



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

New Technology

After more than two years of desperately needing one, and procrastinating/postponing for mainly financial reasons... I am ***FINALLY*** the proud owner of a new computer.

And not just ANY computer.

Thanks to Cousin Harold, this is the über-computer — literally the most powerful thing I could design. (Well, OK, within reason. But “reason” is being defined fairly loosely.)

And design it I did. Every part was selected individually to be the best it could be, and then the whole thing was assembled by my friend, coworker and fellow CSS member Tim Harris.

For the geeky among us, we’re talking about:

- An ASUS P5E3 Deluxe motherboard (which has built-in WiFi, and a built-in “emergency OS” which you can use to surf the web and read Email EVEN IF your hard drive has failed or Windows won’t boot).
- A quad-core 3Ghz Intel Core 2 Extreme QX9650 CPU.
- Four gigs of DDR3 ultra-high-speed RAM.
- An nVidia GeForce 8800 GTX video card (factory-overclocked to speeds higher than an 8800 Ultra).
- Three (count'em) one-terabyte hard drives.
- A Thermaltake Toughpower 1000W power supply (power is NOT a problem!).
- An LG DVD burner that can read HD-DVD ***AND*** Blu-ray disks.
- The case is a Cooler Master Cosmos 1000, with a total of seven fans keeping everything cool.
- And oh, yes, I’m upgrading to a 30” Samsung flatscreen so I can actually see two facing pages of this newsletter, full-size, while editing them.

The whole thing is running Windows Vista Ultimate, and I’ve even gone so far as to install Office 2007 Ultimate. Yes, I am shamefully kneeling before the altar of our Microsoft corporate overlords...

Even more shamefully: so far, I’m actually liking Vista (though I freely admit that I might feel differently, if I

weren’t feeding it such enormous amounts of CPU, RAM and hard drive space).

HOWEVER — my ancient newsletter-designing software, PageMaker 6.5, is apparently not very happy in Vista-land. I’m hobbling along with it for this issue... but in the next few weeks, I’m going to see about moving everything over to Publisher. If the newsletter looks a little different next month, that’s why!

[NOTE: In last month’s issue, I actually managed to include one article twice, under two different titles. (Gee, I ***THOUGHT*** that article seemed familiar...) Your Editor humbly apologizes, and promises to fire his Assistant Editor if she ever lets him pull a stunt like that again.]

Reed Byers

Editor, *Willamette Freethinker*

CSS Meetings and Events

Calendar:

Saturday, Apr 19 th	2:00-4:00	CSS regular meeting
Saturday, May 17 th	2:00-4:00	CSS regular meeting
Saturday, Jun 21 st	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).

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From the President:

Arthur C. Clarke

Biography

Arthur C. Clarke, a great Humanist, science fiction author, inventor, and futurist, died March 19, 2008, in Colombo, Sri Lanka. [Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon) is an island nation about 19.3 miles (31 km) south of India.] He was born in Minehead, Somerset, UK, on December 16, 1917, and grew up on a farm in Somerset.

He read American science fiction magazines and peered into the heavens with homemade telescopes as a boy. He was unable to afford college, so he took a civil service job as an auditor. He spent his free time hanging out with fellow science-fiction fans and members of the British Interplanetary Society. During World War II, he volunteered for the Royal Air Force and became a radar specialist. He was involved in the early warning radar defense system, which contributed to the RAF's success during the Battle of Britain. He spent most of his wartime service working on Ground Controlled Approach (GCA) radar, which was later vital to the Berlin Airlift of 1948-1949.

He proposed satellite communication systems in 1945. His article in *Wireless World* magazine outlined a worldwide communications network based on fixed satellites orbiting Earth at an altitude of 22,300 miles – an orbital area now often referred to as the Clarke Orbit. He was paid \$40 for his article. Almost twenty years later, Syncom II became the world's first communications satellite put into geosynchronous orbit.

After the war, Clarke earned a first-class degree in mathematics and physics at King's College London. He began writing, both nonfiction and science fiction, in earnest, and began devoting himself to full-time writing from 1951 onward. He lived in Sri Lanka from 1956 until his death, holding citizenship of both the UK and Sri Lanka.

Early on, he had a fascination with the paranormal and noted that he was one who was fooled by a Uri Geller demonstration. Later he became skeptical of all pseudoscience, but advocated research into psychokinesis (movement of physical objects by the mind without use of physical means) and similar phenomena.

His literary career soared with the success of his 1951 nonfiction book *The Exploration of Space* and his critically acclaimed 1953 science-fiction classic *Childhood's End*.

In 1964, Clarke began collaborating with film director Stanley Kubrick to write the screenplay for *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The book of the same name was written at the same time. The novel was published a few months after the movie's release in 1968. "He has the kind of mind of which the world can never have enough, an array of imagination,

intelligence, knowledge and a quirkish curiosity, which often uncovers more than the first three qualities," Kubrick said at the time. Clarke's celebrity status was enhanced when he offered commentary alongside CBS news anchor Walter Cronkite during the Apollo missions.

In 1973, he wrote *Rendezvous with Rama*, which won the major science fiction awards. In 1986 he was named a Grand Master by the Science Fiction Writers of America. He later wrote and hosted two series for British television that were syndicated around the world in the 1980s, "Arthur C. Clarke's Mysterious World" and "Arthur C. Clarke's World of Strange Powers."

In 1988 he was diagnosed with post-polio syndrome (he contracted polio in 1959) and needed to use a wheelchair most of time thereafter. His death came only a few days after he had reviewed the final manuscript of his latest book, *The Last Theorem*, co-written with Frederik Pohl.

Called a scientific prophet, Clarke foretold several technological notions in his works. These include space stations, moon landings using a mother ship and a landing pod, cellular phones and the internet. "Nobody has done more in the way of enlightened prediction," science-fiction author Isaac Asimov once wrote.

Worldview

Early in his life, he displayed little interest in religion. Yet religious and spiritual themes appear in much of Clarke's writing. In 2000, he told the Sri Lankan newspaper, *The Island*, "I don't believe in God or an afterlife." He said in another interview that he could not forgive religions for the atrocities and wars over time. He left written instructions for a secular funeral, stating: "Absolutely no religious rites of any kind, relating to any religious faith, should be associated with my funeral." For his tombstone he asked for the words: "Here lies Arthur Clarke. He never grew up, but he didn't stop growing."

In a 1992 interview with the *London Times*, Clarke told a reporter that he remained "an aggressive agnostic." He also once told *Popular Science* that "religion is the most malevolent of all mind viruses. We should get rid of it as quick as we can." A humanist laureate in the Council for Secular Humanism's International Academy of Humanism, he was also a signer of the *Humanist Manifesto 2000*.

In an interview on his 90th birthday (December 16, 2007), he was asked, "What is the greatest threat that we, as a race, are facing?" He replied: "Organised religion polluting our minds as it pretends to deliver morality and spiritual salvation. It's spreading the most malevolent mind virus of all. I hope our race can one day outgrow this primitive notion, as I envisaged in *3001: The Final Odyssey*."

Free Inquiry had an interview of Clarke in its Spring 1999 issue (V19N2P36-37). Here are a few sample questions and answers:

FI: Our readers have some familiarity with your views and in particular your very strong emphasis on the use of science in understanding the natural world. But could you say something about your views on moral issues?

Clarke: One of the great tragedies of mankind is that morality has been hijacked by religion. So now people assume that religion and morality have a necessary connection. But the basis of morality is really very simple and doesn't require religion at all. It's this: "Don't do unto anybody else what you wouldn't like to be done to you." It seems to me that that's all there is to it. The other issue is, why can't humans live up to this principle? Why is it that people can't act as human beings should? I'm appalled by what we all see on the news every day—massacres, atrocities, injustices, outrages of all kinds. When I see what's happening, I sometimes wonder if the human race deserves to survive.

FI: What are your thoughts regarding the future development of something else you've often written about – religion?

Clarke: Well, I suspect that religion is a necessary evil in the childhood of our particular species. And that's one of the interesting things about contact with other intelligences: we could see what role, if any, religion plays in their development. I think that religion may be some random by-product of mammalian reproduction. If that's true, would non-mammalian aliens have a religion? Anyway, that's one of the nice things about the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI) project; if it is successful, we could perhaps answer such questions one day. I've just seen *Contact*, by my late friend Carl Sagan. It's quite an impressive film that offers hints on this subject.

FI: If religion does indeed represent an immature stage of humanity, do you see any prospects for humanity growing up?

Clarke: Yes, there is the possibility that humankind can outgrow its infantile tendencies, as I suggested in *Childhood's End*. But it is amazing how childishly gullible humans are. There are, for example, so many different religions – each of them claiming to have the truth, each saying that their truths are clearly superior to the truths of others – how can someone possibly take any of them seriously? I mean, that's insane.

Quotations

Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.

I don't believe in astrology; I'm a Sagittarius and we're skeptical.

I don't pretend to have all the answers. But the questions are certainly worth thinking about.

Sometimes I think we're alone in the universe, and sometimes I think we're not. In either case the idea is quite staggering.

The greatest tragedy in mankind's entire history may be the hijacking of morality by religion.

There is hopeful symbolism in the fact that flags do not wave in a vacuum.

This is the first age that's ever paid much attention to the future, which is a little ironic since we may not have one.

My objection to organized religion is the premature conclusion to ultimate truth that it represents.

As our own species is in the process of proving, one cannot have superior science and inferior morals. The combination is unstable and self-destructing.

John Dearing
President of CSS

Sources & References:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_C._Clarke

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http://www.secularhumanism.org/library/fi/clarke_19_2.html

Faith and knowledge are related as the two scales of balance; when the one goes up, the other goes down. . . . The power of religious dogma, when inculcated early, is such as to stifle conscience, compassion, and finally every feeling of humanity. . . . For, as you know, religions are like glow worms; they shine only when it's dark. A certain amount of ignorance is the condition of all religions, the element in which alone they can exist.

— Arthur Schopenhauer,
Parerga and Paralipomena (1851)

Can We Trust the Food and Drug Administration?

by Diana Lee, freelance writer, 6/1/2005

<http://uniorb.com>

As the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) embroils in scandal after scandal, Americans need to re-examine the once revered and touted federal agency as the protector of public's health. Although nearly 40% of Americans claimed that their confidence in the FDA has fallen due to the recent revelations, still 70% of Americans believed in the FDA's ability to ensure the safety of prescription drugs and foods for the consumer market.

Does the FDA work for the interest of the American people, for the drug and food corporations, or for the political propaganda of the White House?

When medical professionals, scientists and analysts consistently doled out statistics showing more than half of Americans that have become obese, one might surmise that the FDA has not been protecting the people's health. When the FDA approved numerous dangerous prescription drugs despite warnings from the experts and allowed various genetically modified (GM) products to be unlabeled on the food market, one might deduce that the FDA has been working in collaboration with the pharmaceutical and biotech companies. When questionable GM foods and certain drugs with harmful side-effects were banned in other parts of the world while these same GM foods and drugs were given a nod in the United States, one might conclude that the FDA has been functioning as a political propaganda of the Bush Administration favoring biotechnology and big business.

Known as the "the strictest regulatory agency in the world," the FDA is now under scrutiny not only in the American arena but also on world stage. The reputable FDA, as the pillar of integrity run by the elite medical professionals and scientists, has finally been disgraced by its internal documents made public from lawsuits. In debunking the myths of the FDA, these damaging files revealed the corruption within the system, the discord among the staff members, and the influences of political power and of corporations.

Myth One: New foods and drugs have been extensively tested for safety.

Contrary to scientific consensus on GM food, the FDA official policy declares that the process of genetic engineering is the same as traditional breeding; therefore, GM food does not require safety testing. U.S. biotech

companies can voluntarily submit food safety testing data to federal regulators for review. According to the U.S. Center for Science in the Public Interest, when the FDA requested additional information, biotech companies complied only half the time, narrowing the scope of FDA's evaluation of data for food safety. Furthermore, a biotech manufacturer is allowed to introduce a genetically modified food without even informing the government or consumers. Worse still, the FDA ignored independent studies that showed severe harm to laboratory animals fed with GM food in order to boost biotech companies with their novel food creation.

A series of scandals involving dangerous drugs — COX-2 inhibitors, antidepressant drugs and statin drugs that are known to cause serious injuries and even deaths — have now put the FDA in the spotlight for gross negligence in giving them the green light. In November 2004, Dr. David Graham, a chief drug safety researcher, testified before the Senate — disclosing the dangers of these prescription drugs and the censorship of scientists who spoke against the agency's drug safety review process. The fact that such harmful drugs have made it onto the market — *Vioxx*, *Meridian*, *Bextra*, *Accutane*, *Crestor*, *Serevent* — only attests to the dysfunction of the FDA's procedure for testing drug safety.

Myth Two: Approval of foods and drugs was based on sound science.

Despite the world banning GM foods, the United States stands alone in promoting GM foods as safe for human consumption. The FDA insists that GM foods are no different from natural foods — an unscientific claim. According to technical experts, the processes of genetic engineering and natural breeding are indeed different, and they lead to different risks. The procedure of introducing an unrelated gene to a cell in a lab is not the same as the process of natural genetic selection in Nature over the years. Scientists warned that GM foods might create a unique set of risks — unknown toxins, allergies, nutritional problems, and diseases that could not be revealed in short-term testing. Due to the genetic nature of the altered food, long-term observation on each genetically modified variety is necessary in order to determine the safety of the food product.

After a decade of marketing GM foods in the U.S., evidence of detrimental effects has been piling — farmers now face setbacks with economic woes (unable to sell GM products

on the world market) and new kinds of environmental problems (super weeds and natural crop fields contaminated with GM seeds blown in by the wind); diminishing number of common field insects; and human health problems related to food have dramatically soared (obesity, allergies, diabetes, and lymphatic cancers). Although no study has ever been made to connect these health problems with GM food, the fact that a growing number of Americans have become unhealthy since the infiltration of GM food on the market in 1994 should make any GM product a suspect.

As for scientific peer-review on drug approval, the recent testimony of Dr. David Graham clearly illustrated the culpability of the FDA — siding with a company's manipulated drug safety testing results over its own scientists' warning against a drug's ill effects. Obviously, if the drugs had been approved by the FDA based on sound science, there wouldn't have been so many lawsuits and recalls of drugs that the White House (under George W. Bush) interceded, pushing for a "tort reform" to relieve the FDA of product liability.

Myth Three: FDA serves and protects the public's health.

Nowadays, the FDA serves and protects the corporate wealth. Everything the FDA has done in the last decade indicates that it values pharmaceutical and biotech industry profits over the health of the public. Furthermore, the FDA has become the instrument in carrying out the policies of the Bush family's dynasty. In 1992, the FDA Commissioner David Kessler confirmed the White House's influence in shaping the FDA's policy (under George Bush) by responding in his memo that the FDA would assure "the safe, speedy development of the U.S. biotechnology industry."

The fact that GM foods are unmarked on the food market demonstrates the FDA's collusion with biotech companies in a mass public deception — passing GM food as traditional food. It's estimated that 75% of processed foods — boxed cereals, other grain products, frozen dinners, and corn products — contain some genetically modified ingredients. Around half of Americans don't even realize that GM foods are being sold in supermarkets — and they're wondering why their diet is getting worse.

The fact that 100,000 people being killed and at least 2 million injuries each year caused by legal prescription drugs, according to the Journal of the American Medical Association, implicates the FDA's cozy relationship with pharmaceutical companies — approving toxic drugs at the expense of public's health. After all, pharmaceutical companies pay the FDA for reviewing their drugs. It's not surprising that the FDA approved 68% of new drugs today, compared to only 2% of new drugs approved a decade ago.

The fact that two-thirds of the FDA's own scientists don't think the agency can adequately monitor the safety of drugs, according to a survey conducted by the Human and Health Services in 2002. The actual distrust of FDA's own

staff in the agency ought to send a loud and clear message to the public. Furthermore, the FDA seems to go out of its way to protect the financial interests of drug companies — silencing its own scientists; burying negative evidence of dangerous drugs; discrediting nutritional supplements, herbal medicine, vitamins and other natural remedies for health benefits; and the latest, blocking the importation of cheaper prescription drugs from Canada.

To evaluate the FDA's competency and efficiency as a federal agency, statistics can speak louder than rhetoric:

- The Death by Medicine research showed more than 750,000 Americans died annually by conventional medicine;
- COX-2 inhibitors killed 60,000 Americans;
- *Rezulin* killed 10,000 people and damaged the livers of 100,000 before being pulled from the market;
- NSAIDs killed some 40,000 patients each year from intestinal bleeding;
- 76 million food-related illnesses occurred each year.

Unfortunately, there were far more unreported cases of injuries from prescription drugs and over-the-counter drugs than the reported deaths of consumers. Without a doubt, Americans are having more health problems than a decade ago.

Can we trust the FDA NOW?

All Dogs Go To Heaven

by Michael Young, *Dallas Morning News*,
3/24/2008

Conan the Chihuahua has proven to be a powerful draw at a Buddhist temple in Japan, which has seen a 30 percent increase in visitors since the temple pet began joining the priests in their daily prayers.

Two-year-old Conan sits on his hind legs and holds his front paws together at the tip of his nose, the classic pose for prayer.

"He may be showing his thanks for treats and walks," speculated one priest at the Jigenin temple on Okinawa island.

Priest Joel Yoshikuni said it took Conan just a few days to master the appearance of prayer. "I think he saw me doing it all the time and got the idea to do it, too," he said.



Voice of an Angel

It's All a Matter of Perspective

Lately, I keep hearing about how if you are part of the "Power Wielding Group" you are among the privileged class and you just "don't get it" when it comes to other groups in society. It's all a matter of perspective.

Most of us are part of some "not-privileged class". It all just depends on how we define ourselves. Let's take a look at myself today. I am:

White = Privileged
 Heterosexual = Privileged
 Upper-Middle-Class = Privileged
 Female = NOT Privileged
 Atheist = NOT Privileged
 Disabled = NOT Privileged

The list could go on and on, but these would be my top influences today. The list has changed throughout my life. Being female has always influenced my view of religion. The way the Catholic Church has always treated women is one of the big reasons I left that religion.

I found the following posted recently to an online blog:

(Obama's remarks about the LGBTQ [Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender/Queer] Community) "meshed perfectly with a vague uneasiness I've had whenever Obama would speak about LGBTQ issues — a sense that somehow, he doesn't really 'get it' — that he is not, in fact, comfortable with queers."

I don't think that most heterosexuals really "get" what it's like to be part the LGBTQ community. While I personally know, love and fully support many in that community, I am afraid that no matter what statements I make, it will definately appear that I, indeed, do not "get it". I don't think any heterosexual will EVER truly "get it". It's not because we don't want to "get it", it's because until you "walk a mile in someone's shoes", you can never fully understand.

I think it's only fair to admit that there is a part of religion that I just "don't get". This seems to effect Christians in large groups. The bigger the group, the more extensive the effect. It seems most prevalent at "Christian Rock" concerts.

The band will sing about worshiping their god. It's not just worship, it's this self degradation ("I am worthless" and "my god is my world") type thing. I recently watched a few minutes of this type of concert and I just didn't "get it". I could not understand what would make a person do such a thing. I mentioned my confusion to Reed, because to me

all this seemed so fake and silly. Reed's comments made sense to me.

"They don't really love their god in that way." Reed said, "They love the idea of others thinking they love their god. They get a big group high from feeding off each other."

That made sense to my logical mind. This was further backed up by the Christian's own Bible in Luke 11:2-4 which says "When you pray, don't be like those show-offs who love to stand up and pray in the meeting places and on the street corners. They do this just to look good. I can assure you that they already have their reward."

To me it seems it's not about "talking to their god" it's about "being seen talking to their god". Although I can assure you that any Christian reading this would comment that I just "don't get it". They would probably be right.

I would now like to show some recent remarks from a Christian who not only doesn't "get" what being an Atheist is all about, she downright hates them. In fact, it seems she would like to see Atheism wiped out.

[The following are remarks made by Ill. Rep. Monique Davis (D-Chicago) on 4/2/08 during an exchange with Atheist activist Rob Sherman. The incident took place in the General Assembly as Sherman testified before the House State Government Administration Committee.]

Rep Davis: I don't know what you have against God, but some of us don't have much against him. We look forward to him and his blessings [...] I'm trying to understand the philosophy that you want to spread in the state of Illinois. This is the Land of Lincoln. This is the Land of Lincoln where people believe in God, where people believe in protecting their children. [...] What you have to spew and spread is extremely dangerous, it's dangerous. [...] It's dangerous to the progression of this state. And it's dangerous for our children to even know that your philosophy exists! [...] You have no right to be here! We believe in something. You believe in destroying! You believe in destroying what this state was built upon.

A final amusing note. I don't think my Spell Checker really "gets it" either. It wants to capitalize the word Christian, but not the word Atheist. Hmm...

Angela Byers
 CSS Webmaster / Assistant Editor

Wisconsin Parents Didn't Expect Daughter to Die During Prayer

by Associated Press, FoxNews.com, 3/26/2008

WESTON, Wis. — The mother of an 11-year-old girl who died of untreated diabetes said Wednesday that she did not know her daughter was terminally ill as she prayed for her to get better.

Madeline Neumann died Sunday from a treatable form of diabetes.

Her mother, Leilani Neumann, told The Associated Press that she never expected her daughter, whom she called Kara, to die. The family believes in the Bible, and it says healing comes from God, but they are not crazy, religious people, she said.

The girl's father, Dale Neumann, a former police officer, said he has friends who are doctors. He started CPR "as soon as the breath of life left" his daughter's body, he said.

Other family members called 911 to seek emergency help, Leilani Neumann said.

"We are remaining strong for our children," she said. "Only our faith in God is giving us strength at this time."

The couple has three other children.

Everest Metro Police Chief Dan Vergin has said an autopsy determined Madeline died from diabetic ketoacidosis, an ailment that left her with too little insulin in her body.

She had probably been ill for about 30 days, suffering symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, excessive thirst, loss of appetite and weakness, he said.

But Leilani Neumann said her daughter, a straight A student, was in good health until recently.

"We just noticed a tiredness within the past two weeks," she said. "And then just the day before and that day (she died), it suddenly just went to a more serious situation. We stayed fast in prayer then. We believed that she would recover. We saw signs that to us, it looked like she was recovering."

Her daughter had no fever and there was warmth in her body, she explained.

The family does not belong to an organized religion or faith, Leilani Neumann said.

"We just believe in the Bible, that's all," she said. "This is our faith."

Her husband added that, "We believe the word of God and live according to its precepts."

Leilani Neumann said the family is not worried about a police investigation into her daughter's death because "our

lives are in God's hands. We know we did not do anything criminal. We know we did the best for our daughter we knew how to do."

Vergin said he expect the investigation to wrap up by Friday and the findings to be forwarded to the district attorney to review for possible charges.

The family moved to Weston from California about two years ago to open a coffee shop and be closer to other relatives, the Neumanns said. They live in rural Weston, in a modern, middle class home in the woods. A basketball hoop is set up in the driveway.



Madeline Kara Neumann is shown working on chalk art last summer during downtown Wausau's Chalk Fest.

Officers went to the home after a relative in California asked police to check on the girl. She was taken to a hospital where she was pronounced dead.

According to Vergin, the parents told investigators Madeline last saw a doctor when she was 3 to get some shots. The girl had attended public school during the first semester but didn't return for the second semester, he said.

Mrs. Neumann said she deeply loves all her children and has nurtured them spiritually, emotionally and physically.

"Our lives are in God's hands and whatever we go through we are just going to trust him," she said. "We need healing. We are going through the healing process."

**I turned to speak to God
About the world's despair
But to make bad matters worse
I found God wasn't there.**

— Robert Frost,
A Further Range (1936)

Flying Spaghetti Monster Takes Up Residence at County Courthouse

by Gary Nelson, *Crossville Chronicle* (TN), 3/24/2008

http://www.crossville-chronicle.com/archivesearch/local_story_084161126.html

Among the county's historic directional sign post, farm equipment and gazebo stand several monuments and expressions of free speech. The displays include an Iraq and Afghanistan Soldier's Memorial, Statue of Liberty, chainsaw-carved monkeys and bears, Jesus carrying a cross, and the most recent display added — a Flying Spaghetti Monster.

Several onlookers and tourists have stopped to take pictures of the sculptures.

The Flying Spaghetti Monster is the latest display to a slew of others that have been erected on the lawn over the past year. Several marches and demonstrations have also taken place on the courthouse grounds.

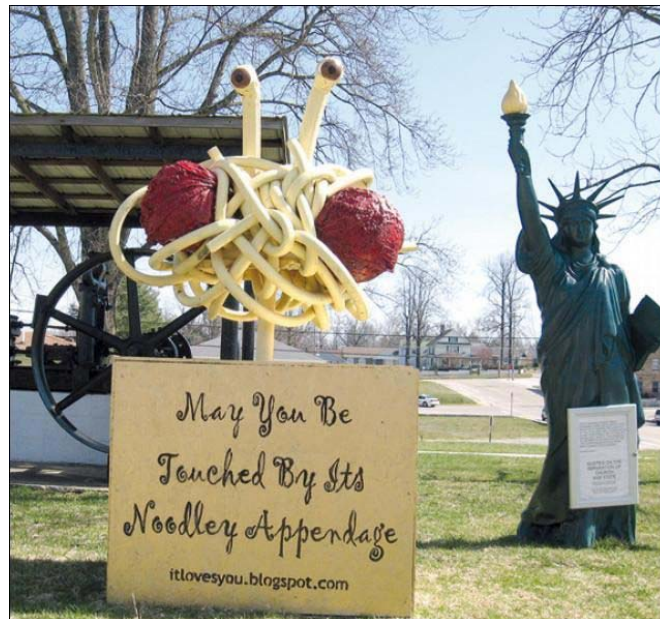
A free speech zone?

Cumberland County Buildings and Grounds Committee Chairman Harry Sabine explained the committee has deferred all decisions on displays and handling of the courthouse grounds to County Mayor Brock Hill.

"I think at some point this may become ridiculous. I'm not so sure if now is the point or not. My concern is about what could or may go up there ... I mean the committee could ultimately decide to remove all displays, but at this point we haven't. I think a time limit on the displays may need to be enacted, though. I do think that too many of these displays tend to detract from the beauty of our courthouse lawn. I think our courthouse lawn is among the prettiest in the state. I hate to see that sacrificed," 1st District Commissioner Harry Sabine said.

On her Web site, www.itlovesyou.blogspot.com, a blog explaining the Flying Spaghetti Monster, Crossville artist Ariel Safdie states, "We are lucky enough to live in a

country that allows us, its citizens, the freedom of speech. I have chosen to put up a statue of the Flying Spaghetti Monster to represent the discourse between people of all different beliefs. The many faiths, ethnicities and backgrounds of Cumberland County's residents make our community a stronger richer place. I respect and am proud that on the people's lawn, the county courthouse, all of these diverse beliefs can come together in a positive dialogue. Here, we are all able to share the issues close to our hearts whether it is through a memorial to the soldiers killed fighting for our country, the Statue of Liberty honoring our nations welcoming promise to all, a group's fight to stop homelessness, or powerful symbols of faith. I greatly treasure this open forum between everyone in the community."



Although it may seem silly to some, Safdie adds, "The Flying Spaghetti Monster is a pile of noodles and meatballs, but it is meant to open up discussion and provoke thought. Being able to put up a statue is a celebration of our freedom as Americans; a freedom to be different, to express those differences, and to do it amongst neighbors — even if it is in a noodley way."

Safdie was not available for comment at press-time.

County Mayor Brock Hill said, "We are basically operating it as a freedom of speech venue. We

don't deny the constitutional rights of anyone, but we certainly don't endorse all the displays. I feel the Flying Spaghetti Monster is an effort on the part of non-Christians to try and minimize Christianity and the images that have been placed there. I'll go as far as to say that I think it's an attempt to minimize and ridicule the good intentions of Christians in Cumberland County, but I don't deny their right."

Hill said there have been some requests for displays which have been turned down and each request is looked at on the merit of the display.

On Good Friday a chainsaw-carved statue of Jesus carrying the cross was placed on the lawn, along with the Flying Spaghetti Monster and a play of the Stations of the Cross was acted out by the Cumberland Countians for Peace and Justice.

"This is a group of various denominations brought together to bring awareness to the injustices of today," said Joe Gittings.

Gittings said the group also hosts peace displays or demonstrations at the courthouse each Wednesday from 4 to 5 p.m.

Gittings said he appreciates the opportunity the county is allowing.

Anyone wishing to erect a display is required to go to the county mayor's office and fill out a building and grounds committee application for use of the courthouse grounds. The applicant must be a Cumberland County resident. The application is reviewed and then either approved or rejected by the county mayor.

"We decided to do it this way because it seemed silly to have to meet all the time in order to approve these applications. The committee does have the right, though, to ultimately reject all of them if it decides," Sabine said.

Over the past year, a chainsaw-carved nativity scene has been there as well as a massive carving of the Last Supper.

The free speech zone began in 2006 after the American Civil Liberties Union in Nashville sent the county a letter asking if the display of a Moses statue meant the county was creating a free speech zone.

The displays by various people and organizations have continued since. Hill said unless the situation gets out of hand, he feels the current policy will continue.

The real war is not between the West and the East. The real war is between intelligent and stupid people. There is much more in common between George Bush and the fanatics in my country than between me and the fanatics of my country. There is much more common ground between me and normal people here in America who don't want that. As an Iranian, I feel much closer to an American who thinks like me than to the bearded guy of my country.

— Marjane Satrapi, author of *Persepolis*
(a memoir of growing up in Iran during the Islamic Revolution)

Taxi to the Dark Side

by Roger Ebert, 2/7/2008

We have to work the dark side.

So said Dick Cheney a few days after 9/11, discussing the war on terror. Is this what he meant?

In December 2002, an Afghan named Dilawar had scraped together enough money to buy a taxi. He was fingered by a paid informant as a terrorist connected with a rocket attack. Taken to the American prison at Bagram, Afghanistan, he was tortured so violently that he died after five days. An autopsy showed that his legs were so badly mauled, they would have had to be amputated, had he lived. Later, the informant who collected U.S. money for fingering him was proven to be the terrorist actually responsible for the crime the innocent Dilawar was charged with.

An official report said Dilawar died of "natural causes." *The New York Times* found an autopsy report describing the death as a homicide. After a belated investigation, a few U.S. soldiers were accused of the murder. No officers were involved. Dilawar was the first casualty after we started to "work the dark side." In all the torture scandals since, few officers have ever been charged. If all of these crimes took place without their knowledge, they would appear to be guilty of dereliction of duty, if nothing else.

Alex Gibney's horrifying documentary "Taxi to the Dark Side" uses the death of Dilawar as an entry point into a remorseless indictment of the Bush administration's unofficially condoned policy of the torture of suspects, which is forbidden by U.S. constitutional and military law and international agreements, but justified under the "necessity" of working the dark side. Gibney interviews U.S. soldiers who participated in such torture sessions (under orders, they thought, although their superiors claimed innocence, all the way up to Bush, who claimed ignorance of torture even after he had seen official Pentagon and intelligence reports). They seem sorry, sobered, and confused.

The film has television footage of administration officials demonstrably lying about what they knew and when they knew it. And it leads to Gibney's conversation with his own father, who was an interrogator of prisoners in World War II and says not only was such behavior forbidden, but it wouldn't have worked, anyway. If you torture a man long enough, he will tell you anything to make you stop. If you act on that "information," you are likely on a fool's errand.

Gibney is the same filmmaker who made the merciless "Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room" (2005), a documentary where he produced actual tape recordings of Enron operatives creating the California "power shortage" by ordering power plants shut down and joking that a few grandmothers might have to die without air conditioning for Enron to make more millions. By the same logic, lives may have to be lost to torture to produce intelligence,

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A Tale of Three Lawyers

by Scott Horton, *Harpers Magazine*, 4/8/2008

On Thursday in the National Press Club in Washington, a crowd gathered to witness the presentation of the Ridenhour Prize for Truth-Telling to Lieutenant Commander Matthew Diaz. The story of Matthew Diaz was chronicled in this space repeatedly (also here and here). It is a story of courage, fortitude, conviction and suffering. Joe Margulies introduced the honoree with clarity:

No one can think it is fun when you sit in a courtroom as an accused, and a United States prosecutor points an accusatory finger at your chest and calls you a criminal and tells you that you have betrayed your oath and you have betrayed your country, and you have endangered the safety of the men and women that you swore to share your burdens with. And no one can think it is fun when you have to sit with your heart pounding in your chest as the jury files back into the room with a piece of paper folded in its hands, and that piece of paper holds your fate. And no one can think it is fun when that jury, your peers, pronounces you guilty. And no one can think it is fun when you have to face that same jury that will sentence you for what may be many years; many years that you will be away from your family, your life in tatters, your career ruined.

Matthew Diaz served his country as a staff judge advocate at Guantánamo. He watched a shameless assault on America's Constitution and commitment to the rule of law carried out by the Bush Administration. He watched the introduction of a system of cruel torture and abuse. He watched the shaming of the nation's uniformed services, with their proud traditions that formed the very basis of the standards of humanitarian law, now torn asunder through the lawless acts of the Executive. Matthew Diaz found himself in a precarious position—as a uniformed officer, he was bound to follow his command. As a licensed and qualified attorney, he was bound to uphold the law. And these things were indubitably at odds.

Diaz resolved to do something about it. He knew the Supreme Court twice ruled the Guantánamo regime, which he was under orders to uphold, was unlawful. In the Hamdan decision, the Court went a step further. In powerful and extraordinary words, Justice Kennedy reminded the Administration that Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions was binding upon them, and that a violation could constitute a criminal act. One senior member of the Bush legal team, informed of the decision over lunch, was reported to have turned "white as a sheet" and to have immediately excused himself. For the following months, Bush Administration lawyers entered into a

frenzied discussion of how to protect themselves from criminal prosecution.

One of the crimes the Administration committed was withholding from the Red Cross a list of the detainees at Guantánamo, effectively making them into secret detainees. Before the arrival of the Bush Administration, the United States had taken the axiomatic position that holding persons in secret detention for prolonged periods outside the rule of law (a practice known as "disappearing") was not merely unlawful, but in fact a rarified "crime against humanity." Now the United States was engaged in the active practice of this crime.

The decision to withhold the information had been taken, in defiance of law, by senior political figures in the Bush Administration. Diaz was aware of it, and he knew it was unlawful. He printed out a copy of the names and sent them to a civil rights lawyer who had requested them in federal court proceedings.

Diaz was aware when he did this that he was violating regulations and that he could and would, if caught, be subjected to severe sanction. What he did was a violation of law, even as it was an effort to cure a more severe act of lawlessness by the Government. Diaz violated the law in precisely the same sense as Martin Luther King reminds us, in the Letter from Birmingham Jail, that his arrest was based on a violation of law. That everything the Nazis did in Germany was lawful. And that every act of the Hungarian freedom fighters was a crime. In terms of the moral law, however, Diaz was on the side of right, and the Bush Administration and the Pentagon had, by engaging in the conduct that the Supreme Court condemned, placed themselves on the side of lawlessness, corruption and dishonor.

Diaz was charged, tried and convicted for disclosing "secrets." For the Bush Administration, any information which would be politically embarrassing or harmful to it is routinely classified "secret." In this fashion the Administration believes it can use criminal sanctions against those who disclose information it believes will be politically damaging. The list of detainees at Guantánamo, which by law was required to be disclosed, was classified as "secret."

Diaz spent six months in prison and left it bankrupt and without a job. In addition to his sentence, the Pentagon is working aggressively to have Diaz stripped of his law license so he will not be able to practice his profession. The Bush Administration has sought to criminalize, humiliate and destroy Diaz. Its motivation could not be clearer: Diaz struck a blow for the rule of law. And nothing could be more threatening to the Bush Administration than this.

In the week in which Diaz received the Ridenhour Prize, another Pentagon “secret” was disclosed. This “secret” was a memorandum made to order for William J. Haynes II, Rumsfeld’s General Counsel, and the man at the apex of the Pentagon’s military justice system that tried, convicted and sentenced Diaz. The memo was authored by John Yoo. This memorandum was designed to authorize the introduction of torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading interrogation techniques to be used upon prisoners held at Guantánamo, and ultimately also used in Afghanistan and Iraq. The memorandum authorized waterboarding, long-time standing, hypothermia, the administration of psychotropic drugs and sleep deprivation in excess of two days in addition to a number of other techniques. Each of these techniques is long established as torture as a matter of American and international law. The application and implementation of these techniques was and is a crime.

The exact circumstances surrounding the dealings between Haynes and Yoo that led to the development of this memorandum are unclear. However, it is clear that Haynes had previously authorized the use of the torture techniques, and had secured an order from Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld authorizing them.

Following the implementation of these techniques, more than 108 detainees died in detention. In a large number of these cases, the deaths have been ruled a homicide and connected to torture. These homicides were a foreseeable consequence of the advice that Haynes and Yoo gave.

The introduction of torture techniques destroyed America’s reputation around the world, dramatically eroded a system of alliances that generations of Americans fought and labored to sustain and build, and provided the basis for a dramatic recruitment campaign for terrorist groups who are the nation’s principal adversaries in the war on terror. Yoo’s and Haynes’s conduct dramatically undercut the security and safety of every American. And equally, Yoo and Haynes demonstrated by their conduct contempt for the rule of law and the principles for which hundreds of thousands of Americans shed their blood in prior conflicts.

Yoo is currently a professor at the University of California at Berkeley, the author of a number of widely featured books, and a widely followed media figure whose works are routinely published in the Wall Street Journal and other publications. He remains a member of the bar in Pennsylvania and California.

Haynes recently left the position of General Counsel at the Department of Defense to become General Counsel—Corporate at Chevron Inc. He remains a member of the bar in North Carolina, Virginia and the District of Columbia.

A system that punishes and shames Matthew Diaz, yet obstructs any investigation into the misconduct of John Yoo and Jim Haynes, and particularly their focal role in the introduction of torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, is corrupt. Indeed, it persecutes the innocent and rewards the guilty. A bar association that disbars Matthew

Diaz and leaves Yoo and Haynes free to practice is fundamentally corrupt. In essence, this choice reflects a legal profession that puts upholding the will of the Executive, even when it commands the most egregious and unlawful conduct, over the Rule of Law. It reflects the abnegation of the bedrock principles of the profession and the principles of the American Constitution and the Revolution which gave rise to it.

Lieutenant Commander Diaz reminds us of the powerful words of Justice Brandeis:

Our government is the potent, the omnipresent teacher. For good or for ill, it teaches the whole of the people by its example. If the government becomes a lawbreaker, it breeds contempt for the law and invites every man to become a law unto itself. It breeds anarchy. To declare that the end justifies the means would bring terrible retribution.

In a day when the legal profession is disgraced repeatedly by the performance of lawyers in the service of their government, Matthew Diaz is emerging as a hero to many, and as a symbol that for some lawyers devotion to truth, integrity and justice still matters. Indeed, that dedication and willingness to shoulder the burden it can bring, is and will likely be seen by future generations of Americans as the higher form of patriotism.

**The laws of God, the laws of man,
He may keep that will and can;
Not I: let God and man decree
Laws for themselves and not for me;**

**And if my ways are not as theirs
Let them mind their own affairs.
Their deeds I judge and much condemn,
Yet when did I make laws for them?**

**Please yourselves, say I, and they
Need only look the other way.
But no, they will not; they must still
Wrest their neighbour to their will,**

**And make me dance as they desire
With jail and gallows and hell-fire.
And how am I to face the odds
Of man's bedevilment and God's?**

**I, a stranger and afraid
In a world I never made.
They will be master, right or wrong;
Though both are foolish, both are strong.**

**And since, my soul, we cannot fly
To Saturn nor to Mercury,
Keep we must, if keep we can,
These foreign laws of God and man.**

— A.E. Housman,
No. 12, Last Poems, 1922

Taxi to the Dark Side...

(continued from page 9)

although there is precious little evidence that the strategy has worked. And besides, is that what we do, as Americans? Are those our values? Then what do we stand for?

Gibney widens the net to include the illegal detainees at Guantanamo, most of whom have never been charged with any crime. He talks with former administration officials and spokesmen who didn't like what they were seeing and resigned. His conversations with the American torturers themselves are the most heartbreaking; young kids for the most part, they thought they were doing their duty. And he includes never before seen photos and images of torture at work. One tactic: Prisoners have their hands tied above their heads, and are made to balance on boxes in pools of electrified water. Would they really be electrocuted if they fell off? Would you like to try? Sen. John McCain, who endured unimaginable torture during the Vietnam conflict, is among the most outspoken critics of this strategy.

There are those, their numbers shrinking every day, who would agree we have to "work the dark side." Growing numbers of us are yearning for the light. This movie does not describe the America I learned about in civics class, or think of when I pledge allegiance to the flag. Yet I know I will get the usual e-mails accusing me of partisanship, bias, only telling one side, etc. What is the other side? See this movie, and you tell me.

Letter to Monique Davis

from CSS member Torsten Pihl

Rep. Monique Davis (IL):

Nobel laureate Steven Weinberg once said that without religion, good people will do good things and bad people will do bad things, and with religion good people will do bad things. This seems to be your case when you lambasted that atheist who was testifying and told him that he had no right to be there. You may think you're doing good, but your dogma is making you do bad judgmental things.

A little early American history is in order here. Article 11 of the Treaty of Tripoli 1797 reads that "the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion", unanimously approved by the US Senate, and signed into law by president John Adams. While the treaty is of course no longer valid, it's a clear statement of the secular intentions of our founding fathers. While many early Americans were indeed religious, our founding fathers were wise to create a secular constitutional democracy, not a theocracy.

Thanks to freedom of religion, you are free to openly practice your faith at your Church of Christ, not forced to attend a Puritan Church of America.

Thanks,

Torsten Pihl,
a good atheist,
Corvallis, Oregon

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Contacting Us:

President / Treasurer

John S. Dearing
President@CorvallisSecular.org

Use this address for:

- Questions about CSS.
- Membership or subscription payments.

126 NW 21st St.
Corvallis, OR. 97330
(541)754-2557

Vice President / Editor

Reed H. Byers
Editor@CorvallisSecular.org

Webmaster / Asst Editor

Angela C. Byers
Webmaster@CorvallisSecular.org

Use this address for:

- Newsletter submissions.
- Comments about the CSS web page

3035 SE 24th Ave.
Albany, OR. 97322
(541)924-9128

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