



THE SECULAR HUMANIST PRESS

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THE GOD DELUSION ROOT OF ALL EVIL?

A Note from the Editors: In previewing this documentary, we found ourselves repeatedly saying, "That's exactly what I've thought for years!" This is an indictment -- from a freethinker's viewpoint -- of *all* religion not to be easily dismissed. Its controversial nature has precluded it from being shown on American television to this day. HOW will sponsor a showing of this film on July 27 at the Phinney Neighborhood Center. Check the Schedule of Events on page 5 for address and directions. The following is an impartial review of the video from *Wikipedia*.

Root of All Evil? is a television documentary, written and presented by Richard Dawkins, in which he argues that the world would be better off without religion. The documentary was first broadcast in January 2006, in the form of two 45-minute episodes, on Channel 4 in the UK.

Dawkins has said that the title "The Root of All Evil?" was not his preferred choice, but that Channel 4 had insisted on it to create controversy. His sole concession from the producers on the title was the addition of the question mark. Dawkins has stated that the notion of anything being the root of all evil is ridiculous. Dawkins' book *The God Delusion*, released in September 2006, goes on to examine the topics raised in the documentary in greater detail.

Part 1: *The God Delusion*

The God Delusion explores the unproven beliefs that are treated as factual by many religions and the extremes to which some followers have taken them. Dawkins opens the program by describing the "would-be murderers . . . who want to kill you and me, and themselves, because they're motivated by what they think is the highest ideal." Dawkins argues that "the process of non-thinking called faith" is not a way of understanding the world, but instead stands in fundamental opposition to modern science and the scientific method, and is divisive and dangerous.

Pilgrims at Lourdes

Dawkins first visits the shrine of Lourdes in southern France, where he joins a candlelit procession of pilgrims singing, "Laudate Maria!" He is particularly struck by the sense of group solidarity, which he contrasts with the lonely delusion

of believing that one is Napoleon, for example. At daybreak, Dawkins surveys the faithful queuing up for healing water, and says that they are more likely to catch a disease than find a cure. He speaks to an Irish lady who has found the experience beneficial.

Dawkins then quizzes Father Liam Griffin about the number of miraculous cures which have taken place over the years. Griffin reports 66 declared miracles and about 2,000 unexplained cures (out of approximately 80,000 sick visitors per year over more than a century) but claims that millions more have been healed spiritually. Dawkins remains skeptical, and remarks afterwards that nobody has ever reported the miraculous re-growing of a severed leg. Instead he says the cures invariably comprise afflictions that might have improved anyway.

Faith versus science

Dawkins continues with a discussion of what he sees as a conflict between faith and science. He points out that science involves a process of constantly testing and revising theories in the light of new evidence, while faith makes a virtue out of believing unprovable and often improbable propositions. For an example of faith, Dawkins takes the infallible doctrine of the Assumption, which Pope Pius XII declared in 1950 simply by relying upon tradition. He contrasts this with the scientific method, which he describes as a system whereby working assumptions may be falsified by recourse to reason and evidence. Dawkins provides an example from his undergraduate study, when a visiting researcher disproved a hypothesis of a professor, who accepted the outcome with "My dear fellow, I wish to thank you, I have been wrong these

IN THIS ISSUE

<i>Schedule of Events</i>	5
<i>Humanists in Print</i>	7
<i>Unpublished Letters</i>	8
<i>Letters to HOW</i>	10
<i>From the City by the Bay - Lenny Maughan</i>	10
<i>The Time is Now - Rob Moitoza</i>	10
<i>Pro-Choice Updates - Marcy Bloom</i>	11
<i>Tell Me Where Your Freedom Lies - R. Bozarth</i>	12
<i>Right to Die Updates - Midge Levy</i>	14
<i>Four Years in Iraq - Adrian Liston</i>	15
<i>Seuss by Bush</i>	17
<i>Let Me See If I've Got This Right</i>	18
<i>Excerpts from The Salmon of Doubt</i>	19
<i>A Good Book</i>	21
<i>Fond Farewells</i>	22
<i>Fundamentalist Flatulence</i>	22

SECULAR HUMANISM is a rational, non-theistic, naturalistic philosophy which supports intellectual freedom, free inquiry, self-responsibility, and scientific progress for the benefit of humankind. When applied to everyday decision-making, Secular Humanism provides a foundation for ethical conduct and human compassion without the need of salvation or supernatural guidance.

fifteen years.”

Dawkins then considers a scientific theory of great significance to him -- Charles Darwin's theory of evolution -- which he discusses by reference to his Mount Improbable analogy. The notion that the full complexity of life emerged either through blind chance or by the hand of an intelligent designer, he likens to leaping up the sheer face of a mountain in one bound. By contrast, he suggests that Darwin's theory of design by natural selection provides an explanation which is akin to climbing a mountain gradually, via a gentle gradient. Dawkins also comments that the design hypothesis raises another question: who made the designer?

Colorado Springs

Next, Dawkins visits Colorado Springs to discuss the rise of Fundamentalist Christianity in the United States where, according to polls, 45 percent of the population believe the universe to be less than 10,000 years old. He visits the New Life Church, an \$18 million worship centre where Pastor Ted Haggard at the time presided over a 14,000 strong congregation. Haggard was at the time chairman of the National Association of Evangelicals and, according to Dawkins, Haggard said he had a weekly conference call with President George W. Bush.

Dawkins interviews Haggard and begins by likening the worship experience to a Nuremberg Rally of which Goebbels might have been proud. Haggard says he knows nothing of the Nuremberg Rallies and goes on to say that some evangelicals think of his services as something akin to rock concerts. Haggard said the Bible is true and doesn't contradict itself (a hotly debated issue), as science does. Dawkins contends that the advantage of science is that new evidence changes ideas, allowing the advancement of human knowledge, something religion does not allow. Steadily the exchanges become increasingly fractious.

Haggard says that American evangelicals fully embrace the scientific method, expecting it to show how God created the heavens and the earth. Dawkins asks if he accepts the scientific demonstration that the earth is 4.5 billion years old. According to Haggard, this is merely one view accepted by a portion of the scientific community. He goes on to contend that Dawkins's own grandchildren may laugh at him upon hearing this claim. Dawkins responds “do you want to bet?” Haggard insists that some “evolutionists” believe that the eye “just formed itself somehow.” Dawkins replies that not a single evolutionary biologist he knows would think that, and that Haggard clearly knows nothing about the subject. In response Haggard implies that some (unnamed) “evolutionists” he’s met have said that. The meeting takes a markedly contentious turn with Haggard asserting that “this issue” of “intellectual arrogance” is the reason why people like Dawkins, and others who dispute creationism, have a problem with people of faith. This scene ends with Haggard telling Dawkins that as he [Dawkins] ages he will find himself “wrong on some things, right on some other things”, and so he shouldn't be arrogant.

As Dawkins and his film crew pack up to leave, there is a brief altercation in the car park. It is reported that Haggard ordered Dawkins's crew off his land with threats of legal action and confiscation of their recording hardware, along with the statement “you called my children animals.” Dawkins retrospectively interprets this as saying that the evolutionary

standpoint indeed amounts to saying that Haggard's flock were animals, which all humans are.

Dawkins then attends a meeting of freethinkers, where a biology teacher reveals that he has been labeled “Satan incarnate” for teaching evolution, and another freethinker compares the present situation to the McCarthy era.

Jerusalem

Finally, Dawkins visits Jerusalem, which he regards as a microcosm of everything that is wrong with religion. He is taken on a guided tour of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. This church is considered by some Christians to be the site of the crucifixion and burial of Jesus. Dawkins comments on what he calls the “edgy watchfulness” in the Old City. One area in particular lies under heavy guard: the Temple Mount, enclosing both the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock. The same ground is also the site of the ancient Jewish Holy Temple, which has been a source of tension between the religious communities.

Dawkins listens to people from both sides of the divide – first, Jewish representative Yisrael Medad and then, the Grand Mufti of Palestine, Sheikh Ekrima Sa'id Sabri. The two sides appear irreconcilable. Hoping to meet someone who might be able to see both viewpoints, Dawkins interviews Yousef al-Khattab, formerly Joseph Cohen, an American-born Jew who came to Israel as a settler before converting to Islam. After offering Dawkins a cheerful welcome, al-Khattab explains his views relating to the decadence of Western values.

Al-Khattab has two major concerns. Firstly, he wants all the non-Muslims off the lands of Muhammad. Secondly, he is concerned about the manner women are dressed. He doesn't want to see women dressed “like whores,” as he puts it, or “bouncing around on television topless.” When asked for his thoughts on the September 11 attacks, he traces the blame back to the creation of the state of Israel. It should be noted that the released version of the film edited many aspects of this interview that made Al-Khattab's answers seem irrational.

Russell's teapot

Dawkins rounds off this episode with a presentation of Bertrand Russell's celestial teapot analogy. He argues that just because science has not yet answered every conceivable question about the universe, there is no need to turn to faith, which has never answered anything of significance.

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The *Secular Humanist Press* is edited and produced by Barbara Dority and Jim Rybock.



"WE ARE GOING TO DIE, AND THAT MAKES US THE LUCKY ONES. MOST PEOPLE ARE NEVER GOING TO DIE, BECAUSE THEY ARE NEVER GOING TO BE BORN. THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO COULD BE HERE IN MY PLACE OUTNUMBER THE SAND GRAINS OF THE SAHARA. IF YOU THINK ABOUT ALL THE DIFFERENT WAYS OUR GENES COULD BE PERMUTED, YOU AND I ARE QUITE GROTESQUELY LUCKY TO BE HERE: THE NUMBER OF EVENTS THAT HAD TO HAPPEN IN ORDER FOR YOU TO EXIST, IN ORDER FOR ME TO EXIST. WE ARE PRIVILEGED TO BE ALIVE AND WE SHOULD MAKE THE MOST OF OUR TIME ON THIS WORLD." RICHARD DAWKINS

Part 2: The Virus of Faith

In *The Virus of Faith*, Dawkins opines that the moral framework of religions is warped, and argues against the religious indoctrination of children. The title of this episode comes from *The Selfish Gene*, in which Dawkins discussed the concept of memes.

Sectarian education

Dawkins discusses what he considers as the divisive influence of sectarian education, with children segregated and labeled by their religion. He describes the Hasidic Jewish community of North London as cloistered away from external influences such as television, with children attending exclusive religious schools. He questions Rabbi Herschel Gluck to find if their culture allows children to access scientific ideas.

Gluck believes that it is important for a minority group to have a space in which to learn and express their culture and beliefs. Dawkins states that he would prefer traditions taught without imposing demonstrable falsehoods. Gluck emphasizes that although they believe that God created the world in six days, the children have studied evolution, although he goes on to say that the majority of students will not believe in it when they leave the school. Gluck contrasts the tradition of Judaism with scientists who "have their tradition." Dawkins facial expression at this point seems to suggest he is taken aback at

the assertion that science is based solely on "tradition." Gluck then goes on to contend that it's called the "theory of evolution" rather than the "law of evolution." When Dawkins points out that the term is used in a technical sense and describes evolution as a fact, Gluck suggests he's a "fundamentalist believer."

Dawkins expresses concern about increasing religious influence in British schools with over 7,000 faith schools already and the government encouraging more, so over half of the new City Academies are expected to be sponsored by religious organizations. He says that the most worrying development is a new wave of private Evangelical schools that have adopted the American Baptist Accelerated Christian Education curriculum, and as an example calls on Phoenix Academy in London.

Dawkins is shown around the school by head teacher Adrian Hawkes and remarks on how the teaching material appears to mention God or Jesus on almost every page; such as a reference to Noah's Ark in a science textbook. Hawkes responds by saying that the stories could have a lot to do with science if you believe in them, and that the science he was taught at school is laughable today. As an example, he mentions that he was taught that the moon came from the Earth's ocean and was "somehow flung out into space" during the early years of the Earth's life. Dawkins says that it should have been presented as a strong current theory. Another lesson talks about AIDS as being the "wages of sin," so Dawkins inquires whether this might not be mixing health education with moralistic preaching.

Hawkes responds that without a law-giver, "Why is rape wrong? Why is paedophilia wrong?" and that if people believe they can get away with committing bad deeds then they will tend to do them. Dawkins responds to this claim by asking Hawkes if the only reason he doesn't do these things is that he's frightened of God and subsequently suggests that this attitude is characteristic of the warped morality that religion tends to instill in people.

Religion as a virus

Next, Dawkins discusses specifically the idea of religion seen as a virus in the sense of a meme. He begins by explaining how he considers the mind of a child to be genetically pre-programmed to believe without questioning the word of authority figures, especially parents – the evolutionary imperative being that no child would survive by adopting a

FREETHINKER: A Person who rejects authority and dogma, forming opinions about religion on the basis of reason and rational inquiry independently of tradition, authority, or established belief.
American Heritage Dictionary, Second College Edition

skeptical attitude towards everything their elders said. But this same imperative, he claims, leaves children open to “infection” by religion.

Dawkins meets the psychologist Jill Mytton, who suffered an abusive religious upbringing – she now helps to rehabilitate similarly affected children. Mytton explains how, for a child, images of hell fire are in no sense metaphorical, but instead inspire real terror. She portrays her own childhood as one “dominated by fear.” When pressed by Dawkins to describe the realities of Hell, Mytton hesitates, explaining that the images of eternal damnation which she absorbed as a child still have the power to affect her now.

Then Dawkins visits Pastor Keenan Roberts, who has been running the Hell House Outreach program for 15 years, producing theatre shows aimed at giving children of twelve or older an indelible impression that “sin destroys.” We see rehearsal scenes depicting doctors forcing an abortion on a woman despite her changing her mind, and a lesbian gay marriage ceremony presided over by Satan in which the women swear to “never believe that you are normal” and Satan cites First Corinthians 6 as God saying homosexuality equals sin. Roberts absolutely and unapologetically believes the scriptures about sin, and when Dawkins questions this basis for morality, replies that it is a faith issue.

Biblical morality

Next, Dawkins questions whether the Bible really does provide a suitable moral framework, and contends that the texts are of dubious origin and veracity, are internally contradictory and, examined closely, describe a system of morals that any civilized person should find poisonous. He describes the Old Testament as the root of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and as example readings are given of Deuteronomy 13 which instructs believers to kill any friend or family member who favors serving other gods, and Numbers 31 where Moses, angered at the mercy his victorious forces show in taking women and children captive, instructs them to kill all save virgin girls: an act Dawkins describes as genocide. Dawkins also questions another story from Judges 19 in which a lesser character, an old man, offers his maiden daughter out to an angry mob of “wicked men” to be raped and humiliated to save his male guest from being raped by the “wicked men.” In Dawkins's opinion, God must be the most unpleasant character in all fiction.

Dawkins then discusses the New Testament which, at first, he describes as being a huge improvement from the moral viewpoint. But he is repelled by what he calls St. Paul's nasty sadomasochistic doctrine that Jesus had to be hideously tortured and killed so that we might be redeemed -- the doctrine of atonement for original sin -- and asks “if God wanted to forgive our sins, why not just forgive them? Who is God trying to impress?” He says that modern science shows that the alleged perpetrators, Adam and Eve, never even existed, undermining St. Paul's doctrine.

Dawkins then interviews Michael Bray who interprets the Bible literally – he would like to see capital punishment enforced for the sin of adultery, for instance. Bray was a friend of Paul Hill, who was executed in 2003 for murdering a doctor who performed abortion and the doctor's armed escort, James Barrett. Bray defends Hill's actions and speculates that he is now “doing well” in Heaven. Later, Dawkins converses with his friend Richard Harries, the former Bishop of Oxford and a

liberal Anglican. Harries sees the scriptures as texts which should be read in the context of the time they were written, and interpreted in the light of modern insights. Dawkins asks Harries about his attitude towards miracles – does he believe in the Virgin Birth, for instance? It's not “on a par with” the resurrection, says Harries.

Secular morality

Finally, Dawkins searches for an explanation of morality based upon evolutionary biology, which he considers more hopeful than ancient texts. Together with the evolutionary psychologist Oliver Curry, he discusses the primordial morality to be found among chimpanzees. Curry explains his view that we don't need religion to explain morality and, if anything, it simply gets in the way. Instead, he claims, a more convincing explanation is to be found in the concepts of reciprocal altruism and kin selection.

After briefly addressing the rise of secular values, Dawkins goes on to discuss morality with the novelist Ian McEwan. McEwan takes as his starting point the mortality of human life, which he says should naturally lead to a morality based on empathy – one which he claims should confer upon us a clear sense of responsibility for our brief span on earth.

Dawkins finishes by arguing that atheism is not a recipe for despair but just the opposite; rather than viewing life as a trial that must be endured before reaching a mythical hereafter, an atheist sees this life as all we have, and by disclaiming a next life can take more excitement in this one. Atheism, Dawkins concludes, is life-affirming in a way that religion can never be.

[Editors' note: A DVD of *The Root of All Evil?* can be purchased at: www.skeptic.com]

“THE TIME HAS COME FOR PEOPLE OF REASON TO SAY: ENOUGH IS ENOUGH. RELIGIOUS FAITH DISCOURAGES INDEPENDENT THOUGHT, IT'S DIVISIVE, AND IT'S DANGEROUS.” RICHARD DAWKINS

BIZARRO

By Dan Piraro



SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

FRIDAY, JULY 27, 2007, 7:30 - 9:30 PM *ROOT OF ALL EVIL?*

HOW will sponsor a showing of Richard Dawkins' controversial video, *Root of All Evil?* This meeting will be free, in Room 6 of the Phinney Neighborhood Center and open to the public. See the lead story in this *SHP* for many more details on the film.

Directions to Phinney Neighborhood Center, located at 6532 Phinney Ave. N. in Seattle: From I-5, exit at 50th and travel west for 1.5 miles. At the Woodland Park Zoo, angle right onto Phinney Avenue N. and proceed about 1 mile. A large light blue building with dark blue trim will be on the right. Street parking is usually available. You may also park in the large fenced parking lot on the north side of the building.

"FOR MANY PEOPLE, PART OF GROWING UP IS KILLING OFF THE VIRUS OF FAITH WITH A GOOD STRONG DOSE OF RATIONAL THINKING. BUT IF AN INDIVIDUAL DOESN'T SUCCEED IN SHAKING IT OFF, HIS MIND IS STUCK IN A PERMANENT STATE OF INFANCY, AND THERE IS A REAL DANGER THAT HE WILL INFECT THE NEXT GENERATION." *RICHARD DAWKINS*

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 26, 7:30 – 9:30 PM

See your summer *SHP* for details about this meeting.

SECULAR SEATTLE

Secular Seattle is a social group sponsored by the Humanists of Washington to provide a venue for bringing together Secular Humanists, Atheists, and others unencumbered by religion. Our purpose is to provide an opportunity for people of like mind to meet and have fun together. Secular Seattle events are open to the public. There is no charge; participants pay only for their own restaurant orders.

Secular Seattle's Yahoo Group website is located at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SecularSeattle>. This site is open to the public. It includes a calendar of upcoming HOW events and a convenient way to sign up to receive email reminders of these events. HOW members, *SHP* subscribers, and non-members alike are welcome at all listed events. Please email the moderator at tiffany_ann_27@yahoo.com if you have any questions or would like to add an event.

Secular Seattle Second Thursday Dinners: Please join us for discussion of current events from a Humanist perspective, or just to visit with like-minded skeptics. Check out the Secular Seattle calendar at the Yahoo Group above or contact Jerry (see below) for the time and location of the next dinner.

We also have many other events (game nights, dancing, hiking, bicycling, etc.). Check our full calendar of events at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SecularSeattle>. You may also contact Jerry Schiffelbein at 425-402-9036 or email him at jerryschiffelbein@msn.com.

- The Board of Directors of the Humanists of Washington meets at least quarterly. Members may obtain dates, places, and times by leaving a message on the HOW answering machine at 527-8518. An officer will call you back.
- If you misplace this journal or want to check the calendar

of events, call 527-8518 to hear our 24-hour recording of upcoming events.

- To find out more about HOW and view the latest version of the *Secular Humanist Press*, go to our website at www.humanistsofWashington.org or email us at humanists@comcast.net.
- NOTICE: The deadline date for submissions to the Summer 2007 *SHP* is June 1st.

NORTHWEST FREETHOUGHT COALITION

The Northwest Freethought Coalition (NWFC) is an informal group representing various Freethought, Atheist, Agnostic, Humanist, Naturalist and other Secular groups in the Pacific Northwest. The coalition is planning a series of special events, each of which will be sponsored by one or more NWFC member organizations. The Winter Solstice Potluck, held on December 16, 2006 and co-sponsored by the UU Humanists and HOW, was one of those events. Information on NWFC events scheduled for the first half of 2007 follows.

Happy Birthday Dr. Freud, May 8

The Secular Jewish Circle will host a film about Freud in May as a special movie event on their calendar. The target date is May 8, 2007. Time and location to be announced.

Celebrating Freedom, July 1

For the third year, the Northwest Freethought Coalition will commemorate our July 4 freedoms by hosting a picnic at Cottage Lake Park. It will be held on Sunday, July 1.

UNIVERSITY UNITARIAN HUMANISTS

The UU Humanists meet at the University Unitarian Church (6556 35th Avenue N.E. in Seattle) from 7:15 - 9PM on the fourth Thursday of each month. The usual meeting format is a 40-minute presentation by a speaker (or speakers) followed by 30-35 minutes of discussion, or to have a topic introduced briefly by a discussion leader, who then moderates an open and free-wheeling discussion for about an hour. Either format may be followed by further informal discussion over coffee or tea until 9PM for those who wish to stay. To be added to the newsletter list, call Jeanette Merki at (425) 821-4605.

Meetings are held in the Knatvold Room (first room on the left, downstairs as you enter from the parking lot). All are welcome.

A Journey Into & Out of Mormonism April 26, 2007

At age 19, Bill Campbell, one of our new board members, joined the Mormon Church. For 24 years he was a devoted and committed member. He held leadership positions and contributed significant sums, but eventually decided he didn't believe. He became a secular humanist in 2004. Come and find out why otherwise intelligent people can sometimes be lured into fundamentalist sects.

End of Life Issues May 24, 2007

We'll have a speaker from Compassion & Choices, now the largest organization in the US advocating for patients rights

at the end of life. Their vision: a society where everyone receives state-of-the-art care at the end of life, and a full range of choices for dying with comfort, dignity and control. We'll hear where we are nationally and locally in the struggle since Oregon passed their Death With Dignity Act in 1994.

Let's Get Better Acquainted June 28, 2007

It seems that most of us are in a hurry at the end of our meetings, and we don't get to know each other very well. We'll come together with the object of socializing and getting to know each other better. We may have topics to discuss at each table. Please bring food to share and table service. Non-alcoholic beverages will be provided.

FREETHINKERS UNITED NETWORK

Join us for First Friday discussion group and dinner at the Maple Leaf Chinese Restaurant in Bellevue at 7:30pm.

Join us for Dim Sum Sundays, 11am, every third month on the 3rd Sunday. We are also seeking actors and improv characters for our not-yet-aired cable show, "The Naked Atheist." See calendar at yahoo groups for updates on these and for other events. By joining the yahoo group, you will receive automatic e-mail reminders of events. For more information on FUN, go to www.freethinkersunitednetwork.com or contact Wendy Britton at wendita99@hotmail.com or 425-269-9108

HUMANISTS OF NORTH PUGET SOUND

The Humanists of North Puget Sound (HNPS) holds general membership meetings on every Third Sunday. They convene from 11am to 1pm at the Farmhouse Inn, 13724 LaConner Whitney Road in Mount Vernon. Come out and enjoy a good meal and social fellowship with like minded gents and ladies. HNPS posts their upcoming events on their web page at www.HumanistsNPS.com

ETHICAL CULTURE SOCIETY OF PUGET SOUND

The Ethical Culture Society of Puget Sound (ECS) meets to discuss and celebrate ethical and humanist living. ECS meetings are held on the First and Third Sunday each month only (not every Sunday) at the Tallmadge Hamilton House in the University District, located at 5225 15th Avenue. NE, Seattle 98105. Doors open at 10:00am and meeting begins at 10:30am. Meetings end approximately at noon. Coffee and snacks are served. Donations accepted.

NOTE: ECS does not hold meetings during the summer. We will resume meetings on September 2, 2007. Contact ECS at info@EthicalCultureSociety.org.

EASTSIDE ATHEISTS/AGNOSTICS MEETUP GROUP

Eastside Atheists/Agnostics started because of the long commute to the Seattle meetups. We enjoy a social meeting and share contact information about many local groups. Meetings are held the third Wednesday of each month at 7 PM.

For more information, see <http://atheists.meetup.com/500>. Meetings have been held in Kirkland, Bellevue, Redmond, Woodinville and Issaquah and we will continue to rotate, looking for opportunities to meet new individuals on the Eastside. Email us at atheists-500-announce@meetup.com.

JOIN THE DARWIN PARTY by Graham

[Editors' note: The following is the content of a flyer created by Graham for leaving on the windshields of automobiles displaying the Darwin Fish. We have his permission to print it here and extend his invitation to like-minded readers, especially those who may be feeling a bit isolated in the Olympia area and find it difficult to make it to HOW activities and meetings.]

THE DARWIN PARTY has lunch at 11:30am every Friday at Anthony's Home Port in Olympia. In honor of the foot-fish displayed on your car (or some other praiseworthy quality of mind or character), you are invited. It is no host, no dues, no fees. The world's problems are solved for the day. Jokes may be exchanged. (When an actual joke is not available, a quotation from Congress or the clergy may be substituted.)

Leave a message at 360-866-1286 by Thursday evening of your intention to try to drop in so we can save you a space. Should your work or other commitments make it difficult for you to break bread with like-minded people, do call, drop a card, or email to say hello anyway. Address: Real World Service, Suite 502, 3403 Steamboat Island Road, Olympia, WA 98502. Email: therealworld@comcast.net.

SOCIETY FOR SENSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

Do you have a skeptical opinion about paranormal claims or pseudo-science and can't find anyone with whom you can intelligently discuss it? This is your chance! Society for Sensible Explanations offers an opportunity to connect with others who share a skeptical point of view on various topics. Although the group does not meet on a regular basis, Tim Kammer, President of SSE, keeps a mailing list for notifying skeptics about topics and events of interest. For more information, go to www.seattleskeptics.org. To subscribe, contact Tim at timk@cablespeed.com.

HUMANIST MEDITATION

Are you interested in being more mindful of yourself and your environment? Come practice meditation grounded in human nature. We discuss techniques, sit for half an hour, and listen to a reading. We are meeting Wednesdays from 7:30-8:30pm in the theatre on the 4th floor of the Good Shepherd Center in Wallingford located at 4649 Sunnyside Avenue North. Beginners welcome.

For more information, contact Michael Waterston by phone at (206)779-1128 or email him at michaelwaterston@gmail.com.

SCIENCE ON TAP

Science on Tap is a place where anyone can come to explore the latest ideas in science and technology in a relaxed atmosphere. A forum for discussing science issues with local scientists, Science on Tap is based on Cafe Scientifique. We are

LIBERAL: One who has, expresses, or follows views or policies that favor civil liberties, democratic reforms, social progress, tolerance, generosity, and the freedom of individuals to act or express themselves in a manner of their own choosing.

American Heritage Dictionary, Second College Edition

committed to promoting public engagement with science and to making science accessible.

What to expect: meetings usually last about one to two hours. The speaker gives a short talk about their area of interest, followed by a break to fill up on coffee and a time for small group discussions. Afterwards there will be a question and answer session and general discussion of the topic with the speaker and the audience at large.

Monthly meetings take place at the Ravenna Third Place Bookstore in Seattle at the corner of 20th Ave NE and NE 65th Street. Free parking is available.

AMERICAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION 66TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE IN PORTLAND

The American Humanist Association will hold its annual conference in Portland, Oregon this year, June 7 – 10. The gathering will be at the Red Lion Hotel on the River. More details will appear on the AHA website at www.americanhumanist.org/conference. Meanwhile, if you have any questions, you are encouraged to call the AHA at their toll-free number: 800-837-3792.

HUMANISTS IN PRINT: SHARING YOUR PUBLISHED LETTERS

[Editors' note: We solicit copies of the printed letters of HOW members, subscribers, and friends for inclusion in this section. Space preference will be given to letters by members.]

Seattle P-I, 3/4/07

Beliefs are one thing, actions quite another

The owners of the Sonics are entitled to their beliefs, whatever they may be. However, their actions are another matter. We have now learned that two of the owners have given a huge amount of money to a group dedicated to defeating gay rights. If we build them a new arena, as they have requested, we will be helping them make a profit. We have every reason to believe that two of the owners will use at least some of their profits to fund anti-gay groups.

Let the anti-gay people in this state pay for the new arena. For those of us who believe in equal rights for all, the answer to the owners' request for taxpayer money should be, "Not a cent."

David A. Summers
Seattle

King County Journal, 1/2/07

SALVATION ARMY A charity that discriminates

The Journal ran an article Dec. 12 that encouraged readers to volunteer for or donate to the Salvation Army. John Carlson's Dec. 10 column made the same suggestion. This may come as a shock to those who think the Salvation Army is beyond reproach and as American as apple pie, but that charity discriminates against gays and non-Christians and it does so with your money.

In 2001, The Washington Post discovered that the Salvation Army and George Bush had a backroom deal: If the Army backed Bush's faith-based initiative, Bush would push for regulations that would allow the Salvation Army to discriminate when filling taxpayer-funded jobs. Indeed, in 2005, the Salvation Army won a court case that allowed it to fire non-Christian employees, even though those positions were funded by the public (including non-Christian taxpayers).

I hope the government eventually stops taxpayer-funded discrimination. Until then, I encourage readers to donate to groups who don't practice bigotry, such as Northwest Harvest.

Matthew J. Barry
Issaquah

Seattle P-I, 2/20/07

Strong diplomatic skills needed in administration

President Bush recently said, "The Iranian people are good, honest, decent people and they've got a government that is belligerent, loud, noisy, threatening – a government which is in defiance of the rest of the world. . . ." Good grief . . . it's been obvious to everyone except George and his most stubborn supporters that a majority of the world views the USA exactly the same way.

Most Americans have come to realize (some slower than others) that we desperately need representatives with strong diplomatic skills, not greedy idiots with itchy trigger fingers.

James Corbett
Seattle

Issaquah Press, 2/21/07

Pledge of allegiance

This is one affirmation that is offensive, irrelevant and unnecessary

I agree with Jon Savelle that the Issaquah City Council should remove the pledge of allegiance from its agenda. When the government starts meetings by declaring that we're all "under God," it makes nonreligious citizens feel like outsiders.

In 2002, the council passed a resolution "against intolerance of another's ethnicity, lifestyle, race, culture, nationality or religious beliefs." The resolution stated that the city "prides itself in doing its best to treat all individuals with dignity and respect." However, it's disrespectful to assume that everyone is religious and especially insulting to ask nonreligious residents to stand and proclaim that they're "under God."

The council cannot claim ignorance. Everyone knows about the "notorious" pledge decision by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in favor of atheist Michael Newdow. The Supreme Court overturned that decision on a technicality, but everyone learned that millions of atheists find Congress's 1954 addition of "under God" offensive. That the council insensitively continues to pressure atheist residents to recite the pledge, knowing full well that it's insulting to them, is inexcusable.

A common response is that the majority of residents believe in a god, therefore atheists should just be quiet and respectful while the majority chants the pledge. By that reasoning, the council could start its meetings by celebrating the city's white and heterosexual heritage, and blacks and homosexuals should listen quietly.

After all, the majority of Issaquah residents are white and straight, right? But that would never happen because it would be blatantly offensive. Bingo!

In addition to being offensive, the pledge is irrelevant to the council's responsibilities. Government officials should not take positions on religious questions (such as whether this nation is under zero, one or more gods) during government meetings on the public's dime. It's literally none of the council's business.

Finally, as Savelle noted, it's unnecessary. The council can simply call the meeting to order and get to work. Many city councils, including Seattle, do not start their meetings with the pledge.

In summary, the pledge is offensive, irrelevant and unnecessary. When something is offensive, irrelevant and unnecessary, you should stop doing it.

Matthew J. Barry
Issaquah

UNPUBLISHED LETTERS

[Editors' note: We solicit copies of your unpublished letters to newspapers and other media on topics of interest to our readers. Space preference will be given to letters written by HOW members.]

"Islamic Terrorist" Stereotyping

[Jess Grant sent the following letter to the Seattle P-I on August 14, 2006]

Wake me up when the British authorities actually convict their latest batch of alleged terrorists. While the corporate press is willing to repeat verbatim every accusation that security agencies can muster, the United States ostensibly remains a bastion of the principle, "innocent until proven guilty." This is a key foundation of the Rule of Law, and the media, no less than the legal system, has an obligation to observe the principle.

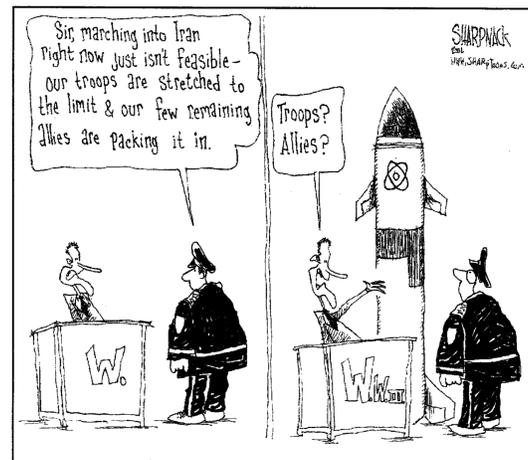
Instead your paper sees fit to perpetuate the stereotype of the "Islamic Terrorist," apparently mindless of the harmful effect this has on ordinary Muslims living here in the U.S. While the "Islamic terrorist threat" remains an effective pretext for our various invasions and occupations in the Middle East -- not to mention the United State's outrageous detentions-without-trial at Guantanamo Bay -- the actual number of terror convictions shows that the real "threat" remains somewhat chimerical.

In the early 20th century, Hearst papers were famous for their inflammatory "yellow" journalism, tarring alleged enemies of the State, such as immigrants and anarchists, with a broad brush. It would seem that old habits die hard.

Participatory Citizenship

[Jess Grant sent the following letter to the Seattle Times on September 02, 2006]

How inspirational to see the Mexican people rising in protest against the electoral fraud committed by their ruling parties. If only U.S. voters would show such interest in the electoral thievery perpetrated by our own officials in Florida (2000) and Ohio (2004) -- not to mention the spectre of easily-tampered-with computer voting machines. Such participatory citizenship is the only real safeguard against the rising tide of home-grown fascism currently seizing our body politic. We have much to learn from our neighbors to the South. Viva Mexico!



Whence Such Hubris?

[Jess Grant sent the following letter to the Seattle Times on January 07, 2007]

Sunday's story about the development of a new generation of nukes ("U.S. Picks Hybrid for New Warhead") exposes the hypocrisy of President Bush's rhetoric concerning the Iranian and North Korean weapons programs. How can we expect other countries to abandon their weapons programs when our own country is hell-bent on developing a new generation of even

deadlier bombs?

The U.S. currently wields about 10,000 nuclear warheads in its arsenal, more than any other nation on earth. Yet the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty requires countries to initiate disarmament "at an early date," a goal that this new weapons program clearly violates. Who gave the U.S. the right to a monopoly on WMDs? Whence such hubris?

As a Baby Boomer born in the shadow of the mushroom cloud, I know first-hand the existential despair that comes from living in a world poised on the brink of annihilation. With planetary survival a question mark at best, wouldn't we be better off using the billions earmarked for these new weapons systems to solve global warming instead?

Medved: Hypocrite Extraordinaire

[The following letter was sent to the King County Journal by Matt Barry on January 18, 2007.]

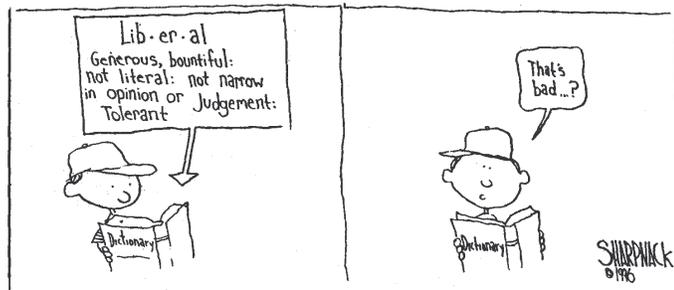
Michael Medved had the audacity to accuse liberals of intolerance for criticizing Dennis Prager, who claimed that a Muslim congressman should not be allowed to take his oath of office on the Koran. Medved claimed that liberals "went beyond disagreement to smear Dennis and savage his reputation" and that the criticisms "make a mockery of liberal claims of tolerance and open-mindedness." Conservatives, on the contrary, "show the way to disagree without becoming disagreeable," according to Medved.

What a hypocrite. On his radio show back in December, Medved called Prager "un-American." Sounds like a smear to me.

On his Internet blog, Medved called Prager's efforts "utterly unjustified and illogical," illustrative of "theocratic tendencies," "a silly distraction," and "a terrible, horrendous strategy" that would lend "credence to liberal charges that we're mean and cold-hearted and theocratic." Sounds pretty disagreeable to me.

Medved also wrote that "many thoughtful conservatives indignantly part company" with Prager. Get it? When indignantly disagreeing, conservatives like himself are "thoughtful," but liberals are intolerant and close-minded.

I'll miss the Journal but not Medved's irrational and hypocritical columns.



Execution Costs Much More

[Billy Kreuter sent the following letter to the Seattle P-I on February 5, 2007]

Robert Jamieson is completely right about the death penalty. I'll add a few more points which I suspect many

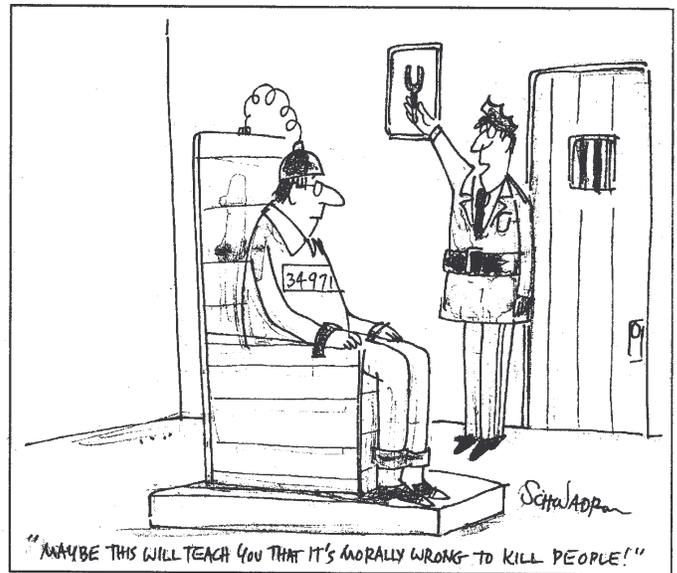
readers might not be aware of.

Pursuing death sentences costs more by far than life sentences. This has been confirmed for decades in every state where it's been examined. In Washington a few years ago our former supreme court chief justice found that the cost of the death penalty was hugely more expensive than life-without-parole (a sentence from which no one has ever been released), not counting appeals. Those objecting to the state's paying the living expenses of a murderer should be aware that execution will cost much more.

Jamieson points out that New Jersey is backing away from the death penalty. In addition, twelve states have not had capital punishment for decades -- Michigan, Wisconsin and Maine since the nineteenth century. They are no worse off nor more poorly protected. No credible researcher thinks that the death penalty is a deterrent.

Almost no other democracy in the world has the death penalty any more. It's on the books but little used in India and Japan; it's been abolished in Canada and throughout Europe for decades. In our use of the death penalty, America is most similar to undemocratic countries such as China and Saudi Arabia.

Jamieson is like many other survivors and friends of murder victims who do not wish for the death penalty.



Sin Taxes

[Editors' note: Percy Hilo sent this letter to the Seattle Times on February 16, 2007.]

As a non-smoker, I'm rarely sympathetic with the nicotine culture. If they're willing to smoke in designated areas, pay exorbitant prices, and run the risk of incurring significant health issues, that's their right as an American – and if they suffer for it, that's their problem. But as an American citizen who believes in freedom of choice, I find our state's treatment of cigarette importer Scott Adams to be a violation of the First Amendment and our time-honored free market system, as well as overly punitive in that the penalty threatens his survival.

How can a law be constitutional when it requires that all purchases and payments for an endeavor practiced in one's

home state be made in that state and no other? We are allowed to use the internet or mail order to purchase clothing, stereo equipment, and other commodities from almost any business that will offer the best deal, so why not cigarettes? And the "sin tax" argument should also hold no sway in a democracy because it's well known at one person's non-violent "sin" is another's pleasure. It doesn't take a smoker to see the injustice of it all.

Of course, the real issue is tax evasion, which is a big deal -- except that it didn't occur. When Adams bought cigarettes in Washington, he paid the tax. But, like anyone on a working person's income who looks for the most economically viable place to purchase groceries, CDs, or cigarettes, he found and accepted a better deal from a legal business. To prosecute this by garnishing 25% of his wages is an overly greedy/aggressive/oppressive action that deserves to be challenged and reversed. After all, if government can victimize one unpopular group today, as times, styles, and viewpoints change, they might come after another group tomorrow using the same process.

LETTERS to HOW

EDITORIAL POLICY: Alternative rational views or rebuttals from members and friends to articles, letters, or editorial comments presented herein should be no more than two single-spaced 8.5x11 sheets, must be signed, and must include a contact phone number. It is always our intention to edit for conciseness and clarity, not to alter your viewpoint in any way. Letters may also be edited to conform to space requirements. As this is a membership publication, space preference will be given to letters from members.

Militant Atheists: Let the Mystery Abide

As usual, I spent several enjoyable hours perusing the latest issue of *The Secular Human Press*. Like any good journal, it inspired a wide range of reactions: teary-eyed inspiration (your biography of Giovanni Costigan), heart-felt agreement (Michael Moore's "Cut and Run"), and impatient annoyance (Rob Moitoza's naive cover piece, "Now What?"), to name but a few.

I agree with most of what I read in the *SHP*, so it will make a shorter letter if I summarize my "issues" with what I encountered in this issue. One is the conflation of the terms "religion" and "theism." I've been an agnostic my whole life, and/but I'm also loosely aligned with Unitarian Universalism, a so-called "liberal religion."

When militant atheists write off all religions as narrow-minded, they ignore the non-dogmatic religions -- admittedly few and far between -- thus alienating potential allies like myself. Some semantic rigor would go a long way here. At the same time, other writers (not necessarily the same ones) seem happy to accept equally dangerous dogmas like Patriotism.

It seems to me that hardcore atheists exhibit the same intellectual hubris as the god-worshippers. While I am atheistic in temperament, at the end of the day I have to admit that I can no more DISPROVE the existence of god than a Christian (or Muslim or Jew) can PROVE His existence. Faith in the non-existence of god is simply the flip-side of theism, since neither position is supported with inarguable fact or logic. Let the mystery abide, folks!

Jess Grant, Performing Songwriter

FROM THE CITY BY THE BAY "BattleCry" Shakes Up the Peace by Lenny Maughan

For the second year in a row, an extreme Christian Right group known as "BattleCry" (www.battlecry.com) has descended on San Francisco to rally support of biblical values being represented in governmental legislation. And for the second year in a row, Bay Area citizens of all stripes were present at a "counter-rally."

Sponsored by the likes of Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, BattleCry leaders claim they are here to denounce pop culture and to encourage "moral values." They have staged a movement which attracts and then indoctrinates young people into a frighteningly pro-war, anti-gay, and anti-woman literalist biblical program. They lease out the ballpark and bus in thousands for two days of concerts, speeches, and lots of praying.

A special BattleCry rally is reserved for City Hall, location of the 2004 gay marriages before the state blocked the practice. This ground is somehow symbolic for them to rally louder and pray harder.

The BattleCry visitors, overwhelmingly teenage-early-twenty-somethings, may feel they are making an impact (beyond themselves), but San Francisco and the whole Bay Area are not biting. Policies are not changing, and prayers are, as always, unheard. Perhaps some of them have had a seed of tolerance and reason planted in them from their San Francisco "vacation?" Let's hope so!



THE TIME IS NOW by Rob Moitoza

The truth is finally coming out about this egregious band of crooks and thieves that currently inhabit the White House, from the Scooter Libby conviction to the cover up of the firings of federal judges. Many of us liberals predicted a lot of this at least five years ago! The wheels of justice turn slowly, indeed. Much damage has been done. But somehow the truth has a way of eventually coming out.

Anyone who doesn't now see what's been going on in our

government has to have his or her head completely buried in the sand. Many of the men and women currently running this administration are the same crooks and thieves who we thought we had gotten rid of during the Nixon era. "They're back!!" And they care about only two things -- wealth and power -- at the expense of the American people and the world.

They have also deceived a lot of well meaning people. One old friend of mine truly believed that George Bush was "a good and honorable man." I find it very sad that she was taken advantage of in such a devious way. It has pretty much ruined my friendship with her and others on the right who I know have good hearts. They have been truly deceived. It is unconscionable that our so-called "leaders" would bankrupt our country, sacrifice the lives of our men and women in uniform, and put all of our lives in jeopardy just to hang onto their own wealth and power. But such is the case. It is now about as clear as it can possibly get.

Those of you who have read my columns know that I have gone back and forth regarding the impeachment issue. The excuse a lot of Democratic legislators have been making for not beginning impeachment proceedings is that it would be a "distraction" from their efforts to end the war or take care of more important issues. For a while I might have believed that. But I have now concluded that there are no more important issues. The war will not end as long as Bush and Cheney are in office, and it is pointless to try to pass bills that Republican congressmen will sabotage or President Bush will veto. So the time has come to get on with it and bring up a bill to impeach. At the very least it will force all these guys to testify under oath and the truth will be hard for them to cover up.

It is frustrating that Congress is moving so slowly. But one of the things that I have found even more frustrating is the lack of outrage and involvement by the public. Maybe the average citizen still doesn't know how egregious all of this is, or maybe people are too busy with their personal lives to make their voices heard, but the truth is . . . it's your country! If you don't care . . . who will?

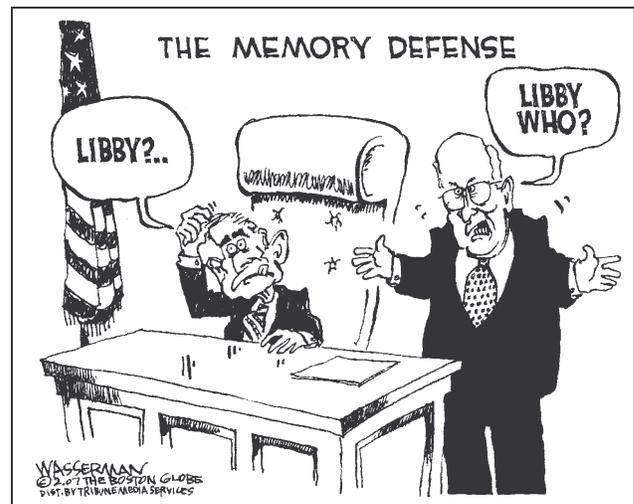
I recently went to Olympia to support state senator Oemig's bill to impeach. There were only about 200 of us who bothered to show up. Very disappointing! I would urge all of you who are still sitting on your couches watching the tube to get up and get involved. I am tired of seeing the same faces at these events and, frankly, it's time for you to get off your butts! If not now, when?

Right now there are three U.S. carrier groups massing off the coast of Iran. Those of you familiar with the Gulf of Tonkin incident know that all it would take is one mistake or one illegal set-up by our government or theirs to set off a war with Iran. That would be tragic and could even open the door to World War III. Don't let it happen! Get involved!

I will admit, it's not easy to find out about anti-war events these days. The main stream media is not letting people know about them. Even media supposedly on our side are dropping the ball. The latest entry into the Washington market, progressive talk station AM 1090, doesn't even have the upcoming Iraq war demonstration at Westlake Center on their on-air calendar, much less someone covering the event. Yet they want us to support them. The reason I was given for their failure to cover local events was that they didn't have the

money to do that. I don't buy it. There are probably hundreds, if not thousands, of aspiring radio journalists out here just dying for a chance to be on the air -- for free! Put out the call! It works for "American Idol," why not for liberal talk show hosts and aspiring reporters? And as for needing a mobile sound truck or expensive broadcasting gear, hey, ever hear of a cell phone, guys? This is the digital age! Further, they seem to have the money to hire a host for a "Gardening in the Northwest" show, but they can't afford to send a reporter to cover an important anti-war event? Sorry. It doesn't fly.

Mainly, the time for excuses is over. If you care about your country, folks, get involved. Even if it's just making a call to your congressman, every little bit helps. But please, don't just sit there and watch your country go down the tubes. You can make a difference.



PRO-CHOICE UPDATES
Aradia Women's Health Center:
The Doors Close, But the Power Remains
 by Marcy Bloom

The painful closing of Aradia Women's Health Center on January 31st is a deep loss for women, reproductive rights, and reproductive health. But I know that we will all continue to see this critically important work and Aradia's powerful influence continue on many levels: locally, nationally, and internationally.

The closing of AWHC is a dramatic sign of our times. The federal government has not funded abortion care since 1978. Our state Medicaid fiscal reimbursements have been far too low. Costs of medical supplies, medical liability (malpractice) insurance, security, and staff health insurance have skyrocketed. Abortion care is on the decline in the US, except in the cases of poor and low-income women. A true societal commitment to quality, funded health care for poor and marginalized women, including ALL reproductive health services, still eludes us. This is truly yet another sign -- a sign of the failure of health care in the US for the underserved. Add to that difficult mix the politics of reproductive health and abortion rights, and the long-term sustainability of running this dynamic and special women's health clinic with limited resources became very difficult to envision.

There were many good years where AWHC grew,

expanded, moved into a new space (quadrupling our physical size), started exciting new programs to educate young people about their bodies, hired bilingual staff to more effectively serve our clients, gave staff raises and bonuses, engaged even more generous donors, built a strong board, and truly thrived. However, close as we were in some years, there was never quite enough “thick” and there was frequently too much “thin.” An organization can only cut staff and programs so far until the vision, mission, and uniqueness become too compromised. I have come to understand that organizations have natural and inevitable life spans. This, sadly, was Aradia Women's Health Center's time.

As our mission was strengthened by seeing increasing numbers of low-income women over the last few years, our finances were increasingly weakened. Truly ironic. We were fulfilling our mission and vision by helping the women most in need, but the fiscal subsidies could not quite fill the gap.

It is indeed the end of an era in many profound ways, but I am confident that the amazing feminist influence that made our organization so unique for 34 years will live on in the lives of the women who were transformed by our innovative, woman-focused model of safe and respectful health care for women. Staff, volunteers, and board members have also been tremendously affected by this organization. They have all gone on to numerous endeavors as doctors, nurses, nutritionists, and social workers. Many are doing work in diverse parts of the US, as well as internationally (that includes me). Our dedicated doctors and other providers, too, have all been “branded” with the feminist model, which they have successfully brought to other areas of health care and medical practice. They trust women as moral and ethical decision-makers, they listen carefully, and they do not judge.

Destigmatizing abortion and true honor and respect for ALL of women's choices in our society and around the world has yet to be accomplished. Given certain circumstances in women's lives, abortion is frequently the most morally responsible and honorable decision a woman can make. This is yet another part of the special feminist legacy of Aradia Women's Health Center that will continue to transform women's health and women's lives -- advocating for women's truths and women's choices -- and it will always be powerful.

We were women's health and abortion rights trail-blazers and pioneers in every way. We changed the world and it was exhilarating. Our advocacy was known throughout the country, and in other countries as well. I gave a presentation in Mexico City in 2005 about Aradia's respectful feminist model. Now, a women's clinic based on that model is in progress there. I survived clinic blockades, death threats, anti-choice legislators in Olympia calling me “a baby-killer,” and ballot initiatives here in our state that showed total disdain for women and would turn the clock back on women's lives and health. Named for the Greek goddess of healing arts, “health care for women by women” was the Aradia byline, passion, and foundation. Women still want and crave that type of medical treatment.



Whether they call it “feminist” health care or use other words or concepts, I have no doubt that every single woman desires -- and deserves -- time, patience, compassion, non-biased information and accurate education, support, respect, and non-judgment when she is receiving contraceptive services, STI testing, or abortion care. The feminist power that created Aradia Women's Health Center changed the lives of close to 60,000 women who came through its doors. Now, that power and commitment called “Aradia” will spread its wings even higher and take on new and even more dynamic forms.

I was honored to be the Executive Director of Aradia Women's Health Center for more than 18 years. I know that this incredible organization and this honorable work of quality reproductive health care and advocating for reproductive justice and women's lives has changed my life forever.

More than 68,000 women die each year in the developing world from the ravages of illegal abortion. There is so much important work for women's lives still to be done. Aradia has shown me the way, and she has taught me well.

TELL ME WHERE YOUR FREEDOM LIES by G. Richard Bozarth

The Founders gave the United States a unique mission, which is stated clearly in the preamble to the U.S. Constitution. Our nation's mission is “to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.” Only by successfully completing this mission would the U.S. become a land of the free where the rights of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” are actually unalienable and equally shared by all people. To complete that mission, we must have uncompromising, relentless determination to transform the U.S. into a land of the free, which would make it a paradise where all citizens have first-class citizenship as though all humans are born equal. Anything less is manqué because anything less is not freedom.

Between where the U.S. was in 1788, when the Constitution was ratified, to where the U.S. will be if it successfully completes its mission was and still is a long journey. And the end of that journey isn't exactly what the Founders intended it to be. Well, they weren't perfect. Ironically, that is one reason why they achieved more than they had intended when writing the U.S. Constitution, which is the vehicle given to us for this journey. The Founders did not believe the Constitution was perfect, so they included a way to make necessary repairs, even though they surely knew future mechanics might do bad work. They created this most wonderful opportunity: if U.S. citizens never lost their commitment to successfully completing their nation's mission, the Constitution would get them to where the Founders promised to take the first U.S. citizens if they won the war. The glory of the Constitution is its intended capability to correct the inevitable mistakes made in 1788. That is why this very old document can take us all the way to a land of the free.

Today all Freethinkers know this: being committed to our nation's mission means being uncompromisingly committed to civil liberties because civil liberties are the constituents of freedom. The law known as the First Amendment contains the most important civil liberties. So what if the intention of the majority of Founders was less than the strict literal interpretation of the best law humans have made since the day they started making laws? U.S. history has taught us -- often brutally -- this: only a strict literal interpretation of the First Amendment will enable us to accomplish our nation's mission.

The language used by the Founders when they turned these most important civil liberties into laws is both explicit and simple to understand: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." Shall make no law! Could there be any easier language to strictly interpret? Given that uncompromising interpretation, the barrier erected by the First Amendment becomes a high and wide wall protecting freedom to communicate, freedom to engage in political activism, and separation of government and religionism. A land cannot be free without this high and wide wall securing for "ourselves and our Posterity" these most important civil liberties.

To any person who declares or suggests that the law known as the First Amendment is a bad law, I say this: prove it! Show the evidence that proves censorship, forbidding political activism, and entangling government with religionism will "establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility . . . promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty." The past and the present are loaded with governments that aggressively did and do everything that the law known as the First Amendment forbids. Show me just one example of a nation without these most important civil liberties that was or is even close to establishing justice, ensuring domestic tranquility, promoting the general welfare, and securing liberty for its entire people. Just one. It can't be done!

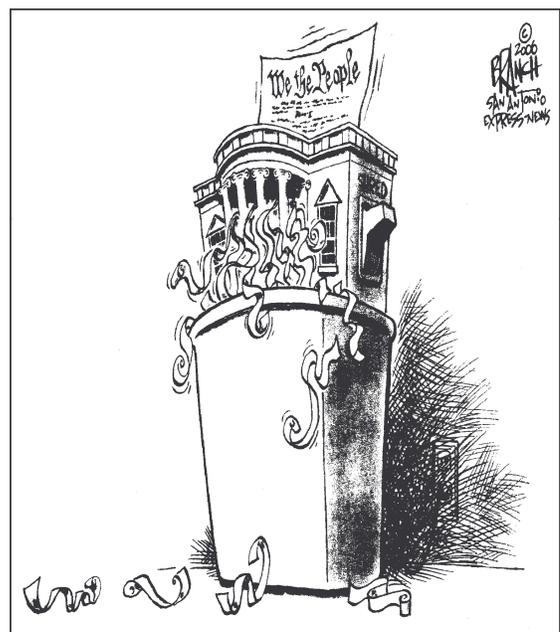
The enemies of civil liberties cannot prove the law known as the First Amendment is bad; therefore they have to use devious tactics in their war against civil liberties. The primary devious tactic is called "strict constructionism;" that is, conservatives are for the laws known as the Bill of Rights, but

want them limited by the Founders' intentions. They present these intentions as though they are so perfect that all our laws must express our total submission to them. Failure to do so will, they claim, doom the U.S. to cultural catastrophe.

They are so wrong. They want the U.S. Constitution to become a prison instead of a vehicle that can take the U.S. all the way to the glorious destination all Freethinkers desire to see during their lifespans. Strict constructionism is *manqué* -- always was, always is, and always will be!

The Founders are just authorities. Like any kind of authority, they're right only when they're right, and they're wrong when they're wrong. Let us never forget how many wrong intentions they turned into laws in the U.S. constitution, which is why it has had to be amended several times. They were often wrong in their interpretation of it (when the federal government was organized, it was loaded with Founders who thought the First Amendment allowed the censorship that became legal when the Sedition Act of 1798 was passed by Congress and signed by the President, and very few Founders thought the federal barrier of separation should be as high and as wide as Freethinkers now know it must be). Any of their intentions that are wrong, either obviously wrong in 1788 or proven wrong during the centuries since 1788, deserve only rejection. Only those intentions that were right then and are still right now deserve to remain culturally viable. Only those intentions that will get us to the land of the free the Founders promised to create in the Declaration of Independence are right.

The process of "strictly construing" the Founders' intent is *manqué* because its sole purpose is to justify conservative fascism. Our journey to the paradise of eunomy has been long and will continue to be long because there always has been and still is resistance in U.S. culture to interpreting "no law" to mean precisely and clearly no law. Too many people believed yesterday and believe today the freedom that the strict, literal interpretation of "no law" creates is dangerous, and a lot of Founders provided a mother lode of quotes that prove they shared that belief. That is why conservatives have embraced the Founders-intent tactic to sell strict constructionism as the true American Way to interpret the Constitution.



One change Freethinkers need to make to overcome this resistance is giving up using our version of the Founders-intent tactic when fighting the Good Fight to preserve, protect, and defend civil liberties. None of the civil liberties are good because one or more Founders said they were good. They are not good because the majority of the Founders agreed to make them laws restricting the behavior of the government they were creating. Civil liberties are good because they are the constituents of freedom. This is what too many people in the U.S. fail to understand.

Our tactic should be loudly and repeatedly emphasizing that freedom is impossible without civil liberties. We should stop telling people that civil liberties are important because Jefferson wrote this and Madison wrote that, or because they are laws in the Constitution. We must start educating people to understand this: preserving, protecting, and defending civil liberties is preserving, protecting, and defending freedom. We must make people understand that anything that weakens, limits, abridges, circumvents, or eliminates civil liberties is an assault on freedom. If we want the U.S. to become a land of the free where justice is established, domestic tranquility is ensured, the general welfare is promoted, and liberty is secured for all the people in it, we must have civil liberties to the max. This has to be our tactic. If we want to win the Good Fight, there's no other way to go. There it is, and there it always shall be.



INTELLIGENT? DESIGN?

By Philip Appleman

(To the tune of "Battle Hymn of the Republic")

Your eyes have seen a blurry scene

That's only known to man:

Your optic nerves are backward and

Have been since time began.

That's what the preachers tell you is

God's very special plan:

Intelligent Design!

Glory, Glory, Hallelujah!

The Great Designer knows what's due ya,

Nothing else can stick it to ya

Like *Intelligent Design!*

You wish a guy's urethra did

The jobs that were proposed:

Both lover's clout and waterspout

Is what you had supposed.

Alas, the Great Designer squeezed

A prostate 'round your hose:

Intelligent Design!

Glory, Glory, Hallelujah!

Nowhere does the Bible clue ya

That your glands would soon subdue ya:

Intelligent Design!

Your tummy's sick, your heart goes tick,

Your hips are giving in.

Childbirth is a horror 'cause

Your pelvis is too thin.

When your appendix ruptures, the

Designer only grins:

Intelligent Design!

Glory Glory, Hallelujah!

Making-do will have to do ya.

Flimflammers cooked this up to screw ya:

Intelligent Design!

[With thanks to Freethought Today, December 2006]



RIGHT-TO-DIE UPDATES

Reflections on Developments since our 1991 Death

With Dignity Initiative Campaign

by Midge Levy, Co-President

Compassion & Choices of Washington State

In 1991 during the campaign to pass a death with dignity law in Washington State, we had a core group of passionate supporters for our issue promoting end of life options inclusive of physician assisted death for qualified adults. Many health care providers who supported the principle were nevertheless

opposed to the passage of a new law for a variety of reasons. They were fearful of restrictive regulations, concerned about abuse, questioned the need, or felt threatened by the challenge to the image of the healing physician. However, developments over the past 16 years have resulted in changed attitudes and wider support for having this option available.

First and foremost, we have the Oregon model, where the law has worked in exemplary fashion since 1997. There have been no abuses. Almost all those who used the law were receiving hospice care. Therefore, concern about people wishing to die because of inadequate care has not been justified. Many of those who requested medication did not use it but were relieved at having the means to avoid a prolonged dying situation.

With continued advances in technology, increasing numbers of people have witnessed family members undergoing intrusive procedures which appeared to prolong life without adding to its quality. As a result of such experiences, they have sought other options and recognized the need for choice at the end of life.

The terminology has also changed. Katherine Tucker, law professor at the UW School of Law, has pointed out that "Physician assisted suicide" or just "assisted suicide" is an inaccurate term for the choice made by a mentally competent terminally ill patient to self-administer medication for the purpose of hastening death.

The Oregon Department of Human Services adopted a policy in October 2006 which states that it will no longer use the above terms when referring to the Death with Dignity Act. The American Public Health association also adopted a policy to this effect, recognizing that "the choice of a mentally competent terminally ill patient to choose to self administer medications to bring about a peaceful death is not 'suicide,' nor is the prescribing of such medications by a physician 'assisted suicide.'" They urged the use of "aid in dying" or "patient-directed dying" to describe this choice.

The American Psychological Association has recognized that "the reasoning on which a terminally ill person bases a decision to end his or her life is fundamentally different from the reasoning a clinically depressed person uses to justify suicide." E.J. Lieberman, M.D. psychiatrist, summarized the differences as follows: "The suicidal patient has no terminal illness but wants to die in contrast to the DWD (death with dignity) patient. Typical suicides bring shock and tragedy to families and friends, whereas families support DWD death; suicide is an expression of despair and futility, DWD is a form of affirmation and empowerment."

Legal scholars have also commented on the inappropriateness of the term "suicide" to a cancer patient who in the final days of an agonizing illness wishes to avoid more needless suffering and indignity.

Katherine Tucker concluded that as advocates for terminally ill patients, some of whom choose aid in dying, we at Compassion & Choices must urge the use of accurate language which is not offensive to patients and their families.

"SAY WHAT YOU WILL ABOUT THE SWEET MIRACLE OF UNQUESTIONING FAITH, I CONSIDER A CAPACITY FOR IT TERRIFYING AND ABSOLUTELY VILE." KURT VONNEGUT

FOUR YEARS IN IRAQ

by Dr. Adrian Liston

If tyranny and oppression come to this land, it will be in the guise of fighting a foreign enemy - President James Madison

"The President is merely the most important among a large number of public servants. He should be supported or opposed exactly to the degree which is warranted by his good conduct or bad conduct, his efficiency or inefficiency in rendering loyal, able, and disinterested service to the Nation as a whole. Therefore it is absolutely necessary that there should be full liberty to tell the truth about his acts, and this means that it is exactly necessary to blame him when he does wrong as to praise him when he does right. Any other attitude in an American citizen is both base and servile. To announce that there must be no criticism of the President, or that we are to stand by the President, right or wrong, is not only unpatriotic and servile, but is morally treasonable to the American public. Nothing but the truth should be spoken about him or anyone else. But it is even more important to tell the truth, pleasant or unpleasant, about him than about anyone else." -Theodore Roosevelt

Four years in Iraq. 650 000 or so Iraqis killed (we haven't been counting), over 4000 coalition troops killed (an underestimate, since deaths among the 40,000+ casualties are not counted if they occur back home), and the verdict is still tied on whether or not the country is in a better shape than it was under a brutal dictator (recent polls in Iraq give an even split on whether it is better, the same, or worse). Unfortunately, we cannot even debate what to do now using logic and reason without being labeled anti-American and pro-terrorist.

Despite what Bush would like us to do, it pays to contemplate what happened four years ago. We were told that we had to invade Iraq because Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction which posed an imminent threat to us. Many of us were dubious, and in retrospect, the skeptics were correct. But did Bush lie to us? That is difficult to tell -- certainly he deceived us about the degree of certainty that lay in the intelligence, which we have since found out was selectively overstated. I think it quite plausible that Bush was telling us what he saw as the truth, but by stating it was a "smoking gun" and "without doubt" he was deceiving us. And the deception worked quite well -- even a year into the invasion, 48% of Americans believed that US troops had found evidence of close pre-war links between Iraq and al-Qaeda, 22% thought troops had found weapons of mass destruction, and 25% believed that world public opinion favored the war (interestingly, these figures changed significantly depending on your source of news -- only 9% of newspaper readers and 4% of NPR/PBS listeners believed one of the above, compared to 80% of Fox News viewers).

Of course, the reason was probably geopolitical rather than security based -- while North Korea was allowed to develop nuclear weapons, stunted Iraq posed an opportunity for power. Not simply oil, but rather the strategic power that comes from having influence over a key resource and military bases near potential enemies. Donald Rumsfeld may have predicted that the military operation would last "six days or six weeks . . . but probably not six months," but the Bush administration anticipated long-lasting US influence in the region. Consider the public warning made to Russia and France when they threatened to veto the invasion -- if they didn't vote to invade,

or at least abstain, their oil contracts in Iraq would be cancelled and redistributed to US companies. At the very least, this demonstrates that Bush expected the long-term ability to distribute the wealth of Iraq following the invasion.

At the onset of the war we were told that "regime change would not be sufficient reason to invade," and only the pre-emptive defense doctrine was used to invade illegally against the United Nations vote (a doctrine which we would quite rightly dismiss if used to justify an attack against the US). This is important for a number of reasons -- firstly, when we consider the policies being touted today we should take into account the consistency and reliability of the source; and secondly, the reason behind the invasion dictated our tactics. Few would argue that Saddam Hussein did not deserve to be removed, but that post-hoc excuse does not justify the destruction caused in the wake of invasion. As Gandhi asked us, "What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans, and the homeless, whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty and democracy?" Regardless of its use as a justification now, it was not the stated reason during the invasion, so the invasion tactics were not designed with future stability as the key objective.

Most people would agree that international military intervention is necessary if people are suffering and diplomatic avenues have been exhausted. In Iraq, while a much better case could have been made for intervention in Iraq during Saddam's genocides rather than during the comparative stability which followed, regime change was not an intrinsically bad idea. Consider a competent planner who had the interest of Iraqis as their first priority. Perhaps they would have invaded only after interim governance plans were formed, then the military could have performed a surgical removal while keeping essential infrastructure intact (perhaps someone should have mentioned to Bush that hospitals and sewage networks rank up there with oil fields as essential infrastructure). Troops could have declared martial law to reduce looting, the army could have been passed over intact to the new government (rather than disbanding it into thousands of suddenly unemployed heavily armed men) and a fair and secular constitution could have been put in place. Troops could have been trained for the policing role they would serve in addition to their military role. The Arabic-speaking troops that were fired because of their sexuality could have been helpful in that situation. And a competent commander in chief would have ordered a withdrawal from Iraq as soon as possible -- it wouldn't have to be far, you could have troops sitting on an aircraft carrier one hundred meters from shore, ready to return upon the request of the Iraqi government.

Instead, hospitals and infrastructure were either bombed directly or left unguarded during the looting and the army was disbanded, leaving the interim government powerless and the militias well-stocked. The group appointed by the US to write the new constitution came up with a heavily religious constitution (just what was needed to simmer sectarian anger, resulting in elections that essentially became a religious census), and the all-male group wrote into the constitution multiple provisions which reduced the personal freedom of women in Iraq below the little they had under Saddam.

And most obviously, the continued presence of American

troops stirred up massive resentment against both the Americans and their Iraqi proxies, especially with the true power in Iraq being illuminated by the inability of the Iraq government to investigate incidents of murder and rape by US troops. Early on in the war, 71% of Iraq described their lives as good, and opinion towards the Americans was largely positive (83% called anti-American attacks unacceptable). At that point, the transfer of power to the Iraq government (with behind the scenes support) could have led to a stabilization of the country. Instead, as the occupation has dragged on and security conditions dramatically deteriorated (now 40% describe their life as good), previously thankful Iraqis have turned against the Americans and 51% now call anti-American attacks acceptable while 90% oppose the way the US has carried out its responsibilities in Iraq. Rather than aiding the security situation, there is a reasonable case to be made that the presence of American troops is actually worsening it by providing patriotic fodder to those recruiting militia.

And yet it is considered un-patriotic to question how we caused this quagmire, and how to fix it -- the President asks for blind faith in his (demonstrated insufficient) ability. Perhaps rather than listening to Bush we should listen to Theodore Roosevelt "Patriotism means to stand by the country. It does not mean to stand by the President or any other public official save exactly to the degree in which he himself stands by the country."

I find myself disagreeing with the vocal voices coming from both the pro-war and anti-war camps at the moment. From the pro-war camps we are told to trust the President (sorry, Bush has lost that prerogative) and that failure in Iraq would embolden terrorists. This is a mantra rather than logic. Failure in Iraq means that we have caused untold harm to millions of innocent people. However, it is the arrogant abuses of power which make the US the prime target of terrorism, and it is occupation of people's land and the disenfranchisement of their people that drive extremist religion and the recruitment of terrorists. So far the Iraq war has made us all less safe. Since the invasion of Iraq, the number of global terrorist attacks has risen 7-fold (or a 35% increase if we discount attacks within Iraq and Afghanistan). Hitting down hard on terrorists is a justified response, but every innocent who is hurt by misguided force takes away any claims of moral superiority and leads to an ever-growing spiral of violence.

And yet I also disagree with the most commonly heard anti-war claim that "we have given Iraqis the chance to live free, it is their own fault that they haven't taken it, our work is now done." This appears to be an attempt to ignore our responsibility, and it is quite simply untrue. We did not give Iraq the chance to live free. Our management of the invasion made Iraqi independence and stability an impossibility. And certainly the majority who want to live in peace do not deserve to be judged by the minority who are militant.

Regardless of my opposition to the mis-planned invasion of Iraq, I believe that we have the continuing responsibility to provide security and stability above that which was present before our invasion. If extra troops could provide that security and stability, I would (reluctantly) support a troop surge. Unfortunately, the one lesson we should have learned from the last four years is that American troops are now part of the

problem, not the solution. So the best way we can help Iraq is to leave and provide non-military support. There are many ways we can aid Iraq: taking in more than a handful of the 1.8 million refugees and 1.6 million internally displaced people, providing funding for Iraqi construction rather than sending tons of cash to corrupt American contractors, running a strong international student exchange program to train a new generation of Iraqi doctors, scientists, engineers, and economists, among many other currently neglected non-military priorities. And finally, the best way we can help ourselves is to elect a new administration that will not present a world-wide image of American arrogance and condescending power.

"RELIGIONS ARE ALL ALIKE – FOUNDED UPON FABLES AND MYTHOLOGIES." THOMAS JEFFERSON

Seuss by Bush

"I HEAR THE VOICES AND I READ THE FRONT PAGE AND I KNOW THE SPECULATION," THE PRESIDENT TOLD REPORTERS IN THE ROSE GARDEN. "BUT I'M THE DECIDER AND I DECIDE WHAT'S BEST. AND WHAT'S BEST IS FOR DON RUMSFELD TO REMAIN AS THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE." GEORGE W. BUSH

Well, it took me awhile, but I finally realized what "I'm the decider," reminds me of. It sounds like something a character in a Dr Seuss book might say. So with apologies to the late Mr. Geisel, here is some idle speculation as to what else such a character might say:

I'm the Decider by Roddy XXXXX

I'm the decider. I pick and I choose.
I pick among whats.
And choose among whos.

And as I decide
Each particular day,
The things I decide on
All turn out that way.

I decided on Freedom
For all of Iraq .
And now that we have it,
I'm not looking back.

I decided on tax cuts
That just help the wealthy.
And Medicare changes
That aren't really healthy.

And parklands and wetlands
Who needs all that stuff?
I decided that none
Would be more than enough!

I decided that schools
All in all are the best.
The less that they teach
And the more that they test.

I decided those wages

You need to get by,
Are much better spent
On some CEO guy.

I decided your Wade
Which was versing your Roe,
Is terribly awful
And just has to go.

I decided that levees
Are not really needed.
Now when hurricanes come
They can come unimpeded.

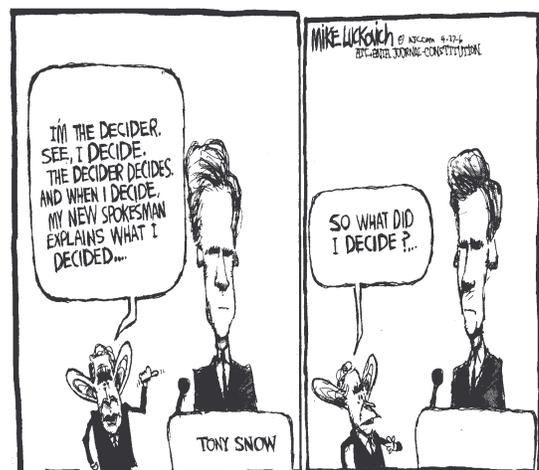
That old Constitution?
Well, I have decided-
As "just Goddamn paper"*
It should be derided.

I've decided gay marriage
Is icky and weird.
Above all other things,
It's the one to be feared.

And Cheney and Rummy
And Condi all know
That I'm the Decider -
They tell me it's so.

I'm the Decider
So watch what you say,
Or I may decide
To have you whisked away

Or I'll tap all your phones.
Your e-mail I'll read.
'cause I'm the Decider -
Like Jesus decreed.



"RELIGION IS A BYPRODUCT OF FEAR. FOR MUCH OF HUMAN HISTORY, IT MAY HAVE BEEN A NECESSARY EVIL, BUT WHY WAS IT MORE EVIL THAN NECESSARY? ISN'T KILLING PEOPLE IN THE NAME OF GOD A PRETTY GOOD DEFINITION OF INSANITY?"
ARTHUR C. CLARKE

Let Me See If I've Got This Right

By Nancy Gregg

I'm supposed to believe that the man who sat in a classroom reading a kids' book for seven minutes AFTER he was told the country was under attack, who was warned repeatedly about imminent threats against the country and chose to ignore them, who has traipsed off on vacation every time there is a domestic or international disaster, is a decisive man-of-action with the fortitude to run a nation.

I am supposed to believe that God himself chooses my nation's leaders and that, in His infinite wisdom, he chose a lying, thieving, self-absorbed, pro-torture, pro-war, lazy frat-boy jerk like George W. Bush.

I am supposed to believe that the same man who used family money and influence to duck military duty, who has failed at every business venture he ever tried, who never did an honest day's work or accomplished anything of value in his entire life, is fit to be Commander-in-Chief.

I am supposed to believe that a man who ignores the Constitution he swore to uphold, breaks the law with abandon, repeatedly lied about the reasons for going to war, its cost, its duration, and even its goals, is honest and trustworthy.

I am supposed to believe that the escalating violence, chaos and deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan are a sign of progress.

I am supposed to believe that a man who, by his own admission, does not read newspapers, who only meets with and listens to 'yes' men, who refuses to speak before any group that is not hand-picked from his staunchest supporters, is in touch with the realities of the world.

I am supposed to believe that sending US soldiers into combat without proper equipment or a viable military strategy, while decreasing their pensions and their benefits, is a patriotic display of supporting the troops.

I am supposed to believe that gutting the funding of social programs aimed at assisting the poor, the sick, the hungry and the homeless is the outcome of good Christians being in office, and that torturing, maiming and killing innocent civilians is "doing the Lord's work."

Oh, don't go anywhere, because I haven't even gotten started yet ...

I am supposed to believe that a president who acts like an ill-mannered, oafish, mindless buffoon in public, both at home and in international settings, and a vice president who tells a colleague to go f*ck himself in the course of conducting the country's business, are both deserving of respect.

I am supposed to believe that spying on US citizens, quashing free speech, and suspending laws that govern detention and confinement without just cause is preserving the tenets of democracy.

I am supposed to believe that alienating our allies, isolating ourselves from the world, refusing to use diplomacy instead of aggression, and causing people around the globe to hate us is the best way to protect my country from violent attack.

I am supposed to believe that no-bid contracts awarded to companies owned by members of this Administration, its families and its cronies is pure coincidence, and that secret meetings resulting in policies that enrich their supporters to the detriment of hard-working Americans is good and honest government.



Hold on, because there's MORE of this crap . . .

I am supposed to believe that outsourcing American jobs, under-funding our educational system, and plunging the country deeper into debt with every passing day will lead to a stronger, more competitive nation in the years to come.

I am supposed to believe that the same people who left NOLA to drown, who refuse to secure our borders, who refuse to implement the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission, and who initiate policies that incite anger and violence the world over are protecting my country from harm.

I am supposed to believe that an Administration whose policies make basic medical care and life-saving drugs unaffordable for millions of Americans is pro-life.

I am supposed to believe that elected representatives who voted for the Bankruptcy Bill, tax breaks for wealthy individuals, and tax subsidies for multi-billion dollar corporations are looking out for their constituents.

Along with all of the above, I am also supposed to believe that selling authority over our ports to foreign nations, selling our national lands to private interests, and selling our children's future by burdening them with debt for decades to come is in the best interests of our country.

Drum roll, please -- here's the BIG FINALE . . .

I am supposed to believe it is safe to board an airplane with a hold full of uninspected cargo as long as no passengers are in possession of baby formula, that a group of men in Britain were about to take down ten airliners without tickets or passports, that seven men in Miami were going to blow up buildings in cities they didn't have the money to get to, that one lone guy in New York was going to take down the Brooklyn Bridge with a blow-torch, that if we leave Iraq every terrorist in the world is going to come to the US and fight us in the malls and the supermarkets, that the 'Liberal media' simply forgets to cover the lies, cover-ups and corruption of this Administration and its party members, that voting for a Democrat in Connecticut sends shockwaves of unbridled encouragement throughout the Muslim world, that a bunch of PNAC members whose predictions have been proven totally wrong in every instance should be dictating policy to my government, that our military isn't stretched too thin and they are just recalling those who have already fulfilled their duty because they've got too much

time on their hands, and that George W. Bush spends his summers reading Camus and Shakespeare.

Oh, if only I were GULLIBLE, ILL-INFORMED, EASILY LED and TOTALLY STUPID -- what a FINE Bush supporter I would have made.

"THE GOD OF THE OLD TESTAMENT HAS GOT TO BE THE MOST UNPLEASANT CHARACTER IN ALL FICTION: JEALOUS AND PROUD OF IT, PETTY, VINDICTIVE, UNJUST, UNFORGIVING, RACIST, AN ETHNIC-CLEANSER URGING HIS PEOPLE ON TO ACTS OF GENOCIDE."
RICHARD DAWKINS

Excerpts from *The Salmon of Doubt*

By Douglas Adams

(author of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*)

In the years I'd spent learning history, physics, Latin, math, I'd learnt (the hard way) something about standards of argument, standards of proof, standards of logic, etc. In fact we had just been learning how to spot the different types of logical fallacy, and it suddenly became apparent to me that these standards simply didn't seem to apply in religious matters. In religious education we were asked to listen respectfully to arguments that, if they had been put forward in support of a view of, say, why the Corn Laws came to be abolished when they were, would have been laughed at as silly and childish and -- in terms of logic and proof -- just plain wrong. Why was this?

So I was already familiar with and (I'm afraid) accepting of, the view that you couldn't apply the logic of physics to religion, that they were dealing with different types of "truth." (I now think this is baloney, but to continue . . .) What astonished me, however, was the realization that the arguments in favor of religious ideas were so feeble and silly next to the robust arguments of something as interpretive and opinionated as history. In fact, they were embarrassingly childish. They were never subject to the kind of outright challenge which was the normal stock in trade of any other area of intellectual endeavor whatsoever. Why not? Because they wouldn't stand up to it.

So I became an Agnostic. And I thought and thought and thought. But I just did not have enough to go on, so I didn't really come to any resolution. I was extremely doubtful about the idea of God, but I just didn't know enough about anything to have a good working model of any other explanation for, well, life, the universe, and everything to put in its place. But I kept at it, and I kept reading and I kept thinking.

Sometime around my early thirties I stumbled upon evolutionary biology, particularly in the form of Richard Dawkins's books *The Selfish Gene* and then *The Blind Watchmaker*, and suddenly (on, I think the second reading of *The Selfish Gene*) it all fell into place. It was a concept of such stunning simplicity, but it gave rise, naturally, to all of the infinite and baffling complexity of life. The awe it inspired in me made the awe that people talk about with respect to religious experience seem, frankly, silly beside it. I'd take the awe of understanding over the awe of ignorance any day.

But our early man has a moment to reflect and he thinks to himself, "Well, this is an interesting world that I find myself in." Then he asks himself a very treacherous question, a question that is totally meaningless and fallacious, but only comes about because of the nature of the sort of person he is,

the sort of person he has evolved into, and the sort of person who has thrived because he thinks this particular way. Man the maker looks at his world and says, "So who made this, then?" Who made this? -- you can see why it's a treacherous question. Early man thinks, "Well, because there's only one sort of being I know about who makes things, whoever made all this must therefore be a much bigger, much more powerful and necessarily invisible one of me. And because I tend to be the strong one who does all the stuff, he's probably male." And so we have the idea of a God.

Then, because when we make things, we do it with the intention of doing something with them, early man asks himself, "If he made it, what did he make it for?" Now the real trap springs, because early man is thinking, "This world fits me very well. Here are all these things that support me and feed me and look after me; yes, this world fits me nicely," and he reaches the inescapable conclusion that whoever made it, made it for him.

"FUNDAMENTALIST CHRISTIANITY IS ON THE RISE AMONG THE ELECTORATE OF THE WORLD'S ONLY SUPERPOWER, RIGHT UP TO AND INCLUDING THE PRESIDENT. IF YOU BELIEVE THE SURVEYS, 45 PERCENT OF AMERICANS, THAT'S ABOUT 135 MILLION PEOPLE, BELIEVE THE UNIVERSE IS LESS THAN TEN THOUSAND YEARS OLD."
RICHARD DAWKINS

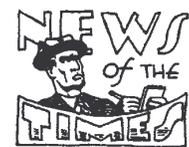
Major Religions of the World Ranked by Number of Adherents

- Christianity: 2.1 billion
- Islam: 1.3 billion
- Secular/Nonreligious/Agnostic/Atheist: 1.1 billion
- Hinduism: 900 million
- Chinese traditional religion: 394 million
- Buddhism: 376 million
- primal-indigenous: 300 million
- African Traditional & Diasporic: 100 million
- Sikhism: 23 million
- Juche: 19 million
- Spiritism: 15 million
- Judaism: 14 million
- Baha'i: 7 million
- Jainism: 4.2 million
- Shinto: 4 million
- Zoroastrianism: 2.6 million
- Neo-Paganism: 1 million
- Unitarian-Universalism: 800 thousand
- Rastafarianism: 600 thousand
- Scientology: 500 thousand

"I CANNOT IMAGINE A GOD WHO REWARDS AND PUNISHES THE OBJECTS OF HIS CREATION, WHOSE PURPOSES ARE MODELED AFTER OUR OWN -- A GOD, IN SHORT, WHO IS BUT A REFLECTION OF HUMAN FRAILTY. NEITHER CAN I BELIEVE THAT THE INDIVIDUAL SURVIVES THE DEATH OF HIS BODY, ALTHOUGH FEEBLE SOULS HARBOR SUCH THOUGHTS THROUGH FEAR OR RIDICULOUS EGOTISM." ALBERT EINSTEIN

TOM the DANCING BUG
PRESENTS:

by
RUBEN BOLLING



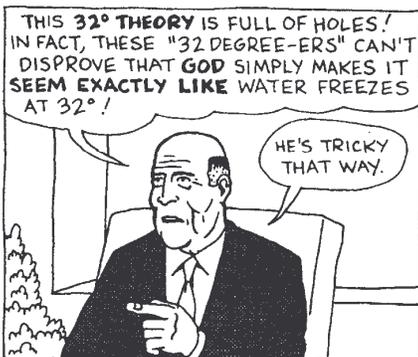
Creationists Challenge the Teaching of Water's Freezing Point



LOOK AT THIS TEXT-BOOK! THERE'S NO MENTION THAT THIS 32° FREEZING POINT IS JUST A THEORY!

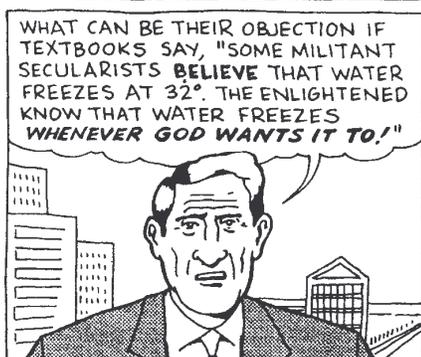
THIS IS THE RESULT OF THE ANTI-RELIGION INTELLECTUAL ELITES RADICAL SECULAR AGENDA.

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THIS 32° THEORY IS FULL OF HOLES! IN FACT, THESE "32 DEGREE-ERS" CAN'T DISPROVE THAT GOD SIMPLY MAKES IT SEEM EXACTLY LIKE WATER FREEZES AT 32°!

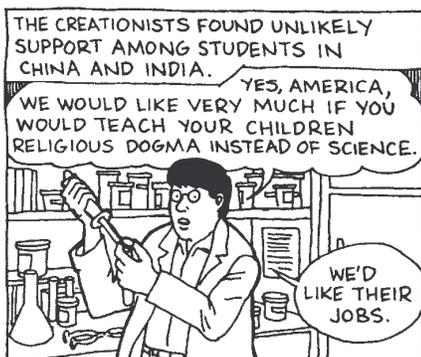
HE'S TRICKY THAT WAY.



WHAT CAN BE THEIR OBJECTION IF TEXTBOOKS SAY, "SOME MILITANT SECULARISTS BELIEVE THAT WATER FREEZES AT 32°. THE ENLIGHTENED KNOW THAT WATER FREEZES WHENEVER GOD WANTS IT TO!"



THIS TRANSITION FROM WATER TO ICE IS TOO COMPLEX TO HAPPEN NATURALISTICALLY AT SOME RANDOM TEMPERATURE.



THE CREATIONISTS FOUND UNLIKELY SUPPORT AMONG STUDENTS IN CHINA AND INDIA. YES, AMERICA, WE WOULD LIKE VERY MUCH IF YOU WOULD TEACH YOUR CHILDREN RELIGIOUS DOGMA INSTEAD OF SCIENCE.

WE'D LIKE THEIR JOBS.

**RELIGION DOES MORE HARM THAN GOOD:
82% Say Faith Causes Tension in Country
Where Two Thirds Are Not Religious
by Julian Glover & Alexandra Topping
The Guardian**

More people in Britain think religion causes harm than believe it does good, according to a recent *Guardian*/ICM poll. It shows that an overwhelming majority see religion as a cause of division and tension -- greatly outnumbering the smaller majority who also believe that it can be a force for good.

The poll also reveals that non-believers outnumber believers in Britain by almost two to one. It paints a picture of a skeptical nation with massive doubts about the effect religion has on society: 82% of those questioned say they see religion as a cause of division and tension between people. Only 16% disagree. The findings are at odds with attempts by some religious leaders to define the country as one made up of many faith communities.

Most people have no personal faith, the poll shows, with only 33% of those questioned describing themselves as "a

religious person." A clear majority, 63%, say that they are not religious - including more than half of those who describe themselves as Christian.

Older people and women are the most likely to believe in a god, with 37% of women saying they are religious, compared with 29% of men.

The findings come at the end of a year in which multiculturalism and the role of different faiths in society has been at the heart of a divisive political debate.

But a spokesman for the Church of England denied yesterday that mainstream religion was the source of tension. He also insisted that the "impression of secularism in this country is overrated."

"You also have to bear in mind how society has changed. It is more difficult to go to church now than it was. Communities are displaced, people work longer hours -- it's harder to fit it in. It doesn't alter the fact that the Church of England will get 1 million people in church every Sunday, which is larger than any other gathering in the country."

The Right Rev Bishop Dunn, Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle, added: "The perception that faith is a cause of division can often be because faith is misused for other uses and other agendas."

The poll suggests, however, that in modern Britain religious observance has become a habit reserved for special occasions. Only 13% of those questioned claimed to visit a place of worship at least once a week, with 43% saying they never attended religious services.

Non-Christians are the most regular attendees -- 29% say they attend a religious service at least weekly. Yet Christmas remains a religious festival for many people, with 54% of Christians questioned saying they intended to go to a religious service over the holiday period.

Well-off people are more likely to plan to visit a church at Christmas: 64% of those in the highest economic categories expect to attend, compared with 43% of those in the bottom group.

Britain's generally tolerant attitude to religion is underlined by the small proportion who say the country is best described as a Christian one. Only 17% think this. The clear majority, 62%, agree Britain is better described as "a religious country of many faiths."

ICM interviewed a random sample of 1,006 adults aged 18+ by telephone between December 12 and 13, 2006. Interviews were conducted across the country and the results have been weighted to the profile of all adults. ICM is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules.

"WE ARE ALL ATHEISTS ABOUT MOST OF THE GODS THAT SOCIETIES HAVE EVER BELIEVED IN. SOME OF US JUST GO ONE GOD FURTHER."
" RICHARD DAWKINS

A GOOD BOOK
FIASCO: THE AMERICAN MILITARY ADVENTURE
IN IRAQ
BY THOMAS E. RICKS
Reviewed by Richard Bozarth

Fiasco: The American Military Adventure In Iraq by Thomas E. Ricks is another book about W. Bush's war in Iraq that did not make him happy. *Fiasco* is an excellent history designed to explain why Iraq became a guerrilla-war quagmire after such a swift victory in the regime-change phase. It has no real surprises for any person who has read and/or viewed what print and electronic news providers have reported about Iraq. What *Fiasco* offers is more depth and detail.

The prewar section of the book focuses heavily on the WMD scam used to get initial U.S. public support for the war. Ricks does this because he argues that the PR damage the scam's exposure caused is one of the reasons why the regime-change victory turned into a guerrilla-war quagmire. *Fiasco* shows that the lie was about the quality of the intelligence supporting the existence of WMD in Iraq. What W. Bush and the rest of his gang did not tell the public was that the evidence that persuaded them was the evidence judged least likely to be true by intelligence analysts. How much public support could have been won if the Bush 2 Gang had been honest about the expert evaluation of the intelligence they accepted as true? They believed it was a necessary lie that would be made irrelevant when WMD were found.

W. Bush and Rumsfeld wanted a reorganized U.S. military. They were going to create a pro-U.S. new world order with a high-tech, highly mobile military that would win wars quickly with fewer troops and less equipment than old foggy generals thought was necessary. The Iraq War was going to prove the fogies were wrong. These imperial neocon fantasies, joined with B2G's hostile refusal to be exposed to dissent, set the stage for the regime-change victory turning into a brutal guerrilla-war occupation that now has become also a civil-war occupation.

Ricks makes a case for there having been about three months after the fall of Baghdad when, if W. Bush and Rumsfeld had been competent leaders, and if the U.S. force in Iraq had been large enough, the country could have been prevented from its descent into the chaos of simultaneous guerrilla and civil wars. These, according to Ricks, are the major mistakes W. Bush and Rumsfeld made in Iraq:

- During the regime-change phase of the war, the Fedayeen used guerrilla tactics the first time it came in contact with U.S. troops. That warning was ignored.
- When Baghdad fell, there was no surrender. Hussein fled Baghdad without surrendering. The Iraqi army took off their uniforms and disappeared into the civilian population without surrendering. The Fedayeen, who had been the fiercest fighters during the regime-change phase of the war, definitely did not surrender. The Sunnis didn't surrender. No surrender should have been a huge, flashing red light warning the U.S. that a guerrilla war was inevitable because the U.S. did not have enough troops to prevent it from happening, or at least containing it. The warning was ignored.
- The U.S. ignored the looting in Baghdad for way too long. This alienated the people and devastated the infrastructure

the U.S. needed to turn the regime-change victory into total victory.

- B2G's incompetence resulted in creating a Coalition Provisional Authority that eventually was unofficially renamed Can't Produce Anything. L. Paul Bremer was selected to be head of the CPA and he was an incompetent who could not make a success of an organization that, like the U.S. force in Iraq, was compelled by W. Bush and his gang to try to do its job with insufficient resources.
- When the occupation turned into a brutal guerrilla-war occupation, the U.S. military violated the established principles of counterinsurgency warfare by using conventional war tactics, which are guaranteed to lose a guerrilla war. Ricks emphasizes this as one of the most important mistakes made by the U.S. in Iraq.
- The U.S. invasion force hard-charged into Iraq without its commanders or civilian leaders having done any serious thinking about the hearts-and-minds problem they would have immediately. Collateral damage, for example, is extremely alienating. The term all by itself is alienating because it's one of those terms designed to mask the ugly reality it describes, and using masking terms for ugly realities makes the user appear to be callous. Collateral damage is noncombatant deaths, which are sometimes accidental and sometimes not so accidental. The tactics the U.S. military used were the kind guaranteed to produce a lot of collateral damage, thus increasing the hatred and discontent of the noncombatant Iraqis.
- Concerned about morale, U.S. commanders blundered again by trying to use material comforts to compensate for the horrors and stress of incompetently fighting a guerrilla war. This luxury alienated Iraqis because the U.S. reconstruction effort has been totally incompetent and also rotten with corruption. The result is that the average Iraqi lives in conditions much worse than those that existed before the invasion. How does the average Iraqi feel when he or she sees the guys responsible for the devastation of their country living in luxury while he or she suffers?
- When U.S. troops try to capture insurgents and their supporters by using explosive entrances into homes, they arrogantly ignore the cultural importance of family honor in Islamic countries. The men in the family are humiliated in front of their wives, daughters, and other female relatives, and filled with a raging need for payback.
- U.S. troops alienated Iraqis with their attitude of "Detain 'em all and let the intelligence guys sort 'em out." Because Rumsfeld refused to allow them more troops than the minimum necessary to achieve regime change, the U.S. commanders in Iraq were not prepared for the enormous number of detainees that inevitably flowed into the inadequate prisons the U.S. operated.
- The U.S. made the most terrible blunder of authorizing the torture of detainees because it was supposed to make interrogations more likely to be successful. When the guerrilla war started, the criminal interrogation techniques that had been authorized for al-Qaeda suspects naturally spread to Iraq. What worse thing could the U.S. military have done in Iraq to make winning a guerrilla war there impossible? Abu Ghraib, now the symbol of the crime W.

Bush authorized, was one of the most infamous prisons where Hussein tortured those he detained because they were suspected of being against his government. To have put the U.S. in a position where our military and civilian leaders are perceived to be a vile as Hussein was stupidity multiplied by incompetence multiplied by moral degradation.

Ricks ends *Fiasco* by arguing that the U.S. must correct the mistakes that produced the fiasco and start doing the things that will bring victory, which means Iraq becomes a stable, united nation with a government that is not anti-U.S. and does not give aid and shelter to al-Qaeda or similar terrorist groups. The consequences of failure are either Iraq violently disintegrating like Yugoslavia did, or a new Saddam Hussein taking power and managing, after a vicious civil war, to keep the nation unified.

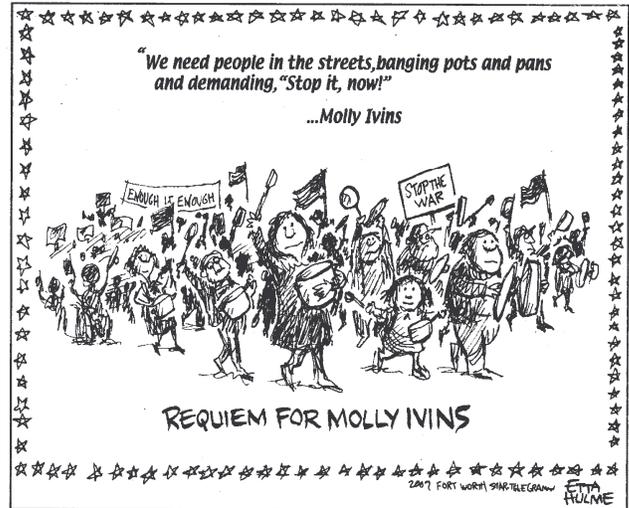
Disintegration has disastrous international consequences that will probably be much worse than those Yugoslavia's disintegration caused. A new Saddam Hussein would most likely be a Shiite cleric -- probably Muqtada al-Sadr, who seems to me to be using his Mahdi Army to achieve that goal -- and he would most likely form a strong alliance with Iran, as well as inflict on Iraq a theocratic government resembling Iran's, or possibly the much worse one the Taliban inflicted on Afghanistan.

Today, many months after Ricks has finished writing this book, it seems much less likely that practicing sound counterinsurgency tactics and strategy will produce victory. The problem is no longer just a guerrilla war. Now it is also a sectarian civil war. The arrogance, stupidity, incompetence, and moral degradation of W. Bush and his gang have probably made any kind of U.S. victory impossible. I think the desperate plan of somehow holding on until the Iraqi army and police can take over the fight is a hope as futile as the hope of Vietnamization was over 30 years ago. Iraq's army and police are too corrupt, too infiltrated, and too sectarian to win the war for the U.S. It won't happen even if the U.S. continues training them and supporting them for the next ten years. The end of this war will most likely be either violent disintegration or a Shiite dictator.



"I CANNOT BELIEVE IN THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL.... NO, ALL THIS TALK OF AN EXISTENCE FOR US, AS INDIVIDUALS, BEYOND THE GRAVE IS WRONG. IT IS BORN OF OUR TENACITY OF LIFE - OUR DESIRE TO GO ON LIVING ... OUR DREAD OF COMING TO AN END."
 THOMAS EDISON

FOND FAREWELLS



TRIBUTES TO FUNDAMENTALIST
 FLATULENCE,
 EVANGELICAL EFFLUENCE,
 AND IMPLACABLE IGNORANCE

Fundamentalism (n) derives from two English words: fund (= give cash) + amentalism (= without brains)

Wikipedia for Christian Fundamentals
 The Lord's Encyclopedia
 By Christian Stöcker

Christian fundamentalists in the US have launched two online encyclopedias modeled on the Wikipedia format. Conservapedia and CreationWiki aim to explain the world from a creationist perspective. They make entertaining reading.

"Kangaroos, like all modern animals, originated in the Middle East and are the descendants of the two founding members of the modern kangaroo baramin [sic] that were taken aboard Noah's Ark prior to the Great Flood." This sentence is taken from an online encyclopedia. And it is meant seriously.

The encyclopedia in question is not Wikipedia but Conservapedia. Modeled on Wikipedia, it is one of the latest coups in the struggle of Christian Fundamentalists to ban scientific teachings in school and reinstate the Bible as the definitive, all-explaining text and history book.

Critics of a literal interpretation of the Bible may find Conservapedia unintentionally amusing. The "Debate Topics" facility allows readers to discuss burning questions like "Crusades -- Good or Bad?"

CreationWiki tries to maintain a veneer of objectivity, even though it labels itself "creationist," but Conservapedia is first and foremost aimed at provocation rather than providing information. It was created by conservative lawyer Andy Schlafly and 58 high school students in November 2006. Schlafly believed that the world needed "a resource for the general audience, but without the defects of Wikipedia," as he told *Wired* magazine, because Wikipedia "is in the hands of the liberals, the godless and the nation-less."

Atheistic jokers have, of course, long discovered the Jesus wikis. According to a reporter for *New Scientist*, Conservapedia

has had to block 60 IP addresses and users from the site due to what administrators called "obscenity," "vandalism" and "inappropriate disparagement of God."

Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales has no problems with the Christian Fundamentalist sites. "Free culture knows no bounds," he tells the writer from *New Scientist*, "we welcome the reuse of our work to build variants. That's directly in line with our mission."

Net users who are not so inclined towards Christianity have recently had the same idea: Athpedia for Atheists was recently launched in German. It doesn't view itself as "a rival to Wikipedia" but as a "complementary resource for interested Internet users." [Source: Spiegel Online at www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,469969,00.html]

Majority of Americans Believe in Angels By Calvin Woodward, Associated Press

A bluebird in the garden, a spirit in a house, a kind man on the side of the road. Americans are big believers in angels, although not necessarily the ones with halos and wings.

An overwhelming majority, almost regardless of backgrounds and religious convictions, think angels are real, according to an AP-AOL News poll exploring attitudes about Santa Claus, angels and more. 1,000 adults were polled by telephone Dec. 12 to 14, 2006 by Ipsos, an international public opinion research company. The margin of sampling error for all adults was plus or minus 3 percentage points.

Belief in angels, however people define them, is highest -- almost universal -- among white evangelical Christians, 97

percent of whom trust in their existence, the poll indicates. But even among people with no religious affiliation, well more than half said angels are for real.

Among the findings: Protestants, women, Southerners, Midwesterners and Republicans were the most likely to believe in angels, although strong majorities in other groups also shared that faith. Belief in angels declined slightly with advanced education, from 87 percent of those with high school education or less to 73 percent of those with college degrees. Overall, 81 percent believed in angels.

If it's one thing to believe in angels, it's something else to explain exactly what an angel is.

"A presence that you feel around you, is my opinion," said Elizabeth Daves, 63, of Flemington, N.J. "I accept them -- to come whenever they want to." She said they came and have comforted her since her mother-in-law died in their house.

Edward Pelz, 80, of Grabill, Ind., said he believes that angels are guiding him, even though it's impossible to explain to anyone else.

"Have I ever seen one? Nope. We depict the angel as a person that's white, has a robe on, has wings on back. I'm not sure that's the way they look. So for me, I think sometimes there's angels that aren't that way."

Pelz recounted a story about a man who showed up to change his tire when he had a flat in Ohio five years ago.

"I look at life -- I say, well maybe I had an angel with me here today. It could have been just another man doing a good deed."

"It's a feeling. It's not like a ghost. It's an attitude."

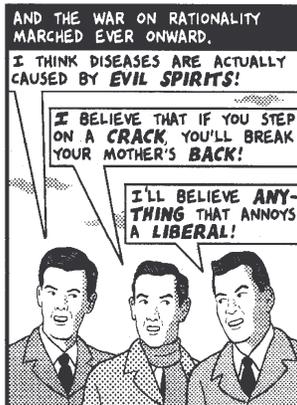
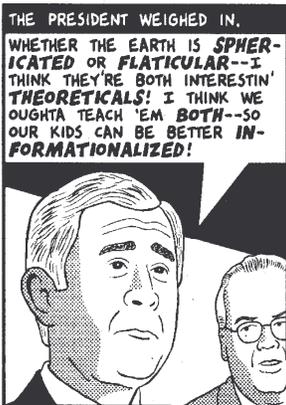
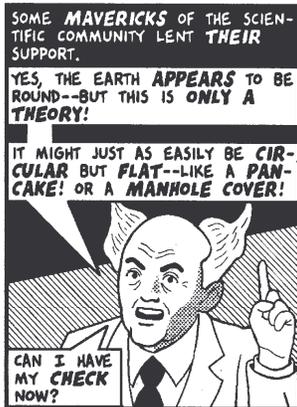
Pelz felt another spirit when he walked into his backyard on a winter's day -- that of the wife he lost over two years ago. He called her Mom.

"She loved bluebirds," he said. "In the wintertime, we don't have bluebirds. I was out in the back, thinking, 'Mom I'd like to see you,' and this little bluebird comes by.

"I don't know, maybe that's an angel. It was just something I wanted to see. Maybe I imagined it. Next thing you know, it flew off. What is an angel? Is an angel something that has a heartbeat like us? Or is it . . . ?" The thought trailed off.

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



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