



Willamette Freethinker



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

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

From Robert Neary:

If you have attended more than a few monthly CSS meetings the chances are good that you have met long-time CSS member, Jerry Andrus. Jerry seldom misses a meeting and usually brings with him one of his latest optical illusions that he is eager to share with the group. He always comes prepared with a notebook full of aphorisms and free verse as well as critiques of the Bible and other religious beliefs that he has written and compiled over the years.

This last spring I began a documentary project about Jerry. Jerry has performed magic on stage and television; he continues to be a regular contributor to skeptical conferences. He has been the subject of countless TV and newspaper articles. In spite of this extensive exposure, no single media has focused on the full spectrum of Jerry's talents. Known mostly as a magician, quite often his Agnosticism and the non-theistic aspects of his beliefs are conspicuously absent from stories done about Jerry. The goal of this documentary is to tell the whole story of Jerry as a humanist, skeptic, poet-philosopher, inventor, artist and agnostic.

We will be bringing a small film crew to the November CSS meeting to film Jerry interacting with the group. My hope is to capture on film some of the lively discussions that usually occur at our meetings regarding the effect of religion and belief on our society along with the myriad of other topics that usually interest the group.

Since we will be filming in a group setting, everyone present could potentially have their comments captured on film. For us to be able to use your image and voice in the final production, I will have standard "Video Documentary Interview Release" forms available for you to sign. If you do not want to appear in the final documentary, simply let me know.

A web site has been set up with more information about the documentary at www.skepticalmedia.com. If you have any questions or comments about the production or our coverage of the November CSS meeting, please feel free to contact me directly.

I believe that documenting Jerry's participation in CSS will provide an illuminating and informative commentary on the importance of having a rational and secular foundation if we are to live in a truly free society.

Announcements

At this month's CSS meeting, we'll be discussing state ballot measures. Bring your voter's guides!

As for next month's meeting, well, see "From Robert Neary" in previous column for details...

CSS Meetings and Events

Calendar:

Saturday, Oct 21 st	2:00-4:00	CSS regular meeting
Saturday, Nov 18 th	2:00-4:00	CSS regular meeting
Saturday, Dec 16 th	1:00-4:00	CSS potluck

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).



NO, I'M NOT AFRAID OF THE DAMN THING.
I JUST DON'T LIKE THE INSANITY IT PROMOTES

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From the President

Members' Views: Jeremy Smith

This month, my column is presenting what, I hope, will be the first of many guest columns written by members and friends of Corvallis Secular Society. I invite *Willamette Freethinker* readers to submit a personal essay. I'm looking for essays that describe the writer's Humanist Worldview. What is the history of the development of your worldview? What experiences and people helped you in your personal growth? Were you raised in a religious or in a secular family? What social or political issues concern you the most?

This month, Jeremy Smith offers us his essay, "There is no such thing as god." He wrote:

I'm delighted to share my story. I look forward to feedback and questions of any nature — my email address is appended. I'd like to hone this article into a self-explanatory stand alone piece.

I think your requesting others to share their story is a great idea. Should be cause for stimulating discussion.

John Dearing
President of CSS

There Is No Such Thing As God

by Jeremy Smith (jeremy@peak.org)

My parents were both protestants, but became catholics upon getting married — it was a mutual exploration of alternatives looking for something that fit. Hence I was brought up as Roman Catholic.

I rejected it early on. When I was eight or nine, I remember walking to church one Sunday with my mum and asking why on earth we went, and getting no meaningful response. It all seemed pointless and tedious to me.

Due to circumstances I ended up going to a Roman Catholic boarding school, run by Irish monks, from ages 11-18. At about age twelve, in a heart to heart with my best friend, we both agreed there might be a god but that was about it. The rest was nonsense — mass, prayers, bible, rituals, saints, pope, clergy. One morning in chapel I prayed earnestly to god, not so much for a sign but for a response. Not a brass monkey — god was screwed. It so happened that in my last year at that school the head of the order took up residence; he was actually very intelligent and approachable. I informed him one evening that when I left I would never again set foot in a church. The way he said 'you don't mean that' he knew there was no question.

I went to college in London in the early 1970s and the New Age was in full swing — Hare Krishna, Divine Light, Rajneesh, channeling, Silva mind control, enneagrams,

parapsychology, theosophy, Findhorn, Emin, neopagans, and eventually the festival for Mind and Body (& later Spirit). It was all a load of bollocks but at the time, being intrigued by the promise of psychic phenomena, and being a person who craves firsthand experience, I became involved in a group purported to offer the highest spiritual teachings. The set of beliefs included the Taoist's 'void' (the force), karma, reincarnation, psychic energy (vibes), and various supernatural beings.

The whole experience was great fun and the information (in hindsight) excellent. The group disbanded but I continued devouring New Age literature, taking various courses, and following developments. All the practical info was fine — nutritional, financial, social — but the actual, core stuff — psychic phenomena and 'other realities' remained elusive. I took the most advanced course TMI offers as a final attempt at other realities, and came away illusioned¹. As for psychic phenomena, all the research showed that telepathy, psychokinesis, remote viewing, and so on, occurred at 51% or 1% above chance. So why wasn't it headlines? Susan Blackmore, world's first PhD in parapsychology and psi researcher, was as passionate about that last 1% as anyone. Her book *In Search of the Light* reports her failure to find it and why she switched careers.

At work one day a lady's brief greeting as we passed in the corridor spoke volumes. As she 'believed' in the New Age rather than explored it, it meant that it became an alternative religion, and her greeting also contained an entreaty, since I was sympathetic, to validate her belief. These kinds of experiences invalidated the new age.

One morning at breakfast I was pondering the remnants of a universal deity lingering in my mind, probably like you can't unlearn to ride a bicycle. So I simply imagined a universe that exists, but with absolutely no a priori reason. I spontaneously experienced infinite blackness, and had a vertiginous sensation like loosing my footing on the rim of a black hole. It was like the safety net of life had been snatched away. I felt like I would have passed out if I had let myself fall into the black hole. It was terrifying, and supremely liberating. My life was now fully my own. I had excised the god atheists don't believe in.

I'm the kind of person who 'receives' life. Like an animal or naïve child, all experiences are normal and everyone has them. So I figured that my path of discovery was the norm and that most intelligent people would arrive at a similar point. I sort of expected to bumble along through life with the issue not really arising again. It was therefore a surprise to discover the religiosity in America, atypical for a first world country. I belong to a computer club consisting of people engaged in the most rational of professions, and was therefore most surprised to find most of them devout Christians. Scientific American did a survey in 2004 and

found that scientists are as religious as the average population; it is only the top scientists who are significantly less religious.

In the late 1990s I was introduced to complexity theory and artificial life, and also evolutionary psychology. At a recent alife conference, I asked 'is it possible to model the evolution of the belief in god'? One scientist pointed out that if you have two tribes, one with a belief system and one without, the one with a belief system is more cohesive and so fares better — read evolutionary selective advantage. (Recently, EO Wilson echoed exactly the same sentiment.) Since then everything has tumbled into place. I have found a new 'belief system' — cutting edge science that is beginning to probe into human nature itself, and provide a rational story for the irrational human. Evolutionary psychology is exploring the evolution or emergence of freedom, morals, altruism, and other psychological and societal traits, and complexity theory sheds light on the mechanisms of societies. Scientific inquiry into basic unanswered questions (why the big bang, how did life arise from non-life, what is consciousness) is extraordinarily fruitful as well as quite thrilling, and is beginning to seep into the public awareness. As a reaction to the tacky public display of affection between religions and the so called government we have seen the formation of The Brights (currently articulating the presence of morals in humans independent of religion), the Flying Spaghetti Monster, folks like Dawkins throwing a wobbly (*Unweaving the Rainbow*) and Dennet calling for a scientific study of religion (his book *Breaking the Spell*). Books I'm currently reading include *A mind of its own: how your brain distorts and deceives* and *Six impossible things before breakfast: the evolutionary origins of belief*.

My current goal is to have a philosophical stance, which is really informed speculation about things we don't (yet) know about (or embracing the paradox or mystery of things we know even less about), having a practical outlook (living a cogent life as well fielding questions of my godless friend's young daughter about her classmates and their religious nut parents), and following the astonishing progress in relevant fields of cutting edge science, much of it still pretty contentious.

'People will believe what they believe' — In looking back I see myself as curious and questioning, and would have arrived at this point no matter my religious climate in growing up. Conversely, my best friend at college is now a Buddhist abbot (who introduced me to complexity theory). And yet other folks would be persuadable either way. Just last month, John sent out a report from an English psychologist demonstrating our dependence on belief and why it may have evolved.

1) I'm being cute. I went to TMI (The Monroe Institute – Robert Monroe invented the term 'out of the body experience') and the course I took validated for me the absence of objective alternate realities. So whereas before I was disillusioned, I was now 'illusioned' or set straight. I think disillusioned might be an auto-antonym. Feel free to replace illusioned with set straight, if it's clearer.

Voice of an Angel On Being Organ-ized...

Part of being a Humanist is caring about and helping your fellow man. One of the greatest ways you can do this is by donating your organs after you die. This issue is very close to my heart.

As some of you know, in March of 2002 I had a Cornea Transplant in my right eye. I have Keratoconus — an eye disease that occurs when the normally round cornea becomes thin and irregular (cone) shaped. My eyesight had been deteriorating for about 10 years and I had lost any depth perception at least 4 years before the surgery. By the time I had my surgery I was "legally" blind in my right eye — I could see light and fuzzy shapes, but that was it. I am now around 20/40 in that eye!

After my Transplant, one of the happiest moments was when I realized I had my depth perception back. Reed and I were at the movies, and I was watching the "Slide Advertising" on the screen while Reed was off getting goodies at the concession stand. There was an ad that had a picture of a bowl of shiny red apples. All of a sudden I could see the "shape" of the apples — all round and perfect. I was so surprised that I said out loud "WOW!" After that I could see the world in a whole new way.

When it came time for the stitches to be removed, 4 of them were impossible to get to — the doctor said they would eventually work their way out. Well, Wednesday night I had a REALLY bad pain in my eye that lasted about 30 seconds — it felt like my eye was going to explode! Then the eye became very scratchy and sore. It was pretty clear one of the left over stitches was trying to escape. I made an emergency appointment with a local eye surgeon and the wayward stitch came out quick and easy.

Every time my eye gives me trouble I start thinking about the person who was generous and thoughtful enough to donate their organs. I always feel kind of bad for never being able to thank the person's family for this gift. I know mine wasn't a "life saving" organ donation, but it did restore my vision.

About six months after my surgery, I asked my doctor if there was any way I could find out ANYTHING about the person who donated the cornea for my eye. He grabbed my file and told me all he was able to — the cornea came from a woman who was in her late 50's. She was in Las Vegas playing the slot machines when she had a sudden massive aneurysm, she never regained consciousness. It always makes me smile to think the last thing my donor saw through this cornea was a Las Vegas slot machine — I think that's as good a way as any to go out of this life. I'm glad she was having fun.

So if there is anyone out there who has not made arrangements to donate their organs after they die, PLEASE consider doing so and make sure your family knows of your wishes. You not only save lives, but you can give someone back their eyesight.

Angela Byers

CSS Treasurer & Webmaster

The End of the U.S. as a Civilized Nation

by Ted Rall, 10/10/2006

SEATTLE — Students of historical hysteria immediately saw 9/11 as America's version of the Reichstag Fire. Both incidents were organic acts of terrorism (contrary to popular misconception, the Nazis didn't set the 1933 fire) seized upon by power-hungry government officials to justify the crushing of political dissent and the rolling back of civil liberties. Hitler began marching his people into the abyss immediately upon seizing power in 1933, but Nazi Germany's fate as a rogue nation wasn't sealed until two years later, in the late summer of 1935.

Before then there had been heinous violations of human rights. Nazi authorities detained thousands of socialists and communists in concentration camps (death camps weren't built until 1941). Many were tortured; some died in custody. Stormtroopers enforced state-sanctioned boycotts of Jewish-owned businesses. Brownshirts beat Jews in the streets as the police stood by and watched. Ignoring Germany's treaty obligations, Hitler poured millions into the armed forces and threatened to use them against Germany's neighbors. No one could doubt that Germany was in the hands of militaristic right-wing thugs.

Until 1935, however, the home of Goethe and Beethoven had not entirely abandoned the universal values accepted by civilized states. True, top German officials and street-level Nazi Party members were breaking all sorts of laws, including constitutional protections against racial and religious discrimination. That's precisely the point: the law endured. Pre-Nazi legal infrastructure and laws, including the 1920s-era "Weimar" Constitution — still the Western world's gold standard for protecting individual rights and privileges — remained in force. Technically, anyway.

Had there been the political will, Hitler and his goons could have been arrested and tried under German law. The German government was a lost cause, but the German nation still had a (slim) chance. Until 1935.

That's when Germany officially codified the Nazis' uncivilized anti-Semitism by passing the Nuremberg Laws. Jews were stripped of citizenship and banned from marrying or dating non-Jews. The laws were a form of legalized harassment, prohibiting Jews from displaying German flags or shopping in stores at certain times. Turning Jews into legal pariahs paved the way for the Holocaust. More immediately, the barbaric ipso facto policies of the Nazi government had corrupted Germany's lofty and admirable system of legal guarantees. Even though German law hadn't been of much help to Jews before — well, there had been the occasional arrest and prosecution of a brownshirt who had gone "too far" —

now there was every reason for them to succumb to hopelessness. Germany was no longer a civilized nation in the clutches of gangsters. It had become a gangster nation.

Similarly, the recently passed Military Commissions Act removes the United States from the ranks of civilized nations. It codifies racial and political discrimination, legalizes kidnapping and torture of those the government deems its political enemies, and eliminates habeas corpus — the ancient precept that prevents the police from arresting and holding you without cause — a basic protection common to all (other) modern legal systems, and one that dates to the Magna Carta.

**How did we get here?
Good Germans — and
many of them were decent,
moral people — asked
themselves the same thing.**

Between 2001 and 2006, George W. Bush worked tirelessly to eliminate freedoms and liberties Americans have long taken for granted. The Bush Administration's CIA, mercenary and military state terrorists kidnapped thousands of innocent people and held them at secret prisons around the world for months and years at a time.

These people were never charged with a crime. (There was good reason for that. As the government itself admitted, fewer than ten had actually done anything wrong.) Yet hundreds, maybe even thousands, were tortured.

Under American law these despicable acts were illegal. They were, by definition, un-American. Although it didn't help the dozens of Bush torture victims who died from beatings and drowning, the pre-Bush American judicial system worked. The Republican-controlled U.S. Supreme Court handed down one decision after another ordering the White House to give its "detainees" trials or let them go. For a brief, shining moment, it looked like there was hope for the U.S. to find its way back to the light.

Now, thanks to a gullible passel of Republican senators and an unhinged leader who is banking that Americans are just as passive as the Germans of the mid-1930s, we have our own Nuremberg Laws.

Under the terrifying terms of the radical new Military Commissions Act, Bush can declare anyone — including you — an "unlawful enemy combatant," a term that doesn't exist in U.S. or international law. All he has to do is sign a piece of paper claiming that you "purposefully and materially supported hostilities against the United States." The law's language is brilliantly vague, allowing the president to imprison — for the rest of his or her life — anyone, including a U.S. citizen, from someone who makes a contribution to a group he disapproves of to a journalist who criticizes the government.

Although Bush and his top officials ordered and endorsed torture, the courts had found that it was illegal under U.S. law and treaty obligations. Now torture is, for the first time, legal.

“Over all,” reports The New York Times, “the legislation reallocates power among the three branches of government, taking authority away from the judiciary and handing it to the president.” Bruce Ackerman, professor of law and political science at Yale, notes that the MCA trashes the centuries-old right of a prisoner to petition to the courts: “If Congress can strip courts of jurisdiction over cases because it fears their outcome, judicial independence is threatened.”

How did we get here? Good Germans — and many of them were decent, moral people — asked themselves the same thing. The answer is incrementalism, the tendency of radical change to manifest itself in bits and pieces. People who should have known better — journalists, Democrats, and Republicans who are more loyal to their country than their party — allowed Bush and his neofascist gangsters to hijack our republic and its values. They weren’t as bad as Bush. They just couldn’t see the big picture.

Just as no single rollback led marked the transition from the Weimar Republic to the Third Reich, no event is individually responsible for America’s shocking five-year transformation from beacon of freedom to autocratic torture state. It wasn’t just letting Bush get away with his 2000 coup d’état. It wasn’t just us standing by as he deliberately allowed his family friend Osama bin Laden to escape, or as he invaded Afghanistan, or as he built the concentration camps at Guantánamo and elsewhere, or even Iraq. It was all of those things collectively.

The Military Commissions Act signals that our traditional system of beliefs and government has irrevocably devolved into moral bankruptcy. Memo to Senator McCain: You don’t negotiate with terrorists, and you don’t compromise with torturers.

It doesn’t matter how much food aid we ship to the victims of the next global natural disaster, or how diplomatic our next president is, or whether we come to regret what we have done in the name of law and order. Our laws permit kidnapping, torture and murder. Our laws deny access to the courts. The United States has ceded the moral high ground to its enemies.

We are done.

The idea of the sacred is quite simply one of the most conservative notions in any culture, because it seeks to turn other ideas — uncertainty, progress, change — into crimes.

— Salman Rushdie (1947-),
Is Nothing Sacred?, 1990

From the Editor

Holding Out for a Hero...

My favorite TV show of all time, is **The Greatest American Hero**. (Angela and I even played the theme song, “Believe It Or Not”, at our wedding!)

The premise was, aliens give a gift to an idealistic young schoolteacher. The gift is a magic super-suit — when Ralph wears the suit, he gains a variety of “super powers” that enable him to stop bad guys and make the world a better place.

The catch — aside from the fact that Ralph loses the instruction book to the suit, and thus can’t use his powers very well — is that this is the “real world”. People tend to stare if you wander around town in a cape and long johns...

Why do I bring this up? Well... I find myself daydreaming sometimes these days, fantasizing about something more powerful than a President of the United States, who could somehow stop our “elected” bad guys from doing more harm to our country, and the world.

[In fact, I’ve come to the conclusion that George W Bush proves that the human race will never develop time travel. Because time-travelling humans from the future would never allow the unmitigated disaster that has been the past six years.]

At some point in the past few years (and I am *WAY* too lazy right now to look up when), I included some material in this newsletter comparing Bush to Hitler. A reader (again, I forget who) thought this was way too extreme, and didn’t think our cause was well served by hyperbolic rhetoric.

I published his letter, and in response, I wrote an article describing just exactly HOW similar Bush’s rise to power, and acts in office, were to the early Hitler’s.

If that reader is still with us, I’d like to ask what he thinks now. Read the article on the previous page — go ahead, I’ll still be here when you get back — and then tell me that the Hitler comparisons were unjustified.

OF COURSE, things don’t look that bad, if you’re getting your information from the evening news. How much did you hear on the news about the Military Commissions Act? Anything at all?

The fact of the matter is, it is EXACTLY THAT BAD. As a nation, we have turned a blind eye as Bush has illegally claimed greater and greater power, and now, when the highly conservative Supreme Court was finally forced to step in and say “no”, the response from Congress has been to shrug and make it all legal. The scope of what Bush can now legally do is terrifying.

Where’s a hero when we need one...?

Reed Byers
Editor, *Willamette Freethinker*

An Urgent Call by Scientists to Defend Science

10/10/2006

IN THE UNITED STATES TODAY SCIENCE, AS SCIENCE, IS UNDER ATTACK AS NEVER BEFORE.

The signs of this are everywhere. The attacks are coming at an accelerating pace, and include frequent interventions by powerful forces, in and out of the Bush administration, who seem all too willing to deny scientific truths, disrupt scientific investigations, block scientific progress, undermine scientific education, and sacrifice the very integrity of the scientific process itself — all in the pursuit of implementing their particular political agenda. And today this dominant political agenda is profoundly allied and intertwined with an extremist (and extremely anti-science) ideological agenda put forward by powerful fundamentalist religious forces commonly known as the Religious Right. These fundamentalists now have extensive influence and representatives in major institutions of the US government, including Congress and the White House. This itself goes a long way toward explaining why science itself is under such unprecedented attack.

It is commonplace under the current Administration for the government to deny funding, censor scientific reports, or in other ways undermine scientific research which might turn up facts which they don't want to hear; to manipulate, distort, or outright suppress scientific findings they find objectionable; to attempt to reshape government scientific panels to obtain policy recommendations on issues ranging from health to the environment, based less on actual scientific findings than on the requirements of the Administration's agenda.

The situation is so serious that more than 6,000 scientists have already signed the "Restoring Scientific Integrity" statement of the Union of Concerned Scientists, which denounces the Bush Administration for "abuse of science"; and Scientific American published an editorial under the title: "Bush-League Lysenkoism: The White House Seeks to Bend Science to Its Will."

CONSIDER THIS:

- Particular Christian fundamentalist "moral codes" are increasingly imposing restrictions on what kinds of questions can be investigated by scientists and what kinds of answers scientists can come up with. HIV-prevention studies have come under attack for even attempting to study prevalent sexual practices. Funds have been cut and researchers have faced intimidation and harassment from

fundamentalists inside and outside of government who insist that scientific study of HIV/AIDS begin and end with the demand for "abstinence-only" programs — regardless of the human and social cost. Research into human sexuality in general has been suppressed and faulty studies and outright disinformation about the effectiveness of condoms and other birth control methods have been promoted and disseminated by the Administration. The Department of Health and Human Services is known to have deleted from its web site scientific health information which conflicted with the Administration's "abstinence-only" approach to sex education ... THIS IS NOT ACCEPTABLE.

**No, Mr. President,
the verdict is NOT
out on evolution.**

- Entire new fields of scientific inquiry, like stem-cell research, with potential for path-breaking medical breakthroughs, are denied federal funds because of fundamentalist religious objections ... THIS IS NOT ACCEPTABLE.

- Scientists whose findings conflict with corporate interests or policies of the Bush Administration face threats of retaliation or denial of funding. There have been "gag orders" forbidding government scientists from talking publicly about important scientific questions and, at times, even mentioning terms like "global warming." In studies by government scientists on global warming and its potentially devastating consequences for the planet and humanity, titles of reports have been changed and whole sections deleted by high political officials. There are repeated efforts by government officials to over-rule scientists on such things as which plant and animal species to include on the "Endangered Species" list, which natural habitats are in critical need of preservation, how to set air and water quality standards, and so on ... THIS IS NOT ACCEPTABLE.

- In a practice many have denounced as "Scientific McCarthyism," scientists who are candidates for scientific advisory boards and panels have been asked how they voted or whether they support particular policies of the Administration, and some have been denied appointments because of their political views. THIS IS NOT ACCEPTABLE.

- Official government-run bookstores at the Grand Canyon have carried books promoting as fact the literalist Biblical notion that the Grand Canyon was formed only a few thousand years ago by "Noah's Flood," in direct contradiction to the overwhelming geological evidence and scientific consensus that the Grand Canyon contains rocks that are billions of years old and that the Canyon

itself was carved out by a river, over a very long period of time, millions of years ago ... THIS IS NOT ACCEPTABLE.

And that is not all: Here we are in the 21st century, and the head of the government himself, George W. Bush, refuses to acknowledge that evolution is a scientific fact! THIS IS NOT ACCEPTABLE.

The President claims: "On the issue of evolution, the verdict is still out on how God created the earth," and then sits smugly by while Creationists carry out an assault against evolution in classrooms, museums, libraries, government bookstores, and even IMAX movies and science theaters.

No, Mr. President, the verdict is NOT out on evolution. EVOLUTION IS A FACT — IT IS ONE OF THE MOST WELL-ESTABLISHED AND WELL-DOCUMENTED FACTS IN THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE. TO DENY AND ATTACK EVOLUTION IS TO DENY AND ATTACK ONE OF THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL FACTS ABOUT ALL OF NATURE AND REALITY AND ONE OF THE MOST CRUCIAL FOUNDATION STONES OF ALL OF MODERN SCIENCE. Evolution is not a matter of "controversy" in the scientific community: It is recognized as a fact by the overwhelming majority of scientists in the US and throughout the world. Evolution is just as well-established as the fact that the earth goes around the sun — a scientifically-demonstrated truth which, several centuries ago and for some time, was also opposed and even viciously suppressed because of a religious inquisition, resulting in great harm to science and to humanity. We cannot, and will not, allow the same kind of thing to happen with the scientific fact of evolution.

Therefore, we, the undersigned scientists and members of the scientific community, are issuing this urgent call to everyone in society to take up the challenge to DEFEND SCIENCE.

To be clear: Many who continue to hold religious beliefs can and should rally to this call to DEFEND SCIENCE. This is not about science trying to destroy religion. It is about defending science from a specific right-wing political agenda which, coupled with a fundamentalist, Biblical-literalist religious ideology, is setting out to implement a program that will fundamentally pervert and undermine science and the scientific process itself.

Individual scientists may be atheists or agnostics, or may hold various religious beliefs; and their politics range over the full spectrum of political views. But one thing the overwhelming majority of scientists have in common is their understanding that, when conducting scientific investigation and applying the scientific method, it is essential to use as a starting point previously accumulated scientific knowledge — the storehouse of well-established scientific evidence about reality which has previously been arrived at through concrete and systematic scientific observation and experiment and has been subjected to rigorous scientific review and testing. This is what we scientists stand on as our foundation when we set out to further investigate reality and make new discoveries. This

is how science has been done and how it has advanced for hundreds of years now, and this has allowed science to benefit humanity in countless ways.

Genuine science never proceeds from, or uses as its starting point, any set of subjective "beliefs," "opinions" or "faith-based edicts" handed down by religious or secular authorities and proclaimed to be beyond human questioning, testing and investigation. To bring into the scientific process assumptions, religious or otherwise, which were not arrived at by scientific methods, and which by definition cannot be tested by scientific methods, would destroy science as science.

In conclusion: We must refuse to accept a situation where scientific inquiry is blocked or its findings ruled out of order unless they conform to the goals of the government, to corporate interests and to the ideology of religious fundamentalists; where dogma enforced by governmental and religious authority takes the place of science; where the scientific approach of seeking natural explanations for natural phenomena is suppressed. We must insist on an atmosphere where scientists are allowed to seek the truth, even when the truth conflicts with the views and policies of those in power, and where the scientific spirit is fostered, where science education and the popularization of the scientific method are valued, where people are encouraged to pursue an understanding of how and why things are the way they are; where all that has been learned by humanity so far, all that has repeatedly been tested and found to be true, serves as the starting point for further investigation of reality.

IT IS UP TO US. IT IS TIME TO TAKE A CLEAR AND DECISIVE STAND IN DEFENSE OF SCIENCE. THIS IS OF CRUCIAL AND URGENT IMPORTANCE NOT ONLY FOR SCIENTISTS BUT FOR PEOPLE THROUGHOUT SOCIETY, FOR HUMANITY AS A WHOLE AND FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

(End Statement)

PARTIAL LIST OF DEFEND SCIENCE SIGNATORIES

Isabella A. Abbott, marine botanist/ ethnobotanist, Dept. of Botany, University of Hawaii, Honolulu

Marc Davis, Professor of Astronomy, UC Berkeley, member National Academy of Sciences

Paul Ehrlich, Bing Professor of Population Studies, Stanford University

Michael G. Hadfield, Professor of Zoology, University of Hawaii

Philip Hanawalt, Professor of Biology, Stanford University, member National Academy of Sciences

Donna Haraway, Professor, History of Consciousness Dept., University of California at Santa Cruz

Carl Heiles, Astronomy Department, UC Berkeley

John G. Hildebrand, Regents Professor of Neurobiology, University of Arizona

[Editor's Note: ...and many others, truncated for space.]

Letters to Corvallis Gazette-Times

Intellect saner than religion 9/19/2006

I see no evidence of spiritual growth in our world. Today's wars have as much to do with religious conflicts as they do about controlling the Earth's oil supply. Not a day goes by without hearing that Christians, Jews and Muslims are attacking one another over a particular piece of land or over a particular brand of god.

How many more centuries will have to pass before people wise up and toss out their poorly-written, flat-world texts filled with ancient words of hate?

When will we allow our own experiences and feelings to determine our spiritual alignment instead of basing our faith on the often-edited translations of "holy" books by war-mongering men?

Why can't we apply our intellectual and scientific growth to our spiritual growth? How much longer will we tolerate religious/oil wars that are dictated by presidents, prime ministers and popes? When will we refuse to sign on the dotted line when propositioned by religious salespeople who are stuck in the past?

Let's learn to think for ourselves by taking a bite out of the forbidden fruit.

Robert Simms Corvallis

Murder in God's name abominable 9/19/2006

Muslim reaction to Pope Benedict XVI's remarks should have been laughter and a humorous response, given Catholicism's bloody history. Instead, the violent reaction (murder of a nun) validated his remarks.

If there is a God, He must be shaking His head over all this nonsense and bloodshed going on in His name by various name-brand religions, with each claiming to provide the only stairway to heaven.

On the side, we kill, cheat and judge one another while destroying the Earth (allegedly created as a gift) and certainly our life-support system.

What is wrong with this picture? How can we achieve peace in this world before religious bickering, arrogance and violence trigger "The End"?

Jody A. Harmon Corvallis

Conservatives, then and now 9/19/2006

It was refreshing Sept. 18 to read Walt Lindsley Sr.'s accurate perception of the current administration, "Letter about power grab restored one man's hope." I, too, am confused as to how political conservatives can willfully abandon such hard-won individual freedoms to the government in the name of "security."

Years ago, conservatives worked hard to limit the powers of government, placing the rights of the individual

sacrosanct from government intrusion. It seems that their fear of terrorism and the charisma of their leader now makes warrantless wire-tapping, prisoners held without charge and torture perfectly acceptable.

These are not the American values I grew up with. I remember reading that the United States has gone to war with regimes that practiced such human rights abuses.

About the only way I've found to get these modern conservatives to stop and think about the ramifications of giving the government such power is to ask "Would you have given these powers to Bill Clinton?" I then have to step back because their recoil is so knee-jerk violent.

Terry Moore Corvallis

We have new dates of infamy 10/2/2006

History will mark September 27-28, 2006 as a dark day for our country. On those two days, the GOP-controlled House and Senate voted in favor of the Military Commissions Bill (H.R. 6166 and S. 3930, respectively), which will leave permanent damage to the U.S. Constitution.

The Military Commissions Bill does the following:

- Re-establishes the Bush military tribunals (which were previously rejected by the Supreme Court as unconstitutional)
- Gives the green light to the "CIA program" allowing waterboarding and other forms of torture
- Strips Guantanamo detainees of the right to challenge their detention, thus prejudging them as being guilty
- Disallows any person harmed by the United States, in violation of the Geneva Conventions, from filing a claim in United States court;
- Most heinous of all, it strips legal U.S. citizens of their right to challenge their detention if they are accused of being "enemy combatants"

Furthermore, this legislation grants immunity to Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, et al, by legalizing U.S. war crimes committed prior to Dec. 30, 2005. This clause, as well as the Geneva Conventions waiver, indicates that the administration knows full well that its acts will be considered war crimes.

The only members of the Oregon delegation to vote for this disgusting legislation were Sen. Gordon Smith and Rep. Greg Walden (who, coincidentally, are the only Republicans in the group).

Please thank Sen. Ron Wyden and Reps. Earl Blumenauer, Peter DeFazio, Darlene Hooley, and Peter Wu for their futile attempt to uphold the United States Constitution.

Greg Lief Corvallis

While Nixon Campaigned, the F.B.I. Watched John Lennon

by Adam Cohen, *New York Times*, 9/21/2006

In December 1971, John Lennon sang at an Ann Arbor, Mich., concert calling for the release of a man who had been given 10 years in prison for possessing two marijuana cigarettes. The song he wrote for the occasion, "John Sinclair," was remarkably effective. Within days, the Michigan Supreme Court ordered Mr. Sinclair released.

What Lennon did not know at the time was that there were F.B.I. informants in the audience taking notes on everything from the attendance (15,000) to the artistic merits of his new song. ("Lacking Lennon's usual standards," his F.B.I. file reports, and "Yoko can't even remain on key.") The government spied on Lennon for the next 12 months, and tried to have him deported to England.

This improbable surveillance campaign is the subject of a new documentary, "The U.S. vs. John Lennon." The film makes two important points about domestic surveillance, one well-known, the other quite surprising. With the nation in the midst of a new domestic spying debate, the story is a cautionary tale.

It focuses on the late 1960's and early 1970's, when the former Beatle used his considerable fame and charisma to oppose the Vietnam War. Lennon attracted worldwide attention in 1969 when he and Yoko Ono married and held their much-publicized "bed-ins" in Amsterdam and Montreal, giving interviews about peace from under their honeymoon sheets. Lennon put to music a simple catch phrase — "All we are saying is give peace a chance" — and the antiwar movement had its anthem. Two years later, he released "Imagine."

The government responded with an extensive surveillance program. Lennon's F.B.I. files — which are collected in the book "Gimme Some Truth" by Jon Wiener — reveal that the bureau was monitoring everything from his appearance on "The Mike Douglas Show" to far more personal matters, like the whereabouts of Ono's daughter from a previous marriage.

The F.B.I.'s surveillance of Lennon is a reminder of how easily domestic spying can become unmoored from any legitimate law enforcement purpose. What is more surprising, and ultimately more unsettling, is the degree to which the surveillance turns out to have been intertwined with electoral politics. At the time of the John Sinclair rally, there was talk that Lennon would join a national concert tour aimed at encouraging young people to get involved in the politics — and at defeating President Nixon, who was running for re-election. There were plans

to end the tour with a huge rally at the Republican National Convention.

The F.B.I.'s timing is noteworthy. Lennon had been involved in high-profile antiwar activities going back to 1969, but the bureau did not formally open its investigation until January 1972 — the year of Nixon's re-election campaign. In March, just as the presidential campaign was heating up, the Immigration and Naturalization Service refused to renew Lennon's visa, and began deportation proceedings. Nixon was re-elected in November, and a month later, the F.B.I. closed its investigation.

If Lennon was considering actively opposing Nixon's re-election, the spying and the threat of deportation had their intended effect. In May, he announced that he would not be part of any protest activities at the Republican National Convention, and he did not actively participate in the presidential campaign.

After revelations about the many domestic spying abuses of the 1960's and 1970's — including the wiretapping of Martin Luther King Jr. — new restrictions were put in place. But these protections are being eroded today, with the president's claim of sweeping new authority to pursue the war on terror.

Critics of today's domestic surveillance object largely on privacy grounds. They have focused far less on how easily government surveillance can become an instrument for the people in power to try to hold on to power. "The U.S. vs. John Lennon" would be a sobering film at any time, but it is particularly so right now. It is the story not only of one man being harassed, but of a democracy being undermined.

**Wandering in a vast forest at night,
I have only a faint light to guide
me. A stranger appears and says to
me: "My friend, you should blow
out your candle in order to find
your way more clearly." This
stranger is a theologian.**

— Denis Diderot,
*Addition to Philosophical
Thoughts* (c. 1762)

Camp Quest: It's Beyond Belief

by Livia Edwards, 22, former camper, and current staff member

I spent a week of my summer at the greatest camp on earth. Camp Quest this year was fantastic, and I'm so disappointed it's over already. This was my third year as a staff member, but I've been going to the camp as a camper since I was about 12, so I've been at camp for nine years total!

For those of you who aren't familiar with the program, "Camp Quest is the first residential summer camp in the history of the United States for the children of Atheists, Freethinkers, Humanists, Brights, or whatever other terms might be applied to those who hold to a naturalistic, not supernatural world view". In a country where most of the people are religious, it's often difficult for children of secular families to express their beliefs, out of fear of being ostracized. Camp Quest is a safe haven for these kids, where they can discuss their thoughts without being called a "devil worshipper".

Campers learn about famous atheists and freethinkers in history, such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Ben Franklin, Albert Einstein, Charles Darwin, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, as well as more modern figures like Yoko Ono and John Lennon, Ted Turner, Lance Armstrong, and Christopher Reeve. These are just a few of the people that my dad, Fred Edwards, tells the kids about during mealtimes, all to emphasize the fact that good, moral people that are freethinkers can do great things, and our kids are not alone in their views.

Of course, we do normal camp stuff too. This year, the entire camp spent a day canoeing through gorgeous

scenery down the Little Miami River. We also went horseback riding, my personal favorite. Campers have the opportunity to rock climb, try archery, and hike. We also go swimming every day. It was especially fun this year because the shower area was refurbished to look like a water park. Fountains, sprinklers, and colorful buckets that dump water on you do a lot to take your mind off of how cold that first dive in the pool will be!

If you can't tell, I love it there. This year I was a counselor in the cabin for 13-17 year old campers. I also hosted our annual Talent Night, and during activity time I teach drama to the kids. Activities are a time when campers can get to know staff members that aren't necessarily their cabin counselors. They can tie die or create other arts and crafts to mold their artistic side. They can learn about the weather, and practice their future job as a TV weatherperson by doing a forecast for the next day. They can play sports, learn about biology, or have a grand battle with foam swords!

There are way too many activities at Camp Quest to possibly name here, and even if I tried, I still wouldn't do it justice. At camp, so many of us feel connected to a community that doesn't seem to exist where we live, and I believe this is why so many of us return year after year. We feel safe here, we have friends here, and you only need try us out to become a part of our family!

Camp Quest Classic is held annually in southwestern Ohio. Other Camp Quests are located around the country in Tennessee, California, Minnesota, Ontario, and Michigan. See <http://www.camp-quest.org> for more info.

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