

Dear Dr. Laura: Why can't I own Canadians?

by Ron Steelman

To me there's a value in knowing that the email I'm forwarding is actually true. Yes, if something is an obvious joke, I'll send it on without stopping to verify its veracity because Humor is a precious commodity. However, in honor of the repeal of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" law, I wanted to revisit the classic "Dear Dr. Laura" email about homosexuals.

Dr. Laura Schlesinger, the woman who passes herself off as a psychologist, had a radio talk show for years giving advice to the lovelorn. On her show she said that, as an observant Orthodox Jew, homosexuality was an abomination according to Leviticus 18:22, and cannot be condoned under any circumstance.

This open letter has actually been around since 2000 and has

likely passed through your e-mailbox several times in the last decade. The letter mocks Dr. Laura for her self-proclaimed knowledge and myopic interpretation of the Bible. It's wickedly funny and still makes me laugh. I looked it up on Snopes.Com, not because I felt I needed to verify any of the content, but because I wondered what Snopes had to say about it. The provenance of this letter is almost as funny as the letter itself.

After you read the letter, check out its history on this link: Snopes.com

"Dear Dr. Laura:

Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God's Law. I have learned a great deal from your show, and try to share that

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a new design

Our January, 2011 issue of MUSE features this new graphic design created by RBH member, Leigh Stoecker. Thanks, Leigh for your help!

As a general policy we try not to engage in biblical criticism, preferring to focus on Humansim. However, in the first two articles in this issue there is considerable mention of the bible. The first is a humorous coda to the DADT repeal, and the second is a revelation that the scientific method existed in the bible. NOT. But funny.

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Discovery: Scientific Method Used in the Bible

Excerpts From "Religion's Claim to be Non-Disprovable"
- by Eliezer Yudkowsky (reprinted with permission)

The people of Israel are wavering between Jehovah and Baal, so Elijah announces that he will conduct an experiment to settle it - quite a novel concept in those days! The priests of Baal will place their bull on an altar, and Elijah will place Jehovah's bull on an altar, but neither will be allowed to start the fire; whichever God is real will call down fire on His sacrifice. The priests of Baal serve as control group for Elijah - the same wooden fuel, the same bull, and

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Elijah and the Priests of Baal conduct experiments.

continued from pg 1 - own a canadian

knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind them that Leviticus 18:22 clearly states it to be an abomination. End of debate.

I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some other elements of God's Laws and how to follow them.

1. Leviticus 25:44 states that I may possess slaves, both male and female, provided they are purchased from neighboring nations. A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans, but not Canadians. Can you clarify? Why can't I own Canadians?

2. I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?

3. I know that I am allowed no contact with a woman while she is in her period of menstrual un-cleanliness - Lev.15: 19-24. The problem is how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offense.

4. When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odor for the Lord - Lev.1:9. The problem is my neighbors. They claim the odor is not pleasing to them. Should I smite them?

5. I have a neighbor who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself, or should I ask the police to do it?

6. A friend of mine feels that even though eating shellfish is an abomination, Lev. 11:10, it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality. I don't agree. Can you settle this? Are there 'degrees' of abomination?

7. Lev. 21:20 states that I may not

approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle-room here?

8. Most of my male friends get their hair trimmed, including the hair around their temples, even though this is expressly forbidden by Lev. 19:27. How should they die?

9. I know from Lev. 11:6-8 that touching the skin of a dead pig makes me unclean, but may I still play football if I wear gloves?

10. My uncle has a farm. He violates Lev.19:19 by planting two different crops in the same field, as does his wife by wearing garments made of two different kinds of thread (cotton/polyester blend). He also tends to curse and blaspheme a lot. Is it really necessary that we go to all the trouble of getting the whole town together to stone them? Lev.24:10-16. Couldn't we just burn them to death at a private family affair, like we do with people who sleep with their in-laws? (Lev. 20:14)

I know you have studied these things extensively and thus enjoy considerable expertise in such matters, so I'm confident you can help.

Thank you again for reminding us that God's word is eternal and unchanging.

- Your devoted disciple and adoring fan,

(This guy didn't actually send it)
James M. Kauffman, Ed.D. Professor Emeritus, Dept. Of Curriculum, Instruction, and Special Education University of Virginia
(It would be a damn shame if we couldn't own a Canadian :)"



continued from pg 1 - science in bible

the same priests making invocations, but to a false god. Then Elijah pours water on his altar - ruining the experimental symmetry, but this was back in the early days - to signify deliberate acceptance of the burden of proof, like needing a 0.05 significance



Eliezer Yudkowsky

level. The fire comes down on Elijah's altar, which is the experimental observation. The watching people of Israel shout "The Lord is God!" - peer review.

And then the people haul the 450 priests of Baal down to the river Kishon and slit their throats. This is stern, but necessary. You must firmly discard the falsified hypothesis, and do so swiftly, before it can generate excuses to protect itself. If the priests of Baal are allowed to survive, they will start babbling about how religion is a separate magisterium which can be neither proven nor disproven. . .

Back in the old days, people actually believed their religions instead of just believing in them. The biblical archaeologists who went in search of Noah's Ark did not think they were wasting their time; they anticipated they might become famous. Only after failing to find confirming evidence - and finding disconfirming evidence in its place - did religionists execute what William Bartley called the retreat to commitment, "I believe because I believe."

. . . Most people's concept of rationality is determined by what they think they can get away with; they think they can get away with endorsing Bible ethics; and so it only requires a manageable effort of self-deception for them to overlook the Bible's moral problems.

[Link to the full article](#)



A.I. - Who's Minding the Store?

While researching the article in this issue of MUSE, "Religion's Claim to be Non-Disprovable" by Mr. Yudkowsky, I discovered some important websites. We are hearted to find out there are people working on the future impact of Artificial Intelligence from an ethical and moral perspective. Mr. Yudkowsky, whose humorous blog was excerpted on our front page, is a researcher in this field. This is something that will effect us all. visit this website for an understanding of the issues being confronted by at least one segment of the Artificial Intelligence community.

The Singularity Institute for Artificial Intelligence

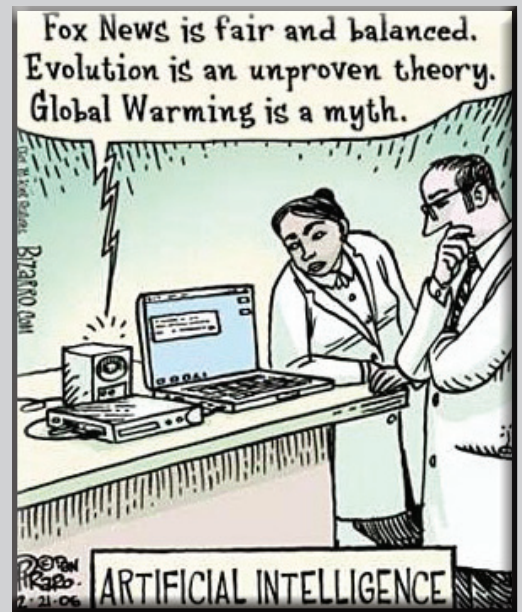
In 1965, the eminent statistician I. J. Good proposed that artificial intelligence beyond some threshold level would snowball, creating a cascade of self-improvements: AIs would be smart enough to make themselves smarter, and, having made themselves smarter, would spot still further opportunities for improvement, leaving human abilities far behind. Good called this process an "intelligence explosion," while later authors have used the terms "technological singularity" or simply "the Singularity".

The Singularity Institute aims to reduce the risk of a catastrophe, should such an event eventually occur. Our activities include research, education, and conferences. In this document, we provide a whirlwind introduction to the case for taking AI risks seriously, and suggest some strategies to reduce those risks.

What We're (Not) About

The Singularity Institute is interested in the advent of smart, cross-domain, human-plus-equivalent, self-improving Artificial Intelligence. We do not forecast any particular time when such AI will be developed. We are interested in analyzing points of leverage for increasing the probability that the advent of AI turns out positive. We do not see ourselves as having the job of foretelling that it will go well or poorly - if the outcome were predetermined there would be no point in trying to intervene. We suspect that AI is primarily a software problem which will require new insight, not a hardware problem which will fall to Moore's Law. We are interested in rational analyses which try to support each point of claimed detail, as opposed to storytelling in which many interesting details are invented but not separately supported.

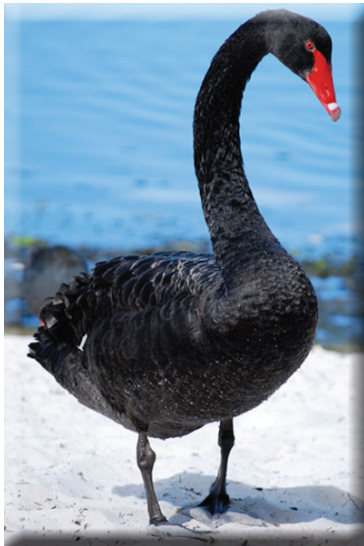
[Link to Singularity Institute website](#)



Steven Spielberg & Haley Joel Osment
on the set of the film A.I.

What is a Black Swan Event?

(Excerpts from Wikipedia)



Black Swan Events were characterized by Nassim Nicholas Taleb in his 2007 book (revised and completed in 2010), *The Black Swan*. Taleb regards almost all major scientific discoveries, historical events, and artistic accomplishments as “black swans” — un-directed and unpredicted. He gives the rise of the Internet, the personal computer, World War I, and the September 11 attacks as examples of Black Swan Events...

What we call here a Black Swan (and capitalize it) is an event with the following three attributes. First, it is an outlier, as it lies outside the realm of regular expectations, because nothing in the

past can convincingly point to its possibility. Second, it carries an extreme impact. Third, in spite of its outlier status, human nature makes us concoct explanations for its occurrence after the fact, making it explainable and predictable.

. . .to summarize the triplet: rarity, extreme impact, and retrospective (though not prospective) predictability. A small number of Black Swans explains almost everything in our world, from the success of ideas and religions, to the dynamics of historical events, to elements of our own personal lives.



Forum Topic - Sunday, January 9, 2011 - 10:30 a.m.



Friendship: Gender and Lifespan Perspectives by **Janice C. Stapley, Ph.D.**

Chair, Dept. of Psychology Monmouth University

- ▶ What is friendship?
- ▶ Does the definition differ by gender? By age?
- ▶ What about cross-sex friendships?
- ▶ Who benefits from “friends with benefits”?
- ▶ How do friends make us resilient?

Join us for a stimulating discussion. . .and bring a friend!

A.I. - Who's Minding the Store? - Part 2

Here is another website worth exploring:

The Future of Humanity Institute at Oxford University



MISSION

The Future of Humanity Institute's mission is to bring careful thinking to bear on big-picture questions about humanity and its prospects. The Institute's work focuses on how future technology might affect fundamental parameters of the human condition, the risks and opportunities involved, and the epistemic, moral, and prioritization issues that confront actors who pursue long-range global objectives. We currently pursue four interlinked research programs:

- ♦ Global catastrophic risks: What are the biggest threats to global civilization and human well-being? How can the human species survive the 21st century?
- ♦ Human enhancement: How can medicine and technology be used to enhance basic biological capacities, such as cognition and lifespan? Can enhancement be ethical and wise?
- ♦ Applied epistemology and rationality: How can we make better decisions under conditions of profound uncertainty and high stakes? How can we reduce bias and human error in our decision-making?
- ♦ Future technologies: What would be the impacts of potentially transformative technologies such as advanced nanotechnology and artificial intelligence?

[Link to the Institute website](#)



Excerpts from “The Promise of Humanism”

By Fred Edwords

▶ The Humanist lives as if this world were all and enough. He is not otherworldly. He holds that the time spent on the contemplation of a possible afterlife is time wasted. He fears no hell and seeks no heaven, save that which he and others created on earth. He willingly accepts the world that exists on this side of the grave as the place for moral struggle and creative living. He seeks the life abundant for his neighbor as for himself. He is content to live one world at a time and let the next life—if such there may be—take care of itself. He need not deny immortality; he simply is not interested. His interests are here.

- **Edwin H. Wilson**, (FYI - Humanist Manifesto II was written by Wilson and Paul Kurtz)

▶ The way those interests should be carried out here is described by Havelock Ellis in his book, *The Dance of Life*. There he presents living as an art, one best characterized as a dance. In this, he follows the ancient Greeks who chose the image of dancing because, unlike walking or running, dancing is not generally viewed as a goal-oriented activity leading from point A to B. One dances for the sheer joy of the activity. It is the process more than the product that counts. And this is how the Humanist good life is to be lived.

... So, when someone asks a Humanist, “What is the purpose of life?” the Humanist should answer, “Life is not purpose, life is art.” The meaning is found in the doing. The Stoic remedy for misfortune is as much a part of this promise as is the Cyrenaic enjoyment of good fortune.

... When misfortune limits you, shift your focus and move on. I would argue that we can, in most cases, keep the promise of joy in the here and now. And even when all cannot be joy - for life indeed includes a large share of obligations, struggles, sorrows, and pain - the larger context can still be that of an artful life. - **Fred Edwords**

▶ The world is so full of a number of things, I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings.

- **Robert Louis Stevenson**



[Link to full text.](#)



Freedom is still the bonus we receive for knowing the truth.

- Dr. Martin Luther King

HIGH JINKS

“Destiny Is A Dirty Word”

From the archives, here is a Rant by Ron Steelman, ranted at the June 2005 Red Bank Humanists Forum.

Read it loud, angry, and fast!

DESTINY IS A DIRTY WORD

If a man would follow, today, the teachings of the Old Testament, he would be a criminal. If he would follow strictly the teachings of the New, he would be insane.

- Robert Green Ingersoll

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