



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).

High Court Deals Setback to Boy Scouts

by David G. Savage, *LA Times*, 10/16/2006

In a setback for the Boy Scouts, the Supreme Court turned away today a free speech challenge to a city policy in Berkeley that denied a subsidy to a Scouting group because it excludes gays and atheists.

The court's action lets stand rulings in California and elsewhere that have said cities, schools and colleges may deny special benefits to groups that refuse to comply with broad non-discrimination rules involving religion and sex orientation.

Some conservative groups had joined the challenge to the Berkeley policy, saying that advocates of "traditional moral values" were being subjected to discrimination nationwide by "politically correct" government officials.

Without comment, the justices dismissed the appeal.

Six years ago, the high court came to the aid of the Boy Scouts of America when it ruled that a state cannot force a private group, such as the Scouts, to admit openly gay men if doing so would violate its professed code of conduct. In that case, James Dale, a former Scout master, had sued the group after he was excluded upon admitting he was gay.

The New Jersey courts said the Scouts must abide by the state's antidiscrimination law. The Supreme Court disagreed in a 5-4 decision in the case of *Boys Scouts vs. Dale*.

But in the wake of the Scout's victory, some cities and school districts refused to permit Scouting groups to use their facilities on the same basis as others.

Lawyers for the Scouts went back to court to challenge this exclusion as unconstitutional discrimination. So far, they have been rebuffed.

For many years, Berkeley had given a rent-free berth in its marina to nonprofit community service organizations, including the Sea Scouts. An affiliate of the Boy Scouts, the group teaches sailing and seamanship to teenagers.

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Announcements

*** ATTENTION ***

As announced last month, this month's meeting will be filmed as part of a documentary about the life of CSS Member Jerry Andrus. There will be "Video Documentary Interview Releases" you will need to sign, if you wish for your image or voice to appear in the final production.

CSS Meetings and Events

Calendar:

Saturday, Nov 18th 2:00-4:00 CSS regular meeting

A film crew will be on hand, documenting the life of Jerry Andrus.

Saturday, Dec 16th 1:00-4:00 CSS potluck

Saturday, Jan 20th 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).

The only true shield standing between women and the bible, that handbook for the subjugation of women, is a secular government. U.S. citizens must wake up to the threat of an encroaching theocracy, and shore up Thomas Jefferson's "wall of separation between church and state."

— Annie Laurie Gaylor, *Woe to the Women: The Bible Tells Me So* (2004)

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From the President

The Islamification of Europe

"In the legend of Moorish Spain, the last Muslim king of Granada, Boabdil, surrendered the keys to his city on Jan. 2, 1492, and on one of its hills, paused for a final glance at his lost dominion." Thus begins "The Moor's Last Laugh: Radical Islam finds a haven in Europe", by Fouad Ajami (*Opinion Journal*: from *The Wall Street Journal* editorial page, March 28, 2004.) <<http://www.opinionjournal.com/extra/?id=110004879>>. Ajami is a professor at Johns Hopkins University. He continues:

Yet Boabdil's revenge came. It stole upon Europe. Demography — the aging of Europe on the one hand and, on the other, a vast bloat of people in the Middle East and North Africa — did Boabdil's job for him. Spurred by economic growth in the '60s, which created the need for foreign laborers, a Muslim migration to Europe began. Today, 15 million Muslims make their home in the European Union.

In the 1980s, terrible civil wars were fought in Arab and Islamic countries — with privilege on one side, militant wrath on the other. The despots and the military caste in Algeria and Tunisia and Syria and Egypt won that struggle. Their defeated opponents took to the road: From Hamburg and London and Copenhagen, the battle was now joined. If accounts were to be settled with rulers back home, the work of subversion would be done from Europe. Muslim Brotherhoods sprouted all over the Continent. There were welfare subsidies in the new surroundings, money, constitutional protections and rules of asylum to fight the old struggle.

... Muslims who fled their countries brought Islam with them. Men came into *bilad al kufr* (the lands of unbelief), but a new breed of Islamists radicalized the faith there, in the midst of the *kafir* (unbeliever).

The new lands were owed scant loyalty, if any, and political-religious radicals savored the space afforded them by Western civil society. But they resented the logic of assimilation. They denied their sisters and daughters the right to mix with "strangers." You would have thought that the pluralism and tumult of this open European world would spawn a version of the faith to match it. But precisely the opposite happened. In *bilad al kufr*, the faith became sharpened for battle. We know that life in Hamburg — and the kind of Islam that Hamburg made possible — was decisive in the evolution of Mohammed Atta, who led the "death pilots" of Sept. 11. It was in Hamburg where he conceived a hatred of modernity and of women and of the "McEgypt" that the Mubarak regime had brought into being. And it was in Hamburg, too, that a young "party boy" from a secular family in Lebanon underwent the

transformation that would take him from an elite Catholic prep school in Beirut to the controls of a plane on Sept. 11, and its tragic end near the fields of Shanksville, Penn.

The Egyptian Sayyid Qutb, intellectual godfather of radical Islamism, wrote, "**A Muslim has no nationality except his belief.**" Dyab Abu Jahjah, a young Lebanese who freely admits he lied about persecution at home in order to be allowed to immigrate into Belgium, has said, "**Assimilation is cultural rape.**" Europe's fertility replacement rate is well below the 2.1 children per woman replacement rate: in Germany, it is 1.3; Italy, 1.2; Spain, 1.1; France, 1.7 (and this high only because of its large Muslim population). In contrast, the rates in Islamic countries are much higher: Algeria, 3.2; Egypt and Morocco, 3.4; Iraq, 5.2; Saudi Arabia, 6.1. This population difference, as well as economic and political reasons, has encouraged emigration from Islamic countries to neighboring Europe.

This massive influx of Muslims into Europe has caused social problems, which political leaders by and large are ignoring. This immigration has cost Europe a great deal, and will likely cost it *far* more in the future. The website "*Aftenposten*: news from Norway," <<http://www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article1514123.ece>>, reports: "Half of the first immigrants to Norway in the first half of the 1970s are now living on state payments. The figure comes from a new study by the Frisch Center for Socio-economic Research and is supported by the University of Oslo, newspaper Dagens Næringsliv reports. The study focused on 2,500 immigrants from Pakistan, India, Turkey and Morocco born between 1936 and 1955, and compared with a control group of Norwegians of the same age."

In the article, "The Rape of Europe" <<http://www.brusselsjournal.com/node/1609>>, the author, Paul Belien, writes: "**The number of emigrants leaving the Netherlands and Germany has already surpassed the number of immigrants moving in. One does not have to be prophetic to predict ... that Europe is becoming Islamic.** Just consider the demographics. The number of Muslims in contemporary Europe is estimated to be 50 million. It is expected to double in twenty years. By 2025, one third of all European children will be born to Muslim families. Today Mohammed is already the most popular name for new-born boys in Brussels, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and other major European cities.... In a recent op-ed piece in the Brussels newspaper *De Standaard* (23 October) the Dutch (gay and self-declared "humanist") author Oscar Van den Boogaard ... says that to him coping with the islamization of Europe is like "a process of mourning." He is overwhelmed by a "feeling of sadness."

"I am not a warrior," he says, "but who is?" **"I have never learned to fight for my freedom. I was only good at enjoying it."**

Yale Global Online — a publication of the Yale Center for the Study of Globalization — last month published an article by Patrick Sabatier, a French author and columnist <<http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=8293>>. Its title is: "A Clash of Civilizations in Europe?: Sensitivity over every perceived slight to religion pits Islam against European secularism." He writes:

Acts of terror have brought tension to the surface between European secularism and all-embracing Islam.

Conflicts between a fundamentalist version of Islam and European societies based on secularism, liberal democracy, individual rights and non-discrimination of the sexes reawaken in European minds ancient fears, steeped in centuries of wars and invasions — all the more so since the phenomenon takes place under the persistent threat of Islamic terrorism, which has struck Madrid and London since 2001 and targets other large European cities. Conflict is aggravated by the pressures born out of immigration from Muslim countries across the Mediterranean, which has made Islam, with more than 20 million believers, one of the European Union's major religions. The conflict is also highlighted by the debate around the candidacy to the EU of Turkey, whose 60 million Muslim inhabitants have elected an Islamist-influenced government.

Robert Redeker, a 52 year-old French philosophy teacher and author, known for his abrasive criticism of all religions, launched a virulent attack on Islam in the September 19th issue of the conservative daily "Le Figaro" — savaging the blessing of violence in "The Koran" and harshly characterizing Mohammad as a "teacher of hatred — looter, Jew-killer and polygamist." The next day, the popular Egyptian preacher Youssef al-Qaradawi denounced Redeker on Al-Jazeera TV, and Redeker received death threats after an Islamist group posted his address, cell-phone number and photos online and called on Muslim "lions" to kill him, as Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh was killed in 2004 in Amsterdam by a 27-year old immigrant from Morocco. Van Gogh outraged militants by making a film denouncing the oppression of women in Islamic societies.

Redeker's predicament, reminiscent of British author Salman Rushdie's after Ayatollah Khomeini's 1989 fatwa calling for his murder, has roused support from French unions, civil liberties defense groups and politicians of all stripes. Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin denounced the threats as "unacceptable" and defended "freedom of expression." The incident has fueled a debate between those intent on defusing tensions by refraining from criticism of Islam and those who view that attitude as appeasement.

Redeker's essay, admittedly provocative, was written to protest Pope Benedict's apology for a speech given September 12th in Ratisbonne, Germany. The Pope had quoted Emperor Manuel II Paleologus who, circa 1400, assailed use of the sword to spread Mohammad's teachings. The quote prompted furious protests from Islamic preachers, threats of diplomatic retaliation by Muslim governments and violent street demonstrations that led to the murder of a nun. Benedict XVI expressed his regret for a "misunderstanding." To Redeker and many other Europeans, the Pope's apology smacked of appeasement.

The sense of a creeping surrender of central values such as freedom of expression and the right to criticize, and even lampoon any creed and faith, was compounded by the decision of Berlin's Deutsche Oper director to cancel showings of Mozart's "Idomeneo" for fear of violence by Islamist extremists. German Chancellor Angela Merkel reacted: **"Self-censorship out of fear cannot be tolerated."**

The absence of clear denunciations by moderate Islamic theologians, preachers and representatives to calls of violence and censorship is perceived as a sign of Islamists' growing clout. It also feeds suspicions that **silencing criticism of religion is, like female oppression, part and parcel of Islam.** The threats against France, recently reiterated by Al Qaeda deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri, for the 2004 law prohibiting the Islamic veil in schools and public-service jobs have reinforced the feeling that Islam is trying to force its prejudices on secular European societies.

On the one hand, then, Muslims react more violently and internationally to criticisms they deem "blasphemous" and "Islamophobic." On the other, books and essays denouncing **Islam as "the new totalitarianism"**, in the line of fascism and communism, have been popular since the 2002 anti-Muslim bestseller by Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci, "The Rage and The Pride." European fear of a "green peril" is a mirror image of Muslim phantasms of a Western conspiracy against Islam, an inexorable spiral of false perceptions fueled by the media cauldron of instant TV images and internet pronouncements by radicals.

All this obscures the fact that Muslim furor, as shown during the caricature controversy, is often staged for media consumption by small groups of extremists while the vast majority of Muslims remain indifferent. Over 70 percent of Muslims living in Europe, according to a 2005 European-wide study, describe themselves as hostile to Islamists. Most practice a peaceful and tolerant brand of Islam, and many wish for the emergence of a European form of Islam, through reforms that adapt the faith to the modern world.

But a daily diet of violent news, images and threats — many bloodthirsty acts by Muslims against other Muslims — hides to European eyes the extreme diversity of Islam and its deep divisions along sectarian, ethnic or theological lines. The silence of tolerant Muslims ends up making militant Islamism the only message of Mohammad heard by Europeans, the very aim of proponents of “jihad” and xenophobes. The dire prediction of André Malraux, made half a century ago, might one day become true. “The political unification of Europe would require a common enemy,” said the author and Gaullist minister of culture in 1956. “But the only possible common enemy would be Islam.”

Conclusion

No nation that controls its population is obligated to take in the endless reproductive excess of other countries. Nor is it obligated to abandon its secular, democratic values to theocratic extremists from other nations.

I feel that European nations need to reassert their fundamental, secular, democratic nature. No Muslim has the “right” to emigrate to Europe. Europeans should control their immigration, and not allow any more Muslims in. Muslims that are in Europe now that are not citizens should be deported. (At the very least, all alien Muslims who commit crimes should be deported.) All Muslims remaining must be required to integrate into European society or emigrate. No separate educational institutions should be allowed: all schools should be secular; no discrimination against women should be permitted. I believe that Europe does not have to be, and should not be, taken over by Muslims, and that it has the right to, and should, defend the secular, democratic values that define European nations. **We all have “the right to criticize, and even lampoon any creed and faith.”** There should be no question about this. Immigrants must not be allowed to destroy this or any other European — and therefore Western — secular, democratic principle — or nation.

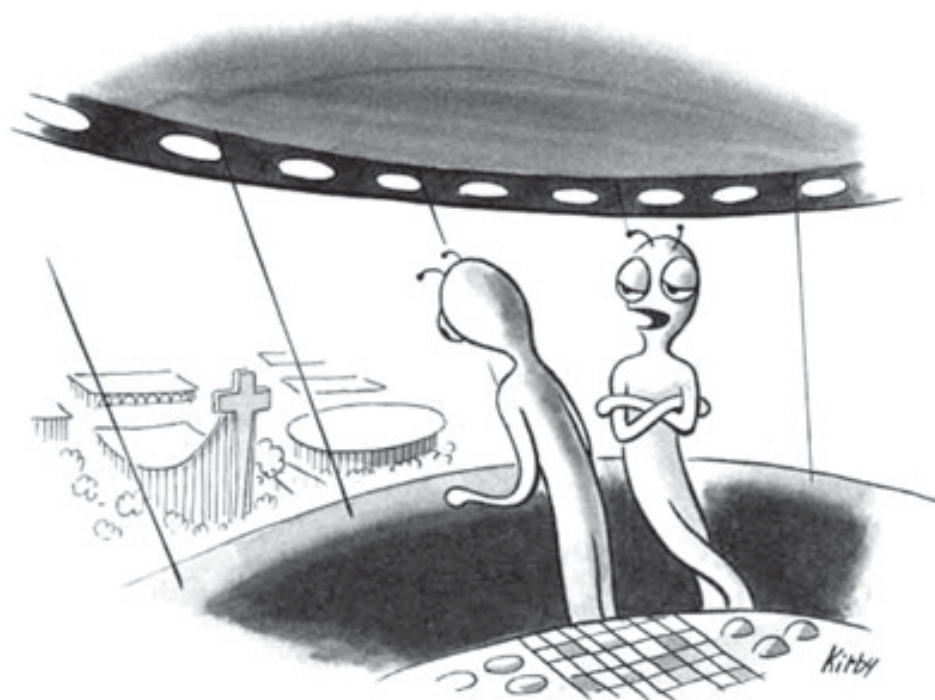
Why are Muslims undesirable in Europe? Because Islam is incompatible with these values. It opposes freedom of expression, the separation of government and religion, the rights of women, equal secular education, and, apparently, population control. It is violent, cruel, and irrational. **The Koran (Quran) contains many passages that support this view. For example: “We will cast terror into the hearts of the unbelievers ... their lodging shall be the fire” (3.144), and “The Jews, the Christians and the Pagans will burn forever in the Fire of Hell.**

They are the vilest of all creatures” (98.6). Of course, there are vile passages in the Christian Bible, as well. Yet many Christians are tolerant and moderate (and many are not). Islam needs a reformation, but none is in sight. We can’t afford to wait for one to happen.

Patrick Sabatier, above, writes of the diversity of Islam and of the large number of tolerant Muslims. Perhaps there *are* many moderate Muslims. But where are they? Why aren’t they speaking out against and reining in their extremist coreligionists? And what is a “moderate” Muslim, anyway? The other day, I was listening to public radio for just a few minutes, and heard about a meeting of self-proclaimed moderate European Muslims who invited the editor of the newspaper that first published the notorious “Mohammad” cartoons to speak. One Muslim woman, a lawyer, told him that she respected the right to free expression. But, she added, “that does not give you the right to offend anyone!” Well, her remarks offended me. She just doesn’t get it.

To my way of thinking, she is anything but moderate. There can be no freedom of expression without the right to risk offending someone. If Muslims are ever to truly become moderate and tolerant, they must accept secular values, including true freedom of expression, the separation of government and religion, and full rights and equality of women with men. And clearly they don’t: not even their “moderates.”

John Dearing
President of CSS



“Here’s how it works: One of them says there is a big, mysterious force that only he can see — and this force won’t harm any of them if they all send in their money. Cute?”

A Dissent: The Case Against Faith

Religion does untold damage to our politics. An atheist's lament.

by Sam Harris, *Newsweek*, 11/13/2006 issue

Despite a full century of scientific insights attesting to the antiquity of life and the greater antiquity of the Earth, more than half the American population believes that the entire cosmos was created 6,000 years ago. This is, incidentally, about a thousand years after the Sumerians invented glue. Those with the power to elect presidents and congressmen — and many who themselves get elected — believe that dinosaurs lived two by two upon Noah's Ark, that light from distant galaxies was created en route to the Earth and that the first members of our species were fashioned out of dirt and divine breath, in a garden with a talking snake, by the hand of an invisible God.

This is embarrassing. But add to this comedy of false certainties the fact that 44 percent of Americans are confident that Jesus will return to Earth sometime in the next 50 years, and you will glimpse the terrible liability of this sort of thinking. Given the most common interpretation of Biblical prophecy, it is not an exaggeration to say that nearly half the American population is eagerly anticipating the end of the world. It should be clear that this faith-based nihilism provides its adherents with absolutely no incentive to build a sustainable civilization — economically, environmentally or geopolitically. Some of these people are lunatics, of course, but they are not the lunatic fringe. We are talking about the explicit views of Christian ministers who have congregations numbering in the tens of thousands. These are some of the most influential, politically connected and well-funded people in our society.

It is, of course, taboo to criticize a person's religious beliefs. The problem, however, is that much of what people believe in the name of religion is intrinsically divisive, unreasonable and incompatible with genuine morality. One of the worst things about religion is that it tends to separate questions of right and wrong from the living reality of human and animal suffering. Consequently, religious people will devote immense energy to so-called moral problems — such as gay marriage — where no real suffering is at issue, and they will happily contribute to the surplus of human misery if it serves their religious beliefs.

A case in point: embryonic-stem-cell research is one of the most promising developments in the last century of medicine. It could offer therapeutic breakthroughs for every human ailment (for the simple reason that stem cells can become any tissue in the human body), including diabetes, Parkinson's disease, severe burns, etc. In July, President George W. Bush used his first veto to deny federal funding to this research. He did this on the basis of his religious faith. Like millions of other Americans, President Bush believes that "human life starts at the moment of conception." Specifically, he believes that there is a soul in every 3-day-old human embryo, and the

interests of one soul — the soul of a little girl with burns over 75 percent of her body, for instance — cannot trump the interests of another soul, even if that soul happens to live inside a petri dish. Here, as ever, religious dogmatism impedes genuine wisdom and compassion.

A 3-day-old human embryo is a collection of 150 cells called a blastocyst. There are, for the sake of comparison, more than 100,000 cells in the brain of a fly. The embryos that are destroyed in stem-cell research do not have brains, or even neurons. Consequently, there is no reason to believe they can suffer their destruction in any way at all.

The truth is that President Bush's unjustified religious beliefs about the human soul are, at this very moment, prolonging the scarcely endurable misery of tens of millions of human beings. Given our status as a superpower, our material wealth and the continuous advancements in our technology, it seems safe to say that the president of the United States has more power and responsibility than any person in history. It is worth noting, therefore, that we have elected a president who seems to imagine that whenever he closes his eyes in the Oval Office — wondering whether to go to war or not to go to war, for instance — his intuitions have been vetted by the Creator of the universe. Speaking to a small group of supporters in 1999, Bush reportedly said, "I believe God wants me to be president." Believing that God has delivered you unto the presidency really seems to entail the belief that you cannot make any catastrophic mistakes while in office. One question we might want to collectively ponder in the future: do we really want to hand the tiller of civilization to a person who thinks this way?

Religion is the one area of our discourse in which people are systematically protected from the demand to give good evidence and valid arguments in defense of their strongly held beliefs. And yet these beliefs regularly determine what they live for, what they will die for and — all too often — what they will kill for. Consequently, we are living in a world in which millions of grown men and women can rationalize the violent sacrifice of their own children by recourse to fairy tales. We are living in a world in which millions of Muslims believe that there is nothing better than to be killed in defense of Islam. We are living in a world in which millions of Christians hope to soon be raptured into the stratosphere by Jesus so that they can safely enjoy a sacred genocide that will inaugurate the end of human history. In a world brimming with increasingly destructive technology, our infatuation with religious myths now poses a tremendous danger. And it is not a danger for which more religious faith is a remedy.

Harris is the author of the *New York Times* best sellers "Letter to a Christian Nation" and "The End of Faith."

An Evolutionary Theory of Right and Wrong

by Nicholas Wade, *New York Times*, 10/31/2006

Who doesn't know the difference between right and wrong? Yet that essential knowledge, generally assumed to come from parental teaching or religious or legal instruction, could turn out to have a quite different origin.

Primatologists like Frans de Waal have long argued that the roots of human morality are evident in social animals like apes and monkeys. The animals' feelings of empathy and expectations of reciprocity are essential behaviors for mammalian group living and can be regarded as a counterpart of human morality.

Marc D. Hauser, a Harvard biologist, has built on this idea to propose that people are born with a moral grammar wired into their neural circuits by evolution. In a new book, "Moral Minds" (HarperCollins 2006), he argues that the grammar generates instant moral judgments which, in part because of the quick decisions that must be made in life-or-death situations, are inaccessible to the conscious mind.

People are generally unaware of this process because the mind is adept at coming up with plausible rationalizations for why it arrived at a decision generated subconsciously.

Dr. Hauser presents his argument as a hypothesis to be proved, not as an established fact. But it is an idea that he roots in solid ground, including his own and others' work with primates and in empirical results derived by moral philosophers.

The proposal, if true, would have far-reaching consequences. It implies that parents and teachers are not teaching children the rules of correct behavior from scratch but are, at best, giving shape to an innate behavior. And it suggests that religions are not the source of moral codes but, rather, social enforcers of instinctive moral behavior.

Both atheists and people belonging to a wide range of faiths make the same moral judgments, Dr. Hauser writes, implying "that the system that unconsciously generates moral judgments is immune to religious doctrine." Dr. Hauser argues that the moral grammar operates in much the same way as the universal grammar proposed by the linguist Noam Chomsky as the innate neural machinery for language. The universal grammar is a system of rules for generating syntax and vocabulary but does not specify any particular language. That is supplied by the culture in which a child grows up.

The moral grammar too, in Dr. Hauser's view, is a system for generating moral behavior and not a list of specific rules. It constrains human behavior so tightly that many rules are in fact the same or very similar in every society — do as you would be done by; care for children and the weak; don't kill; avoid adultery and incest; don't cheat, steal or lie.

But it also allows for variations, since cultures can assign different weights to the elements of the grammar's calculations. Thus one society may ban abortion, another may see infanticide as a moral duty in certain circumstances. Or as Kipling observed, "The wildest dreams of Kew are the facts of Katmandu, and the crimes of Clapham chaste in Martaban."

Matters of right and wrong have long been the province of moral philosophers and ethicists. Dr. Hauser's proposal is an attempt to claim the subject for science, in particular for evolutionary biology. The moral grammar evolved, he believes, because restraints on behavior are required for social living and have been favored by natural selection because of their survival value.

Much of the present evidence for the moral grammar is indirect. Some of it comes from psychological tests of children, showing that they have an innate sense of fairness that starts to unfold at age 4. Some comes from ingenious dilemmas devised to show a subconscious moral judgment generator at work. These are known by the moral philosophers who developed them as "trolley problems."

Suppose you are standing by a railroad track. Ahead, in a deep cutting from which no escape is possible, five people are walking on the track. You hear a train approaching. Beside you is a lever with which you can switch the train to a sidetrack. One person is walking on the sidetrack. Is it O.K. to pull the lever and save the five people, though one will die?

Most people say it is.

Assume now you are on a bridge overlooking the track. Ahead, five people on the track are at risk. You can save them by throwing down a heavy object into the path of the approaching train. One is available beside you, in the form of a fat man. Is it O.K. to push him to save the five?

Most people say no, although lives saved and lost are the same as in the first problem.

Why does the moral grammar generate such different judgments in apparently similar situations? It makes a distinction, Dr. Hauser writes, between a foreseen harm (the train killing the person on the track) and an intended harm (throwing the person in front of the train), despite the fact that the consequences are the same in either case. It also rates killing an animal as more acceptable than killing a person.

Many people cannot articulate the foreseen/intended distinction, Dr. Hauser says, a sign that it is being made at inaccessible levels of the mind. This inability challenges the general belief that moral behavior is learned. For if

people cannot articulate the foreseen/intended distinction, how can they teach it?

Dr. Hauser began his research career in animal communication, working with vervet monkeys in Kenya and with birds. He is the author of a standard textbook on the subject, "The Evolution of Communication." He began to take an interest in the human animal in 1992 after psychologists devised experiments that allowed one to infer what babies are thinking. He found he could repeat many of these experiments in cotton-top tamarins, allowing the cognitive capacities of infants to be set in an evolutionary framework.

His proposal of a moral grammar emerges from a collaboration with Mr. Chomsky, who had taken an interest in Dr. Hauser's ideas about animal communication. In 2002 they wrote, with Dr. Tecumseh Fitch, an unusual article arguing that the faculty of language must have developed as an adaptation of some neural system possessed by animals, perhaps one used in navigation. From this interaction Dr. Hauser developed the idea that moral behavior, like language behavior, is acquired with the help of an innate set of rules that unfolds early in a child's development.

Social animals, he believes, possess the rudiments of a moral system in that they can recognize cheating or deviations from expected behavior. But they generally lack the psychological mechanisms on which the pervasive reciprocity of human society is based, like the ability to remember bad behavior, quantify its costs, recall prior interactions with an individual and punish offenders. "Lions cooperate on the hunt, but there is no punishment for laggards," Dr. Hauser said.

The moral grammar now universal among people presumably evolved to its final shape during the hunter-gatherer phase of the human past, before the dispersal from the ancestral homeland in northeast Africa some 50,000 years ago. This may be why events before our eyes carry far greater moral weight than happenings far away, Dr. Hauser believes, since in those days one never had to care about people remote from one's environment.

Dr. Hauser believes that the moral grammar may have evolved through the evolutionary mechanism known as group selection. A group bound by altruism toward its members and rigorous discouragement of cheaters would be more likely to prevail over a less cohesive society, so genes for moral grammar would become more common.

Many evolutionary biologists frown on the idea of group selection, noting that genes cannot become more frequent unless they benefit the individual who carries them, and a person who contributes altruistically to people not related to him will reduce his own fitness and leave fewer offspring.

But though group selection has not been proved to occur in animals, Dr. Hauser believes that it may have operated in people because of their greater social conformity and

willingness to punish or ostracize those who disobey moral codes.

"That permits strong group cohesion you don't see in other animals, which may make for group selection," he said.

His proposal for an innate moral grammar, if people pay attention to it, could ruffle many feathers. His fellow biologists may raise eyebrows at proposing such a big idea when much of the supporting evidence has yet to be acquired. Moral philosophers may not welcome a biologist's bid to annex their turf, despite Dr. Hauser's expressed desire to collaborate with them.

Nevertheless, researchers' idea of a good hypothesis is one that generates interesting and testable predictions. By this criterion, the proposal of an innate moral grammar seems unlikely to disappoint.

High Court Deals Setback...

(continued from page 1)

But the Berkeley City Council adopted a policy that required groups who wanted a free berth to agree in writing that they would not discriminate against persons based on, among other factors, their race, religion, ethnicity or sexual orientation. The Scouts did not sign the agreement because the Boy Scouts' policy excludes gay and atheists.

Eugene Evans, an adult leader of the Sea Scouts, agreed to pay \$500 a month to maintain the berth in the Berkeley marina, but he also led a lawsuit challenging the policy as violating the group's rights to freedom of speech and the equal protection of the laws. He argued that the Scouts were being treated as "second class citizens" because their views on religion and homosexuality were disfavored by the government.

He lost decisively in the California courts, however.

In March, the California Supreme Court upheld Berkeley's policy in an unanimous ruling. "Berkeley had not attempted to muzzle anyone's speech," the state high court said. "A government entity may constitutionally require a recipient of funding or subsidy to provide written, unambiguous assurances of compliance with a generally applicable nondiscrimination policy," it said.

The Scouts had hoped for a more sympathetic hearing from the Supreme Court. The Pacific Legal Foundation, which presented the appeal in the high court, said the California ruling "sets an ominous precedent" for Scouting groups.

Success is a journey, not a destination.

— Ben Sweetland

Christian Atheism

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/atheism/types/christianatheism.shtml>

[Editor's Note: *Have any of you ever heard of this? Yeah, me neither...*]

Christian Atheists want to remove what they see as the fairy tale elements of Christianity.

They prefer to call this a non-realistic version of Christianity, rather than Christian atheism. They say that they do believe in God — but not in a fairy tale way.

To do this requires great intellectual sophistication, as you can see from the outline of non-realistic Christianity below.

Essentials of non-realistic Christianity

- Religion is about internal spiritual experiences, and that is all.
- There is no world other than the material world around us.
- There are no beings other than the living organisms on this planet or elsewhere in the universe.
- There is no objective being or thing called God that exists separately from the person believing in him.
- There is no 'ultimate reality' outside human minds either.
- We give our own lives meaning and purpose; there is nothing outside us that does it for us.
- God is a projection of the human mind.
- "God" is the way human beings put 'spiritual' ideals into a poetic form that they are able to use and work with.
- "God" is simply a word that stands for our highest ideals.
- God-talk is a language tool that enables us to talk about our highest ideals and create meaning in our lives.
- Religious stories and texts are ways in which human beings set down and work out spiritual, ethical, and fundamental meanings in life.
- Our religious talk is really about us and our inner selves, and the community and culture we live in.
- Religious language enables us to do something unique.
- Religious talk uses the familiar language of things that exist outside ourselves to make it easier for us to handle complex and subtle ideas.

- Faith therefore isn't belief in a God that exists outside minds.
- Faith is what human beings do when they pursue 'spiritual' ideals.
- Saying that someone follows a particular faith is a way of talking about their attitudes to life and to other people.

Worship and prayer

If there's no God out there, it might seem pointless to go to church, or to pray. Christian Atheists would disagree:

Worship is a beneficial activity. Worship in a group is good way for a community to:

- Communicate with each other.
- Share ideals and ideas.
- Explore the meaning and purpose of their individual lives, and the life of their community.

Hymn-singing and prayer:

- These are powerful ways for individual human beings to explore the meaning and purpose of their lives.

Liturgies:

- The ceremonies and rituals of the church are a powerful way of acting out the ideas that give meaning to our lives. They enable human beings to use action instead of words to explore their deepest ideas.

Benefits of this form of belief

Those who who believe like this claim many advantages for it:

- Humanity is forced to take responsibility for everything.
- Human beings are seen as powerful and able to do things for themselves.
- Religion no longer has to try to explain many difficult issues that go with believing in supernatural things.
- Religion is no longer in opposition to scientific progress.
- Religion is an inherently democratic, rather than hierarchical activity — it's something that comes from humanity, not something forced on us by a powerful God.

Evangelical Confesses to ‘Sexual Immorality’ in Letter

by Eric Marrapodi, CNN, 11/5/2006

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colorado (CNN) — Less than a day after being fired from leadership of the evangelical mega-church he founded, the Rev. Ted Haggard confessed Sunday to “sexual immorality” and called himself “a deceiver and a liar.”

In a letter read to members of his New Life Church on Sunday, Haggard said he is “a deceiver and a liar.” Haggard apologized to his congregation in the letter and asked for their forgiveness.

“There is part of my life that is so repulsive and dark that I’ve been warring against it all of my adult life,” Haggard said in the letter read by the Rev. Larry Stockstill, a member of the board of overseers of New Life Church.

On Saturday, members of the board ousted Haggard from the 14,000-member Colorado Springs church, citing his “sexually immoral conduct.”

Mike Jones claims the prominent pastor paid him for sex over a three-year period. Haggard only admitted to receiving a massage from the Denver man, in an interview Friday with CNN affiliate KUSA-TV.

The pastor also admitted that he had bought methamphetamine but said he did not use the drug and threw it away.

In his apology letter, Haggard made no mention of drug use, but said, “I am guilty of sexual immorality.” He also noted that “the things I did opened the door for additional allegations.”

Haggard asked the congregation to forgive his accuser, whom the minister said revealed “the deception ... that was in my life.”

Stockstill also read a letter from Haggard’s wife to the women of the congregation. In it, Gayle Haggard said while her heart is broken, she remains “committed to him until death do us part.”

The couple have five children.

After the letters were read, an overflow congregation, many of them wiping away tears, responded with a standing ovation.

The interim pastor, the Rev. Ross Parsley, then called upon congregants to forgive Haggard.

“It is OK to be angry, it is OK to grieve,” Parsley said. But the “fall of one man” will not destroy the congregation, he said.

“Today our church family and Pastor Ted is more obedient, more repentant, more transparent than we’ve

been in a long time,” Parsley said. “You’re watching the Gospel at work. You’re watching healing and restoration start to occur as we go through this process.”

After the service, 10-year church member Michelle Richmond predicted Haggard and the church will recover.

“I probably cried all morning,” Richmond said. “He knows he’s hurt us and it hurts when your brother has done something, but like Pastor Ross said, he’s in a good place — he’s better off this week than he was last week — and he will receive the healing he needs and he did a good thing for our church so that we can heal.”

Jones said he went public with his allegations because of Haggard’s support for a state constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage that’s on Colorado’s ballot Tuesday.

“For someone who is up there preaching that marriage should only be between a man and a woman, and he’s going behind his wife’s back and seeing a gay man for sex — I felt like I owed it to the gay community to expose the hypocrisy,” Jones said.

Haggard also was stripped of his title as president of the National of Association of Evangelicals.

The Rev. Leith Anderson, who has been named as the group’s interim president, told CNN on Monday that Haggard’s failure reflects more on trust lost than on homosexuality.

“What we have here is someone who in leadership has failed the standard that he lifted up for himself,” said Anderson, a Eden Prairie, Minnesota, pastor and Christian broadcaster. “The reason it’s a big news story is because it’s so unusual and so exceptional.”

Jones has said he met Haggard three years ago when the pastor answered his escort ad, identifying himself as a man from Kansas City named “Art.” He said their sexual encounters continued monthly until August.

Haggard’s middle name is Arthur.

Haggard started the New Life Church 26 years ago in his basement and attained a nationwide identity among evangelicals as his church grew. He was one of a group of religious leaders who regularly participated in conference calls with White House aides, Time magazine reported.

On Friday, White House spokesman Tony Fratto sought to downplay Haggard’s influence within the administration, saying he was an occasional participant in weekly conference calls between West Wing staff and leading evangelicals.

From the Editor:

Wow.

I can't stop saying it.

Wow.

Was it just last month I was wishing for a hero — someone who could stop Bush and his cronies from doing more damage to our country, and the rest of the world?

We have met the hero, and he is us.

A few days ago, Americans voted Democrat in such droves, that even the usual right-wing vote suppression tactics couldn't stop the Dems from taking *BOTH* houses of Congress!

Take a moment to enjoy that. As of January, Bush's Congressional enablers will no longer be in power!

This is nothing short of astonishing. It's almost enough to give you faith in democracy again.

Mind you, the nightmare's not over. Bush is still President, and he has repeatedly shown that no mere Constitution or rule of law will stop him from doing whatever he pleases.

Meanwhile, the Dems have all too frequently shown themselves to be timid, spineless things who wilt from the first hint of name-calling by the right-wingers.

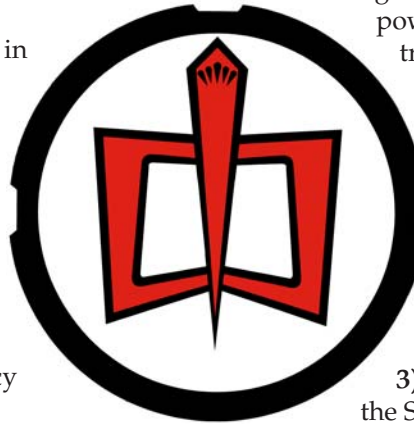
Nevertheless, Bush will find life a good deal more difficult now, for with control of Congress comes three very important things:

1) Subpoena power. Even though the Dems have promised that "impeachment is off the table", they have ALSO promised the full investigations that the Republican Congress has denied us for so long. With subpoena power, comes the ability to finally get at the truth. And once we get the facts on record, impeachment will be all too easy.

2) Control of congressional committees. Which means control of what actually comes to a full vote in Congress, and what doesn't. Bush may still have veto power — but now he'll have to USE it. And some of the things he'll want to veto, won't improve his popularity any...

3) Perhaps most importantly, with control of the Senate comes the ability to block any further extremist Supreme Court nominations. With the possible exception of Iraq, nothing Bush has done will cause more far-reaching damage than the two nominees he's already placed...

The Democrats may be merely the lesser of two evils, but compared to the alternative right now, they look positively... heroic.



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