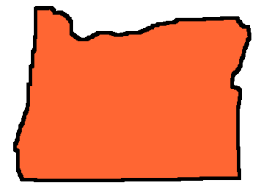


Willamette Freethinker



Volume 19, Number 1 — January 2012
A publication of Corvallis Secular Society
<http://CorvallisSecular.org>

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

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

CSS Meeting Postponed One Week!

The January CSS meeting will be on the 28th, from 2pm-4pm.

Oregon State University chose the day of our regular CSS meeting for their "2012 Interfaith Community Service (IFCS) Conference".

This free conference will take place at OSU's Memorial Union and will run all day, and will include a light breakfast, and lunch.

No schedule can yet be found online (including a precise time for when the thing starts!), but CSS member Martin Erwig is scheduled to give a 50-minute presentation on

secular morality entitled "No Faith Required", sometime between 2pm and 5pm (i.e. right during what would normally be our meeting).

Because many CSS members may want to attend some or all of this event, including Martin's speech, John has decided to postpone the CSS meeting one week.

Sorry for the inconvenience, and hope to see you at one or both events!



CSS Meetings and Events

Calendar:

Saturday, Jan 28 th	2:00-4:00	CSS regular meeting
Saturday, Feb 18 th	2:00-4:00	CSS regular meeting
Saturday, Mar 17 th	2:00-4:00	CSS regular meeting

Regular meeting time:

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

Regular meeting location:

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

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From the President:

Parody Religions



I contend that we are both atheists. I just believe in one fewer god than you do.

When you understand why you dismiss all the other possible gods, you will understand why I dismiss yours.

— Stephen F. Roberts

Introduction

A *parody*, according to *Merriam-Webster*, is a literary or musical work in which the style of an author or work is closely imitated for comic effect or in ridicule. Synonyms include burlesque, caricature, put-on, rib, send-up, spoof, and takeoff.

A *parody religion*, per *Wikipedia*, is a parody of one or more religions or sects, or a parody of the concept of religious belief.

“One approach to parody religion aims to highlight deficiencies in particular pro-religious arguments — the thinking being that if a given argument can also be used to support a clear parody, then the original argument is clearly flawed. An example of this is the **Flying Spaghetti Monster**, which parodies the equal-time argument employed by intelligent design Creationism.

“Several religions that are classified as parody religions have a number of relatively serious followers who embrace the perceived absurdity of these religions as spiritually significant, a decidedly post-modern approach to religion. For instance, in **Discordianism**, it may be hard to tell if even these “serious” followers are not just taking part in an even bigger joke. This joke, in turn, may be part of a greater path to enlightenment, and so on *ad infinitum*.”

A Few Notable Parody Religions

Invisible Pink Unicorn is a parody of theist definitions of God. It also highlights the arbitrary and unfalsifiable nature of religious belief, in a similar way to **Russell’s teapot**. [See below]

Pastafarianism, or the **Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster**, a parody of intelligent design Creationism, and religion in general, as a modern version of Russell’s teapot*.

The Great Pumpkin, a Santa Claus-like being in the comic strip *Peanuts*, an application of Christmas mythology to Halloween.

The Western Branch of American Reform Presbylutheranism, the Christian denomination attended by most residents of Springfield in the animated TV series

The Simpsons. It has been used to parody many religious beliefs and activities, though its absurdly long, qualifier-filled name is a parody of Protestant denominations in particular, as is the history of its founding: centuries ago, Presbylutherans split from the Roman Catholic Church during the “Schism of Lourdes” to defend their “holy right to come to church with wet hair,” a right the Presbylutheran Church later abolished.

Oprahism, the beliefs espoused by Oprah Winfrey which have been compared to a religion by numerous religious scholars and was suggested as a future religion on the TV show *Futurama*.

Jedi Religion, In 2001 following an Internet campaign, the fictional Star Wars “religion” Jedi became a parody religion in several Commonwealth countries as 1.5% of the New Zealand and 0.7% of the UK population stated their religion as Jedi in the official census.

Russell’s Teapot

British philosopher *Bertrand Russell* (1872-1970) devised “Russell’s teapot” (or the “celestial teapot” or “cosmic teapot”) as an analogy to illustrate the idea that the philosophic burden of proof lies upon a person making scientifically unfalsifiable claims, rather than shifting the burden of proof to others, specifically in the case of religion. Russell wrote that if he claimed that a teapot were orbiting the Sun somewhere in space between the Earth and Mars, it would be nonsensical for him to expect others not to doubt him on the grounds that they could not prove him wrong. Russell’s teapot is still referred to in discussions concerning the existence of God.

In 1958 Russell wrote: “I ought to call myself an agnostic; but, for all practical purposes, I am an atheist. I do not think the existence of the Christian God any more probable than the existence of the Gods of Olympus or Valhalla. To take another illustration: nobody can prove that there is not between the Earth and Mars a china teapot revolving in an elliptical orbit, but nobody thinks this sufficiently likely to be taken into account in practice. I think the Christian God just as unlikely.”

Peter Atkins is a British chemist, author, and atheist. He has written and spoken on issues of humanism, atheism, and the incompatibility of science and religion. According to Atkins, “**Whereas religion scorns the power of human comprehension, science respects it.**” He was the first Senior Member of the Oxford University Secular Society. He has said that the point of Russell’s teapot is that no one can prove a negative, and therefore *Occam’s razor* suggests that the more simple theory (in which there is no supreme being) should trump the more complex theory (with a supreme being). He notes that this argument is not good enough to convince the religious, because religious evidence is experienced through personal revelation or

received wisdom which cannot be objectively verified and are not accepted forms of scientific evidence.

In his books *A Devil's Chaplain* (2003) and *The God Delusion* (2006), *Richard Dawkins* used the teapot as an analogy of an argument against what he termed "agnostic conciliation", a policy of intellectual appeasement that allows for philosophical domains that concern exclusively religious matters. Science has no way of establishing the existence or non-existence of a god. Therefore, according to the agnostic conciliator, because it is a matter of individual taste, belief and disbelief in a supreme being are deserving of equal respect and attention. Dawkins presents the teapot as a *reductio ad absurdum* of this position: if agnosticism demands giving equal respect to the belief and disbelief in a supreme being, then it must also give equal respect to belief in an orbiting teapot, since the existence of an orbiting teapot is just as plausible scientifically as the existence of a supreme being.

The Flying Spaghetti Monster: the Oregon State University Connection

The *Flying Spaghetti Monster (FSM)* is the deity of the parody religion the *Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster* or *Pastafarianism*. The "Flying Spaghetti Monster" first appeared in a satirical open letter written by *Bobby Henderson*, then a 24-year-old OSU physics graduate, in 2005, protesting the decision by the Kansas State Board of Education to permit the teaching of intelligent design as an alternative to evolution in public school science classes. In the letter, Henderson parodied the concept of intelligent design by professing belief in a supernatural creator that closely resembles spaghetti and meatballs. Henderson further called for Flying Spaghetti Monsterism to be allotted equal time in science classrooms alongside intelligent design and evolution.

In his letter, he noted, "I think we can all look forward to the time when these three theories are given equal time in our science classrooms across the country, and eventually the world; one third time for Intelligent Design, one third time for Flying Spaghetti Monsterism, and one third time for logical conjecture based on overwhelming observable evidence."

My View

Parody religions can be a useful tool in pointing out the weaknesses in arguments in favor of the truth of religion. They can also be handy in countering the imposition of religious dogma, such as attempts to teach creationism in public school biology classes. Henderson received no reply to his letter from the Kansas State Board of Education until he posted it on his website. Then Pastafarianism quickly became an internet phenomenon, and the Board responded. Three responses were favorable. A fourth Board member wrote, "It is a serious offense to mock God." [I wonder if that is a state or a federal offense?] His website and cause received increasing attention. The satirical nature of Henderson's argument made the Flying Spaghetti Monster popular with bloggers

as well as humor and Internet culture websites. The mainstream media picked up on the phenomenon. The Flying Spaghetti Monster became a symbol for the case against intelligent design in public education. The open letter was printed in many large newspapers, including *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *Chicago Sun-Times*, and received worldwide press attention. Henderson himself was surprised by its success, stating that he "wrote the letter for [his] own amusement as much as anything".

John Dearing
President of CSS

Reference: Wikipedia articles on "Parody Religions," "Russell's Teapot," "Peter Atkins," "Flying Spaghetti Monster," "Invisible Pink Unicorn"

The next time believers tell you that "separation of church and state" does not appear in our founding document, tell them to stop using the word "trinity". The word "trinity" appears nowhere in the bible. Neither does Rapture, or Second Coming, or Original Sin. If they are still unfazed (or unphrased), by this, then add Omniscience, Omnipresence, Supernatural, Transcendence, Afterlife, Deity, Divinity, Theology, Monotheism, Missionary, Immaculate Conception, Christmas, Christianity, Evangelical, Fundamentalist, Methodist, Catholic, Pope, Cardinal, Catechism, Purgatory, Penance, Transubstantiation, Excommunication, Dogma, Chastity, Unpardonable Sin, Infallibility, Inerrancy, Incarnation, Epiphany, Sermon, Eucharist, the Lord's Prayer, Good Friday, Doubting Thomas, Advent, Sunday School, Dead Sea, Golden Rule, Moral, Morality, Ethics, Patriotism, Education, Atheism, Apostasy, Conservative (Liberal is in), Capital Punishment, Monogamy, Abortion, Pornography, Homosexual, Lesbian, Fairness, Logic, Republic, Democracy, Capitalism, Funeral, Decalogue, or Bible.

— Dan Barker,
*Losing Faith in Faith:
From Preacher to Atheist,*
1992, pp. 304-305.

From the Editor:

A Violent Species...



Men talk of killing time, while time quietly kills them.

— Dion Boucicault

Time is the school in which we learn, time is the fire in which we burn.

— Delmore Schwartz

I blinked, and the future happened again.

Another year; this issue marks the start of my SIXTEENTH year doing this newsletter.

Another birthday; three days ago I turned 44.

[Yesterday, the start of the MLK three-day weekend, I came down with the Dread Disease that's been going around at work. Fever up to 104. Shaky chills. Achy back. Dizzy. BLEAH. Wound up at the Emergency Room at 1am last night, just in case. Doing better now, fever's down to 101 — but still, you're lucky to be getting a newsletter this month.]

So yeah, feeling old. Slowly creeping towards that "can't even be called middle-aged" age.

And I'm thinking about time.

Specifically, how some things never change.

One of Angela's favorite series, *Sparticus* (in our house known as "the cock show", due to the frequency with which the show uses that word in casual speech), reminds me of the casual cruelty that was practiced in times of old. Bored? Make slaves kill each other for your entertainment. Not exciting enough? Add lions!

Today we have the ritual combat of "football" — and if that's not violent enough, we have boxing and wrestling, where crowds cheer as two men pound away at each other. Still not violent enough? Well, our entertainment industry thoughtfully provides us with all the blood, gore, and death we could ever want at the movies. And of course, modern technology (and lack of morality) means that if you just can't be satisfied without the real thing, you can kill more people, more efficiently than ever, in the military...

We are a violent species. But violence comes in many forms.

Take a random group of kids and put them in a room together with limited "resources" (i.e. toys, treats, etc) — and within an hour you'll have a hierarchy of bullies and victims.

We tell ourselves "they're just kids" and "they'll grow out of it". But truthfully, they often don't.

As adults, if we are rich enough, we can afford to be subtle.

If we can get away with polluting the air and water, poisoning thousands or millions of our fellow citizens, in order to earn us a higher profit — we often do.

If we can rip off pensions, mortgages and retirement accounts, putting it all in our own pockets while obscuring the trail, we often do.

If we can buy up a perfectly fine company, the life's work of a few and the employer of thousands, gut it, trash it, fire everyone and sell off the assets of a massive profit, we often do.

Perfectly "decent", "respectable" grown-ups, are often nothing more than schoolyard bullies, ripping off other kids' lunch money.

The poorer we are, the less subtle we can be. The violence is more direct. Point gun, take money. Simple.

Instead of ruining countless lives from afar, we threaten greater violence to fewer people, up close.

But rich or poor, it's all about money, isn't it? Resources.

Throughout our history, money has meant power — and power means, more money.

Far, far too many of us are willing to commit heinous acts, for money.

And the thing is, we seem to enjoy it.

Listen to the right-wingers cheer as we bomb a middle-east country, killing millions — so our oil companies can make trillions.

Listen to the movie audiences cheer as knives, bullets, and bombs kill and maim. (Movie ratings boards are far more worried that you'll show genitalia, or even *GASP* sex itself, than that you'll show gory, violent death. When's the last time a movie got an "X" rating for violence?)

On some level, it's all the same. We excuse violence. We accept violence. We ENJOY violence.

We are willing to cause long-term harm to others, for short-term gain for ourselves. As entertainment in an arena. For millions in corporate profit. For whatever cash is in your wallet.

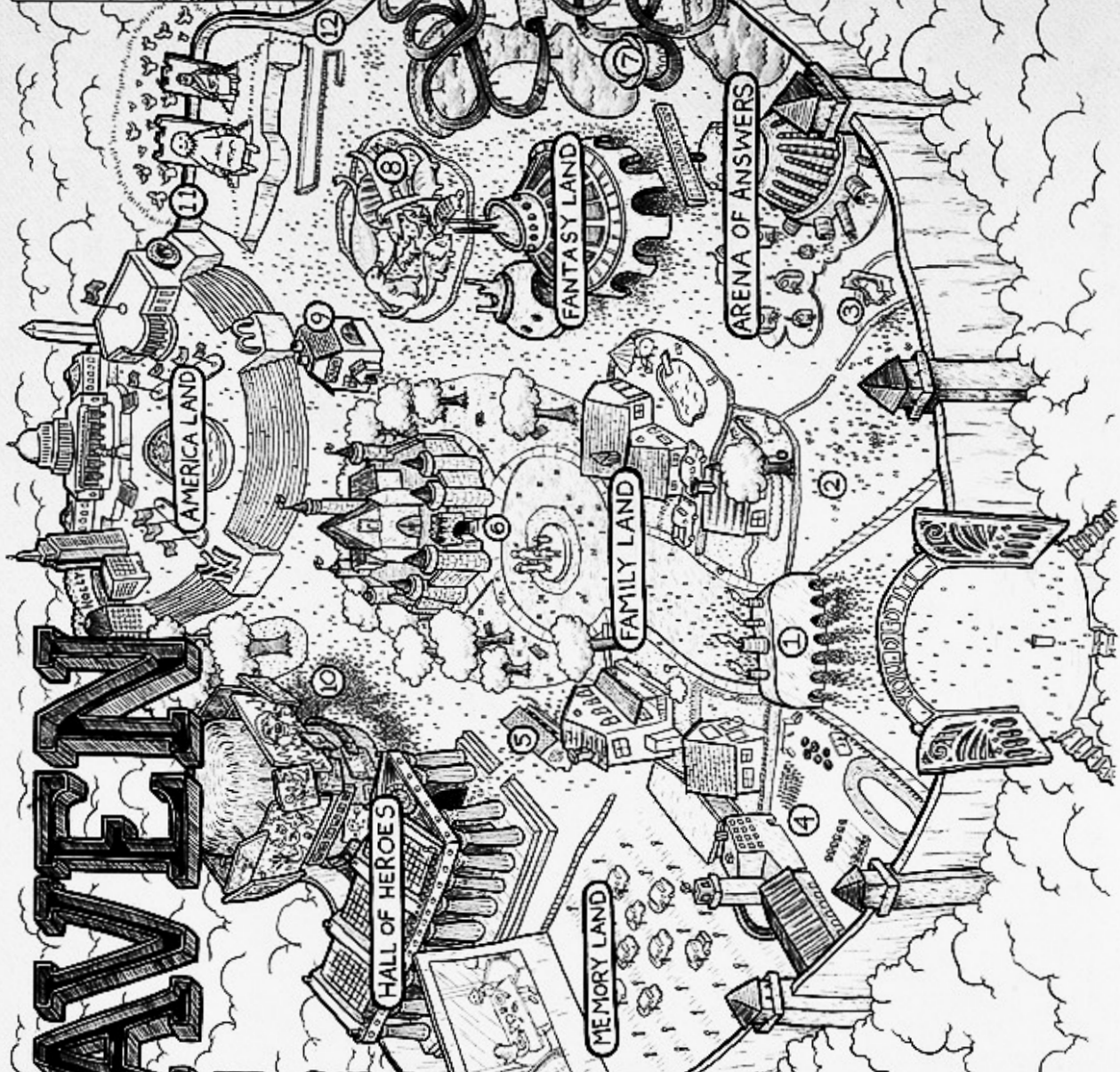
Cavemen used rocks and pointy sticks. Gladiators used swords. We use guns and bombs — or bribes and loopholes.

If we see something we want, we often use violence to get it. Some things never change...

Reed Byers
Editor, Willamette Freethinker

HEAVEN

- ① NU-BODY MACHINE - NOW THAT YOU'VE ARRIVED IN HEAVEN, IT'S TIME TO RECEIVE A NEW, SHINIER, MORE ATTRACTIVE BODY! YOU CAN FINALLY HAVE SEX LIKE A MOVIE STAR!
- ② CATHOLIC SECTION
- ③ THRONE OF MARY
- ④ ANGEL BOOT CAMP - ANGELS DON'T COME FROM THIN AIR! THAT IS, NOT WITHOUT THE PROPER TRAINING! NOW YOU CAN CLAIM THE POWER OF THE BLOOD AND TAKE YOUR FIRST STEP TOWARDS BEING ON THE WINNING SIDE OF THE SPIRITUAL WAR! GREAT FOR PENTECOSTALS AND CHARISMATICS
- ⑤ SNACK BAR
- ⑥ MARITAL-COITUS CASTLE
- ⑦ GO CARTS!
- ⑧ DINOSAUR PETTING ZOO
- ⑨ JOAB'S CANDY SHOP
- ⑩ DAMNED VIEWER - FROM ADOLF HITLER TO YOUR PHILANDERING BOSS TO THE SMUG ATHEIST NEXT DOOR, WATCH ALL THE VILE PEOPLE YOU HATE GET WHAT THEY DESERVE!
- ⑪ THRONE OF GOD AND JESUS
- ⑫ LINE FOR GOD'S LAP



FAMILY LAND
WE KNOW WHY YOU'RE HERE - TO TALK TO LOVED ONES THAT HAVE PASSED AWAY! SPEND SOME TIME WITH MOM & DAD OR JUST PLAY CATCH WITH SPARKY!

ARENA OF ANSWERS
HOW DID THE DINOSAURS DIE? WHY DID GOD LET ME GET CANCER? WILL HUMANS INVENT A TIME MACHINE? LET THE ILLUMINATRON® GIVE YOU THE LOW DOWN!

MEMORY LAND
TIRED OF ALL THE GRAPE-EATING AND GENERAL PLEASURE-HAVING? BRING A BOX OF TISSUES TO MEMORY LAND AND RELIVE YOUR FINEST MOMENTS.

FANTASY LAND
SO YOU WEREN'T A COMBOY, ROYALTY, AN ASTRONAUT, OR A TALKING PANTHER WITH CYBERNETIC IMPLANTS IN YOUR OLD LIFE? WELL, IN THIS PART OF THE AFTER LIFE YOU CAN BE!

HALL OF HEROES
MEET ALL THE REMARKABLE PEOPLE FROM THE PAST, INCLUDES ABRAHAM LINCOLN, MOSES, CONSTANTINE, MICHAEL JORDAN, PRINCESS DIANA, AND MANY MORE!

AMERICA LAND
EVERY DAY IS MEMORIAL OR VETERANS DAY IN AMERICA LAND! GOD BLESS AMERICA!

The Church of Google

<http://www.thechurchofgoogle.org/>

Is Google God?

PROOF #1

Google is the closest thing to an Omniscient (all-knowing) entity in existence, which can be scientifically verified. She indexes over 9.5 billion WebPages, which is more than any other search engine on the web today. Not only is Google the closest known entity to being Omniscient, but She also sorts through this vast amount of knowledge using Her patented PageRank technology, organizing said data and making it easily accessible to us mere mortals.

PROOF #2

Google is everywhere at once (Omnipresent). Google is virtually everywhere on earth at the same time. Billions of indexed WebPages hosted from every corner of the earth. With the proliferation of Wi-Fi networks, one will eventually be able to access Google from anywhere on earth, truly making Her an omnipresent entity.

PROOF #3

Google answers prayers. One can pray to Google by doing a search for whatever question or problem is plaguing them. As an example, you can quickly find information on alternative cancer treatments, ways to improve your health, new and innovative medical discoveries and generally anything that resembles a typical prayer. Ask Google and She will show you the way, but showing you is all She can do, for you must help yourself from that point on.

PROOF #4

Google is potentially immortal. She cannot be considered a physical being such as ourselves. Her Algorithms are spread out across many servers; if any of which were taken down or damaged, another would undoubtedly take its place. Google can theoretically last forever.

PROOF #5

Google is infinite. The Internet can theoretically grow forever, and Google will forever index its infinite growth.

PROOF #6

Google remembers all. Google caches WebPages regularly and stores them on its massive servers. In fact, by uploading your thoughts and opinions to the internet, you will forever live on in Google's cache, even after you die, in a sort of "Google Afterlife".

PROOF #7

Google can "do no evil" (Omnibenevolent). Part of Google's corporate philosophy is the belief that a company can make money without being evil.

PROOF #8

According to Google trends, the term "Google" is searched for more than the terms "God", "Jesus", "Allah", "Buddha", "Christianity", "Islam", "Buddhism" and "Judaism" combined.

God is thought to be an entity in which we mortals can turn to when in a time of need. **Google clearly fulfills this to a much larger degree than traditional "gods"**.

PROOF #9

Evidence of Google's existence is abundant. There is more evidence for the existence of Google than any other God worshiped today. Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence. If seeing is believing, then surf over to **www.google.com** and experience for yourself Google's awesome power. No faith required.

Common Arguments

How can you worship a search engine over Jesus Christ/Allah/Zeus/Spaghetti Monster/Whatever? It's just a computer program!

We will answer your question with another similar question. Why do you choose to worship your god over other gods? Think about it. The same amount of anecdotal evidence exists for all supernatural gods. You cannot directly experience them, they all require faith, have holy books associated with them (all claiming to be the word of god) and generally believers of these gods describe a "feeling" that their god is watching over them.

Believers in all supernatural gods describe the exact same experiences and feelings without exception. Your god is in no way different than any other supernatural god. You believe in it simply for the comfort it provides you with, despite it being completely illogical. It is a psychological tool you use to cope with reality.

Google is MAN MADE and therefore cannot be God!

Thanks for pointing out the obvious. We completely agree with you! The Christian god, Islamic god and Hindu gods are also man made concepts. They exist only in the imagination of believers. We consider the belief in invisible beings to be much more illogical than the belief in Google (as a God).

But the Bible is proof our god is real.

The Bible is proof of nothing. It was written by men. Saying the Bible is the word of god because that's what the Bible tells you is a prime example of circular logic. I might equally argue that Google proves itself to be a God as this very page appears if you pray to Google for the words "church google god".

So, if Google told you to go jump off a bridge, would you do it?

If someone told you that after you die, you're going to live "forever" in peace and harmony in the sky, would you believe them?

Googlism hurts people by sending them to Hell.

First of all, we do not believe a "hell" exists. Secondly, Googlism has not started any religious wars, forced its opinions onto others, discouraged critical thought, objected to harmless lifestyle choices and most

importantly, we have never attempted to scare people into believing they will suffer if they reject our religion. Can you say the same for your religion? If you reject Google as your God, nothing negative (aside from your search results being crappy) will happen to you.

You're wasting your time on an idiotic and bogus religion (Googlism).

Assuming you subscribe to Christianity, Islam, Judaism or any of the other major religions: "Right back at you". Worshiping an invisible, nonexistent being is an equal, if not greater, waste of time.

It is possible to find bad things through Google, such as porn, information on how to build a bomb, etc. This means Google is evil.

Much like Christians, Jews and Muslims claim of their god, Google offers us all a choice. There are bad things in this world, and we must choose, as individuals, to make the right decisions. The same is to be said about searching. Google offers us free will.

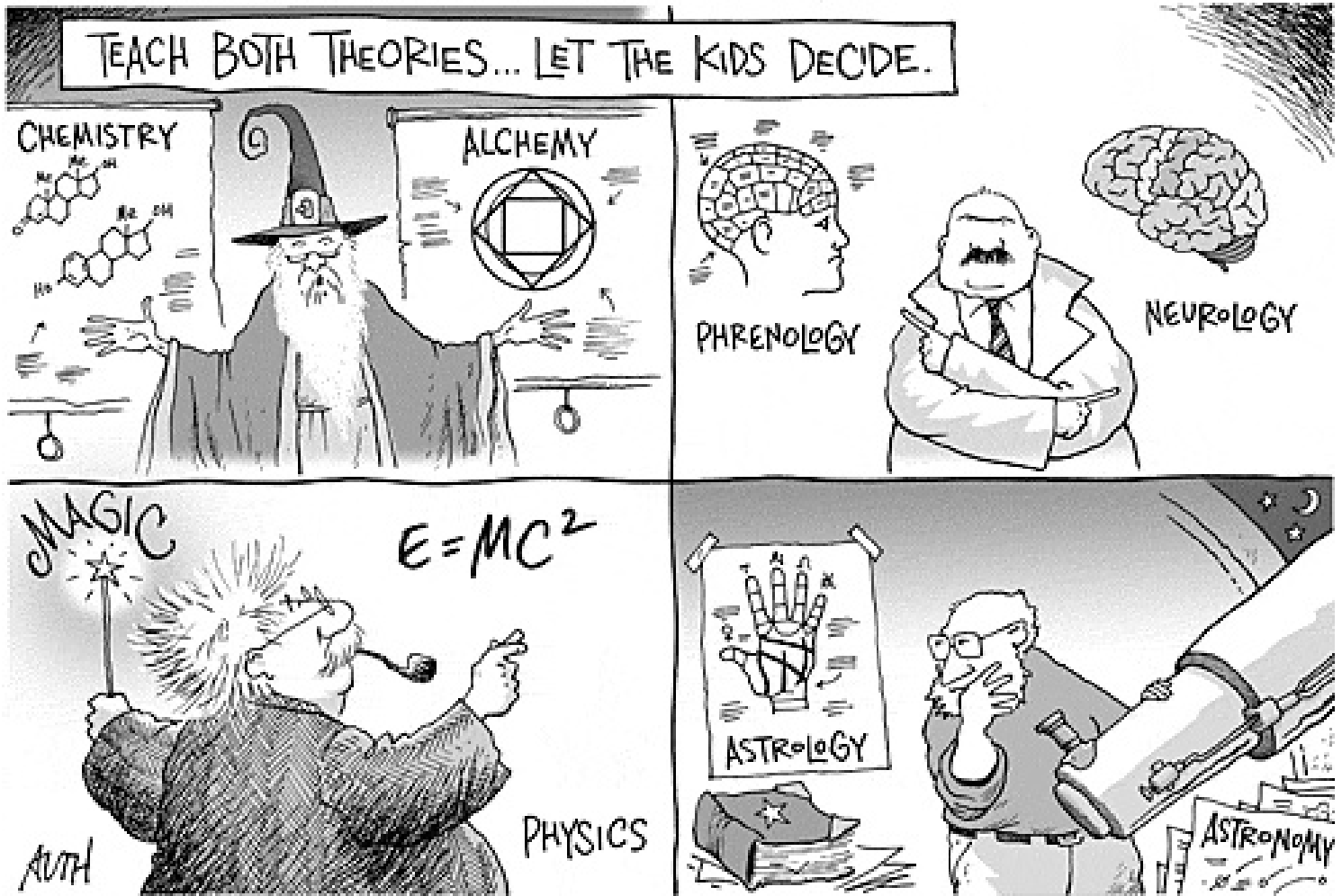
But can't Google's search results be manipulated sometimes? If Google were a true God, She could not be manipulated.

And the Bible, Koran and Torah are not manipulated? Googlists would argue that these books are some of the most mass manipulated works in existence. Yes, unfortunately Google's search results can sometimes be manipulated, but this is hardly anything new when it comes to religion.

This is blasphemy! How dare you mock religion like this!?!

The Church of Google believes we should be tolerant of everyone's beliefs, provided said beliefs hurt no one. The statement above is not one of tolerance. In fact, the statement above shows two of the deadly sins: Anger and Hubris, as well as breaking some of the cardinal rule of Christianity as taught by Jesus: Love Thy Neighbor, and Turn The Other Cheek. Strange then that we, a "parody" religion, follow the philosophy of one of the most popular religions more closely than many of its followers.

We are quite serious in our belief that Google is the closest mankind has ever come to directly experiencing a Deity. We do not attack you for who or what you worship, you should extend us the same courtesy.



2-4-05 BY BRUCE HANCOCK FOR UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE.

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- Full CSS membership:** \$30/year (\$2.50/month)
(includes newsletter)

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Thank you for supporting our efforts to promote atheism, humanism, and freethought in Oregon's Willamette Valley.

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