



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 the Editor

On the Death of Friends and Loved Ones...

Not one but two people close to me died this month. Neither death was unexpected, but somehow, that doesn't lessen the loss...

First, I am sad to report the death of CSS founding member and world-reknowned magician Jerry Andrus. Jerry was diagnosed with cancer several months ago, but he didn't let that slow him down. He continued to attend CSS meetings, and live his life exactly as he chose.

I feel like I missed out on a great opportunity with Jerry. Oh, I knew him as well as any CSS member, and thoroughly enjoyed the discussions I got to have with him at the meetings. And of course, you couldn't help but love the illusions and tricks he always brought with him.

But I know of people who've driven halfway across the country to spend a day with Jerry and tour his Castle of Chaos. Yet even though he only lived five minutes away from me, I never took the time to get to know him better; never got to tour his Castle myself.

It's a mistake I will always regret. He was an amazing man.

The second recent death was more personal.

I've mentioned my "crazy cousin Harold" once or twice in this column previously. He was the only other atheist in my family, and attended a couple of CSS meetings over the years, when he was in town.

Harold was the living definition of the phrase "old coot" — and had been, ever since I was young. He had absolutely no sense of tact; if he had an opinion to express, he expressed it loudly, to all who would listen. Since he was a confirmed bachelor and lived alone, he usually didn't have anyone AROUND to listen, so he developed the habit of talking loudly to HIMSELF.

Harold loved to take long, cross-country driving trips every year or two, staying with friends or family along the way (usually, showing up with no warning, and casually announcing that he'd be staying for a few days). If there were no friends or family nearby when night fell, he would just pull over and sleep in the car. Under no circumstances could he EVER be persuaded to stay in a motel, or spend any other money on himself that was not strictly necessary.

Well, a few months after his last visit (which is its own amazing story), he had a massive stroke. He wound up in a nursing home, completely paralyzed on the left side.

Since Harold had given me his powers of attorney, it was up to me to take care of him and his affairs. He'd have been horrified if he'd found out that we were spending down his "vast fortune" to keep him comfortable in the best nursing home in Richardson. This was one case where what he didn't know DEFINITELY didn't hurt him.

He had his ups and downs during the next few months. At the start of Labor Day weekend, though, we got the call — the time was near. Over the next few days, he stopped responding to stimulus, his vital signs diminished, and by Tuesday evening, he was gone.

Harold died as he lived — an ornery old coot who wanted things his way or not at all. He gave the nurses grief, but they all loved him anyway. As did we all...

Reed Byers

Editor, *Willamette Freethinker*

CSS Meetings and Events

Calendar:

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

Regular meeting time:

Third Saturday of each month, from 2:00-4:00 pm.

Regular meeting location:

Corl House (3975 NW Witham Hill Dr, Corvallis).

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From the President

Jerry Andrus: In Memoriam

A most extraordinary person has passed from our midst.

On Sunday, August 26, 2007, Jerry Andrus died. He was 89. Jerry was a world-renowned magician/illusionist. He lived, and died, in Albany, Oregon, just ten miles from Corvallis.

The following is from an August 28 article in the *Albany Democrat-Herald*:

His brother, George Andrus, said Jerry died of cancer.... "Among other things, Jerry many times stated that he'd had a good life," George, 91, said this morning. "He wasn't morbid about it at all. He wasn't fighting it."

Rick Rogers, owner of Movies and Magic in downtown Albany, said Andrus was one of his early inspirations. "I've known him to be one of the kindest people I've ever met. Any child that ever knocked on his door and said, 'Mr. Andrus, I'd like to see a trick,' or 'Mr. Andrus, can you help me with this trick?' ... I've never known him not to stop and take the time to help a child, or an adult, for that matter." Rogers said Andrus was considered to be one of the top close-up magicians in the world. He knew illusionists David Copperfield and Criss Angel, performed at the famous Magic Castle in Hollywood and at shows worldwide, and had spoken at Harvard and Stanford as well as other universities.

His brother said the family moved from Springfield to Albany in 1928, when he and Jerry were boys. He said Jerry never moved far from Albany the rest of his life. Ring 238 of the International Brotherhood of Magicians held a special Jerry Andrus Day March 18 at the Venetian Theater. Albany Mayor Doug Killin contributed to the honor, proclaiming the day to be "Jerry Andrus Day." George Andrus lived next door to his brother since 1979. He said Jerry's house was the "tightest, fullest house and shop of any place in the world," packed with moving shelf units, which held Andrus's many gadgets and inventions.

James Randi, magician, skeptic and investigator of paranormal claims, has written of Jerry on his website, <http://www.randi.org/jerryandrus.html>:

Jerry Andrus was born ... in Sheridan, Wyoming. At age 12 he saw a performance by a reformed



"spiritual medium," whereupon he was captivated by the art of illusion. At age 16, he joined the International Society of Junior Magicians, and rapidly became known in the trade as a "magician's magician." His absolute honesty and integrity was never compromised. As he traveled the globe lecturing for enthusiastic magician's groups and appearing on television, his message was always clear: don't lie to your audience; deceive them only for purposes of entertainment.

Jerry was a magical mentor to Ray Hyman, Loren Pankratz, and many other performers. In 1954 he invented the Linking Pins, a classic close-up trick that is still to be seen in the repertoires of major artists. He

wrote one book on his subject of expertise, "Andrus Deals You In," and several booklets which he distributed at his lectures. Someday, I'll go into the many anecdotes that describe how Jerry and I interacted – and perhaps I'll feel his presence, whispering to me, "That was an exaggeration," or "You know it wasn't that good," as I may over-emphasize a detail or two.

Hail and farewell, Jerry. We loved you and you made a difference in our lives, my friend. Please visit his web site [<http://jerryandrus.org>], also mirrored at <http://web.mac.com/barrybrilliant/Site/Welcome.html>] and show your support for Mr. Andrus' relatives and friends during this difficult time.

Dr. Michael Shermer, science writer, founder of The Skeptics Society, and editor of its magazine *Skeptic*, remembers Jerry: <http://www.skeptic.com/eskeptic/07-09-05.html>:

I was first introduced to Jerry's work in the mid-1980s at Caltech for an event on how our senses and brains can be easily fooled. Jerry was a brilliant and talented close-up magician, but he was best known for his 3D illusions that, when presented at a certain angle, distance, and lighting, could completely blow your mind with shape-shifting, figure-flipping regularity. With Jerry's permission, I incorporated into my public lecture on "The Power of Belief" his famous 3D impossible crate illusion (pictured on his website), explaining that it is one thing to see the various 2D illusions typically presented in introductory psychology textbooks; it is quite another thing to see them re-

created in 3D. Jerry Andrus was the world's greatest 3D illusionist.

Although Jerry had no formal degrees, he was one of the most creative, eclectic, and diverse minds I have ever encountered, a true polymath.... His thoughts ranged widely across all fields, and he devoted his life to thinking and creating, all toward the goal of trying to better understand how the world works, most notably the world of the mind. I brought Jerry to Caltech on a number of occasions for our annual conferences, where he tirelessly held court in a section of the hall devoted just to his illusions, sitting there for hours on end patiently showing people just how unreliable our senses and brains can be under the influence of his special magic. Even well into his 80s, Jerry managed the trip to L.A. from Oregon with his suitcases full of illusions, and not just for the Skeptics Society conference, but several times a year at the Magic Castle in Hollywood, where he was a resident magician working the close-up magic room.

What he did for science and skepticism (which was considerable) aside, however, what I most remember about Jerry was his kindness, honesty, and genuineness. I think it was James Randi who said that if you looked up the word "integrity" in the dictionary there would be a picture of Jerry Andrus. Jerry was kind and considerate to everyone he met. He could be asked the same question a hundred times in a day about some illusion he was showing, and he would answer it with the same enthusiasm the hundredth time as he did the first time. Even though he practiced deception professionally as a magician, Jerry Andrus could no more deceive someone in regular life than he could fly.... Jerry simply wanted to know the truth about the world. He wanted to cut straight through political, religious, and social barriers to our understanding to get to the heart of a problem. This he did as well as and often better than most professional Ph.D. scientists I have met. We shall miss you so very much Jerry. Your legend lives on.

My Observations

Jerry was a world-famous magician or illusionist. He was also an agnostic. Jerry was a founding member of Corvallis Secular Society and attended meetings regularly when he wasn't traveling. Jerry and I several times discussed our meanings of the terms "agnostic" and "atheist." We realized we had the same view: we were both "without god-beliefs": we felt that the hypothesis of the existence of one or more gods was, while not disproven absolutely beyond all possible doubt, highly improbable. He preferred the term "agnostic" in order to emphasize his uncertainty, while I prefer "atheist" ("a-theist") to emphasize that I am "without god-beliefs."

Jerry was a Humanist, as well. His worldview and ethics were not based on supernatural or paranormal beliefs and on obedience to the supposed will of a god. Rather, they were based on science, reason, and human compassion. Diogenes the Cynic wandered around ancient Greece carrying a lantern and searching for an honest man. He could have visited Jerry: the search would have been over. Jerry would never tell a lie. Not even on stage. He wouldn't say "The coin disappears"; he would instead say "The coin appears to vanish", or "The coin is no longer in my hand."

Jerry was kind to all: never haughty or arrogant. Jerry was as moral or ethical person as I've ever met. He always did the right thing out of empathy and simply because it was the right thing. I'm sure that Jerry never in his adult life did the right thing because he expected a reward for doing it or feared punishment if he didn't do it. To him, I'm convinced, that would have been immoral.

As one person, remembering, said online: "I think he was just, plainly put, a good guy. He was nice, friendly, approachable, easy to smile, eager to share and humble. Such simple qualities are easy to take for granted. But I appreciated them."

Jerry often was called an iconoclast. (*Iconoclast*: 1. A breaker or destroyer of images, esp. those set up for religious veneration. 2. A person who attacks cherished beliefs, traditional institutions, etc., as being based on error or superstition.) But his questioning and exploration of beliefs or misperceptions was never mean-spirited. He just followed the truth, wherever it led.

Jerry Andrus was a man of relentless curiosity and zest for life. He lived a long and full life and will be mourned by many.

Like many others, we at Corvallis Secular Society will miss Jerry very much.

A most extraordinary person has passed from our midst.

Jerry In His Own Words

A Thing of Wonder

What are the sparks that light the particles that move and inform the channels of perception in the mind of man.

How move the subatomic particles to give us this incredible awareness of self.

The consciousness of man, what makes us the formula that spins the patterns of reason and that drives engines of knowledge. No matter what or how, it is indeed a thing of wonder.

—Jerry Andrus

John Dearing
President of CSS

It Did Happen Here

American Citizen Tortured, Convicted of Thought Crime

by Ted Rall, 8/21/2007

NEW YORK — “Just about everyone agrees that the recent conviction of Abdullah al-Muhajir, a.k.a. Jose Padilla, is a good thing,” wrote right-wing pundit Neil Kressel in The New York Post. Indeed, just about everyone did. “It is hard to disagree with the jury’s guilty verdict against Jose Padilla, the accused, but never formally charged, dirty bomber,” opined the liberal editorial board of The New York Times. (They went on to criticize the way the Bush Administration denied Padilla due process.)

Meet Mr. Not Everyone.

Padilla, a 36-year-old American citizen born in Brooklyn who converted to Islam, was arrested at Chicago’s O’Hare airport in May 2002. Using the bombastic “1984”-style rhetoric of the post-9/11 era, then-attorney general John Ashcroft announced that Padilla had participated in an “unfolding terrorist plot to attack the United States by exploding a radioactive dirty bomb.” Padilla’s arrest, Ashcroft ranted, would have caused “mass death and injury” in an American city.

But there wasn’t any evidence. Or there wasn’t enough to convict him in court. Which was, under the system of justice citizens of Western countries have lived under for eight centuries, the same thing.

Before 9/11 and “preventative detention” and legal torture and scary new laws like the USA-Patriot Act and the Military Commissions Act eliminated habeas corpus, Padilla would have sat in jail a day or two. He might have gotten roughed up. Then he’d have walked.

That was under democracy. In Bush’s neofascist security state, Padilla rotted in solitary confinement — in a military brig — for three and a half years. (Read Henry Charriere’s classic prison memoir “Papillon” if you doubt that solitary confinement is a form of torture.) No family visits. No lawyer. They subjected him to sensory deprivation, covering his eyes and ears to make him lose his mind.

And still no trial. Because the government knew Padilla was innocent.

By 2006 Bush was unpopular. Federal judges had begun to regrow their ‘nads, ruling that the Administration had to charge Padilla or release him. So the Bushies came up with a clever dodge whose narrow legalism was worthy of depends-on-the-meaning-of-is: they transferred Padilla to the civilian justice system and charged him with something else.

Or, to be specific, something less. They added Padilla to a case against two Middle Eastern men on trial for “conspiracy to murder, kidnap and maim people in a foreign country” and “material support” for Islamic terrorism. Padilla had met the two in Florida and, prosecutors say, traveled to Afghanistan in 2000 to join Al Qaeda. The key evidence presented was Padilla’s supposed Al Qaeda application form, which fingerprints proved he had handled.

Padilla’s public defenders claimed that their client was forced to pick up the “Al Qaeda form” in the brig. Who knows what happened while he was “disappeared” during those three and a half years?

The conspiracy count against Padilla, Margulies continued, “is highly amorphous, and it basically allows someone to be found guilty for something that is one step away from a thought crime.”

“There is no need to show any particular violent crime [in a conspiracy trial],” said law professor Robert Chesney, of Wake Forest University. “You don’t have to specify the particular means used to carry out the crime.” Nevertheless, Padilla faces the possibility of life in prison.

Of course, the United States wasn’t at war with Afghanistan in 2000. Before 9/11 the Clinton and Bush Administrations both sent millions of dollars to the Taliban. The vast majority of Muslims who trained at Al Qaeda camps never plotted against the U.S. They planned to fight in places like Chechnya, Kosovo and Xinjiang. Padilla’s membership in Al Qaeda, even if proven, doesn’t prove anti-Americanism.

Post-9/11 conspiracy prosecutions are de facto attempts to make anti-Americanism — the mere thought, not any action — illegal.

“It is a pretty big leap between a mere indication of desire to attend a camp and a crystallized desire to kill, maim and kidnap,” said Peter Margulies, a law professor at Roger Williams University. The conspiracy count against Padilla, Margulies continued, “is highly amorphous, and it basically allows someone to be found guilty for something that is one step away from a thought crime.”

The charge was laughable and the standard of proof rock-bottom. But the masters of Padilla’s show trial didn’t miss a chance to cheese up the proceedings.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Brian Frazier never presented evidence that Padilla actually joined or was accepted by Al Qaeda. Nevertheless, reported the Associated Press, he “mentioned Al Qaeda 91 times in his opening statement and more than 100 times in his closing, according to court

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Gonzales vs United States

A Torturer Takes a Victory Lap

by Ted Rall, 8/29/2007

NEW YORK — Al Capone served six years at Alcatraz — for tax evasion. The true Original Gangsta was never held to account for the St. Valentine's Day Massacre that left seven men cut in half by machine gun fire. Or the two disloyal wiseguys he ordered beaten to death with baseball bats. Or the corruption and mayhem his gangsters inflicted during the years he terrorized Chicago. Eliot Ness was cute, but the justice system failed. Capone won in the end.

Like Capone, Alberto Gonzales has gone down for a mere misdemeanor: firing U.S. attorneys for investigating Republican politicians. What led to his resignation as attorney general was his smearing them as incompetent. Hell hath no fury as a man fired without a positive recommendation. (Gonzales, a buffoon on his best day, perjured himself in spectacularly inept style in testimony about domestic wiretapping before Congress — an outfit that has forgotten more about lying than lesser lights will ever know.)

Gonzales' crime was a doozy: He created the legal framework for American fascism. No punishment could suffice for America's Eichmann, author of infamous pseudolegal rationales for torture and the end of habeas corpus. And none will he face.

"Fredo" (Bush's nickname for him) quit over a procedural personnel matter. If he ultimately faces justice, it will be for mere perjury. Even his critics don't care about his monstrous role as the legal architect of our post-9/11 gulags — proof positive that the master corrupter of democracy has triumphed, that we Americans are not a decent people.

"Are we being forward-leaning enough?" Gonzales used to ask his colleagues. "Forward-leaning" was Bush Administration jargon for toughness in the war on terror. It didn't mean bending the rules. The Bushies were radicals. Trashing centuries-old constitutional protections — the right to an attorney, to face your accuser in a court of law, not to be tortured — wasn't enough for our suburban Robespierres. They longed for an American Rome ruled by a harsh, omnipotent emperor over legions of troops standing ready to destroy all who challenged them, foreigners and Americans alike. They said 9/11 had changed everything. The new order required new laws.

One of the first steps down the road to perdition was a January 25, 2002 legal memorandum advising Bush to deny legal rights to Afghan POWs. "There are reasonable grounds for you to conclude that [the Geneva POW

Convention] does not apply...to the conflict with the Taliban," wrote Gonzales, then working as White House counsel. Deploying his characteristic blend of ignorance, arrogance and illogic, he called the Geneva Conventions — which have saved the lives of thousands of captured American soldiers — "quaint." He then argued "that the Taliban and its forces were, in fact, not a government but a militant, terrorist-like group." Actually, the Clinton and Bush Administrations had treated the Taliban regime as a government, negotiating with its leaders over oil-pipeline transit fees and subsidizing it with millions of U.S. taxdollars. U.S. allies, including Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, had embassies in Kabul. History was collateral damage in the war of terror.

Having denied captured Afghan soldiers POW status — "detainees," newspapers began calling them — the Bush Administration looked for "forward-leaning" ways to abuse them. Children as young as 12 were beaten, shipped in shackles, their heads shaved and covered with gunny sacks, to Guantánamo Bay. Years have passed; they've grown up in Camp Delta. These kids — rural conscripts who couldn't have attacked the U.S. even if they'd thought of it — still haven't been allowed to see a lawyer or their parents.

Worried that the American people might someday return to its senses and prosecute them for their monstrous crimes against humanity, the Bushies again turned to their affirmative-action poster child — this time for a C.Y.A. memo validating torture. The CIA wanted permission to use six "pressure techniques" against prisoners. Mock burial, Gonzales and his legal staff thought, was a mite "too harsh." The medieval practice of waterboarding, on the other hand, was OK. Another practice, "open-handed slapping of suspects, drew much discussion," reported Newsweek. The idea was "just to shock someone with the physical impact," one of Gonzales' staffers said, with "little chance of bone damage or tissue damage." Gonzales approved it.

The discussion resulted in an August 1, 2002 memo to Gonzales, which he passed on to Bush. The CIA and U.S. soldiers were free to subject prisoners to "cruel, inhuman or degrading" treatment. All they needed was permission from the Emperor. "Those committing torture with express presidential authority," The Washington Post reported about the memo, "were probably immune from prosecution." Abu Ghraib followed.

Gonzales' crime was a doozy: He created the legal framework for American fascism. No punishment could suffice for America's Eichmann, author of infamous pseudolegal rationales for torture and the end of habeas corpus. And none will he face.

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Bush Restricting Travel Rights of Over 100,000 U.S. Citizens

by Sherwood Ross, 9/4/2007

The freedom to travel of more than 100,000 Americans placed on "watch" and "no fly" lists is being restricted by the Bush-Cheney regime.

Citizens who have done no more than criticize the president are being banned from airline flights, harassed at airports, strip searched, roughed up and even imprisoned, feminist author and political activist Naomi Wolf reports in her new book, "The End of America." (Chelsea Green Publishing)

"Making it more difficult for people out of favor with the state to travel back and forth across borders is a classic part of the fascist playbook," Wolf says. She noticed starting in 2002 that "almost every time I sought to board a domestic airline flight, I was called aside by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and given a more thorough search."

During one preboarding search, a TSA agent told her "You're on the list" and Wolf learned it is not a list of suspected terrorists but of journalists, academics, activists, and politicians "who have criticized the White House."

Some of this hassling has made headlines, such as when Senator Edward Kennedy was detained five times in East Coast airports in March, 2004, suggesting no person, however prominent, is safe from Bush nastiness. Rep. John Lewis of Georgia has also been mistreated. And it can be nasty. Robert Johnson, an American citizen, described the "humiliation factor" he endured:

"I had to take off my pants. I had to take off my sneakers, then I had to take off my socks. I was treated like a criminal," Wolf quotes him as saying. And it gets worse than that. Nicolas Maduro, Venezuela's foreign minister, said he was detained at Kennedy airport by officers who "threatened and shoved" him. And that was mild. Maher Arar, a Canadian software consultant was detained at Kennedy and "rendered" to Syria where he was imprisoned for more than a year by goons that beat him with a heavy metal cable.

After the Canadian furor over Arar's illegal kidnapping and torture, he was eventually released as he had zero ties to terrorists. Yet the Bush gang refused to concede error; refused to provide documents or witnesses to Canadian investigators; and claimed last January it had "secret information" that justified keeping Arar on the watch list, Wolf noted.

Again, Chaplain James Yee, an American citizen born in New Jersey who had converted to Islam and had the Christian compassion to call for better treatment of Guantanamo prisoners, was nabbed in Sept., 2003 on suspicion of "espionage and possibly treason" and flung into the Naval brig at Charleston, S.C., where he was manacled, put in solitary for 76 days, forbidden mail and family visits, demonized in the media and warned he could face execution. Wolf writes, "Within six months, the U.S. government had dropped all criminal charges against Yee," claiming it did so to avoid making sensitive evidence public, not because the chaplain was innocent.

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Over and over again, the Bush gang claims it can prove terrible crimes about suspects but, like the men imprisoned at Guantanamo, it repeatedly turns out to have "conspiracy" zilch in its briefcase rather than hard proof of actual misdeeds. Yet it goes on punishing hundreds of suspects with solitary confinement and worse without ever bringing them to trial. Globally,

the number of such detainees is in the tens of thousands. Stalin would have understood.

Apparently, favorite targets of the Bush tyranny are peace activists like Jan Adams and Rebecca Gordon, detained at the San Francisco airport; a political leader such as Nancy Oden, of the Green Party, prevented from flying from Maine to Chicago; King Downing and David Fathi, both of the American Civil Liberties Union and both detained (proves ACLU's case about Bush, eh what?); and Constitutional scholar Walter F. Murphy, of Princeton University, who had attacked the illegalities of the Bush regime. He was put on notice his luggage would be ransacked.

"When you are physically detained by armed agents because of something you said or wrote, it has an impact," Wolf writes. "...you get it right away that the state is tracking your journeys, can redirect you physically, and can have armed men and women, who may or may not answer your questions, search and release you."

Wolf traces the "watch list" back to a 2003 directive from Bush to his intelligence agencies to identify people "thought to have terrorist intentions or contacts." After the list was given to the airlines, CBS-TV's 60 Minutes got a copy. The list was 540 pages long and there were 75,000 names on it of people to be taken aside for extra screening.

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How the Public Resolves Conflicts Between Faith and Science

On Subjects such as Evolution, Many Americans are Aware of — but Reject — the Scientific Consensus

by David Masci, Senior Research Fellow, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 8/27/2007

<http://pewresearch.org/pubs/578/when-science-and-faith-compete-faith-usually-wins>

The relationship between faith and science in the United States seems, at least on the surface, to be paradoxical. Surveys repeatedly show that most Americans respect science and the benefits it brings to society, such as new technologies and medical treatments. And yet, religious convictions limit many Americans' willingness to accept controversial scientific theories as well as certain types of scientific research, such as the potential use of embryonic stem cells for medical treatments.

Science and religion have traditionally, and often incorrectly, been viewed as enemies. This perception has been fueled in part by a number of famous episodes in history that have pitted scientists, like Galileo and Darwin, against the prevailing religious establishments of their time. But more often than not, scientists and people of faith have operated not at cross purposes but simply at different purposes.

Today the situation is much the same. Certainly, there are modern scientists who are actively hostile to religious belief. British biologist Richard Dawkins, for instance, in his best-selling book, *The God Delusion*, argues that many social ills — from bigotry to ignorance — can be blamed, at least in part, on religion. In addition, a significant number of scientists — roughly a third according to a 2006 Rice University survey of more than 750 professors in the natural sciences — do not believe in God, compared with only one-in-twenty in the general population. But regardless of their personal views, most scientists tend to view the two disciplines as distinct, with each attempting to answer different kinds of questions using different methods. The late evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould famously referred to this complementary relationship as “non-overlapping magisteria.”

But there are times when the “magisteria” do overlap. The debate over the origins and development of life is the most compelling example of this. All but a small number of scientists regard Darwin's theory of evolution through natural selection as an established fact. And yet, a substantial majority of Americans, many of whom are deeply religious, reject the notion that life evolved through natural forces alone.

Indeed, according to a 2006 survey from the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life and the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 42% of Americans reject the notion that life on earth evolved and believe instead that humans and other living things have always existed in their present form. Among white evangelical Protestants — many of whom regard the Bible as the inerrant word of God — 65% hold this view. Moreover, in the same poll, 21% of those surveyed say that although life has evolved, these changes were guided by a supreme being. Only a minority, about a

quarter (26%) of respondents, say that they accept evolution through natural processes or natural selection alone.

Interestingly, many of those who reject natural selection recognize that scientists themselves fully accept Darwin's theory. In the same 2006 Pew poll, nearly two-

thirds of adults (62%) say that they believe that scientists agree on the validity of evolution. Moreover, Americans, including religious Americans, hold science and scientists in very high regard. A 2006 survey conducted by Virginia Commonwealth University found that most people (87%) think that scientific developments make society better. Among those who describe themselves as being very religious, the same number — 87% — share that opinion.

So what is at work here? How can Americans say that they respect science and even know what scientists believe and yet still disagree with the scientific community on some fundamental questions? The answer is that much of the general public simply chooses not to believe the scientific theories and discoveries that seem to contradict long-held religious or other important beliefs.

When asked what they would do if scientists were to disprove a particular religious belief, nearly two-thirds (64%) of people say they would continue to hold to what their religion teaches rather than accept the contrary scientific finding, according to the results of an October 2006 *Time* magazine poll. Indeed, in a May 2007 Gallup poll, only 14% of those who say they do not believe in evolution cite lack of evidence as the main reason underpinning their views; more people cite their belief in

...much of the general public simply chooses not to believe the scientific theories and discoveries that seem to contradict long-held religious or other important beliefs.

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Good Luck, Dawkins!

Superstitions like astrology, Tarot reading, crystal-gazing and mediumship may be fun, but they are not harmless.

by Sue Blackmore, *The Guardian*, 8/15/2007

I enjoyed Richard Dawkins' first episode of his new Channel Four documentary, *Enemies of Reason*, but then I would, wouldn't I?

He's taken on the role I used to call "rent-a-sceptic" — the one who goes on TV, talks to all those nice, cuddly, "spiritual" people, and tries to point out that they are making false claims, deluding themselves and others, and profiting out of other peoples' suffering. It's a tough job because you always seem to be on the side of the misery-guts, debunkers and kill-joys.

You always seem to be telling well-meaning, sincere people that they are not only wrong but bad. It's not fun, and after a while it gets you down. I know because I did it for the best part of 25 years and eventually I couldn't stand it any more.

Why does he do it, then? And why did I? Richard claims that superstitions like astrology, Tarot reading (I used to be a pretty good Tarot reader myself before I became so sceptical), crystal-gazing, and mediumship impoverish our society and harm both individuals and their families. So someone needs to stand up to them. And I think he is right.

I didn't always think so. Indeed as a student I was blown away by what I saw as a more spiritual way of looking at the world, full of exciting new (or terribly ancient) theories that "establishment" scientists rejected, and rich with opportunities for understanding myself and changing the world for the better. I embraced all sorts of whacky theories and decided to devote my life to studying them. A few years of research changed my mind completely and I went from being a believer in just about every New Age phenomenon, through totally rejecting it all, to something far harder to sustain — an open-minded scientist trying to disentangle the grains of truth from the mass of superstition, deception and ignorance.

There are some grains of truth in there. Out-of-body experiences happen, even though nothing leaves the body, sleep paralysis happens and is terrifying if you don't know what it is, mystical experiences can change people's lives for the better, and some alternative therapies can be wonderfully relaxing and enjoyable, even if their underlying theories are completely false. Even so, these grains are hidden in a vast mass of delusion.

During the programme Richard asked: "Am I taking all this too seriously?" I'm sure some viewers will think he is, and that it's all just harmless fun. But it's not.

To give one example I've never forgotten, I was once in the London audience for the Jimmy Young television programme with the famous medium Doris Stokes. Appearing to be a kind, and caring granny type, she "communicated" with the spirits and brought messages to their loved ones here on the lower planes.

I sat next to a bereaved couple from Manchester who travelled to London every week to visit Doris who, they said, gave them comfort and hope. Between takes they told me that one of their three young girls had been playing near an upstairs window and fell out, impaling herself on the railings below, and dying of horrific wounds. It must have been appalling and I could only imagine their sorrow. But above all I was angry at what Doris Stokes was doing. This

couple were spending money and time they clearly could ill afford, leaving their other children at home, and being deluded into thinking they were talking to their dead child. This is no way for either them or their other children to come to terms with grief.

Doris Stokes died a few years later and the critics revealed how she had used all the same old shoddy tricks, even using accomplices to make her séances more impressive. Yet many people still remember her warmly as the best medium of her generation.

Among all the hundreds of mediums, psychics and Tarot and I-Ching readers I met, I think the vast majority were sincere, and honestly believed that they were doing more than cold reading or using their intuition. Nevertheless this does not change the fact that they are making false claims, defrauding people of vast sums of money and convincing people that it's all right to believe something just because you feel deeply that it's true.

I met people addicted to their favourite psychics — people who would not make decisions without consulting their astrologer, and people who were terrified because of false predictions some reader had given them. In a stressful and unpredictable world it's understandable that people turn to those who can offer them false guidance but I've seen too many horrible outcomes to think it's just a bit of harmless fun. After all those years of research I try not to get involved any more. I find it too upsetting. It's amazing how unpopular you become by trying to tell the truth, and how little effect experiments and evidence have on the exploitative and money-making New Age world. So good luck, Richard! I hope you won't get too depressed by it all.

This couple were spending money and time they clearly could ill afford, leaving their other children at home, and being deluded into thinking they were talking to their dead child. This is no way for either them or their other children to come to terms with grief.

It Did Happen Here...

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transcripts." Padilla had nothing to do with 9/11. To link him to the attacks in jurors' minds, Frazier had them watch a seven-minute video clip of Osama bin Laden. (There's no evidence that Padilla ever watched the 1997 CNN interview.)

Padilla's lawyers asked the judge in the case to dismiss the case because he had been denied a speedy trial. Marcia Cooke said no — and ordered them not to talk to the jury about the three and a half years the defendant had spent being tortured and deprived of his rights. Reporters' eyes rolled as Frazier said that government wiretappers heard Padilla and his two co-defendants use code words like "football" to mean jihad and "eggplant" and "zucchini" for weapons. "They wanted to recruit, fund and train fighters," he told the jury. "Playing this kind of football was more important than anything else to these men. What they were doing was no game." But, reported the AP, Padilla's "voice was only picked up on seven of the FBI intercepts, [and] he never talked in code." He shouldn't have been convicted — even on those lame-ass conspiracy charges.

Osama bin Laden is an ends-justifies-the-means kind of guy. So, apparently, is Uncle Sam. Jeffrey Addicott, director of the Center for Terrorism Law at St. Mary's University, said after the verdict: "It's kind of a dirty victory because of the way the case came about, but still it's a victory nonetheless." Yeah. But for whom?

Restricting Travel Rights...

(continued from page 8)

The more stringent "no fly" list has 45,000 names on it, Wolf reports. Prior to 9/11, the list had just 16 names, but 44,984 suspects were quickly manufactured to justify the creation of the vast airport security apparatus at God knows what cost to American taxpayers.

One ludicrous "no fly" story concerns John Graham, president of the nonprofit Giraffe Heroes Project, an organization that honors people who stick their necks out. A former government careerist who served in Viet Nam, Graham is an inspired speaker that receives standing ovations from groups such as West Point cadets, yet is kept from flying from his Langley, Wash., base by the National Security Agency. NSA won't tell him why, either. Maybe they have "secret" information on him, too.

Author Wolf notes that dictatorships from Hitler's Germany to Pinochet's Chile have employed arbitrary arrests to harass critics. And Bush's airport detention policies are more of the same. As Wolf writes, "being free means that you can't be detained arbitrarily." Somebody ring the fire bell!

Sherwood Ross is an American reporter who has worked for major American newspapers and magazines as well as international wire services.

Gonzales vs United States...

(continued from page 7)

Slippery slopes are usually cited as cautionary tales. Gonzales saw post-9/11 fear as an opportunity to be exploited. He pushed for the USA Patriot Act. Foreign detainees, he decided, would get military kangaroo courts. Using Gonzales' advice as back-up, Bush signed an executive order authorizing himself to declare any U.S. citizen an "enemy combatant" and have him assassinated. Next came the terrifying Military Commissions Act, which allows a president to declare martial law, seize control of the National Guard from the states, and throw U.S. citizens into concentration camps for the rest of their lives.

But no one objected to any of these attacks on our freedom. Not the news media. Not the Democrats — they voted for them.

After Torturer-in-Chief Gonzales announced his departure, Ted Kennedy slammed him — for perjury. "He has exhibited a lack of candor with Congress and the American people and a disdain for the rule of law and our constitutional system," said the liberal stalwart. "The rampant politicization of federal law enforcement that occurred under his tenure seriously eroded public confidence in our justice system," added House speaker Nancy Pelosi, focusing, like everybody else, on the fired U.S. attorneys. The word "torture" didn't come up.

Gonzales will be remembered as corrupt and intellectually deficient. Nevertheless, his legal legacy will likely remain in place for the foreseeable future. Torture isn't in the news because it isn't news. It's normal.

The monster dragged the rest of us down to his level. We are all Alberto Gonzales.

Faith and Science...

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Jesus (19%), God (16%) or religion generally (16%) as their reason for rejecting Darwin's theory.

This reliance on religious faith may help explain why so many people do not see science as a direct threat to religion. Only 28% of respondents in the same Time poll say that scientific advancements threaten their religious beliefs. These poll results also show that more than four-fifths of respondents (81%) say that "recent discoveries and advances" in science have not significantly impacted their religious views. In fact, 14% say that these discoveries have actually made them more religious. Only 4% say that science has made them less religious.

These data once again show that, in the minds of most people in the United States, there is no real clash between science and religion. And when the two realms offer seemingly contradictory explanations (as in the case of evolution), religious people, who make up a majority of Americans, may rely primarily upon their faith for answers.



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