Existence of a God

Letter to the OSU Daily Barometer

by John Dearing, CSS President, 10/27/2005

Theists believe that one or more gods exist. Atheists are without god-beliefs. The burden of proof is upon the theist. This is 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.

Until the existence of a god is established, all other theological arguments and beliefs are meaningless. The question of the existence of god(s) is a factual question, to be answered in the same way as any other. Evidence must be presented and examined.

Now "god" is a generic term. Christians generally call their god, "God," rather than, say, "Yahweh." They might argue that there is only one god (monotheism), so it doesn't matter. However, the Bible mentions other gods several times, and many people have believed in other gods (at least 2,500 gods). What follows are a few of the arguments against theism.

God of the Gaps: The explanation by religionists for everything that happens, if science hasn't yet explained it. Science seeks natural causes; religion seeks supernatural causes; hence this religious argument is the very essence of the inescapable conflict between science and religion.

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.

"Intelligent Design" (ID): "Life is so complex that it must have had an intelligent designer." ID masquerades as science, but has no body of research to support its claims. One argument against ID is that the human body is not a good "design." For example, we each are born with an appendix, which serves no function. It can become infected and burst, a potentially fatal condition. The presence of an appendix can be explained by evolution, but it would not be there if humans were intelligently designed. Another criticism is that ID proposes that complexity (life) arose from greater complexity ("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 absurd. The natural, reasonable, explanation of evolution is that complexity arose over time from less complexity.

The Second Law of Thermodynamics doesn't allow complexity to increase. This argument uses the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics: "any closed system will tend toward disorder." But it is only the over-all disorder, or entropy, of a 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. Life on Earth can increase in complexity over time because of input of energy from the sun, which is losing energy in the process.

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." 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.

Theology v. Free Inquiry: Theology attempts to reduce humanity to a state of perpetual ignorance. The fate of Galileo illustrates the conflict between religion and science: 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; it is, "Why has Christianity found it necessary and desirable to suppress free inquiry with the threat of force?" The person of reason, concerned with arriving at truth, supports his or her ideas with evidence and logic — not with personal attacks. The conflict between reason and faith is immense and irreconcilable. We atheists 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.

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. "To argue with a man who has renounced his reason is like giving medicine to the dead." (Thomas Paine.)

Two Newspaper Letters

by Evelyn B. Sherr, CSS Member

Denial of evolution denies science, too

Corvallis Gazette-Times
Sunday, November 6, 2005, page B7.

In Frank van Werkhoven's Oct. 30 letter, "Who still believes in evolution?", the writer bases his argument on personal opinion quotes from a 22-year old book written by political activist Jeremy Rifkin.

This is weak.

First, evolution is a fact, not a theory. The age of the solar system — 4.5 billion years — is a fact; the fossil record is a fact; the genetic relationship between all living organisms on this planet is a fact.

Second, "belief" is not an appropriate term to describe scientific understanding. Scientists accept Darwin's theory of natural selection as the best explanation for the sequence of organisms in the fossil record and for present biotic diversity, in the same way that the theory of plate tectonics is accepted by scientists as the best explanation for observed geological processes on our planet.

The fusion of Darwin's concepts with molecular genetics nicely explains why there is bacterial DNA in mitochondria, the energy generating organelles in plant and animal cells (through symbiosis of bacterial and protozoan cells early in the history of life on Earth); and why a similar set of genes controls eye development in diverse animals, from the compound eye of insects to the camera eye of squid to the camera eye of vertebrates.

Darwin's theory has been validated to the extent that it is now considered the basic paradigm of biological science.

EVELYN B. SHERR
Corvallis

Supreme Court Nomination Abortion debate rekindled

Oregon State University Daily Barometer
Monday, November 7, 2005, page 5.

With the nomination of Justice Samuel Alito to the Supreme Court, abortion is being debated even more hotly than usual. However, even if *Roe v. Wade* were overturned, abortion would not end; rather, the degree to which abortion is restricted would be separately decided by individual states.

The central question would be: under what circumstances should a woman be, or not be, compelled, against her will, to use her body to sustain a life? After all, no person is legally required to donate their blood, even if that were the only way to save a life; and pregnancy is much more serious than giving a pint of blood. Some calls are easy. In about one of every 50 pregnancies, the embryo implants in a fallopian tube rather than the uterus. Termination of a tubal pregnancy is the only option to prevent internal bleeding and potential death of the mother.

No state would bar abortion in this circumstance. Most would also agree that a woman could choose abortion in cases of pregnancy resulting from rape or incest, to protect her health if, for example, she has cancer or a heart condition, or when a fetus develops without a brain and would not survive long after birth. A state-by-state patchwork of rules on abortion would certainly result in hardship for women living in more restrictive states; but one thing is certain: some abortions would still be legal in every state.

EVELYN B. SHERR
Professor of Oceanography

"Religious liberty in a nation is as real as the liberty of its least popular religious minority. Look not to the size of cathedrals or even to the words on the statute books for proof of the reality of religious freedom. Ask what is the fate of the Protestant in Spain, the Jew in Saudi Arabia, the Arab in Israel, the Catholic in Poland or the atheist in the United States."

— Paul Blanshard, Address,
Orlando, Florida, February 1974,
from Menendez and Doerr, *The Great
Quotations on Religious Freedom*

"Religions are not revealed: they are evolved. If a religion were revealed by God, that religion would be perfect in whole and in part, and would be as perfect at the first moment of its revelation as after ten thousand years of practice. There has never been a religion which fulfills those conditions."

— Robert Blatchford,
God and My Neighbor, 1903

Ten Reasons Why Gay Marriage is Wrong

Slightly edited from an original article at:
<http://www.craigslist.com/about/best/por/102351114.html>

01) Being gay is not natural.

Real Americans always reject unnatural things like eyeglasses, polyester, and air conditioning.

02) Gay marriage will encourage people to be gay.

...in the same way that hanging around tall people will make you tall.

03) Legalizing gay marriage will open the door to all kinds of crazy behavior.

People may even wish to marry their pets because a dog has legal standing and can sign a marriage contract.

04) Straight marriage has been around a long time and hasn't changed at all.

Women are still property, blacks still can't marry whites, and divorce is still illegal.

05) Straight marriage will be less meaningful if gay marriage were allowed.

The sanctity of Britany Spears' 55-hour just-for-fun marriage would be destroyed.

06) Straight marriages are valid because they produce children.

Gay couples, infertile couples, and old people shouldn't be allowed to marry because our orphanages aren't full yet, and the world needs more children.

07) Obviously gay parents will raise gay children.

...Since straight parents only raise straight children.

08) Gay marriage is not supported by religion.

In a theocracy like ours, the values of one religion are imposed on the entire country. That's why we have only one religion in America.

09) Children can never succeed without a male and a female role model at home.

That's why we as a society expressly forbid single parents to raise children.

10) Gay marriage will change the foundation of society; we could never adapt to new social norms.

Just like we haven't adapted to cars, the service-sector economy, or longer life spans.

<p style="text-align: center;">To Join or Subscribe:</p> <p>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:</p> <p>Newsletter subscription: \$18/year (\$1.50/month) Full CSS membership: \$30/year (\$2.50/month) (includes newsletter)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PLEASE MAKE CHECKS OUT TO "CSS", AND MAIL TO OUR TREASURER (SEE BOTTOM-RIGHT SECTION).</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Thank you for supporting our efforts to promote atheism, humanism, and freethought in Oregon's Willamette Valley.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Contacting Us:</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <p>President</p> <p>Use this address for: Comments/questions about CSS. (Please NO payments).</p> </td> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <p>John S. Dearing 126 NW 21st St. Corvallis, OR. 97330 (541) 754-2557 President@CorvallisSecular.org</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p>Vice President / Editor</p> <p>Use this address for: newsletter submissions.</p> </td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p>Reed H. Byers 3035 SE 24th Ave. Albany, OR. 97322 (541) 924-9128 Editor@CorvallisSecular.org</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p>Treasurer / Webmaster</p> <p>Use this address for: Membership/subscription payments, or comments about the CSS web page.</p> </td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p>Angela C. Byers 3035 SE 24th Ave. Albany, OR 97322 (541) 924-9128 Webmaster@CorvallisSecular.org</p> </td> </tr> </table>	<p>President</p> <p>Use this address for: Comments/questions about CSS. (Please NO payments).</p>	<p>John S. Dearing 126 NW 21st St. Corvallis, OR. 97330 (541) 754-2557 President@CorvallisSecular.org</p>	<p>Vice President / Editor</p> <p>Use this address for: newsletter submissions.</p>	<p>Reed H. Byers 3035 SE 24th Ave. Albany, OR. 97322 (541) 924-9128 Editor@CorvallisSecular.org</p>	<p>Treasurer / Webmaster</p> <p>Use this address for: Membership/subscription payments, or comments about the CSS web page.</p>	<p>Angela C. Byers 3035 SE 24th Ave. Albany, OR 97322 (541) 924-9128 Webmaster@CorvallisSecular.org</p>
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