



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).

Announcements

My "From the Editor" column has always served a dual purpose. Sometimes, I write an actual column, with a formal topic, like John and Angela do. But all too often, my space has served a more generic purpose — taking care of "business matters", making announcements about CSS or the newsletter, that sort of thing. I've always meant to do something about this, but I could never think of what to do — and between newsletter deadlines and real life, it's been easier to just keep going as I always had.

Well, no more. As of this issue, I am formally separating the two items. General announcements will remain on the front page, and will be called, well, "Announcements", unless someone comes up with a better idea. And my "From the Editor" column will slide back to a page of its own, and hopefully become as entertaining to read as John's and Angela's columns have always been.

Other announcements:

- John and Peggy's son James will be graduating from Corvallis High School next month! Commencement is on Monday, June 12th at 7:30pm, at Gill Colliseum, Oregon State University, Corvallis.

Congratulations, James! It's all downhill from here... ;)

- As mentioned in the last newsletter, if you'd like to keep up with me and Angela more regularly, check out our new Journals at:

Reed: <http://unbeliever64.livejournal.com>

Angela: <http://oregongirl1969.livejournal.com>

Sometimes they're silly. Sometimes they're dead serious. But they should always be interesting. Plus, you can easily link to our friends' Journals, and THEIR friends' journals... and you never know who you might run into... :)

My "From the Editor" column this month started life as a post in my Journal...

- Angela and I won't be able to attend this month's CSS meeting; we'll be busy selling our junk — I mean, "valuable treasures" — at our neighborhood garage sale...

CSS Meetings and Events

Calendar:

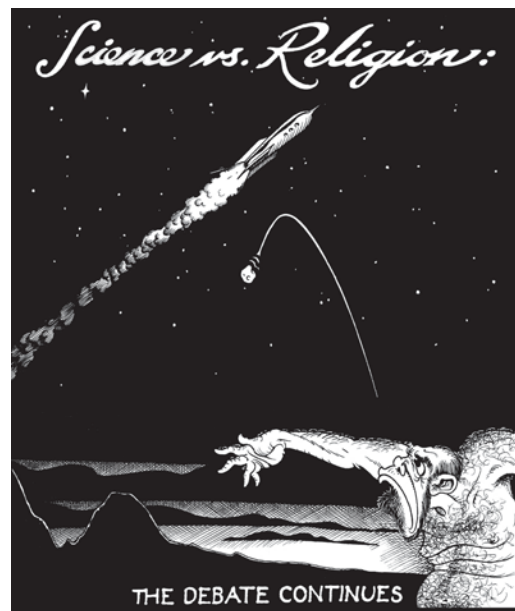
Saturday, May 20 th	2:00-4:00	CSS regular meeting
Saturday, Jun 17 th	1:00-4:00	CSS potluck
Saturday, Jul 15 th	2:00-4:00	CSS regular meeting

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).



In this issue:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| • From the President of CSS | p.2 |
| • Voice of an Angel | p.3 |
| • From the Editor | p.4 |
| • What Big Brother Sees | p.5 |
| • Why Kent State is Important Today | p.6 |
| • Letters to the Editor | p.7 |
| • Make the Pie Higher! | p.7 |
| • The Presidential Curse | p.8 |
| • Freethought Quote | p.8 |

From the President

The Human Diet: Should it be Determined by Dogma, Custom, or Reason?

Introduction

EDIBLE: Good to eat, and wholesome to digest,
As a worm to a toad, a toad to a snake,
A snake to a pig, a pig to a man,
And a man to a worm.

— Ambrose Bierce: *The Devil's Dictionary*

People around the world hold diverse and even conflicting views on what is proper to eat. At the most basic level, food is essential for life. At the same time, too much, or the wrong, food can shorten one's life or even end it quickly. Necessarily, we can eat only what is available, and, in extreme situations, people will eat (or attempt to eat) almost anything.

Where there is choice, many people limit the foods they will eat, or when they will eat, based on religious belief. For example, Jews and Muslims don't eat pork; Hindus avoid beef. Many religious people fast on certain days, restricting the foods they consume or even eating nothing at all. (On feast days, they may be expected to eat too much!) Such restrictions are based on dogma, not reason.

Some restrictions or taboos are based on custom. Americans, for instance, avoid eating horse or dog meat, or insects, while people in some other countries have no such reluctance. Yet all three provide nutrients.

Rational people, while not immune to basing food selection on custom (many of us, for instance, have no desire to dine on insects), tend to choose what they eat based on principles of good health. Being people of feelings, emotions, and desires, as well as of reason, we, and all people, also select what we eat based on the pleasure food and dining provide.

All people tend to avoid eating poisonous foods (at least more than once). For some, food taboos are self-enforced: vegetarians, for example, avoid meat and sometimes all animal products, in spite of the fact that our species is *omnivorous* (feeding on both animal and vegetable substances).

Beverages, too, are subject to restrictions. According to Wikipedia, Some religions—most notably Islam, the Bahá'í Faith, Latter-day Saints, the Nikaya and most Mahayana schools of Buddhism and some Protestant denominations of Christianity—forbid or discourage the consumption of alcoholic beverages. In addition to alcohol, coffee and tea are also taboo drinks for members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and some other Mormon groups. For some Mormons this taboo extends to cola and other caffeinated beverages, but usually not to chocolate.

The religious approach to diet

(from: http://www.eat-online.net/english/education/religion_and_food/religious_determinants.htm)

Judaism: Only animals with cloven hooves and which chew the cud may be eaten (e.g., cattle, sheep, goats, deer—pigs are expressly forbidden). Only those fish which have scales and fins may be eaten. Poultry may be eaten. Carnivorous animals may not be eaten. Only meat from animals which have been slaughtered by the prescribed method may be eaten; a rabbi must supervise the slaughter of all food animals. Meat and dairy foods may not be eaten in the same meal. Blood may not be consumed. The sciatic nerve may not be eaten. Internal fat may not be eaten. All foods must be without blemish.

Christianity: There is considerable variability, depending on sect. Eastern Orthodox have fast days: strictly, every Wednesday and Friday, as well as other specific days (esp. Advent and Lent). Adventists tend to be lacto-ovo-vegetarians; avoid tea, coffee, and alcohol, as well as tobacco products.

Islam: Dietary prohibitions: very similar to Jewish law: prohibition of pork, carnivorous animals, blood. However, all foods not specifically prohibited may be eaten. Specific ritual for slaughter of animals. Alcoholic beverages are forbidden by the Qur'an, as are other intoxicants. During Ramadan (in ninth lunar month of each year; commemorates first revelation to Mohammed by the angel Gabriel), Muslims practice complete abstinence from food and water from sunrise to sunset for one month (light meals consumed after sundown), for all who have reached the 'age of responsibility' (girls age 12, boys age 15).

Hinduism: Most devout Hindus are vegetarian; the soul of an ancestor may be in an animal. Some Hindus do not eat eggs. Vegetarianism became established in Hinduism because of Buddhist emphasis on respect for life (400-300 BC). The cow is sacred, and beef is forbidden; some people (especially lower castes) will eat pork and chicken. Milk and ghee (clarified butter) are sacred because they are products of the sacred cow; a Brahmin may accept milk or foods cooked in ghee from even a *Sudra* (A Hindu of lower caste traditionally assigned to menial occupations). Coconut is also sacred (the three 'eyes' of the coconut represent the three eyes of Shiva). Other forbidden foods: domestic fowl, salted pork, onions, garlic, turnips, and mushrooms. Some avoid red foods (tomatoes) because of association with blood.

Buddhism: Buddhists vow to abstain from killing or otherwise injuring living creatures; however, some

(continued on page 3)

Voice of an Angel

Children Are Not Weapons

As a typical “good Catholic” my mother was obsessed with the abortion issue. Irregardless of what side of the debate you are on, I hope these lessons will be taken seriously. The fact is a small child has no clue what pregnancy is, let alone understands abortion. These children should not be used as weapons in the abortion debate. I should know, I was used as such a weapon.

One of the earliest memories I have is of an abortion rally at the state Capital Building in Salem. I’m not sure of the exact date, but it was some where around 1971-1972 when states were re-debating the abortion issue after Roe v. Wade. I was about 3 years old. My mother dragged my sister (age 2) and I to this event which consisted of both Pro-Choice and Anti-Choice women screaming at each other. I was completely terrified, which is probably why I remember the event. I recall my mother grabbing me and shoving me to the front while she screamed things like: “You want to kill my baby!”

I think we can see the problem here. She made me think that people there actually wanted to hurt me! I was completely terrified. This went on for hours outside while inside the legislature was holding hearings. Because of the volume of people who wanted to speak, they were drawing names from a hat and of course my mother’s name was drawn. She had plans to have my sister and I with her while she pleaded with them not to kill any more children. Thankfully she gave up her spot to a group of religious men who she thought would state the case better. (Yes, religious MEN know what’s best for women’s bodies!)

What did that day teach me then?

- Certain women wanted to kill me and my friends.
- The women who didn’t want to kill me smoked and littered a lot.
- When you are an exhausted child, even cold, cigarette covered concrete will work as a place to sleep.

What did that day teach me today?

- CHILDREN ARE NOT WEAPONS!
- If your child is not old enough to understand abortion, don’t take them to abortion rallies! I don’t care what side you are on, this is no place for children!

As I got older (6 - 9 years old) and Oregon remained a Pro-Choice state, my mother became more insane on the issue. She would regularly leave out those “abortion pictures” on the kitchen table. She would make us look at them and explain how that was a murdered child. She would repeat over and over. “Women just throw their children in the trash when they don’t want them!” I honestly thought that if I did anything wrong to upset her, my mother would throw me out with the trash! I did not even fully understand what abortion was until I was in my early teens.

So PLEASE, if you really love your child, do not expose them to this crap. It only confuses and terrifies them. Do you really want your child worrying that people are trying to kill them? Do you really want to terrify your child? Do you really want to use your child as a weapon in a war they do not understand?

Protest or support any cause you like — that’s your right as an American, just leave the kids at home for issues like this. And if you think that somehow taking them will get the child on your side of the debate when they get older — forget it! I am as Pro-Choice as you can get!

Angela Byers

CSS Treasurer & Webmaster

From the President

(continued from page 2)

Buddhists do eat meat, and many eat fish. Fasting and feasting: Buddhist monks may fast twice a month (new moon and full moon). Most monks do not eat after noon.

The rational approach to diet

To People of Reason, religious and cultural diet strictures are sources of amazement and curiosity. Would a Jew or a Moslem really suffer if he or she ate a ham sandwich? Would a Hindu get sick after eating a chicken-fried steak (which is beef, not chicken)? Would a vegetarian “sin” by eating lamb kabob?

The sensible approach to selecting what foods we eat is based on science, not on what a god, holy book, religious leader, or health guru has commanded us to do. The basic principles of healthful eating are well-enough known to most of us. These include (adapted from www.nal.usda.gov): Eat moderate quantities of foods. Balance the food you eat with physical activity — achieve and maintain your ideal weight. Eat a variety of foods. Choose a diet with plenty of grain products, vegetables, and fruits. Choose a diet low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol. Limit the amount of sugars, salt and sodium you consume. Drink alcoholic beverages in moderation or not at all.

Food and the dining experience can provide great pleasure. Dining is often a significant social activity, not just a means to ingest nutrients. And no reasoned, dogma-free approach to life would ignore this pleasure. The goal, I suggest, is balance eating for pleasure with eating to live healthful lives. No arbitrary religious or cultural restrictions in diet are needed.

Bon appétite!

John Dearing
President of CSS

From the Editor:

I Have A Dream

It is January, 2009, and John Doe, Democrat, is sworn into office. In his first few weeks, he sets a new record for executive orders, undoing as much of George Bush's evil by executive fiat as he possibly can.

Then he rolls up his sleeves. In order to undo the worst of the damage, he'll have to be sneaky.

First, he holds several top-secret meetings with civilian advisors. All that is revealed is that they involved the War on Terror. No other information, including who attended or what was talked about, is released under any circumstances.

Two months later, several people simultaneously turn up missing:

- Bill O'Reilly
- Sean Hannity
- Ann Coulter
- Rush Limbaugh
- Michelle Malkin

...and several other similar names.

There is a massive uproar. People are screaming "liberal conspiracy" at the top of their lungs. Multiple contradictory stories come out at once, but very quickly, the media starts asking questions of the White House.

After about a week of denials, the White House spokesman announces that the President has declared all of these people to be enemy combatants in the War on Terror, and is holding them indefinitely at an undisclosed location, with no contact with the outside world.

When the press scoffs at this and demands to see the proof, the White House spokesman says he's sorry, but the intelligence is classified. But the incarcerated people were definitely helping America's enemies in a time of war, and the President is firm in his decision that these are enemy combatants.

And that's it. The rest is up to the right-wingers.

Now THEY get to argue that there are limits to a President's powers in wartime. Now THEY get to argue that holding Americans without trial is unconstitutional. Now THEY get to argue that Congress has the right to know who attended those secret meetings, and what was discussed.

President Doe's administration simply makes the same arguments in court that the Bushies did. We have a right to consult whoever we please to make sure the President has the best information. If we had to reveal who attended the meetings, the President would not have access to the best information in the future. The Commander in Chief's wartime powers are absolute. He

can declare anyone an enemy combatant, and enemy combatants have no rights during wartime. The War on Terror is indefinite and might well go on forever.

If it looks like the President's arguments are actually winning the day, we up the ante and kidnap some more right-wingers. Because the whole point of this exercise is, we're playing to lose! But we make absolutely sure that the case is as broad as possible. No losing on a technicality. The goal — the ONLY goal — is to force the people who argued so strenuously for unlimited Presidential powers to switch sides — and force a Supreme Court case to decide the issue for good.

[Congress can't impeach during all of this — we don't give them enough information TO impeach. And if they try to impeach BECAUSE the President won't give them any information... well, that, too, will be a victory.]

In the end, the right-wingers will never allow a Democrat the same powers they would have happily granted (and DID happily grant) a Republican. In the end, they'll have to decide against us — and therefore, against Bush's Doctrine of Infinite Presidential Powers.

And when they DO force us to reveal our intelligence, we simply release boatloads of our prisoners' videos and columns and argue that these people were agitating for a fascist overthrow of our democratic government. (The beautiful thing is, it's all true.)

And when the Supreme Court knocks that position down because the defendants were merely exercising Free Speech, we say sorry, but the President disagrees, and refuses to remove the enemy combatant status — and thus we force the Supreme Court to decide that the President can't arbitrarily designate people as enemy combatants.

And when the Court declares that the President CAN'T just "disappear" someone by calling them an enemy combatant and demands the prisoners be set free, we hang our heads and apologize, but we've already engaged in "extraordinary rendition", and sent them all to other countries where they have been continuously "interrogated" for many months (possibly years) now...

Anyway, that's my dream. What's yours?

Reed Byers
Editor, *Willamette Freethinker*

Religion may in most of its forms be defined as the belief that the gods are on the side of the Government.

— Bertrand Russell

What Big Brother Sees

by Kismet of DailyKos.com

Ever since I saw the call records story breaking this morning I've been sitting here with a very visceral visual of exactly what Big Brother knows about me.

See, what I do for a living is, I study gene networks, and specifically methods for monitoring what changes in a network of genetic and biochemical interactions when a perturbation is introduced. We use a lot of graph theory and network analysis in this field. I'm a data miner by trade, although my focus is mostly on cleaning up the signal so others can mine it more effectively, because of course, in networks, errors add up and false connections are made and you get the wrong answer, which means (in biology) that you waste time pursuing irrelevant leads.

So when I think of what a database of all of our call histories looks like I get the heebie jeebies. Because I know with a fair degree of certainty what kind of connections they can look for in that data, and what kinds of events they can flag. With these records, they know who you call, they know when you call them (and can maintain a history that stretches over years) and they know exactly where you call them from.

- Big Brother knows everyone that you care about. Not just your family of birth but your family of choice.
- Big Brother knows who all your friends are, and who their friends are, and friends of their friends. He knows when you make a new friend, and he knows when you stop talking to someone. He knows when that friend you haven't heard from in years suddenly turns up in your life. Big Brother knows that after you got that call from that old friend, your social network lit up with calls back and forth to other old friends to exchange hot gossip.
- Big Brother knows when you're making personal cell phone calls from work. He knows which way you drive home, if you're making calls from your car on the way.
- Big Brother knows that you know a guy who knows a guy. Say, for instance, you call a friend a lot and that friend calls a guy who gets busted for dealing drugs. Big Brother knows that you called your friend and then your friend called his dealer and that this happened to happen in that sequence several Friday nights in a row.
- Big Brother knows when you're calling your illicit lover to arrange an assignation, and he knows when you call your wife from the hotel room to tell her you're working late.
- Big Brother knows when you call that guy you were dating who blew you off and just as quickly hang up the phone.
- Big Brother knows when you went on a trip, where you went, who you called while you were away and when you got back. Big Brother also knows who takes care of your pets while you're gone.

I'm sure there's many more examples of patterns that we could define. But the point is: it's absolutely unprecedented in history for a government to have that kind of detailed knowledge of its citizens' connections and the patterns of their private lives. It brings a whole new level of "total" to the word "totalitarian".

With the start and end time of a phone call, the identities of the originator and receiver (easily mined from other less-secure sources even if the telcos strip them off what they sell to the government), and the cell phone tower location, literally any pattern of associations among people, businesses, places and times can be mined out if there's a smart geek at the data mining end who knows how to formulate the pattern as a query. And your node may not have identifying information attached to it, but it may be associated through a pattern with a node that does -- someone who has somehow gotten on the radar, say, by being rounded up at an anti-war rally or registered to vote as a Democrat or busted for holding a small amount of pot.

The reason that this thing has got me so disturbed today is that I am a smart geek, and I could formulate that query and direct a programmer to implement it, much as I direct students to implement queries in a genomic database. I have the imagination, and the training in looking for patterns in data, to understand how such information could and would be used. In the world of database queries, if you can dream it (formulate the criteria) you can do it.

Sure, the power to know such things seems innocuous. But if you wouldn't trust the Chinese government under Mao with information about who the friend you love to talk to most actually is, then you shouldn't trust your own government. The power to use those connections just needs to be animated by a small amount of will to use them wrongfully and, as I read somewhere else today, you could be stripped of your rights as an American faster than you can say Padilla.

We need to find a way to bring home to non-geeks what the power of such a database can be, to take it out of the realm of geekiness and show how easily it could be used to attach consequences to seemingly innocuous actions and patterns. People should be madder than hell about this. It should drive George Bush's approval rating into the negative numbers.

For medical data, to use that data for research, we have to meet elaborate standards under HIPAA to strip any personally identifying information off the data. What we need is a HIPAA for communications and consumer data. Force the corporations to file off the serial numbers on the information they track about our lives. Let the corporations mine our purchasing and resource use patterns for trends all they want, but let them not connect those trends to individuals unless a warrant is issued to connect the abstract to the individual.

Why Kent State is Important Today

by Michael Corcoran, *The Boston Globe*, 5/4/2006

THIRTY-SIX years ago today, Ohio National Guardsmen shot 13 college students at Kent State University who were protesting US incursions into Cambodia as part of the Vietnam War. Nine victims survived, including one who is confined to a wheelchair for the rest of his life. Four students — Jeffrey Miller, Allison Krause, Bill Schroeder, and Sandy Scheuer — were killed.

The students were unarmed, and the closest was more than 60 feet away from the Guard at the time of the shooting. There was no warning shot; the National Guard never issued an apology; and no one ever spent a day in jail for the killings despite the fact that the President's Commission on Campus Unrest, appointed by President Nixon in 1970, found the shootings to be "unwarranted and inexcusable."

Yearly, since the tragedy, Kent State students, alumni, and others have met on the anniversary of the shooting to reflect and remember. Alan Canfora, who was shot by the Guard, says, "The students today act as the conscience of the college, and the country... just like the students did in 1970."

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This year's memorial will come, as the last three have, in the midst of a war that has become increasingly divisive. While the memory of Kent State and other violent clashes from that time between protesters and authorities did not deter the incumbent president from leading the country into another unpopular war, it is important to honor Kent State's spirit of dissent and what it taught about the bloody consequences of intense division.

Halfway across the country, the lessons of Kent State are taught each semester in debate classes at Emerson College. J. Gregory Payne, associate professor of organizational and political communication and a Kent State historian, has been teaching students about history, advocacy, and rhetoric through the lens of Kent State for decades.

According to Payne, remembering this tragedy is important because "Kent State is not about the past — it's about the future."

Consider the similarities: In 1970, just as today, we had an unpopular president carrying out an unpopular war for questionable reasons.

Richard Nixon and George W. Bush embody many of the same divisive characteristics. Bush tells the world: "You are with us or you are with the terrorists." Nixon's public statement after the shootings blamed the students: "When dissent turns to violence it invites tragedy."

Again our civil liberties are being threatened. Bush has ordered the wiretapping of US citizens without a warrant and holds detainees indefinitely without trial; Nixon was spying on student activists and what he called "domestic radicals."

But, perhaps the most telling comparison is the sharp division within the nation, both then and now. Americans are now, as we were then, split to the core on matters of war and peace, life and death, and cultural values. The President's Commission concluded it was "the most divisive time in American history since the civil war." Bill Schroeder's parents received signed letters after the shooting saying, among other things, that their "riot-making, communist son" deserved to die.

Today antiwar protesters are unfairly discredited by the administration as they were in 1970. When Cindy Sheehan took antiwar positions after her 24-year-old son, Casey Sheehan, died in Iraq, she was smeared by pundits like Bill O'Reilly, who said she was a pawn of "far-left elements that are using her" and that Sheehan

was "dumb" enough to let them do it.

Of course, the absence of a draft now and its presence then may explain why the antiwar movement during the Vietnam War had a greater intensity than it does now. Still, as the protests in New York City last week indicate, the longer the war in Iraq drags on, the more vehement the opposition seems to get.

Musicians, once again, are singing songs of dissent. Last Friday Neil Young, who in 1970 wrote "Ohio" in reaction to the shootings, began streaming a new antiwar album "Living with War" for free on his website. Days later, Pearl Jam also released an album made up entirely of protest music.

My generation can't ignore the lessons of Kent State. The same mindset and failure in leadership that led National Guardsmen to fire at students of the same age and from the same Ohio hometowns is similar to what led US soldiers to torture detainees in Iraq.

Kent State should remind us of what happens when a grossly misguided war divides a country. If we can speak candidly and openly about our history and our present — even the worst elements of it — then we can ensure that the lives lost on May 4, 1970, were not in vain.

[Michael Corcoran is a journalism major at Emerson College.]

Letters to the Editor

Concerning "Study: Prayer Doesn't Affect Heart Patients", from last month's newsletter:

Once again we are faced with the absurdity of "medical studies" that purport to ascertain if prayer can have an effect on the outcome of some medical condition. The most recent, highly publicized one, carried out by Harvard Medical School researchers led by Dr. Herbert Benson, is as ridiculous as those believers who seem determined to continue their inane inquiries. The current intrepid explorers into the arcane, examined the possibility that having people pray for heart bypass surgery patients would reduce the complications they experienced during their recovery. It is astonishing that the Harvard "researchers emphasized that their work does not address whether God exists or answers prayers made on another's behalf." The irony in denying the reason that most believers engage in prayer in the first place, is apparently lost on the Harvard crew.

Well apologists' locutions aside, to whom is the prayer addressed, and who is supposedly answering them? In reality, the question that is being asked in these studies is simply this: Can a request to God influence the outcome of a medical event? After all, if no prayers are offered, then we must assume that the course of events will proceed according to the plan that God has outlined for the patient along with the rest of the universe. To put the "research question" another way, can God's mind be changed when supplicants ask him to do so?

Aside from the face absurdity of such a study, it is interesting that when these so-called "experiments" are devised, they invariably select as a condition or an outcome to be prayed for one that is ambiguous or not easy to operationally define. Let's face it, there is an infinity of medical conditions that could be prayed for and studied and we could easily imagine an arbitrarily limited number ranging from, say "feeling poorly" to "having lost a limb". Most believers would have no trouble in believing that their prayers would be effective when applied to someone who was "feeling poorly", but would any sane believer in the power of prayer ever consider praying for ten thousand amputees to see if even one would regenerate a new limb? And sane or otherwise, would we need a study to confidently predict the outcome of the latter. The answer of course would be "No", even though the God that is being prayed to is omnipotent and could restore a new limb as easily as creating a galaxy.

The strategy for the bogus researchers is to select a condition to be prayed for that does not place an undue burden on God, indeed a condition that could conceivably respond positively to an infinite number of variables, including treatments that would be well within the capabilities of most ordinary mortals, medical or otherwise. Having done this preliminary "weeding out"

of conditions that nature, science or other reasonable causes would be incapable of affecting such as amputated limbs (although any god worth his salt would find that one a snap) the strategists select conditions to be studied the results of which could be explained by an infinite number of causes. This of course allows the faithful to retain the comfort that they derive from prayer, allows the researchers to make claims about numerous other possibilities that would require more research (and funding), allows the newspapers and TV programs to endlessly yammer about the contradictions inherent in such findings, and causes the rational ten percent or so of the remaining population to shake their heads in bewilderment about the nonsense of belief in a personal God, and even worse, the sycophantic pursuits of some scientists who should know better.

— Gil Gaudia
CSS Member
April 25, 2006

Make The Pie Higher

by George W. Bush

[The following is a poem made up entirely of actual quotes from George W. Bush ('Dubya'). The quotes have been arranged, only for aesthetic purposes, by Washington Post writer Richard Thompson.]

I think we all agree, the past is over.
This is still a dangerous world.
It's a world of madmen and uncertainty
and potential mental losses.

Rarely is the question asked
Is our children learning?
Will the highways of the internet
become more few?

How many hands have I shaken?
They underestimate me.
I am a pitbull on the pantleg of opportunity.
I know that the human being and the fish can coexist.

Families is where our nation finds hope,
where our wings take dream.
Put food on your family!
Knock down the tollbooth!
Vulcanize Society!

Make the pie higher! Make the pie higher!

The Presidential Curse

Presidents elected in years ending in "0" tend to die while in office:

- Harrison, elected in 1840, died of pneumonia after serving 31 days.
- Lincoln, elected in 1860, assassinated.
- Garfield, elected in 1880, assassinated.
- McKinley, elected to a second term in 1900, assassinated.
- Harding, elected in 1920, died of a stroke in 1923.
- Roosevelt, elected to a third term in 1940, died of a cerebral hemorrhage in 1945.
- Kennedy, elected in 1960, assassinated.

Reagan, elected in 1980, supposedly broke the curse, by surviving long enough to leave office. But you can't fault fate; Hinckly TRIED to kill him...

And the NEXT president elected in a "0" year... would be George W Bush, elected in 2000.

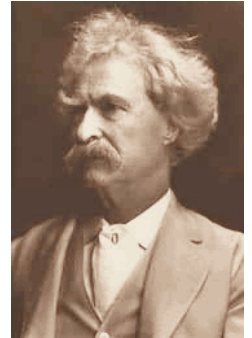
Now we're all rational people here. We don't believe in curses. But still... it's an interesting thought...

"An error made on your own is safer than the ten truths accepted" on faith, because the first leaves you the means to correct it, but "the second destroys your capacity to distinguish truth from error."

— Ayn Rand, "Atlas Shrugged"

Freethought Quote

"During many ages there were witches. The Bible said so. The Bible commanded that they should not be allowed to live. Therefore the Church, after doing its duty in but a lazy and indolent way for eight hundred years, gathered up its halters, thumbscrews, and firebrands, and set about its holy work in earnest. She worked hard at it night and day during nine centuries and imprisoned, tortured, hanged, and burned whole hordes and armies of witches, and washed the Christian world clean with their foul blood.



Then it was discovered that there was no such thing as witches, and never had been. One does not know whether to laugh or to cry. Who discovered that there was no such thing as a witch — the priest, the parson? No, these never discover anything...

There are no witches. The witch text remains; only the practice has changed. Hell fire is gone, but the text remains. Infant damnation is gone, but the text remains. More than two hundred death penalties are gone from the law books, but the texts that authorized them remain."

— Mark Twain, "Bible Teaching and Religious Practice," Europe and Elsewhere (1923)

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