

". . . and Gulliver Returns"
--In Search of Utopia--



Book 4

Understanding Our Human Values

Lemuel Gulliver XVI

“ . . . AND GULLIVER RETURNS”
--In Search of Utopia—

BOOK 4
A LOOK AT OUR HUMAN VALUES
We Don't All Think the Same

by
Lemuel Gulliver XVI as told to Jacqueline Slow

© 2014

Total Health Publishing
Oslo, Norway

Dear friends—Obviously I wrote this series to be read from Book 1 to the end, but silly me! Readers often begin with what sounds interesting to them. This may leave them unaware of the characters, my friends and I. So let me introduce us. We were boyhood friends, as wild and as close as geese heading south for the winter. But our university educations split us philosophically like a drop of quicksilver hitting the floor. But like those balls of mercury, when brought together, they again become one. As have we.



Ray became a Catholic priest and moved far to the right of where our teenage liberalism had bound us. Ray calls himself a neo-conservative. We think he is a reactionary.



Lee slid to the left of our adolescent leanings, and somewhere along the line became an atheist. Lee is a lawyer.



Concannon, Con for short, retired from his very successful business. I guess his business experience moved him a bit to the right, to conservatism—a conservative just to the right of the middle.



Then there's me. I think I'm pretty much a middle of the roader—except for my passion to save our planet by reducing our population before global warming, massive poverty and far-reaching famines decimate our humanity. Hope this introduction makes our discussions make a bit more sense.

LG

By the way, as most of you know, we have put our photos before every bit of dialogue. This should make you more familiar with us. So the books read more like plays. Since most of you read the books in PDF or EPUB format it is no problem. But if you read them in RTF or TXT you will probably lose the photos. This will make the transitions of the conversations more difficult to follow.

LG

Table of Contents

IN THE HOTEL	7
LOOKING FOR HAPPINESS	9
WE MUST THINK MORE DEEPLY—AND UNDERSTAND OUR THINKING	17
OUR BASIC ASSUMPTIONS	20
• THE FOUNDATIONS OF OUR VALUES—	20
SELF-CENTERED ASSUMPTIONS	26
GOD BASED ASSUMPTIONS	32
CONCEPTS OF GOD	35
WHAT IS GOD LIKE?	35
THEISM	38
PROOFS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD	40
IS AMERICA A CHRISTIAN NATION?	43
WHO GETS TO GO TO HEAVEN?	47
PANTHEISM AND PANENTHEISM	50
SATANISM	70
AN IDEA OF A BETTER SOCIETY AS A BASIC ASSUMPTION	71
THE SOURCE OF POWER IN A SOCIETY	75
FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF A SOCIETY	76
TYPE OF GOVERNMENT	79
USING GOD’S LAWS FOR SOCIETY	81
SOCIAL CONCERNS—DO UNTO OTHERS	83
ECONOMIC CONCERNS WHEN ESTABLISHING YOUR IDEAL SOCIETY	84
ECONOMIC EFFICIENCY	85
THE WELFARE STATE—CRADLE TO GRAVE BENEFITS	86
RETIREMENT PENSIONS	90
HEALTH CARE	92
HEALTH CARE AND AGING POPULATIONS	93
WORKING AND RESTING IN THE WELFARE STATE	95
POVERTY IS RELATIVE	96
SICK LEAVE	97
COVERING THE COSTS	98
HIGH TAXES	99
BALANCING THE BUDGET—TAXES FOR YOUR IDEAL SOCIETY	99
ECONOMIC GROWTH RATE	105
REAL WEALTH PER PERSON	105
BORROWING	106
BUDGET DEFICITS AND NATIONAL DEBTS	106
CRIME AND ITS COSTS	108
FOREIGN AID AND GLOBILIZATION	109
WAR OR PACIFISM	109
THERE ARE NO ANSWERS	110
THINKING EFFECTIVELY	111
HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT WE THINK WE KNOW?	111
EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE	114
THEORY AS A START TO SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY	116
HISTORICAL EVIDENCE	117
SCIENCE AND DEMOCRACY ARE SIAMESE TWINS	121
EVOLUTION	123
ACCEPTING OUR KNOWLEDGE FROM AUTHORITY	126
PERSONAL EXPERIENCE	129

FAITH	130
BUT WE ARE PSYCHOLOGICAL BEINGS	132
THE PROCESS OF REASONING	132
SEMANTICS	136
CONFLICTS IN VALUES	141
MORALS OR ETHICS ARE NOT SET IN STONE	143
MORAL RELATIVISM	143
SELF VERSUS SOCIETY	145
VALUE QUESTIONS	146
THE WELFARE STATE.....	147
The Welfare State is Moral from a self-centered point of view	148
From a self centered point of view it is immoral.....	149
Moral from God based assumptions.....	149
Immoral from God based assumptions.....	150
Moral for society based assumptions	150
Immoral from a societal point of view.....	151
HUMAN RIGHTS	151
Immoral from a self-centered point of view.....	154
Moral from a God based point of view.....	154
Immoral from a God based point of view.....	154
Moral from a society based point of view.....	154
Immoral from a society based point of view.....	155
LEGAL AND CIVIL RIGHTS.....	155
SOCIAL QUESTIONS.....	156
OFFICIAL STATE RELIGION.....	156
CHEATING OR LYING.....	157
Moral from a Self-centered point of view.....	157
Immoral from a self-centered point of view.....	157
Moral from a God perspective.....	158
Immoral from a God perspective.....	158
Moral from a societal point of view	158
Immoral from a societal perspective.....	158
STEALING.....	158
Stealing can be moral from a self-centered point of view.....	159
Stealing is immoral from a self centered point of view.....	159
Moral from a God based point of view	159
Immoral from a God basis.....	160
Moral from a societal basis.....	160
Immoral from a society's viewpoint.....	160
LIMITING POPULATION	160
It is moral from a self-centered point of view.....	161
Immoral from a self centered viewpoint.....	162
Moral from a God point of view.....	162
Immoral from God's point of view.....	163
Moral from a societal perspective.....	164
Immoral from a societal perspective.....	164
Population reduction is immoral from a society point of view.....	166
LICENSING PARENTS	167
It is moral from a self-centered point of view.....	167
It is immoral from a self-centered point of view.....	167
Moral from a God based point of view.....	168
Immoral from a God based point of view.....	168
Moral from a society-based point of view.....	168

UNLIMITED FREEDOM OF SPEECH.....	169
Freedom of speech is moral from a self centered viewpoint.....	170
Free speech is moral from a God based viewpoint.....	171
Immoral from a God based point of view	171
Moral from a societal point of view	171
Immoral from a societal viewpoint.....	172
SLAVERY	172
Moral from a self-centered point of view.....	174
Immoral from a self-centered point of view.....	175
Moral from a God based viewpoint.....	175
Immoral from a God based point of view	175
Moral from a societal viewpoint.....	175
Immoral from a societal viewpoint.....	175
IMMIGRATION.....	176
It is moral from a self-centered point of view	176
Immoral from a self centered point of view	176
Moral from a God based viewpoint.....	177
Moral from a societal viewpoint.....	178
Immoral from a societal viewpoint.....	179
ANIMAL RIGHTS	191
From a self centered point of view animals have rights	193
Self centered—animals should not have rights	195
GOD YES animals have rights.....	196
GOD Animals have no rights	199
Society yes animals have rights.....	200
Society-- animals have no rights	201
TORTURE.....	204
Moral from a self centered point of view	204
Immoral from a self-centered point of view.....	204
Moral from a God based viewpoint.....	204
Immoral from a God based point of view	205
Moral from a societal point of view	205
Immoral from a society centered point of view.....	205
Torture to Gain Life Saving Information from Enemies	205
Moral from a self centered point of view	206
Immoral from a self-centered point of view	206
Moral from a God based viewpoint.....	206
Immoral from a God based point of view	207
Moral from a societal point of view	208
Immoral from a societal centered point of view.....	208
LIBERTY OR SAFETY.....	208
Spying on the citizens has value from a self centered point of view	209
Immoral from a self-centered point of view	209
It's OK from a God based point of view	209
God no	209
Society yes.....	210
Society no	210
LIFE AND DEATH ISSUES	210
WHAT IS THE VALUE OF HUMAN LIFE?	210
WHEN IS IT KILLING AND WHEN IS IT MURDER?	213
Killing is good from a self centered viewpoint	213
Killing can be immoral from a self-centered point of view	213
Killing is moral from a society-centered point of view.....	217
Killing can be immoral from a societal point of view.....	218
WHAT IS DEATH?.....	218
SUICIDE	220

It has value from a self-centered point of view	220
It is immoral from a self centered point of view	220
It has value from a God based point of view	220
Immoral from a God-based viewpoint	222
It is moral from a societal viewpoint	224
It is immoral from a societal viewpoint.....	224
EUTHANASIA	225
Euthanasia is moral from a self-centered point of view	225
Euthanasia is immoral from a self centered point of view	226
Mercy killing is moral from a God based point of view	227
Mercy killing is immoral from a God based point of view	229
Euthanasia is moral from a society viewpoint.....	236
Euthanasia can be immoral from a societal viewpoint	242
CAPITAL PUNISHMENT	245
Capital punishment if moral from a self-centered viewpoint	245
Capital punishment is immoral from a self centered point of view	245
Capital punishment is moral from a God-based perspective	245
Capital punishment is immoral from God’s perspective	247
Moral from a societal viewpoint.....	247
STEM CELL RESEARCH	248
Stem cell research is moral from a self-centered viewpoint.....	249
Stem cell research is immoral from a self centered point of view	249
Stem cell research is moral from a God based point of view	249
Stem cell research has value from a societal point of view	250
Stem cell research is immoral from a societal viewpoint.....	251
QUESTIONS OF WAR.....	251
CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS.....	251
TERRORISM	253
Terrorism is moral from a self-centered viewpoint	253
Terrorism is immoral from a self-centered viewpoint.....	253
Terrorism is immoral from a God-based viewpoint	254
Terrorism is moral from a society-based viewpoint.....	254
Terrorism is immoral from a society-based viewpoint.....	254
REPRODUCTION.....	254
ABORTION.....	255
Abortion is moral from a self-centered viewpoint	256
Abortion is immoral from a self centered point of view	257
Abortion is moral from a God-based viewpoint.....	257
Abortion is immoral from a God-based point of view	260
Abortion is moral from a society viewpoint.....	266
Abortion is immoral from a societal viewpoint.....	268
PRE-MARITAL SEX	270
Pre-marital sex is moral from a self centered point of view	270
Pre-marital sex is immoral from a self-centered viewpoint	270
Pre-marital sex is moral from a God based viewpoint	271
Pre-marital sex is immoral from a God based point of view	271
Pre-marital sex is moral from a societal point of view.....	273
Pre-marital sex is immoral from a societal viewpoint.....	273
CONTRACEPTION	275
Contraception is moral from a self-centered viewpoint	275
Contraception is immoral from a self-centered viewpoint	276
Contraception is moral from a God based viewpoint	276
Contraception is immoral from a God based viewpoint.....	279
Contraception is moral from a society based viewpoint	281
Contraception is immoral from a societal viewpoint	286
PORNOGRAPHY.....	288

Pornography is moral from a self-centered viewpoint	290
Pornography is immoral from a self-centered viewpoint	290
Pornography is moral from a God-based point of view	291
Pornography is immoral from a God based point of view	292
Pornography is moral from a society centered viewpoint	292
Pornography is immoral from a societal viewpoint	294
HOMOSEXUALITY	295
Homosexuality is moral from a self centered viewpoint.....	296
Homosexuality is immoral from a self centered viewpoint.....	296
Homosexuality is moral from a God based viewpoint	296
Homosexuality is immoral from a God based viewpoint.....	297
Homosexuality is moral from a society based viewpoint.....	298
Homosexuality is immoral from a society based viewpoint	299
SAME SEX MARRIAGES	300
Same sex marriages are moral from a self-centered point of view	300
They are immoral from a self-centered viewpoint	300
Same sex marriages may have value, or may not have value, from a God based point of view.....	301
Same sex marriage have, or not have, value from a societal point of view.	301
EXTRA-MARITAL SEX	302
Extra marital sex is moral from a self-centered viewpoint.....	302
Extra marital sex is immoral from a self centered viewpoint.....	302
Extra marital sex may be moral from a God based viewpoint.	303
Adultery is immoral from a God based viewpoint.	303
Adultery can be moral or immoral from a societal point of view.	304
PROSTITUTION	304
Prostitution is moral from a self centered viewpoint.....	304
Prostitution is immoral from a self centered viewpoint	305
Prostitution is moral from a God based viewpoint.....	305
Prostitution is immoral from a God based viewpoint.....	305
Prostitution is moral from a society centered viewpoint.....	305
Prostitution is immoral from a society centered viewpoint.....	306
SUMMING UP	307
TRUTH	308
NOTES	311

IN THE HOTEL

Dr. Wang allowed her guests to sleep late and arranged to meet Commander Gulliver at one o'clock. She knew his jet lag was slowing him up, he was still lagging somewhere west of Tahiti. She found him in the hotel lobby but without his South Sea pareo, the colorful traditional body wrap so common among the islanders.

She was honored that she had been selected to acquaint the Commander and his group with a complete view of the values that people use to guide their lives. The values that our societies and religions have immersed us in are nearly universal in opposing the essential need to reduce population in order to save the planet. These values are even more opposed to licensing potential parents. If the Commander is to intelligently infuse new values into the world's population, he must understand the old values he is attempting to replace. Dr. Wang's task is to lay out the basics of the varying sources of values—from one's self, one's god, and one's existing or ideal society. But she understands that we humans are psychological, not logical. Attempting to change the traditions that

we assimilated with our mother's milk is like trying to untangle the Gordian Knot. It seems impossible—but it must be done!



--“Good morning Commander. Did you have a restful night?”



---“I slept well, Dr. Wang. I’m still getting used to these earthly beds. When you’re weightless in space you sleep anywhere and you don’t have to worry about the weight of your body on a mattress. I had trouble sleeping on my bed in California, but these air flotation mattresses at the hotel are like being weightless. I sure would like to bring one back with me.”



---“I’m sure that can be arranged. I’ll talk to the president about it. Did you enjoy the breakfast buffet?”



--“Thanks, but I’m sure she has more important things to do than attend to my insomnia! And yes, I love the food here, I don’t think I’ve ever had a more tasty or a healthier breakfast. Seaweed salad with curry, Swedish sennaps sild, soy cakes, rice bran cereal, half the time I didn’t know what I was eating, but it was all delicious. No wonder you people don’t get fat. You can eat for hours and take in so few calories—all the gourmet gusto but no resulting flabby abs.”



--“And you know it significantly reduces our heart disease and cancer rates”



--“I’ve sure learned something about living more healthily these last few days. But let’s get on with why I came to Kino—to meet and talk with you. Your work on human values really fascinates me. The most important discussions in this world are about values of one sort or another. My friends and I once shared common values, but as we gained our educations and matured many of our values have evolved in different directions. Here they come now. Men I’d like you to meet Dr. Wang. As you know she’s a professor of philosophy at the University of Kino. Dr. Wang these are my dearest friends, Con . . . Ray . . . and Lee. You can’t tell from his Hawaiian shirt but Ray is a priest. He’s in disguise, but he thinks after he’s dead he’ll be in ‘da skies’ while the rest of us will be resting deep below---on the other side of the grass! But at least he says he’s praying for us.”



--“Wreck, I’m just hoping for heaven. I’m not there yet. But if you believe in the hereafter, then da sky’s the limit.”



--“Touche’ And Con is a retired businessman. He finds your country fascinating and wants to list it on the New York Stock Exchange. Lee isn’t so sure he likes Kino. There’s nobody to sue and no reasons to.”



--Nice to meet you all. I've arranged for us to have our chat over lunch. Here at the Golden Dragon they make the finest of Chinese food and do unusual French and Italian dishes. They even make a Texas chili, but it's too tame for those of us who like Szechwan and Thai."



--"My taste buds have been destroyed by jalapenos and habaneras so I'll go for your hottest recommendation. What do you recommend Dr. Wang?"



--"Please call me Wanda, Con. But let's let the waiter take care of your fire starved pallet. Yes Ray?"



--"Con's just getting ready for his next life. Lucifer already has his lariat around him."



--"Ray, let he who has not sinned eat the hottest chili."



--"I pray for you every day Con, I pray that we won't end up in the same post-mortem place!"



--"Come on Ray, you know that afterlife wouldn't be the same without me. It wouldn't be heaven if we didn't have a football to toss around. You think St. Peter can toss you a post-corner or a hook-and-go like I can?"



--"Enough chopping Con, so pick up your chop sticks and eat 'chop chop!'"



--"Wreck, you think that just because you took one little cruise through space you can tell us what to do. Remember I'm still the quarterback, so I'll call the signals. And as I remember we were here to pick Dr. Wang's, I mean Wanda's, brain. Where should we start Wanda?"

LOOKING FOR HAPPINESS



---:"Well, seeking happiness has been a universal goal of humans, so let's start there. The one thing we know is that money doesn't buy happiness."



---"But if you have money you can at least suffer in comfort."



--“True Lee. But to realize happiness we must aim beyond and seek more important goals, then we will find that happiness is a by-product of our life quest. Your famous historian Arnold Toynbee said that ‘It is a paradoxical but a profoundly true and important principle of life that the most likely way to reach a goal is to be aiming not at that goal itself but at some more ambitious goal beyond it.’ Yes, Con.”



--“I remember taking a graduate class in economics from Dr. Easterlin at USC. He had been researching happiness related to income. I remember that he said there’s evidence that happiness is positively related to the frequency of sex.”



—“I heard somewhere that increasing sex from once a month to once a week gave the same life satisfaction as earning another \$50,000 a year.



—“In our country people tend to work instead of vacationing so they have extra money to add a room to their house or to buy a bigger car. In Europe they will nearly always opt for a vacation when they could otherwise work. People in the States still believe that money buys happiness. But when people are surveyed, things like job security, feeling safe, lower crime rates, better medical care and more time with a happy family rate high.

“Some countries are beginning to study what people value—what are their beliefs and what really makes them happy.

“The research shows that generally children make us less happy. So does losing one’s job. Sex makes us happier, as does enjoying one’s job. The Americans, who spend much more time working are much higher on the happiness list than are the French, who vacation a lot.

“Money only makes us happier up to a point, I heard that it was about \$75,000 a year, beyond that point it’s not very important. Obviously a utopia should have happy citizens. Several countries now are developing criteria and measurements for societal happiness but it is a difficult job to make a subjective feeling objective enough to analyze effectively. If married people are happier, is it because marriage makes them happier or that happy positive people are the most like to find partners and marry. What part do our genes play? How important is good weather?

Gulliver was absorbed in Con’s ideas, but wondered about the sources and the limits of paths to happiness. Was it money, God, philanthropy, fame, family, self realization or any of the other human goals and endeavors? He turned to Con and asked:



---“What if we start with Buddha’s ideas? Siddartha Gautama, the Buddha, taught that we should desire nothing, then, because if we had nothing, we should be perfectly happy. You’re one of the few multi-millionaires I know. Are you happy?”



----“I certainly have the physical comforts I need—a couple of houses, a fast car, incredible vacations. But when I think back, there are other things that made me happier when I was younger. Being on the winning side in a tough football game, especially when we played together in high school. Playing with my daughter when she was a child. Watching a Grecian or

Hawaiian sunset. Watching Aida in the Roman stadium in Verona. And there were so many times with Arline, just holding hands, walking in the woods, listening to a concert in the Hollywood Bowl. Gosh I miss her. Her death from breast cancer was the low point in my life. After ten years I'm still not over it. I just buried myself in work to try to forget. But all those great memories cost nothing or next to nothing. What do you say about that Wanda?"



--"I'm so sorry to hear about your wife. You are very lucky to have had such a great love. Very few are so fortunate. But to get back to the subject, you are expressing what you value. Your values seem to be related to what you have experienced and how they have affected your psyche. As I understand, you will be talking to Dr. Chan in Singaling. He's a psychologist. As you know, my field is more in ethical values. We all value different things, some motivate us psychologically, through our needs and drives, and some motivate us because of our values."



---"As I understand it from reading your books, your interests are in how we arrive at our ethical or moral values, like what do we think about abortion or capital punishment or euthanasia while Chan's work is more in the areas that motivate us psychologically, like power or love or meaning."



---"That's right. We are all motivated to action by how strong our psychological or ethical life values push us.

"But let's start with some definitions. There are several definitions of ethics and morals. I like to talk about the overall concept of values. Many people define ethics as an external set of behavioral guidelines. Religions, professions like doctors and lawyers, even the overall society may have ethical guidelines that are either written, like laws, or expected, like customs and traditions. Morals on the other hand are usually seen as how the individual believes and behaves.

"There can be conflicts in ethics, such as with doctors when they may accede to the patient's wishes and help with euthanasia, while their professional ethics, say to do no harm. Or lawyers may be convinced that one of their clients is a murderer but still they must defend them the best of their ability. And certainly there are conflicts between a religious or a societal ethic when the individual behaves differently morally. The recent number of sexually abused children by Catholic priests is an example. So is the action of a shoplifter, bank robber or murderer.

"I like to use the broader term of 'values.' I will speak of societal values and religious values as well as self-centered values. These societal and religious values may be seen as broad sets of ethical ideals. The self-centered values may adhere to societal or religious values totally or may go against those values. For example a drug user would be going against societal values. Someone getting a divorce because of self-centered values may be violating the ethics of their own religion. But values are broader than just ethical thinking. A society may have traditions that may be even more important than their ethical values. For men, wearing a coat and tie, may be essential for acceptance-- even if the custom does not aid in the performance of his job. In one group of society in it be essential to have a tattoo while in another group it may be totally unacceptable. So the values that a person chooses in terms of clothing or behavior may be obstacles or essentials to one's happiness.

"It is quite common that the individual values, including morals, may conflict with societal or religious values. And often societal and religious values conflict. For example wearing a burqa in France may put one's religious values in conflict with the societal values, the laws. While Mohammed did not mention that wearing a burqa was essential to the religion, some Muslim groups have elevated it to an essential, even fundamental, aspect of the religion.

“And Con, the joys you mentioned seemed to be satisfying the psychological motivations of power, love and meaning. But the commander’s major motivations seem to be society based values, to reduce population and to increase the odds that children will have parents capable of loving them and helping them be the best they can be. But I’m sure he has strong psychological motivations. In fact his concern with overpopulation and better parenting indicates that he has a strong motivation for humanitarian love. When you were all in high school it seems that power was your major motivator. And Con, the fact that you worked to develop a major company indicates that you had a strong power drive. And Father Ray, I would assume that your motivations are dominated by ethical concerns.”



--“And I hope a lot of love, Dr. Wang.”



--“And maybe some power too, Father. Knowing that you are right gives you a real feeling of power, doesn’t it?”



---“Well, maybe so. But Dr. Wang, don’t you feel some power from your notoriety?”



--“I hate to say it but I do. Being invited to speak around the world and teaching in major universities makes me feel that I am important to some people. But let’s get on with what the commander wanted to talk about—values. When I talk of values or morals or mores you must understand what I mean. These terms are often interchangeable but not always. ‘Mores’ are the traditions of a society. They may include merely manners and customs but usually they include ethical or moral attitudes. But within groups in the same society these customs may differ somewhat, for example from Catholics to Jews or from businessmen to government workers. Values are concepts that we hold in high esteem. Do you like classical or rock music, more money or more free time? Or it might be the principles by which we guide our lives. It is this latter meaning that I want to discuss.

“‘Morals’ usually refers to the goodness or badness of an action, our own or that of others. Often the general public thinks it’s only about sexual conduct or life and death issues. And while it is often used in a religious sense, such as that God has commanded it, I will use it more in terms of actions that people believe in and act on. So I will narrow the general meaning of ‘values’ and broaden the general meaning of ‘morals’ so that they will be nearly identical. So when I speak of ‘morals’ or ‘values’ I may be speaking in terms of a person’s beliefs and actions whether they are based on what the person selfishly thinks are good for him, what he thinks that God commands or what he thinks is best for the society he wants to live in. So, for example, a Muslim suicide bomber might do it for a self-centered reason—to go to heaven or as revenge for the death of a friend or family member. He might do it because he believes that God wants to kill the infidels. Or he might do it because he wants to live in a religious society governed by the religious laws of Sharia.

“It would be nice if each of us thought our way into intelligent behavior, but most of the time we are guided by our psychological propensities or our familial and societal traditions. So we generally don’t think, even though we think we are thinking. We are generally just reacting. So to think critically, like our homo sapiens species is supposed to do, we had better know how, then start to practice it. Otherwise we had better rename our species from ‘thinking humans’ to ‘reacting humans.’ We have to understand how our thinking starts with assumptions then how we build on those assumptions with evidence of varying levels of verifiability. Some people think quite

effectively, but others mistake their feelings for thinking. But we are all are convinced that our perceptions of truth are the most eternal of verities.

“What you have learned at home, in your neighborhood or in school is the truth, divine truth. Americans eat with their forks in their right hands, Europeans with the fork in the left. Indians may eat with their right hands, Chinese with chop sticks. No need for tolerance, each is wrong in the other’s eyes. My habits are right-- my beliefs regarding socialism or free enterprise, appropriate dress, how to raise children, or what type of god to believe in. But I’ll defend to the death my right to my beliefs—no matter how unscientific or parochial. Everything I believe in is true.”

Dr. Wang pushed back in her chair and looked at Lee who seemed eager to offer his philosophical insight.



--- “Ethics is often the word used to indicate what we have been doing lately. It’s not ethical to clone humans because we’ve never done it before. It’s not ethical to license parents because we’ve never done it before. It’s not ethical to recognize homosexual partnerships because we haven’t done it before. Atomic bombs are OK for one nation, not for others. Capital punishment switches from acceptable to unacceptable depending on who is sitting on the high court. Gassing people in prisons is OK in one society but not in another. Torture, too, is valuable or not valuable at different times and in different places. Bribery in one situation is OK, in another it is not.

“People talk about “ethical standards” but they are talking about their own ethics. There are few universal ethical or legal standards. Treason against one’s country is one. Murder of a person in your own society is also very commonly not allowed—although the Islamic group ISIL was doing it in 2014 and later. They not only executed non-Muslims, but other Muslims, the Shia, and even some in their own sect—the Sunnis. Stealing from someone in your own society also violates a common ethical rule, as does lying to people in your own society.

“Murder is unethical, capital punishment is ethical; rape is unethical, rape to avenge a social wrong is ethical. War is unethical, but this war is ethical. Abortion is unethical, denying a women’s freedom to control her own body and her own pregnancy is similarly unethical. Lying is unethical, lying to protect oneself in a life threatening situation is ethical.

“What has value to us, or what we hold as moral, varies with time, place and situation. Should it vary? Should every rule be universal—never changing through history? The Ten Commandments are such a universal moral code. What if Hitler were your father, should he have been honored as the commandment requires? Are most Christians dishonoring the code by keeping Sunday rather than Saturday, the Sabbath, as their day of worship? Will all people who say ‘God damn you’ go to hell for taking the Lord’s name in vain? Would it be moral for the police to ‘bear false witness’ against a serial killer who would murder again if released? Which commandment should have the higher priority?

“Our values generally are relative to the situation, to the time and place in which we live. And quite frequently they shift from being based on our self-centered interests, to being based on what we think God wants, or often they shift to what we think will produce the best society for us to live in.”



--“You are talking about moral relativism, that our morals depend on what we want. As a priest I certainly agree with Pope Benedict XVI. He came down hard on moral relativism, particularly against self-centered values and the hedonism that often propels them. He is against gay marriage, divorce, stem cell research and abortion. His ideas as to what actions are ethical are quite the opposite of Spain’s prime minister who has social policies favoring gay marriage, easier

divorce, more stem cell research and legalized abortion. But I believe that if you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything."



-- "Yes Father Ray, but Spain was merely following the rest of Europe in passing laws that favor the individual's free choice and the advancement of the welfare state. So thinking people will often disagree on what is moral and what is not.

"When we read that a bioethicist or a medical ethics specialist has said that something is unethical they seldom look at all of the ethical possibilities and explain them in their decisions. A medical ethicist at a Catholic hospital will often have a quite different decision on what is ethical for a patient than an ethicist from a Lutheran hospital or from a county medical center. When we cannot agree on truth, such as whether the universe was created by a supernatural designer or it just happened, or whether evolution is or is not a valid and reliable explanation of how the biological world developed—how can we get a universal agreement on how to behave?

"We all see the world through our own eyes—our own points of view. Whether based on our religion, the tradition of our society, our independent thinking or our self-centered desires—our thinking is clouded by what we think we know. And you remember what Shakespeare said, 'There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.'

"Our values affect many areas of our lives. For example in a medical setting we see a mental illness, such as depression that affects people in most populations, in the West drugs and therapy are usually the preferred treatment, in the underdeveloped areas, shamans are more likely to be given the task of healing the afflicted. In our modern world we look to science for probabilities, such as which potential cure is more likely to succeed, then we look to our values to see whether or not we should use it. Our values often trump what science indicates. Commander?"



-- "That's certainly true Wanda. We always think we are right—and will defend a meaningless position, such as a change in values, because it is traditional. Of course our tradition was given to us by the Almighty, or by Emily Post.

It reminds me of a Norwegian professor who did some undergraduate work at Stanford University. She was taken into a sorority. All the ladies ate their meals together. She was appalled by the poor manners of the American students. Her mother had taught her good table manners at home, rules like don't put your knife or fork down once you start eating., and cut one bite at a time with your fork in your left hand and your knife in your right). But the Americans had very poor manners. They cut all their food first then put the knife down and ate with the fork in the right hand. The Norwegian assumed that after a few weeks the ignorant Americans would follow her lead of good manners. After two weeks she was called in to the sorority president's office and told that her manners embarrassed the others. She was then taught how to eat properly—as the Americans did. Any sensible person would realize that the European way of eating makes much more sense. But the American eating habits are so ingrained in us that we think people who eat differently are barbarians. It is the same in the area of values, when we encounter new concepts we often criticize them because they are, or might be, unethical."

"It also reminds me that George Orwell said, that 'Every generation imagines itself to be more intelligent than the one that went before it, and wiser than the one that comes after it.'"



-- "How true. Now let's move on a bit. A major question in ethics is whether the intention or the result is primary in judging an action as ethical or unethical. For example, if a person leaves an important business meeting and is rushing to the hospital to be by his wife's side for the birth of their child that would be ethical for most people because his intention was noble.

But what if his car goes out of control and he kills a family in another car. That is a bad outcome. So was his action ethical?

“Or what if a suicide bomber wants to kill hundreds in a marketplace. Many would consider this to be unethical. But what if he inadvertently blows himself up while strapping his bomb on his back. Many would say that the outcome was good.

“The Commander has said that he wants to work to reduce the world’s population. Many would see that as a noble intention. What if a governmental ruler sets off nuclear bombs or sprayed the world with toxic gas that killed 90% of the world’s population so that he could easily control those people who were left. Would that be ethical because of the outcome that he reduced population, or unethical because of the means used? Should the end justify the means? What about that Commander?”



---“Whoa! That’s not in my plans. I want it done peacefully. But I see what you mean. I would have to consider it immoral. But I am certainly apprehensive people who want to violently reduce the population. And I don’t want to play God. But as I think about it, the kind of person who would do such a thing would not be one I would want running the world.”



--“But what if this ruler was a concerned and loving person and saw it as the only way to save the planet and that by wiping out 90% of the people now, more people would eventually be born to the world and live happier lives because she saved the planet?”



---“That adds some new evidence. I still couldn’t go for it because of my traditional beliefs against killing. But if more people would eventually enjoy our world before it passed on to the ‘planets’ paradise,’ or wherever good planets go when they die, the idea certainly has some strong reasons for doing it. But I’m still casting my vote for a peaceful population downturn. But you certainly make me think doctor. Obviously our values sometimes are in conflict with each other. We have conflicts within our own value systems and between what we value and what others value.

“On my voyage I wrestled with a great many questions relating to values and morals. It seemed that it should be so easy to have all people accept the same value system. But as I pondered the questions it became obvious that we will never all agree because there are too many elements which are variable. What we can understand, however, is that we each start our value thinking from one of three bases—what is good for me, what God wants me to do, and what is best for my society or the world society.

“When I was a child we believed in God. God gave us the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and the Koran. Our values were simple to understand. Don’t steal, honor your parents, don’t murder, and don’t lie. These made good sense. As I progressed through high school and college I came to understand the Constitution and many of the laws of our state. They also said don’t steal, honor your parents, don’t murder, and don’t lie. But I saw that many people do steal and kill.”



”They also lie on the witness stand when they go to court. Also they have what they thought were good reasons to kill and steal. Their fathers were drunks. They were poor. Their parents had beaten them. Someone else had a different color skin, followed a different religion, was a homosexual, or wore a different identifying gang color—all adequate reasons to hate. Then, of course, some people kill for the money. But there’s always a reason—or a rationalization.”



“On my voyage I was accompanied by CDs containing the great books of the East and the West. I read the Bible and the Koran several times. I read Aristotle and Plato, Shakespeare and Tolstoy, the Upanishads and the Sutras, Freud and Marx. I certainly didn’t understand all that these masters had to say but I did increase my knowledge a bit. And while I gazed from my window into the abyss of space, my mind did play with thoughts on how the illnesses of the human situation could be relieved or rectified. Certainly understanding the values that motivate us earthlings is the essential starting point. What are the values that people hold? Are those values good? Should they be changed? How can they be changed? Are these values legitimately based or are they merely opinions and wishes which we would like to have sanctified by our God or our government?”



--“Welcome to the club, commander. You are probably aware that only 15% of Americans support abortion for any reason during the second trimester. Half of Americans think that abortion is murder. Yet Americans have one of the highest abortion rates in the world at 51 per 1,000 women of child bearing age. Why are they saying one thing while doing something different? Why don’t more American males wear condoms if they are going to have sex. The point is that people determine that actions are moral or immoral if they are in tune with their opinions of the moment. This is even true of the experts, such as the bioethicists.

“Look at the rising number of Catholics in Latin America who say they warned Pope Benedict XVI: that unless the Church changes course, it may commit suicide. There is a growing gulf between many churchgoers who are joined by their grass-roots priests, and the ruling cardinals and the pope. Similarly, the values of the people and those of their religious or political leaders often vary. I wonder how far Pope Francis will go.”



---“Wanda, one of my parishioners told me that she could better judge her contraceptive needs than some elderly cardinals in Rome. It is true that many Catholics are soured by Vatican dogma but in my parish I hold strongly to the official rules of the Church. I wouldn’t doubt that some of my parishioners use contraception and maybe some have had abortions. We are an upper to middle class parish. But I understand there are more problems in the poorer areas of the States and in Latin America where people know that contraception and abortion are available but they are told not to use them. Then their large families keep them in poverty. I don’t know how true it is but I’ve read in the popular press that 70% of Brazilian women use artificial contraception.”



--“Father, I was lecturing in Sao Paolo a few years ago and I was told that Latin America accounts for about 40% of the world’s Catholics, but the number of evangelicals is surging. Some Brazilians warn that Brazil could eventually become a Protestant country. Some conservatives note that the evangelical sects are more morally demanding, not less. But the more common view is that your church has squandered its authority with positions parishioners see as backward, on divorce, birth control and the role of women. Either the church finds a compromise with the values that people seem to be living by or it will find itself outside the society.”



---“I understand that many local priests back their parishioners’ concerns but the Vatican’s rules put the official church at odds with the people’s more basic economic needs. I was

told of a priest who was running shelters for AIDS orphans, he was disciplined by the Church's authorities for advocating the use of condoms to stop HIV transference. Brazilians, like so many other Catholics, want to see the Church change its ideas on women priests, marriage for priests, homosexuality, contraception and other issues that the rank and file think of as important. Then there was the archbishop who was excommunicated by the Pope because he had ordained some married men and had done some other dastardly acts."



---But the way I see it as a priest, the most informed approach to morality comes from the Bible, the learned church scholars and the considered opinions of the pope. I believe that the Church is taking the right approach. If you are right, God is on your side. Martin Luther tried to reform the Church and was excommunicated, and we have done well without him."

WE MUST THINK MORE DEEPLY—AND UNDERSTAND OUR THINKING



--"As you know gentlemen, most of us wander through life accepting what the rest of our society believes. If it is a Christian society we believe in the New Testament. If it is a Muslim society we believe in the Qur'an. If it is a Hindu society we believe in the Upanishads and the Gita. If it is a truly democratic country we believe in certain humanistic principles. If it is a more totalitarian system we may appreciate the order and stability that it gives. We seldom stray from our traditions. People are generally surprised when they begin to face their beliefs by thinking deeply about them.

"Few Jews, Christians, Hindus or Muslims change their religions. Few democrats want a totalitarian dictatorship. And while totalitarianism isn't usually popular among its citizens it is certainly not universally abhorred. For many years after the fall of the USSR there were people who were worse off and who longed for the return of the socialistic dictatorship.

"So tradition is generally the basis for what we call thinking. Those who think they are thinking generally spend their efforts in 'proving' what they already believe, but beliefs that they may often find troubling. And if they find that their newly discovered truth is different from tradition they will probably be ostracized. Just look at Socrates, Jesus, Galileo and Marx. The only rewards they can claim are that they were using their intelligence and courage, and those are the most profound and exalted of human abilities. But discovering a new truth is painful. Intellectual inertia is comfortable and acquiring new knowledge or adopting new values upsets us. Who in his right mind could believe that idiot Copernicus when he said that the earth circles the sun. What madman would insist that the earth is not flat? Why should I believe that disease is caused by germs and not by the devil? Global warming is an alarmist misreading of a natural blip in the history of climate. There is no overpopulation problem—there is plenty room to build new housing. It is not so strange that when a new idea, that is similar to our beliefs appears, we may quickly accept it without scrutiny. But when a highly probable idea comes to us that contradicts our beliefs, we generally reject it.

"We, as individuals or as countries, usually justify our behavior, but that justification may not be in accord with what is the truth. It was abominable for the Nazis to kill innocent Jews, but it is acceptable for the Israelis to kill innocent Palestinians or Lebanese. Hitler rationalized that the Jews were a danger to the Third Reich. The Israelis, before Balfour, said that they needed to take back their homeland through guerrilla warfare. After all, the Arabs were only caretaking Israel until the Jews returned. Since Balfour the Israelis say that the best way to protect their state is to attack their enemies and people who live near those enemies to show that you don't mess with

Israel—rather than the Biblical permission for revenge of ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ The Israelis’ motto seems to be ‘an arm for a tooth.’

“Whether George Bush’s real reasons for attacking Iraq were for its oil or to establish an American-like republic in the country, the reasons he gave to the world were that it was to stop terrorism and to eliminate the weapons of mass destruction. But it hugely increased terrorism and there were no weapons of mass destruction. In fact most scholars believe that Bush’s action were directly responsible for the Islamic terrorism that still plagues the Mid-East and beyond.

“People’s beliefs are seldom totally congruent. George Bush’s approach to capital punishment, as governor of Texas, was that he trusted what the courts had found through their complete review of the facts and values of the case. He did this in the 152 death cases that he affirmed as governor of Texas. But when the courts found that Terry Schiavo was brain-dead he was not willing to follow the courts and the best medical minds involved. When he said that it is better to ‘err on the side of life.’ In the Schiavo case was he considering the poor people who need organ transplants or other medical services but cannot get them because he had cut their Medicaid budgets? Was the President merely as illogical as most of us are, most of the time?

“Most humans say they place their religious beliefs primary in their thinking. Religion is an emotional decision based on faith, science is an intellectual decision based on empirical evidence. In holding either belief we may be asking it to do more than it is capable of doing.

“The simplest thing is that when you have a ready made ‘truth’ just accept it and direct your intellectual efforts in other directions—like into video games, television, or murder mystery books. Why learn the multiplication tables or how to add when you have a calculator? Why consider alternative theories of the origin of the universe when we have the Bible? Why consider us to be animals when we then may be forced to drop the idea of an afterlife? We think we know it all. And there is always somebody in authority who loudly emphasizes the same beliefs that we have. But celebrity status does not make a person all-knowing! A loud voice is no assurance that truth is being spoken. Nor is an army of parrots proclaiming that their beliefs are a guarantee of objective reality. The reality of the universe, the universality of values, and the value of objective truth, have not yet been discovered by our race.’



--- “But don’t tell a person he’s stupid or you’ll lose your head! I don’t know if we can arrive at truth by debating the issues, but we have a better chance to get closer to it. And as we approach it, its ring should be louder”



-- “But the voices of the ignorant may drown it out! We have to continually be aware that truth does not depend on an air of confidence or a posture of certainty. Throughout history progress has been stymied because ignorant people have been in leadership positions.”



-- “Well gentlemen, here comes our lunch. The president ordered it. Just a twenty-seven course snack while we talk.”

Wreck looked over the pile of platters with unknown delicacies and thought of his experience of a few nights earlier when he had done his gourmet gorging. He was going to take it much slower this time. His buddies were hungry for lunch, but seemingly hungrier for conversation. Con asked:



--“If we really believe in a heaven, why do we cling so hard to life? Why save the AIDS doomed child for a life of poverty in rural Africa when the child would be immediately

accepted into Heaven upon death? Why fight the death penalty when the imprisoned will get his just deserts sooner—heaven if he has made his peace with God, or hell if he hasn't. Why stop a physician assisted suicide when the patient is not being 'murdered' because she wants to die?"



--"Well Con, remember when we read Through the Looking Glass in the eighth grade? The White Queen said to Alice 'believing in impossible things is simply a matter of practice'"(1) It seems that we all want to believe in impossible things."



-- "Exactly Commander. Let's look at some of the impossible beliefs that are the bases of our ethical thinking. The ultimate question of any thinking person is 'Does a supreme creating being exist?' If that is answered in the affirmative the next question is 'Is that being involved in the moral operation of the world?' The next of the enduring questions is 'Is there an afterlife, and if so how does one assure oneself of a pleasurable place in the hereafter? Yes Con."



--"Wanda, in my country we are becoming less and less literate. Illiteracy is a problem for thinking because the less information a person has, the less likely it is that he or she will make an informed decision. In the U.S. a study by the Department of Education showed that 5% of Americans are not literate. Of Hispanic immigrants the percentage was 44%, compared to 35% ten years earlier. Even among those with graduate degrees from college, only 41% were deemed to be proficient in comprehending abstract reading and in analyzing information effectively. These abilities were 20% higher for graduates ten years earlier. Could such inabilities be partly responsible for America's voting preferences for national offices?

"Is this the reason that President George W. Bush, as an evangelical Christian, didn't believe in evolution or in global warming? Was it a lack of intelligence, a lack of knowledge, or just the fervent hope that they weren't true, in spite of the evidence?"

"Is it possible that the average person, or many of the leaders, really can't think logically? Is it possible that the average person doesn't have the necessary facts to make an intelligent decision? Is it that they don't have the logical tools to evaluate the evidence effectively? Is it possible that the average person doesn't care? Is it possible that spending their time playing video poker is more important than watching the evening news or reading a newspaper?"



--"There's no question that if we lack the ability for critical thinking we won't be able to wrestle intelligently with the tough problems of ethical thinking. But more than the ability to think deeply and critically we need to have a great deal of reliable evidence. When we criticize an unwelcomed idea do we do it with facts or opinions? What evidence do we have? Is it empirical or just a personal preference? This is especially difficult in ethical questions where unprovable basic assumptions are fundamental to the positions we take.

"Let me clarify something here. There are several definitions of ethics and morals. I prefer to talk about the overall concept of values. Many people define ethics as an external set of behavioral guidelines. Religions, professions like doctors and lawyers, even the overall society may have ethical guidelines that are either written, like laws, or expected, like customs and traditions. Morals on the other hand are usually seen as how the individual believes and behaves.

"There can be conflicts in ethics, such as with doctors when they may accede to the patient's wishes and help with euthanasia, while their professional ethics require that they 'do no harm.' Or lawyers may be convinced that one of their clients is a murderer but still they must defend them to the best of their ability. And certainly there are conflicts between a religious or a societal ethic

when the individual behaves differently morally. The recent number of sexually abused children by Catholic priests is an example. So is the action of a shoplifter, bank robber or murderer.

"I like to use the broader terms of values. I will speak of societal values and religious values as well as self-centered values. These societal and religious values may be seen as broad sets of ethical ideals. The self-centered values they adhere to societal or religious values totally or may go against those values. For example a drug user would be going against societal values. Someone getting a legal divorce may violate the ethics of their own religion. But values are broader than just the ethical thinking. A society may have traditions that may be even more important than their ethical values. For men, wearing a coat and tie, may be essential for acceptance-- even if the custom does not aid in the performance of this job. In one group of society it may be essential to have a tattoo while in another group it may be totally unacceptable. So the values that a person chooses in terms of clothing or behavior may be obstacles or essentials to one's happiness.

"It is quite common that the individual values, including morals, may conflict with societal or religious values. And often societal and religious values conflict. For example wearing a burqa in France may put one's religious values in conflict with the societal values. While Mohammed did not mention that wearing a burqa was essential to the religion it evolved as a tradition, and then often a requirement. Later on in our discussion we will look at how an action, like an abortion, torture, capital punishment—and several others—can have value or not have value depending on the basic assumptions one uses and the evidence that one applies to the situation.

OUR BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

• THE FOUNDATIONS OF OUR VALUES—

"Our beliefs guide us. I believe I will get my paycheck on Friday. I believe that my daughter will come home safely from her date. I believe I will go to heaven. These are commonly acknowledged assumptions. But there are other assumptions that we generally don't even question the foundations of our thinking. They are absolutely basic to our thinking and our behavior. Philosophers generally realize that they have such assumptions. They call them metaphysics—meaning beyond the physical world.

"Philosophers usually see the world as basically 'matter' or as basically 'idea'. The materialists believe that ideas come from matter. The idealists believe that idea is primary—usually that primary idea is God—the supreme idea, the ultimate of spirit. Matter then comes from God, the ultimate idea.

"Certainly not all philosophers agree. Plato saw the basis, the primary starting point, as 'idea'—a world of concepts of perfection. But Karl Marx saw it as matter—the physical world. Plato, as do the great religious teachers, saw idea as coming first. Those religious sages would see the most fundamental idea as the spirit of God. Then God created matter. Marx would see the physical world as the fundamental starting point. As matter evolved into animal life, then human life, ideas evolved. So Marx had a diametrically opposite idea than that of the idealists. Then, philosophically speaking, along came Descartes who said that both mind and matter are equally important. So the greatest minds of our civilization cannot agree on a starting point for our thinking.

"Very few beliefs are basic assumptions. The idea that there are such things as human rights, and what those rights might be, are derived from God based or society based assumptions. Without such a foundation the theory, that rights exist, is groundless. The assumptions from which they derive, however, may also be groundless or untrue. If a basic assumption can be proven to be true or untrue it is no longer in the realm of assumptions. For example, if it could be proven or disproved that there is a god it would no longer be an assumption.

“Most people in the world believe in a religion that they sincerely think is true. The Hindus believe that God is the totality of the universe. This is called pantheism, meaning that ‘all is god.’ Jews, Christians, Muslims, Bahais and Parsis or Zoroastrians believe in a single God. This is called monotheism. The purist Buddhists would not believe in a special god, but some Buddhist sects do and some, such as ‘Pure Land’ Buddhism believe in a hereafter like the monotheistic religions. While each may believe deeply in his or her God, and may even be quite willing to die for that belief, it cannot be proven. If any of these beliefs could be proven we would all have the same beliefs.

“Every religion has its scriptures or traditions that describe its god or gods and the morality that their supreme being requires. The scriptures and traditions cannot be proven or all of us would believe in all of them.

“People are so certain of their beliefs that most will attempt to ‘prove’ that God exists by citing their own scriptures. And how do they know that the scriptures are true? Because they are the inspired word of God! So we have a circular argument. “The Bible says God exists, and God wrote the Bible.” Anyone with any expertise in logic sees clearly the logical problem. But most of us are psychological, not logical, so such circular thinking makes perfect sense to us. So for Jews, Muslims and Zoroastrians that’s all they need—the assumption that there is a God and the assumption that their scriptures are true. For Catholics they add another basic assumption, that the Pope is infallible in matters of faith and morals when he speaks *ex cathedra*. For Mormons, they add another scripture to the traditional Christian scriptures, their Book of Mormon. For most Christians a further assumption is needed—that Jesus is God. Once these two or three assumptions are accepted, the rest of the religion can follow, sometimes logically, sometimes with some gaps in logic.

“There is some historical evidence that verifies some events in the Bible. There are the foundations said to be of Solomon’s Temple. There are remnants of Jericho. But we don’t have the stone tablets of Moses, evidence of Egyptian chariots in the Red Sea, or the remains of Noah’s ark. We can be quite certain that Muhammad and Paul lived and the historian Josephus mentions several Jesuses. It was a common name at that time, as was the name James. But the evidence for Abraham and Adam only come from the Bible. As in all historical evidence we have to account for the bias of the author. Then with ancient historical documents we have to be concerned with the biases of those who copied the original works or those who transcribed the oral traditions.

“So Homer’s tale of Troy, which would have actually occurred in about the 12th Century BCE, was not made into a poem by Homer for another 400 years. He couldn’t have written it down because he died before Greek writing was developed. While it may have been written in another language, it wasn’t written in Greek for another 400 years. So we might question whether everything in the written poem corresponds exactly with the events in Troy. Add to this the fact that scholars aren’t certain that Homer actually existed or that the war in the Iliad actually took place. Was it more of a conglomeration of 300 years of warfare between the Greeks of the west and those who lived in what we now call Turkey? Did Achilles or Hector really exist?

“This type criticism is also made of the Bible, of the works of Josephus and of all other ancient texts. Sometimes it is a question as to whether the authors to which the writings are attributed actually existed. Sometimes it is a question as to whether the people or the events talked about actually existed. Sometimes it is a question about how true the oral tradition was to the actual facts that were being related. Sometimes it is a question of when it was written and whether it had been mistranslated.

“For example, Moses is given credit for writing the first ten books of the Bible. Did Moses actually exist? Could he write? If he wrote did he write in his native tongue of Egyptian? If he wrote in Egyptian did he write the Pentateuch in hieroglyphics? Or did he know Phoenician writing, which was based on Egyptian writing? If he lived about 1200 BCE he couldn’t have written in Hebrew since the earliest Hebrew didn’t evolve from the Phoenician for another 400 years. Of course we know that the earliest written remnants of the Bible date from a thousand years

after the time of Moses. Were there other written records, now lost, that came directly from Moses? Were the Biblical accounts merely oral traditions that were first written in the Second or Third Centuries BCE? There are so many questions that one might ask before a thinking person can accept any scriptures as basic assumptions for a belief system or a religion.”



—“Well, I have taken a great deal of philosophy, both at Notre Dame and in the seminary. I certainly understand metaphysical problems, but certainly some metaphysical assumption is true. I believe in a creating God. It can’t be disproved.”



--“Right Father. That is your basic assumption, and the assumption of billions of others. But some basic assumptions can be criticized or questioned.

“But another kind of knowledge of a supernatural comes from personal experience. Those who are deeply religious hold that the most real knowledge is found in the spiritual experience of uniting with the supernatural. Since it is based on personal experience it can not be proven. It is therefore a basic assumption for that person, although the way that neuroscience is developing we may be able to prove or disprove it in the future. Is it possible that there is an electrical or chemical reason for some people to think that they have had a mystical experience? Some work in Canada strongly indicates a psychological basis for the religious mystical experience.

“Still, with the absence of scientific evidence to the contrary, who am I to argue with such a lofty conclusion from those who have experienced it? The holiest adherents to most religions have had similar mystical experiences—the Hindu who has united with the Brahman through years of correct meditation. The holy Jew, the holy Christian, and the holy Moslem have felt deeply the spirit of Yahweh, God or Allah. And they speak of their experiences just as do Buddhists or Hindus who have united with the oneness of nature. These saints are close brothers in their beliefs—all near the top of the mystical mountain, but all arriving by different means of travel.

“It has long puzzled me why the common brothers in your western religions have fought so violently among themselves for so long. Can’t they see that they believe in the same Supreme Being, identified by the same Abraham. But Christians and Moslems fight, Moslems and Jews fight, Jews and Christians fight, Christians and Christians fight, Moslems and Moslems fight, Jews and Jews fight. Why? There must be an underlying mental process that is more powerful than their expressed beliefs in the supernatural. Yes Commander.”



---“I remember in college that the head of the philosophy department at U.C.L.A., Dr. Kalish, had a debate scheduled with the head of the philosophy department at Loyola University. The U.C.L.A. professor called himself an atheist. The Catholic priest from Loyola obviously believed in God. They debated the question of “whether or not God exists” before a packed auditorium. After three hours of debating they could not agree. As a sophomore I was chagrined. But as a senior I understood why. You cannot debate basic assumptions because they are merely assumptions. They may be true, but they are unprovable by empirical methods. When Paul wrote in his Epistle to the Hebrews that “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” he was not speaking as either a philosopher or a scientist—but rather an explainer of that which is unexplainable. Remember that debate, Con?”



---Ya Wreck. At the time I was disappointed in not knowing for sure if God existed. But you’re right. You can’t argue about basic assumptions because they are only assumptions. If a philosopher accepts the assumption that matter came first—an idea he cannot prove, his

materialism follows consistently from that premise. If another philosopher accepts the non-provable assumption that idea came first, her philosophy follows logically. But how can both starting points be true? They can't. In fact maybe neither is true!

“When we have been admonished to not argue about religion or politics. It is sound advice because we would be arguing about assumptions that we cannot prove. There is a God. There is no God. Justice requires liberty. Justice requires equality. But liberty and equality are often antithetical concepts.”



---“Exactly man, our values, like every other body of thought or opinion, must start with basic assumptions—starting points for our thinking that we cannot prove. That is, there are beliefs which each of us must assume that are basic to the remainder of our thinking. These assumptions are so clear to us, so ingrained in us, that we don't question them. Whether it is science, philosophy or religion—we start with assumptions that we can't prove. Whether we believe in a Supreme Being, a certain set of scriptures, the belief that the universe is merely matter, or that empirical science is the best way of knowing—we are making assumptions that we can't prove.

“Wanda, I believe in science. It is the best way to determine what is true. Science has given us the electric light, the space shuttle, the electric guitar—and the atomic bomb. Science is ‘real’ knowledge.”



--“It's not that simple Lee, because even science rests on basic assumptions. The observation of scientists has told us that the sun always rises in the east. BUT, what about tomorrow? Can I be absolutely certain that it will? No! Scientific observation and analysis only gives us a higher probability that many things will continue as they have been in the past. Science does not give us certainty. And science does not deal with values. Science gives us probabilities, values may tell us what to do about them. Medical science discovered various techniques of contraception, each with its own probabilities for success. But whether we should use these techniques is a value question. Science gave us the atomic bomb, but should we use it? Science gave us the automobile. Most of us use it, but the Amish don't.

“Here are some assumptions of science. Science assumes that: the universe exists, that it shows some order, that we can discover that order, that true knowledge can be objectively demonstrated, and that most knowledge is in the realm of probability rather than absolute truth. To this we might add the assumption that truth is better than ignorance, but all belief systems would support that claim. They would merely disagree on what truth is. If you accept these basic assumptions you will probably be interested in what empirical science has to offer.

“Father Ray, Cardinal Schonborn recently said that ‘Dogmas of faith are OK, but not the dogmas of science’ Of course I would disagree. I see scientific investigation as much more likely to give me truth. A scientific theory may start as an idea, but unless it undergoes rigorous testing it is worthless as science. Which is easier to believe—that a Being created this intricate universe or that it just evolved? That the original ingredients for the universe existed or that a creator existed before that? The fact that the exchange of exhaled carbon dioxide by humans is converted to oxygen by plants and the exchange keeps them both alive is incredible. The order of the universe is unbelievable—but do comets that crash into planets show such order? Does global warming show an intelligent design that allows man-made pollutants to threaten human life? Does allowing children to be born to parents who will soon die, leaving them orphans in a country without food or water but with genocidal warfare, show an intelligent designer of the universe?



--“Dr. Wang, these aberrations of what some humans see as problems with intelligent design do not disprove an intelligent designer. Only an infinite mind can see the whole picture. We don’t know whether God causes earthly catastrophes to punish people, or to allow good people to enter heaven earlier than a normal lifespan would allow.



--“Back in the 1990’s I had occasion to fly the Concord from Paris to Los Angeles. It left shortly after sundown. To my amazement as we flew west I saw the sun rise in the west. Because we were flying westward faster than the Earth was rotating I had a different point of view than other scientists who were standing in one place and saw the sun sink in the west.

“How many hundreds of thousands of times have students in chemistry classes put hydrogen and oxygen together? Hasn’t it always resulted in water? Two hydrogens and one oxygen make water. What if yesterday in a small college in Montana, a student put two hydrogens together with an oxygen and it came out beer!!

“But seriously, if that had happened it would not disprove the theory of the fundamental ingredients in water—it would only make it somewhat less than certain. It would just reduce the probability of it happening by less than a quadrillionth.”



--“The point is that science deals with probabilities—with the assumption that there is uniformity in nature. Science cannot give certainty. The ancient Greek “scientists” could look at the sky and realize that the sun moves around the earth. Certainly it was obvious. But as we began to learn more about space we were able to understand that it was just the opposite. We are in motion around the sun. Then we learned that there were other planets also in motion around the sun. Then we learned that the Earth wasn’t flat. Then we learned about light years. Then we went to the moon. And here am I, the first traveler around the solar system. I certainly am a believer in science. But it is not the only way of knowing.

“Look at the geometry we studied in high school. That was the geometry that Euclid developed. We all assumed that it was true for all times because it was so logical. The shortest distance between two points is a straight line. That’s obvious. What the teacher didn’t tell us was that Euclid’s assumption was that space is flat. But we can’t use that geometry to fly a plane from London to Los Angeles because the earth is somewhat round. It is an oblate spheroid, being a little flatter on the top and bottom and wider at the Equator so we have to use different assumptions than Euclid’s to find the shortest route. That’s why transatlantic flights from Europe go northwest then southwest, rather than directly west. But of course that’s only a small part of why we fly closer to the poles. Winds and other things are factored into the flight route by using the knowledges of other sciences.’



--“But Commander, in dealing with geometry we are not dealing in ‘basic’ assumptions because we can prove the assumptions. The space is either flat or curved. But the basic assumptions we use in deciding on our values are non-provable. These non-provable assumptions include such questions as: Does God exist? Am I the most important person in the world? Should society’s values be considered more important than God values? Should God values be more important than society values, or my personal values? Which type of society should I value most? Whatever beliefs we take regarding these questions can’t be proven, or can’t be proven conclusively.

“Some assumptions that had been believed have been disproved. For example the idea that Marx’s communistic ideas would yield the best society in today’s world didn’t work. Although Marx based his ideas on atheism and the dialectic of economic history, neither of which is provable, it seems that in today’s world individual psychological self-centeredness prevails. The collective economy, tried by the USSR, did not reward individual initiative. It therefore failed. Maybe in a future time it will work, but not yet. So the assumptions of Marx and Lenin turned out to be wrong and historical, psychological and economic evidence trashed those ideas.

“If it were possible to disprove God, which it isn’t, it would eliminate many religious beliefs. If we could make all people believe that they are not important, which we will never do, it would eliminate many obstacles to developing an altruistic society.

“Many of us wonder why we should start with unprovable assumptions when we could start with what is provable, or at least more highly probable—empirical science. We could state like Descartes did, ‘I think therefore I am’ then move on from there. We could spend our time on what is provable or probable, rather than on ideas that can’t be disproved. Because something can’t be disproved doesn’t mean it’s true. I can’t disprove that there is a witch in my house, a cow jumping over the moon, or a god in heaven. Yes Con.”



--- “What about our basic assumptions in the area of values? In the areas of our values, what we really believe in and what we do, our basic assumptions come down to either myself being primary, God being primary or my idea of an ideal society being primary. My basic assumptions may shift depending on the value I am living. I may steal or shoplift because I want something. I may not murder because it is against the laws of the society. I may go to worship once a week for God-based reasons.”



---“Right Con. So our values are based upon basic assumptions—unprovable starting points. These assumptions can be based upon the idea that the individual is primary, on the idea that God is primary, or on the idea that a certain type of society is primary. As individuals we often hold that we are most important—we would call that a self-centered basic assumption.

“Catholics often are following their self-centered values in having abortions, using contraceptives, getting divorces and not going into the religious vocations. In the last 25 years there are half again as many parishioners to priests and the number of nuns has reduced by over 50%. On top of this the clergy’s population is aging and there are few young recruits. Isn’t that true Father?”



--“Yes it is. The Vatican recently announced that there is only one priest for every 2,677 Catholics but 25 years earlier there had been one for every 1,797. You see here the strong pull of being ‘self centered’, or as the Pope says, the ‘relative’ morality because more people are taking the easier road to ‘pleasure now’ rather than the path that God wants that will lead us to communion with Him.

“When a Catholic says ‘until death do us part’ the Church believes this is an essential part of the marriage contract. When King Henry didn’t want to abide by his contract he just started a new approach to marriage. Couples in other religions usually have the same phrase ‘until death do us part’ in their marriage ceremonies, but if things stray from the state of ecstatic bliss they are ready for divorce. They violate their marriage contract. The Church doesn’t approve of breaking the contract. Some Catholics get a civil divorce and remarry in a civil ceremony and think they can go on receiving communion. The Pope says ‘no.’ They have violated the sacrament of marriage and

they want to violate the sacrament of communion. The Vatican says they may not accept communion.

“Similarly, politicians who advocate abortion, which is a grievous sin, should be denied the Eucharist. The problems of the conflicts in values between the Church and governments is even worse in Europe than in the U.S. Legalizing marriages between homosexuals, artificial insemination, contraception, and other self-centered desires run against natural law and the sanctity of the family.”



—“Did you hear about the Nebraska senator who sued God? He wanted to show that anyone can sue anyone for anything in the U.S. He made it obvious that God can be brought into government to change it, but the people can’t challenge God. His suit charged that God is a terrorist. He has threatened the senator’s constituents and the rest of the world’s inhabitants with floods and general death and destruction. He is asking for a permanent injunction against God.

“God can be sued in Nebraska because He is everywhere.”

SELF-CENTERED ASSUMPTIONS



---“Your point is well taken. But let’s discuss self-centered basic assumptions for a while. Most of us believe we are of ultimate worth. But what if we were to agree with Carl Sagan who said ‘We find that we live on an insignificant planet of a humdrum star lost in a galaxy tucked away in some forgotten corner of a universe in which there are far more galaxies than people. It would not alter our exalted view of ourselves. We would still have our self-centered values. They can be based on what I want now or what I want for myself in the future. I want to be an engineer. To do this I must graduate from college. What if I want to go to a party with my friends now, but I have an important engineering test tomorrow? Which do I choose, the present desire or the future desire? I’m at a party and recognize that I have had too much to drink but I want to go home now. Do I drive and take the chance of injuring someone else, killing myself or a friend, being taken by the police for felony drunk driving, with possible jail time, a heavy fine and losing my driving license? Or, do I take a taxi or wait until somebody sober will drive me home? What is most important, my ‘now’ or my future?”

“Are suicide bombers merely self-centered? Are they acting out of a selfish need for revenge, for having had friends or families killed? Are they self centered but looking to the future—for an afterlife in heaven, because they believe that their action is desired by Allah?”

“Suppose I’m very angry with my child. I would like to hit him. But if I hit him will he learn that hitting is an acceptable means of behavior against people generally, or against my future grandchild?”

“Look at global warming! Something must be done, but don’t increase my gasoline or electricity prices. Don’t raise my taxes for research on reducing greenhouse gases. I want you to make some drastic changes in the way you live, but don’t make me alter my lifestyle. If we look at the emerging economies of China and India as ‘selves’ we see that they don’t want curbs on creating dirty energy but they want the West to make the adjustments, after all it was the industrial revolution in the West that created the problem, so why should China and India be penalized for what the West has done?”

“The easy path is to always to choose for the present. But quite often that goes against what is good for the future. It also quite commonly goes against God’s commands or what is good for society. Do I take the position that my life is now? I’ve passed my past and tomorrow will never come.

“Quite commonly we make value decisions based on self centered needs and assumptions. I want to drive fast and exceed the speed limit. Society’s interests are better served if I hold to the legal speed limit. But I am in a hurry. The reason I hurry may be that I love the feeling of power that I get from driving fast. Or it may be that my wife has been in an accident and is in a critical condition in the emergency room in the hospital. In either case it was a self-centered reason for driving fast, but my reason for driving fast may make the action more or less ethical. Yes Lee”



---“I am reminded of one of George Orwell’s sayings that ‘On the whole human beings want to be good, but not too good, and not quite all the time.’ But Wanda, isn’t it conceivable that the ‘self’ can be a single person or a close knit body of people with the same interests, such as a gang or a family?”



---“That’s true, Lee. When you have a small group of like-minded people they might be seen as a ‘self’ or as a ‘society.’ But let’s concern ourselves primarily with the individual. What about you? What do you want to have? Money or experiences? Do you want to accumulate your wealth in goods or in memories? Do you want to experience travel, people, and ideas or do you want to buy cars, yachts and houses? If you go to college is it to gain knowledge and experiences now, like sports and parties, or is it to gain the tools you need for your future occupation or to better enjoy the eventual experiences of your life? When you take college courses in your major you are preparing for your occupation. When you take courses in art history, music appreciation or tennis you are preparing to enjoy your non-working life. When you are facing death which would you have preferred, memories or money?

“Another fact relating to our living only in the present is that we can’t think of our own non-existence. We can imagine ourselves being dead. We can imagine ourselves at our funeral, with both of our friends there. One is even crying. We can imagine ourselves six feet under with the worms gnawing at our bones. But we are still thinking of ourselves as existing. What is more natural for our minds than to hope to continue our existence, preferably in this world. But realizing that we can’t go on forever, we naturally would like to believe in an afterlife.

“Once we decide that we are important, perhaps all-important, we need to decide on whether our present or our future should be primary. Should I go to work right out of high school and start making money and living high? Or should I sacrifice the good life now, work to support myself through college and hopefully become better educated in learning how to be a more complete human being while also learning the advanced skills of an occupation that I will enjoy throughout my life.

“Why do people not exercise, eat too much, eat the unhealthy foods, not have annual physical exams? Probably because they are in denial that negative things will happen to them in the future. We won’t die of heart disease because we smoked or ate too much fat. We won’t die in an auto accident. Our concerns are only in the present.

“When you eat is it because you are hungry? Do you eat only so that you can survive so you will have a future? Do you eat to relieve psychological stresses or boredom? We need food to survive? But how much and what type will you select? Are you really hungry? What about what you eat? A slice of salmon with vegetables? Coffee and donuts? Are you going to eat what is good for your body or what tastes good going down? Does looking fit feel better than eating fried chicken or candy bars and getting fat? If you weigh more than insurance tables say you should, will you reduce your fat and alcohol intake? If so will you eat a salad with a non-fat dressing? Does the saying ‘A minute on your lips forever on your hips’ have any meaning for you?

“So our values can relate only to the present, or we may think and do things with the future in mind. We spend for the present but save for the future. We gorge in the present and diet for the

future. We snort cocaine for the present, we abstain for our futures. The truth is that for ourselves and for our society delayed gratification is necessary. It is my observation that the people in developing countries are more future oriented. It also seems that when people think only in the present the society slides towards decay and its death. It happened in the last days of ancient Rome, in the last days of Renaissance Italy and I see it in the West today. It seems that the message is ‘Eat, drink and be merry—because my government will take care of me until I die.’”



--- “But Wanda, isn’t it true that some behaviors are good for the present and the future. Exercise can help you feel and look better now while reducing the chances of heart disease, cancer, Alzheimer’s and diabetes in the future. Reading a good book can give you pleasure now and may make profound changes in your life in the future.”



--“True Ray. But it seems that most of the time we are deciding for either the ‘now’ or the future. Once you determine your desires or possibly what you think of as your ‘rights’ you may take many methods of trying to get them. I understand that you will be discussing how to get what you want with Dr. Singh when you visit Indus.”



---“That’s right Wanda, but first we have to find out what we want, then we’ll look at how to get it.”



--“Then let’s get on with our self-centered values discussion. Or is it a lecture? I find I’m doing most of the talking! Con?”



---“That’s why we’re here. We want someone who knows what they’re talking about. When we listen to Wreck or Ray they both think they have all the answers. Lee and I are here to learn. So lead on Dr. Wanda!”



--“OK. To take my thoughts another step forward, I can view how I act on my values based on the present time, right now, or on what will happen in the future. Looking at this from a self centered basic assumption I can judge something to be good or bad based on how it affects me now or in the future.

“If I want to lose weight or I have a high cholesterol level and believe that it may affect my longevity, I know that I should reduce my calories and avoid highly saturated fatty foods. I know that I should avoid red meat and eat vegetables. If I opt for the hamburger or ice cream when I know I should have vegetables, my self-centered values for the immediate time have won. My long term values of losing weight or reducing cholesterol have been thwarted by my need to fill my gullet with sweets and fats right now.

“The self-centered values, which hold the present time as most important, nearly always win out over the future based values among us weak mortals. It is only the successful who can defer gratification in the present time so that a future reward will be won. Losing weight, developing a successful business, completing a difficult course of study, learning another language, or perfecting a golf swing are all examples of rewards won by those who fought the enticement of the

immediate gratification of a donut, the temptation of the TV, or the appeal of a party. It is so easy to follow the path of least resistance rather than the path of greatest opportunity.

“You can see what an uphill fight you have commander. If people won’t forego an ice cream when they want to lose weight, do you really think they will be willing to give up their desires to have children—when society applauds it? Or that politicians or business people will volunteer to reduce their populations of workers, consumers and soldiers. Realistically, I think you are dreaming the impossible dream. But with you, it is a dream that would guide us away from self destruction and to a better life.

“But many people are already experiencing the better life. Among the people in the richer countries things that were once luxuries are now necessities. We went from bicycles to cars, now people want more and better models. Bigger, flatter TVs, more rooms in their houses, second homes, pleasure boats, et cetera. Savings is a thing of the past.

“We all like to think that we are doing what is best for us now and in the future. We rationalize when they are not. But like ostriches, we stick our heads in the sands of dreams and only remotely sense reality with our bare posteriors—which protrude into the real world.”



—“Wanda, isn’t it true that sometimes our self centered values rest on religious underpinnings. What better self-centered hope than to spend eternity in heaven, Valhalla, or the happy hunting ground? When there is no hope in this life, the hope of an afterlife looms larger than life. Consequently many poor Muslims are ready to die to enter the promised land.

If someone will merely tell them to strap on a bomb for the love of Allah and guarantee them a blissful life in paradise.”



--“Right Lee, we don’t find Saudi princes or Pakistani presidents driving suicide missions.”



---“What sort of values do those practicing child sexual abuse or producing or watching child pornography have? What about pornography involving women—as things—as objects to be used. A female writer in Norway has taken a definitely minority view that pornography of women is increasing their sexuality and putting them in contact with their sexuality. When it was released in the newspapers she seemed to be a minority of one. But she showed that there is more than one point of view.”



--“Lee, it seems that self-centered morality is becoming more common in our world. Even in life or death situations our personal comfort is more important. A few years ago Lincoln Hall, an Australian, was in a group climbing Mount Everest. He was injured. His party abandoned him near the peak because they thought he had no chance to survive. Another climbing party found him and took him down the mountain. He survived. On another Everest expedition, David Sharp, an Englishman, on his way down did not have oxygen. Many climbers passed him. One stopped and gave him some oxygen. No one stayed with him until he died. Under French law one is required to help. Under American and English common law there is no requirement. It was legal for Englishmen to leave those climbers. But, was it moral?

“Look at how some people pursue physical beauty. The use of time and money often goes to cultivating that which is only skin deep, enlarging bosoms, shortening noses, reducing abdomens, inflating the calves while deflating the thighs, darkening the skin, lightening the hair, contouring

the body through exercise and hiding it or exposing it through clothing—or the lack thereof. What you see is often all you get. In the ‘now’ society fleeting sexual beauty is more important than a beautiful mind, a loving heart, or a deep social concern. But these attributes cannot be evaluated at first sight as can a face, a chest or a leg. We reward, with money and fame, the young Miss World or Mr. Universe but we hide the budding Curies or Einsteins—who must find their rewards in discovering truths or otherwise advancing technology.

“Modern American youth have been told repeatedly that they are special. They have got large trophies just for participating in something, like a youth sport. There are many who are extremely self centered. If they are going to be employees they need to be coddled. Their own interests are primary. They often extend their adolescence into their thirties by living at home. I wonder if this is healthy for themselves or their society.”



--- “The ‘now’ aspect of our values, in both our societies and our selves may not be as noble or as admired as the future values, but they have to be recognized as real. And yet it is those ‘now’ values that often become sin when they run counter to scriptural values or they become crimes when they run counter to society’s values, the codified laws of the society. Many are quite willing to cheat other people or their governments. I recently saw that two Catholic priests had stolen hundreds of thousands of dollars from their parish in Florida. While this was an isolated case, it certainly indicates that what we say and what we do may be quite different. Our society based, or God based, values are often secondary to our self-centered interests.

“Why do people produce child pornography, or any pornography? Why do some people kidnap poor East European women and prostitute them in the West as true sex slaves? Money! Selfish criminals can play to the tastes of selfish men who seek the power and sexual release that money can buy. Only I am important! Any pain I inflict on others is meaningless as long as I can make a profit. Whether it is a bank robbery, shop lifting or white collar crime, it is self-centered with the present time as the primary motivation.

“Whether it is the Cosa Nostra in the U.S., the mafia in Italy, the yakuza in Japan, or the Latin American drug lords—criminals in business are the rule rather than the exception. Prostitution, gambling, drugs and political payoffs are only a small part of their overall business, much of it is in the legitimate sector but often enforced by illegal means. Killings, threats and payoffs keep the authorities away.

“In Europe we point to Italy, with corruption at many levels of the legitimate economy as well as the underworld and the mafia. It is rated the worst of the developed countries in Western Europe in terms of corruption. At the top of the ethical list, Finland was shown as being the least corrupt. (2)

“Every system, whether primitive or modern, seems to have input from pressure groups, often with great financial sources. Our democratically elected representatives are nearly always beholden to somebody: oil interests, doctors, lawyers, Christians, Jews, gambling interests, retired people, teachers, labor, industry. There is often a huge gap between how well the various self-centered interests of rich and poor are represented in the financially fertilized societies. How well are the common people represented when they have not watered the political flower pots?

“There is something to be said for self interest. Ayn Rand’s popular conservative theories stress that self interest makes for honest and fair trading. Dishonesty will negatively affect all who have the best products or work the hardest. Entrepreneurs often develop products because of their own interests. But they often benefit society.”



-“To settle the common conflict between the ‘now’ emphasis and the ‘future’ emphasis, intelligent people should choose their values and their behavior from the point of view

of enlightened self-interest. So if you can see the possible future consequences of your actions, what value will you choose? If you know that if you shoplift you have nearly a 100% chance of going to jail, will you shoplift? If you know that there is a 95% chance that you will be caught, fined and lose your driving license if you speed, will you speed? If you know that a political candidate will lower your taxes but that your children will be saddled with huge taxes to help pay off the immense national debt that resulted from your under-taxation, would you vote for that candidate? If you know that not exercising effectively increases your chances of dying through degenerative disease, will you exercise?

“It seems that both democracies and free market economies emphasize self-centered values. Democracies because we decide what is best for us either now or in the future, then vote for our interests. And the free economy, with its emphasis of advertising to sell products, makes us want to buy more so we produce more. If the people won’t buy, the other people can’t sell. The more we buy and sell the more we keep the currency circulating. It affirms what Adam Smith said, ‘that the person who intends only his own gain is led to promote a social end which he did not intend but which must occur, and it benefits the social economy.’”



—“So you must think through your life and ‘know thyself’ and know thy goals.”



—“Advertisers can play on our desire to recognize and approve of our natural self-centeredness. L’Oreal cosmetics has the slogan ‘I’m worth it.’ I’ve heard more California women spout it whenever they want to do something out of the ordinary, especially if it’s expensive.”



—“To get students to develop more self esteem, teachers have been told to compliment the students even if they haven’t earned it. That was a movement to develop self esteem in the students, a movement that began in the 1980s. Maybe this is the reason that college students have been found to be increasingly more self-centered and narcissistic. On a standardized test for narcissism, with such questions as ‘If I ruled the world, would it be a better place?’ ‘Do I think I am a special person?’ And statements such as ‘I can live my life any way I want to.’ Students today are more self-centered than those tested in 1982 when the test was first administered.

“Are you really special before you’ve earned it? Studies show that while today’s high school graduates are getting higher grades and seem to be taking more advanced classes, they don’t read, write or do math better than students did twenty years ago. Have the watered down classes and grade inflation made them think they are better than they are?

“This increased self-centeredness makes people less likely to want to compromise. This affects the development of close relationships. It makes the self-centered people more controlling, more dishonest and even more likely to be violent as a means of getting what they want.”



—“But you must recognize that this is a generalization. There are many individuals who are not so stuck on themselves and are doing selfless things in their communities.”



—“Of course. But the general tendency is obvious. It seems to be the reaction against extreme self-centeredness that is pushing many people into more fundamental religions. Islam and Christian evangelism are on the rise in opposition to the freedom that modern democracies champion. Modern societies often give license to pursue the most inhuman paths to pleasure or

riches. Pornography treats children and women as things, not humans. Films and television champion murder and revenge. Video games commonly teach violence. Drug sellers vend a release from psychic pain or an orgasmic-like high, that result in people losing their humanness and becoming physiologically dependent motor-morons whose only goal is avoiding painful withdrawal and whose major path to that goal is financed through crime. Dispensing pain, as a way of showing one's superiority, becomes the reason for living for many. Look at violent gangs. Look at ultimate fighting. Look at the rise in popularity of kick boxing. Forget the kidney damage that has killed so many Thai kick boxers—It won't happen to me.

“But if people want to retreat from the extremes of self-centeredness and into religion, why not look to the teachings of Jesus, Mohammad, or to Siddhartha for a more human and humane answer to life's challenges?”

GOD BASED ASSUMPTIONS



--“Well commander maybe now is the time to examine the God based basic assumptions as bases for ethical behavior. Once we accept certain basic assumptions a theory may follow logically from them. If, as a Jew, I accept the fact that Yahweh exists and that the scriptures are true, the rest of the belief system of Judaism may follow logically. If, as a Christian, I accept that same God, then add the belief that Jesus is God, and that the Bible is true—both the Jewish scriptures and the New Testament scriptures, then my religious beliefs may follow logically. If, as a Muslim, I accept the belief in the same God, which in the Arabic language is Allah, and the sanctity of the first born son of Abraham, Ishmael, and the teachings of the prophet Mohammed, then the rest of my Muslim thinking can be logical.

“Those are only some of the monotheistic religions. If you are a Hindu you believe that God is the universe. But many Hindus see millions of aspects of God in that oneness. Someone told me that there were 330 million aspects of that pantheistic god, but that is probably understated. But you can have an aspect of god that is the creator, another that is a destroyer. You might venerate cows and monkeys and any other aspect of the world because all is god.

“And then there is Buddhism which should probably not even be called a religion because it is more of a self centered ethical system which says that to be truly happy you must merely eliminate all your desires, then you will have everything you want. But because this simple basis for happiness was so important, people in southern Asia began making statues of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, the enlightened one, and as we simple humans usually do, worship started. And the last one who would have wanted to be worshipped would have been Siddhartha. But as the ideas of the Enlightened One spread northward to China it became mixed with the traditions of ancestor worship, animism and even the philosophies of Confucius and Lao Tzu.

“Of course such mixing of beliefs is not uncommon. The Hebrews may well have developed their laws from those of the Sumerians and Babylonians or others and they may have developed their concept of there being only one God from the Egyptians or the Zoroastrians. Many think that the ideas of Mithraism were infused into the developing early Christian sect. Greek thought was also influential in the development of Christianity through Paul's epistles and later, the writings of Aquinas..

“We humans need explanations for our past and present, and hope for our futures. Religion is the simplest way of providing us certainty. Philosophy tries but stumbles. Science tries, but its answers do not give us all we want to know from the past, and it is futile for our ultimate futures.

“There may be more assumptions in religions than just the scriptures. Quite commonly other non-provable ideas enter without the blessing of the holy scriptures. For Catholics, the virgin birth of Jesus, the trinity of three divine persons in one God, and the immaculate conception of Mary

born without Original Sin, are examples. Then some teachings of respected people may work their way into the belief systems. Predestination, some jihads, and ideas on when the soul enters or leaves the body are such assumptions. Yes Commander.”



---“Wanda, do we need God as the basis for ethical behavior? Voltaire said that if God didn’t exist we would have to invent him. He, like many others, saw God as necessary as the basis for moral values. Dostoevsky has the devil tell Ivan, that ‘without God all things are lawful.’”



--“Those ideas are based on the age-old idea that God is the only source of morality. But if we look back 4000 years to the Code of Hammurabi we see societal values, and they undoubtedly existed before Hammurabi. And self-centered values have been around since before humans. Just look at the self-centered needs of lions or monkeys and you see the oldest of ethical codes—I’ll protect my young and I’ll kill whatever meat we need to survive.

“Just look at the various assumptions that people, or religions, have relative to the soul. When does a fetus or a baby become a full human being? Is it at conception or as some suggest a week after its birth to allow parents of severely deformed babies to consider infanticide.

“What is life? Or what is a human life? We can’t seem to agree on a definition. But some people have killed others because they advocated or performed abortions. Does this make sense? If I believe that life starts when the sperm meets the ovum and you believe that it starts at birth we both hold only opinions. The old Jewish concept was that life started when the child was born. The Christian idea, as developed by Thomas Aquinas based on the ideas of Aristotle, was that boy babies got their souls about 4 weeks after conception and girl babies got theirs 6 to 8 weeks after conception. Although Thomas seemed to settle on 40 days as being the magical moment. However an earlier church council seriously debated whether females even had souls. If a male fetus younger than four weeks old is aborted, was it a human life?

“Certainly from most religious positions it is the soul that makes the human something special. But what certainty is there that a fetus gets its soul at conception, after 4 to 8 weeks, at birth? People think that their unfounded opinions are absolute truth!

“On what authority is the most recent jihad declared—or the last Crusade? What about a suicide bomber or a 100 to 1 retaliation against that bomber’s homeland? If we want to find Scriptural validation is it “an eye for an eye” or a hundred eyes for one eye? While the jihads and the Crusades were, at least theoretically, inspired by religious beliefs, the suicide bomber and the Israeli retaliations were largely socially inspired. How could a merciful God allow the deaths of so many innocent people in New York in September of 2001. How could a just God allow a bin Laden or the leaders of ISIL to associate Allah’s name with their cowardly attacks?”



---“Wanda, I hope that my view from space gave me a bit more vision. But just how great is the vision of short sighted people? Where is that universal ethic that all religions preach—the Golden Rule? ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you’ or ‘Don’t do to others what you don’t want them to do to yourself.’ Some religions put it in the positive, others in the negative. The oldest religion, Hinduism, put it this way ‘This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you’ and again, ‘Men gifted with intelligence should always treat others as they themselves wish to be treated.’ In Judaism it is written ‘What is hateful to you do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary.’ Buddhism teaches ‘Treat not others in ways that yourself would find hurtful.’ Confucius, a contemporary of the Buddha wrote ‘One word which sums up the basis for all good conduct...loving kindness. Do not do to others what you would not want done to yourself.’ And another contemporary, Lao Tzu,

wrote ‘Regard your neighbor’s gain as your own gain, and your neighbors loss as your own loss’ and ‘The wise person has no interests of his own but regards the interests of the people as his own. He is kind to the kind and kind to the unkind—for virtue is kind.’ Then a few hundred years later Christianity rekindled the Jewish law when Matthew wrote ‘So in everything, do to others, what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the law and the prophets.’ Then in another few centuries Mohammed cautioned ‘Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself.’ And so it goes with the preaching of Zoroaster, Baha’u’llah and every other major religious teacher. You should treat your neighbor as you treat yourself. Throughout the history of religion the value of turning the other cheek and of brotherly love conflicts with the laws of societies in which the ‘eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’ is nearly always the standard of justice. But both concepts of justice rest on non-provable starting points—foundations which are no more than opinions.”



—“I can’t remember any Christian or non-Christian nation using the Golden Rule in their foreign policy. Some welfare states may use it in domestic policy, but foreign policy is a different animal. Can we really believe that any national leaders really believe their religions’ founders if they don’t practice what has been preached?”



--“I’m committed to the holiness of the religious sages—but how many committed followers are there in each religion. I can’t imagine that the Jesus I believe in would have approved of the Crusades, the Inquisition or the burning of supposed witches? Would Mohammed support every jihad which has been called for by the 20th and 21st century mullahs and terrorists? Would Abraham have blessed each transgression of those Jews, Christians and Moslems who trace their religions to him?”



---“Gentlemen you can see the problem of being so absolutely certain. Thinking people can never be certain unless they somehow directly experience God in a mystical experience, and even then, others would argue that it was merely a psychological experience and not an experience where God was actually touched.

“Values should come from valid basic assumptions. But, as with the case of the Taliban, male supremacy reduced women and non-believers to a nearly non-human status. Under the Taliban’s mistaken ideas of traditional Moslem values, women, non-Muslims, and any enemies were treated as non-humans, subject to torture and death. The proud academic traditions of Islam were plowed under by uneducated power-driven zealots who destroyed schools and disenfranchised half of the population.

“While God is infinite and unknowable, we seem to know what God wants in terms of contraception, cloning, stem cell research, war, capital punishment, suicide bombing, controlling the Hamas, eliminating Israel, attacking Iraq, and just about every other problem and whim of humanity.

“The Qur’an’s first lines are ‘In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.’ What rationalizations can these Muslim extremists shout to contradict their holiest scriptures? The ethics of Christianity can be pretty well summed up with ‘turn the other cheek’ and ‘do unto others as you would have them do unto you.’ When an avowedly Christian leader attacks a country without any real provocation, we can see he is in the same boat as the Taliban in terms of flaunting his supposed values. Were the Israelis following their ‘golden rule’ when they attacked Lebanon unmercifully after two of its soldiers were kidnapped? Hardly an eye for an eye!

“If all things are the will of Allah, God or Yahweh, is not our access to such advances of science as electricity, mobile phones, cloning, stem cell potentials for healing, the techniques of abortion, as well as to violent video games sanctioned by God. If God is against pornography, why does He allow it? If powerful self centered warlords rule most of the world, when will the meek inherit the earth? Certainly nuclear, biological or chemical warfare are all in God’s plan. If not, God won’t allow it.

“While it seems to be a rare human quality to think deeply, thinking deeply into why we believe what we believe is essential if we are going to utilize our intelligence. And isn’t it our intelligence that is critical if we are to live in God’s image?”

CONCEPTS OF GOD



---“What do we mean when we say ‘God’? Actually there are many possible meanings. Is it a man-like being sitting on a throne in the clouds? Is it a spirit without form? Does he live in a volcano? Is it a vengeful, a merciful or a disinterested being?”



-- “Beliefs in supernatural powers are nearly universal. Whether it is the spirits that inhabit every living thing, as many primitives believed, or the powerful gods living in the sea or in the sky occasionally casting lightening bolts, or the more beneficent gods of the harvest or those that produce rain. Such ideas seem to be very common. But the societies of the Mid-East in the last 3000 years have hooked into the ideas of a single supernatural. This idea spread to Europe, to North Africa and across the Atlantic, Most people in those areas believe in a single separate being, a single being who created the world along with a pleasant or unpleasant afterlife. Then it gave us the means for achieving either eternal joy or never-ending damnation by following or denying God’s moral code. That code is found in the scriptures that God revealed to humans. This is called theism, from the Greek word for god, theos. If you believe in only a single god, as a Jew, Christian, Zoroastrian or Muslim, you are a monotheist. If you believe in many gods, like the ancient Greeks and Romans, you are a polytheist.

“A second type of one god belief is called deism, from Deus, the Latin word for God. Deists believe that there is a creator, but the creator is not involved in the world. This belief is not a religion because it espouses no revealed morality and no worship. This being that created the universe just walked away. Many scientists who say they believe in a creator are deists. What does this deistic creator do? Aristotle said ‘He thinks about thinking.’

“One of the oldest beliefs is that everything is god. This is called pantheism. Pan is the Greek word for ‘all’. This is the deepest belief found among the Hindus, but there are Jews, Christians and Muslims who write as if they are pantheists. These are usually people who have had what is called ‘the mystical experience’ in which they believe they have united with God.

WHAT IS GOD LIKE?

“When we say ‘I believe in God’ do we all mean the same thing? In a recent survey in the ‘God fearing’ USA, beliefs in God varied considerably.(3) While more than 90% said they believed in God, the God they believed in varied considerably. 31% believed in the authoritarian, often vengeful, God of the Old Testament. This God controls the world and is angry at sinners. He is often found in the Old Testament and in the Koran. 25% of Americans believe in a benevolent God, the forgiving God found more often in the New Testament and also in the Koran. 23% believed in a deistic god who is distant and unconcerned. And 16% believed in a god who judges but is not engaged in the world. 5% of the people said they were atheists.

“It was noted that college educated people or people earning over \$100,000 a year were more likely to not believe in a supernatural while poorer less educated people were more likely to believe more strongly. Another interesting fact was that it was not the religion of the person, as much as their ideas of what God is, that separated them. They found Catholics, Protestants and Jews in each category.



----“Gosh Wanda, I thought that it was an overwhelming majority of Americans who were ‘hell fire and brimstone’ Christians. It looks like it is barely over 50% who have such strong beliefs.”



---“True Lee, but that 50% thinks it is absolutely right, and it makes a great deal of political noise, so you think there are more of them than there actually are.”



----“I’ve observed in the courts that those with the strongest beliefs in anything make the loudest political noises, whether it is people who own big businesses, labor unions, homosexuals or strongly conservative religionists. But then as I think of it, even the strongly atheistic people can make big noises. A small part of that 5% of atheists want to maintain the separation of church and state. They want ‘under God’ out of the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag, ‘in God we trust’ off of the currency, and school prayers out of public schools. But it occurs to me that based on the Baylor University study, just what type of God do the believers want to trust in? There are so many using the same word ‘God’ and they assume that everyone else has the same belief. We certainly aren’t very clear in our thinking or in our communication of our thoughts.”



--“Yes Lee. And as you might guess, those who believe in an authoritarian God are very interested in the government advocating Christian values. Those ‘Christian’ values tend to be very conservative or even reactionary, such as being against gay marriage, abortion and stem cell research. People in the South, which is where many religious conservatives live, can be expected to vote for religiously conservative representatives.

“As beliefs move from the conservative authoritarians, through the forgiving God, to the more lax believers, then to the deists, moral value judgments tend to move from the conservative to the liberal in nearly every question from abortion to the death penalty. Yes Commander.”



---“As we move from religion to religion and culture to culture throughout history, monotheists and polytheists think and write about what their gods are like. Zeus or Jupiter were the heads of the gods. Aphrodite and Venus were the goddesses of love. For the monotheists their God is usually all knowing and all powerful. Usually it is a male who may be vengeful or merciful. These supernatural attributes sometimes run counter to how our natural minds experience things. Many earlier religions had a supernatural goddess as the prime focus of creation. So our concepts of the supernatural certainly come in many forms. There are so many questions!

“Once we have decided on what kind of a supernatural we want to believe in, what attributes does He or She have? If God is all knowing—can He tell the future? Does He know who will go to heaven and who to hell? John Calvin’s protestant doctrine of ‘predestination’ developed a major belief system around this concept. If God knows everything, He knows before we are born, who

will go to heaven, can we do otherwise? Or is it merely that God can see how we will freely choose?

“If God is all good and all powerful, why does He allow innocent children to be killed in natural or man-made catastrophes? Is God All powerful? How do we know that everything is the will of Allah or God?

“If God is all-knowing and merciful, why didn’t He leave His true scriptures intact, instead of leaving centuries between the time that he revealed his commands and the time they were written. Such gaps of time in each scriptural tradition make some people doubt their source. It makes people with different ideas of His message go to war against each other.

“If God is merciful we should look to Francis of Assisi, St. Dominic and Mother Theresa, and to the Muslim saints and Sufis. If He is more vengeful perhaps we should look to the Franciscans and Dominicans of the Inquisition, who took different approaches to their faith than did their founders.

“God is shown as both merciful and vengeful in the Old and New Testaments and the Koran. The Jewish book Nahum (4) shows God to be jealous and avenging, even though He is slow in angering. Numbers 22:22 shows God as angry.(5) If God is merciful, why did He require His Son to die in order to achieve forgiveness for the world’s population? Couldn’t He have just made it happen? If He is all-merciful why did He allow Peter and Paul to be killed, the innocents to be slaughtered by Herod, Joan of Arc to be burned?

“If God is omniscient can you have free will? If God knows how you will choose, do you have the freedom to choose otherwise? God cannot be wrong.

“If God is omnipotent can He create something so heavy that He cannot lift it? Can he do things that countermand his commands, can He kill or murder? Is He violating his own commands when he causes a great flood, sends fire on Sodom, orders the killing of whole nations, or lets the Red Sea engulf the pursuing Egyptians after Moses had crossed. Can he tell lies, do uncharitable acts, like destroying innocent people? Can He defy the rules of logic?

“People who say they are doing God’s will obviously believe that God is not omnipotent. If it is God’s will to create tsunamis and earthquakes, isn’t He powerful enough to blow up a Sunni or Shi’ite marketplace or mosque if He wants it done? Isn’t He powerful enough to save Israel without a war or to prevent abortions or to allow contraceptives to fail if He wills it?”



--“You know from your reading, Commander, that these issues have been tossed around for as long as thinking people have wondered about their creator. Another concern you didn’t mention is how involved god is with people. For the Greeks the gods were often involved. But a deistic god is never involved. For a pantheist, god is part of everything. For a modern day theist, according to the scriptures, He was involved in the past and is involved today. It’s just that he hasn’t sent any messengers lately. But he listens to prayers, approves of wars, and allows natural disasters.

“How we define the Creator may have more to do with how we see ourselves than what the creator is like. We would like mercy shown to us. We would like vengeance against our enemies. We would like a place in the hereafter. Luckily God is always on our side. The Reverend Franklin Graham, son of evangelist Billy Graham, said that Hurricane Katrina was the “wrath of God” because of New Orleans’ sinful past—its Mardi Gras and sensual high living. Evangelists Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson commiserated about God’s withdrawing his protection from the USA because of the evil wrought here by feminists, gays and political liberals.”



---“Hey Ray, is it true that God is really an Englishman of the early 17th Century? Did God speak to Moses as an Englishman, using ‘ye’ and ‘thou’ and ‘commandeth’? I often wondered

why 21st Century preachers use 17th Century language when preaching then revert to modern language in conversation.”



--“ I don’t talk to my parishioners that way, Con. It is strange that as many times as the Bible has been translated from language to language, that the English language of a few hundred years ago seems to have stuck. Even translations of the Koran often use that older version of English.”



--“Let’s get back on track men. Democratic politicians call for “moral values’. But the political course they pick usually follows the values their electorates want. Are they for or against gay marriage? Are they for or against abortion? Are they for or against capital punishment? Are they for or against the government spying on them? Are they for or against war?

“We need only look at the last few years to see the martial mandates for war: for or against Muslims, for or against Catholics, for or against Protestants, for or against Jews, for or against Hindus! We need a war: to stop terrorists, to rid the world of infidels, to expand or protect our borders, to increase our access to oil, to establish democracy, or to give our group more power and control. It is so easy for the political or religious rulers, or the leaders of minorities, to call us to arms to fight: the Axis of Evil, the American Satan, the IRA.

“So our value systems are based to a large degree on what we think God is and what we think God wants. The fact that there are millions of opinions different from mine does not matter, because I am right.”

THEISM



--“Let’s look a bit more deeply at some ideas of the supernatural. As I said, the word theism comes from the Greek word theos and has come to mean a single supreme being who has a personal relationship with His creations. This is the position of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism and Bahai. While some people have merely assumed that a single god exists, most religions have had this idea given to them by that god through his revelations to them. All three of the major theistic religions trace their beliefs to Abraham who lived about 1800 years before the Christian or the ‘common’ era—BCE.

“Some see it as a problem that the scriptures in our possession came many years after the supposed revelations. The earliest written evidence of Abraham and the events that preceded him and followed him are found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were written sometime after 250 BCE. They were not a complete set of scriptures. It is said that a complete set of scriptures was completed about 200 BCE, but they have not been recovered. So the earliest date for a relatively complete set of Old Testament writings are from the 3rd century AD.

“Since the theists believe that their holy scriptures are the inspired word of God, those scriptures are correct even though there was no written record of them from the times of the events written about. It seems strange since there are often other written records from the same time and from that geographical area, such as the Code of Hammurabi which was written before Abraham’s time.

“The Earliest Christian Scriptures, the gospels and epistles, were written from about 50 AD to 150 AD but the earliest records of them are from about 200 AD. Although some people date them earlier. There were actually a number of gospels from that time that were used by the early Christians but the Council of Nicea in 325 AD, in which about 300 of the 1800 Christian bishops attended, and some later councils and publications chose which writings were to be officially

sanctioned by the Christian church. It was at Nicea that the bishops voted on whether or not Jesus was actually God. The vote set the course of Christian beliefs.

“The Qur’an, the revelation by the angel Gabriel to Muhammad, was revealed in the early seventh century but the earliest partial records are from three hundred years later and the first fully written Qur’an dates to the Sixteenth Century, 900 years after Muhammad lived.

“But historic lapses don’t matter, our God, if monotheistic, affirms our actions. It does not matter what our holy books say. Murder, torture, and other such acts, can be OK, we merely find a scriptural way to rationalize our actions. It may not be in the true spirit of our scriptures but it is a passage found in them.

“For example, for the Jews the command not to murder might be brushed aside by the story of Saul, who was chosen by God to lead His people. (6) ‘When Samuel caught sight of Saul, the Lord said to him, ‘This is the man I spoke to you about; he will govern my people.’ But later (7) Saul wants his attendants to murder David, the slayer of Goliath and the future great king of the Jews. Luckily Saul’s son talked him out of it. But his intent to murder was certainly there.

“For the Christians the advice to ‘turn the other cheek’ has been ignored many times. In the Fourth Century Emperor Theodosius made heresy punishable by death. In the Thirteenth Century the Fourth Lateran Council and Pope Gregory IX’s inquisition continued the trend to not turn the other cheek. This continued into the Fifteenth Century and the Spanish Inquisition. Nightmarish tortures and the burnings at stakes of witches and heretics. It wasn’t officially ended until the mid-Nineteenth Century. By modern standards of Christian justice the methods of accusation and punishment were unethical and inhumane, yet pope after pope condoned it. Its methods were not duplicated in the West until the days of Stalin and Hitler, who did not justify their actions under the cloak of religion.

“Since the scriptures of a religion are so often varied in their outlook, from a merciful god who protects those who believe in him, to severe punishments for those who don’t, it is usually quite easy to justify most behaviors. And while many proscriptions from Mosaic law are ignored by Christians, such as not eating pork or shellfish in Leviticus 11:7-12 and keeping three feasts for the Lord in Exodus 23:14 yet vengeful behavior was seen as a necessary Mosaic command to obey. In Deuteronomy 13, the first ten verses, command ‘That prophet or dreamer must be put to death...You must purge the evil from among you.’ And ‘Stone him to death...Then all Israel will hear and be afraid, and no one among you will do such an evil thing again.’ Witch burning is allowed because of Exodus 22 verse 18, ‘Do not allow a sorceress to live.’ So capital punishment is fine.

“New Testament justification for the Inquisition is more difficult to find but if we can equate tree branches with people then John 15:6 can work. ‘If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.’

“Christian theologians, like Thomas Aquinas, approved of the inquisitional methods. ‘Wherefore if forgers of money and other evil-doers are forthwith condemned to death by the secular authority, much more reason is there for heretics, as soon as they are convicted of heresy, to be not only excommunicated but even put to death.’ (8) Not only can the holy leaders kill heretics, they can also bless those who fight for the Christian cause. Pope Leo IV guaranteed heaven to those in the Frankish army who might die ‘fighting for the truth of the faith, for the preservation of their country, aid the defense of Christians. And therefore God will give them, the reward which we have named.’ This is obviously the same guarantee given to modern day jihadists. God always does what a speaker wants Him to do, especially if the speaker tells people that he is closer to God than they are.

“For the Muslims, the advice not to kill, or not to kill other Muslims, is clear. Sura 4: 93 states ‘If a man kills a Believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell, to abide therein forever; and the wrath and the curse of Allah are upon him, and a dreadful penalty is prepared for him.’ Still in Turkey, predominantly Sunni Kurds kill predominantly Sunni Turks. In Iraq Sunnis and Shi’ites

kill each other and themselves. Every believer seems to be able to invoke the blessings of the Almighty either through new revelations, new interpretations of the revelations, or selectively choosing which part of a revelation justifies his beliefs and actions. Commander?”



---“Yes, but a text taken from its context is a pretext. The whole of the revelation needs to be understood. Would the merciful Jesus have sat quietly if his followers had used such inquisitional techniques? Would the Merciful Allah of the Qur’an, or his prophet, have sanctioned the thousands of killings by His followers? One wonders if the power of jihadist leaders is greater than Allah’s and whether the will of many popes transcends that of Jesus. Does that upset you Ray?”



--“I think you misunderstand Wreck. Aquinas’s statement that “God exists” is self-evident. But since God is infinite and we are finite we cannot recognize this except through God’s action on earth. Since the Pope is God’s representative on earth, when he speaks officially for our church I have to agree. But I’m sure you realize that not everything he says is *ex cathedra*, that is the official position of the Church.”



---“So we can see charity, natural disasters, kind acts and warfare as all from God?”



--“Yes. Wreck, do you have a concept of what ‘infinite’ means? It is beyond our comprehension. So we can’t really contemplate what God is or why He works the way He does.



—“We have been discussing only monotheism, the idea that there is only one god who is different from us. Remember that the Hindu approach, the ancient Greeks and Romans, and many other groups have believed in multiple theistic gods. So polytheism should certainly be recognized. Some say that even the Christian idea of a trinity is polytheistic. You have God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Of course Christian theologians, in their infinite wisdom, say that there are three divine persons in their one God. And when pressed, they say that it can’t be explained because it is a mystery, a divine mystery.

PROOFS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD



-- “Lee, you know there are questions that science cannot answer. ‘The fundamental question of philosophy, according to Leibnitz, is “why is there anything at all and not simply nothing?” Science can’t answer that. Creation is a concept that explains the beginning of things and I think it also explains the continuing process of life? So we can interpret evolution as creation, but I do that using my faith as a believer, not as a scientist.

“I prefer to speak about the constants in nature. Take the speed of light. Why has it been there from the start? You have to ask: where did it come from? How did matter develop and not just stay as gas? Or is it the other way around, that gas came from matter? Astrophysicists can only go back to just after the Big Bang. I have to go beyond time and space, and there we can say, ‘I

don't know.' We should not speak too quickly of God in an anthropomorphic sense. But there must have been a Mind that planned the Big Bang."



"Why Ray? You are explaining an unexplainable fact with a cause that is even more inexplicable. But assuming that there is a god, is your God the vengeful God that we see so often in the Old Testament and sometimes in the Koran and the New Testament or is it the Merciful God who spared Isaac, who demands charity in the Koran or forgives in the New Testament?"



"Lee, I thought we were discussing a first cause. We can't jump around from attributes of God to whether God exists. It would be like talking about what your Uncle Charlie is like, when we don't know for sure if you have an Uncle Charlie. So if we're discussing a creator I can't ask the question scientifically, I can't ask about God the Father. In scientific terms, that is absurd. But that symbol of the father certainly has a function and when I read the Bible, I have no problems with that. But we need only be concerned with one fact, and that is that the fundamental cause of the world is God. It is clear from the Bible that God exists."



--"Ray I know you had philosophy classes at Notre Dame. But you don't prove Aristotle by quoting Aristotle. You don't prove Darwin by quoting Darwin. But you in religion generally cite the Bible to prove it."



--"But if it is the inspired word of God, it is correct! There must have been a Mind that planned the Big Bang. What do you think Wreck?"



---"I could never understand when people talk about proofs for God. I always thought that the Bible was the proof. It was certainly enough for Martin Luther."



---"Gentlemen, that's true, but some think that the infinite can be proved by other means. To try to prove the infinite we must go beyond the physical world to a possible metaphysical reality. This is an area of speculation. Is the basic stuff of the world idea, God or matter. Is there a God.

"Naturally some theologians and philosophers have attempted to prove that a Supernatural exists by using either pure reason or by starting from the world that we know then looking for its ultimate cause. The 'proofs' for God that these people have come up with are either cosmological, teleological or ontological. These words are from the Greek, cosmos meaning 'order', telos meaning 'end or purpose', and ousia meaning 'being'. There are also the so-called moral arguments that say that since we have ideas of good and bad, there must be a source for them. And that would be God.

"Aristotle and Aquinas laid out the most comprehensive cosmological arguments for a first mover or an uncaused cause. They say that since everything we know of has a cause, but you can't go back in infinite time without ever having a first cause, there must be a first cause. Their arguments for an unmoved mover are similar. (9) Everything is in motion, we can't always have had motion, so there must have been an unmoved mover.

“A third similar argument says that everything we know is contingent on something else. There must be something necessary that these things are dependent on. That we would call God. These same arguments have been made in the Jewish tradition, particularly by Maimonides, and in the Islamic tradition by the Kalam scholars. All of these followed Aristotle’s lead and were followed by Aquinas, who cited them. But the question is, does that thing on which all other things depend have to be a theistic god? If the universe actually began with a spoonful of incredibly dense matter that exploded with the ‘Big Bang’ would we call that matter God? Or must we have a creator for that spoonful of matter? So we either choose a being or a thing as being first. Theists, deists and pantheists opt for the being, Naturalists and materialists opt for the thing. Each of these positions has its roots in antiquity. Our modern thinking just polishes the philosophers’ stones a bit. Of course as empirical science has evolved it has tipped the scales considerably in terms of nature.

“More serious is the objection that the proof is based on our accepting uncritically the ‘principle of sufficient reason,’ the idea that every event has a cause. If we deny the idea of ‘sufficient reason’ the cosmological argument is close to worthless. David Hume argued that the idea that there is a cause for every result is a psychological idea. It is not metaphysical. Immanuel Kant agreed. So we have two major philosophers contradicting the philosophical argument that we can prove that there is an uncaused cause. Other philosophers like the existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre and the analytical philosopher Bertrand Russell said that the universe is “just there and that’s all.”



--“Wanda, of course I believe that the so-called proofs for God add credence to my faith, but I don’t need them. It just gives me more tangible reasonable grounds for what I already believe. But if you question the idea of cause and effect, aren’t you also criticizing your belief in empirical science?”



--“I don’t think so because we are not trying to prove a first cause. We are looking at actual causes of effects. It is psychological, but it is trying to narrow down causes for specific events. So do hydrogen and oxygen make water? We haven’t found sulfur or iron making water. So in science we narrow down the area of study, while the cosmological argument expands it.

“Obviously I don’t find the ontological argument of Anselm all that convincing either. This argument can be traced at least as far back as Plato. Basically it is that for everything there is an idea of perfection for that thing. So there is an ideal of dog, but no dog has all of the elements of the perfect dog. Anselm said that we can conceive a being that is the ultimate being, or as he said ‘we can conceive of a being than which nothing greater can be conceived.’ He then said if we can conceive of it, it must exist or it wouldn’t be perfect. So he argues from the idea of something to the reality of it. It’s like I have an idea of green Martians, so they must exist.

“The most commonly cited ‘proof’ today is the teleological argument from the design of the universe. It is argued thusly. When we see man made things that show order we can see that they had a designing mind. Whether it be machines or buildings, there was a designer and a builder. Everything we see in the natural world shows order. There are laws of nature from the atomic level to the level of the universe. There must be a grand designer, God. As we learn more of scientific laws, this argument has been used more often. The problem, of course, is what or who designed this infinite designer.

“We can’t just stop at some point, to be logical we need to carry the idea of design back into infinite time. There must have been a designer for the one that designed the universe. Then there must have been a designer for that designer, and so forth. Those who use this argument must then revert to the cosmological argument of a first cause or an unmoved mover.

“Many religious scientists use this argument of design in developing their belief in a Supreme Being. Voltaire put it succinctly “If a watch proves the existence of a watchmaker but the universe does not prove the existence of a great Architect, then I consent to be called a fool.” There is certainly design and order in the universe. Animals need oxygen, plants need carbon dioxide, they supply each other’s needs. Look at the necessary organs of every person. Did they just happen? We can predict the rising and setting of the sun and the ebb and flow of the tides to the minute, even to the second. Is this just accidental? But our minds are not set up to take such an action as the creation of the universe as pure chance. We might get sick by accident or win in Las Vegas by chance but the universe is another ball game. We want explanations!

“But the argument for design, if true, does not prove a moral being or even an omniscient being—only a being intelligent enough and powerful enough to create our finite universe.”



--“But Wanda, wouldn’t such a designer be worthy of our devotion?”



--“Possibly Father Ray, but what if that designer doesn’t care. What if he designed the universe then decided to go play golf, maybe playing from galaxy to galaxy, using volcanoes for holes and moons for sand traps. Or maybe he designed his own golf courses?”



“Impossible. Everybody knows that the best golf courses were designed by the devil.”



--You sound like a golfer, father. Now would you agree with this? With the exception of the moral argument, none of these ‘proofs’ prove a god who is good or who is involved in the world. So if you were to buy any of these arguments, in spite of their philosophical problems, you could easily choose the theistic God of the Jew, Christian or Muslim but you could just as easily believe in an uninvolved deistic god. It seems that believers are more often moving from theism to deism today. Then the next step is often agnosticism, then often atheism.

“But, as you know, if you study history, it is much easier for most people to believe in man-made myths. But these again can be true or false.”

IS AMERICA A CHRISTIAN NATION?



--- “As you all know there is some controversy about whether the United States is a Christian nation. However with the Constitutional requirement of the separation of church and state it would seem that we would be going against the Constitution to call the nation anything that might smack of religion.”



--“It seems to me that in the last hundred years the insecurity brought on by all your wars, the decline in the extended family relationships, and the marketing of Christianity through the mass media, have evangelized much of your country. The influence of preachers has moved from the Sunday pulpit to the daily radio and television fare. With such an all-pervasive saturation of the minds, it seems natural that people would move in that direction. I think too that the world rankings of educational systems does not put the average American at a very high level. While

your top universities are among the best in the world, studies show that many of your college graduates cannot think critically. And as I've said, your own studies show that while over 90% of your people say they believe in God, only about 55% believe in either the vengeful or the merciful Gods of the Bible. So if the majority rules, you are a Judeo-Christian nation. But it seems that your present day beliefs contrast markedly with those of your major Founding Fathers.

"It's too bad that your Founding Fathers didn't have that direct wire to God, but He doesn't talk to deists! I'm sure you all know that in America, deists played a major role in creating the ideas of the separation of church and state. This prompted the Reverend Bird Wilson, an Episcopal minister and historian, to write in 1831 that 'The founders of our nation were nearly all Infidels.' But today, perhaps because most Americans don't understand their history, they think that the Founding Fathers were theists.

"Many of your major founders were against organized religion and they certainly were for separating church and state, but they were also for freedom of religion. Many seem to have been deists. Many of course, were theists. Your deistic founders also were instrumental in getting the religious freedom guarantees in your Constitution. Among your American deistic founders were: Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Ben Franklin, John Adams, Ethan Allen, Thomas Paine and George Washington.

"It is often difficult, if not impossible to separate deists from theists from their writings. Each may use the word 'God' but be thinking of their own definition of that word. So a deist using the word 'God' may be seen by a theist as being theistic. The semantic problem is that neither define what they mean when they use of the word 'God.' It's like using the word dog. One person may be thinking of a Saint Bernard and another of a toy poodle.

"While many of your founders were Christians, there is no question that many of your major founders were influenced by the 'freethinker' John Locke. John Adams, your second president, Thomas Jefferson, your third president, and James Madison, your fourth president, were even more outspoken than George Washington in their antagonism to organized religion. They also can be often seen to be deistic in what they said. Their private statements generally carry more weight than some of their public statements which were often made to their electorate who were traditional theists.

"Thomas Jefferson may well have been your most influential president. He not only wrote the Declaration of Independence but he made the Louisiana Purchase from France for 3 cents an acre, land that is now over a fifth of the whole U.S. and which has increased in value by over 25,000 times since it was bought. He also conceived and financed the Lewis and Clark expedition to explore westward to the Pacific Ocean. Yes Con."



--"Wanda, you may have heard the story about when President John Kennedy was entertaining 49 Nobel Prize winners for dinner at the White House in 1962. He opened with the observation that 'This is undoubtedly the greatest amount of intellectual talent in this room since Thomas Jefferson dined alone.'"



--"I knew Jefferson was greatly respected, Con, but that was some compliment! The question is was he a theist or a deist? When Jefferson wrote that 'all men are created equal' a theist could interpret that as being created by a theistic God and a deist could interpret it as being created by a deistic God, and a seasoned politician would probably say that it was the best way to get the people behind the revolution. Since the majority of people in most Western countries are at least nominally theistic, it wouldn't make much sense for a politician in a democracy to say he was a deist or an atheist. He would have about a zero chance of getting elected. Your Republicans seem to really play the God card. Yet it seems that they are the ones that have the most arrests for

prostitution and corruption. I wonder if Republicans, Papists and terrorists all have their direct lines to the same Being. It makes me wonder if God has multiple personalities.

“Certainly when you read the word ‘God’ in many of the early writings of your Founding Fathers you don’t know if the writer was referring to a theistic or a deistic being. Also, when politicians talk you are never sure that they mean what they say or really believe what they say. Sometimes the intentions seem clear. If we look at Jefferson’s platform for his presidential election he said ‘I am for freedom of religion, and against all maneuvers to bring about a legal ascendancy of one sect over another’ Does that sound like he believed that you should have a Christian nation? There is no question that there were theists and deists among your founders.”



---“Jefferson was clearly against the intolerance that organized religion seems to exhibit. I carry this booklet with me when I expect to discuss our American foundations. You might be interested in hearing what some of our founding fathers actually said. Here is what Jefferson wrote to his nephew. ‘Shake off all the fears of servile prejudices, under which weak minds are servily crouched. Fix reason firmly in her seat, and call on her tribunal for every fact, every opinion. Question with boldness even the existence of a God; because, if there be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason than that of blindfolded fear.’ (10)

“While he greatly admired the teachings of Jesus, he clearly did not approve of the direction that the Christian church had taken. He wrote to a friend: ‘But a short time elapsed after the death of the great reformer of the Jewish religion, before his principles were departed from by those who professed to be his special servants, and perverted into an engine for enslaving mankind, and aggrandizing their oppressors in Church and State.’ (11) He emphasized his belief that religion should not enter government when he wrote ‘History I believe furnishes no example of a priest-ridden people maintaining a free civil government. This marks the lowest grade of ignorance, of which their political as well as religious leaders will always avail themselves for their own purpose.’(12) If there be any doubt of his hostility to Christianity, the excerpt from a letter to John Adams, dated April 11, 1823, should make the views of both of these founding fathers quite clear. ‘One day the dawn of reason and freedom of thought in the United States will tear down the artificial scaffolding of Christianity. And the day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus, by the Supreme Being as His father, in the womb of a virgin will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter.’ This should clarify that his wording of the Declaration of Independence referred either to a deistic God or it was a purely political document whose aim was to incite the colonists to revolt against the British.”



---“I don’t buy that Lee. We have always been a primarily Christian nation. In fact, Jefferson wrote what is called the Jefferson Bible.”



---“Ray, Jefferson did take many of the moral teachings of Jesus from the gospels, and only the gospels. There was no Paul in Jefferson’s Bible. He took only those moral sayings that he thought were those of Jesus, without any embellishment from the Evangelists. And while he uses quotes that contain the word ‘God’ he did not select any sayings that included the crucifixion or the resurrection. He did consider Jesus a great moral teacher, perhaps the greatest. He even called himself a ‘real Christian’ because he was a follower of the doctrines of Jesus, though not of any Christian sect. In fact when people wanted to publish his Biblical selections he refused saying ‘I not only write nothing on religion, but rarely permit myself to speak of it.’ (13)

“Jefferson in his Autobiography wrote a specifically anti-Christian passage relative to the vote on the Constitution. An amendment was proposed to insert ‘Jesus Christ,’ so that the Preamble should read ‘A departure from the plan of Jesus Christ, the holy author of our religion’; the insertion was rejected by a great majority, in proof that they meant to comprehend, within the mantle of its protection, the Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and Mohammedan, the Hindoo and Infidel of every denomination’ And in a letter to Jeremiah Moore on August 14, 1800, he wrote that ‘The clergy, by getting themselves established by law, and ingrafted into the machine of government, have been a very formidable engine against the civil and religious rights of man. They are still so in many countries and even in some of these United States. Even in 1783, we doubted the stability of our recent measures for reducing them to the footing of other useful callings. It now appears that our means were effectual.’

“Jefferson repeatedly wrote of his distaste for organized Christianity. ‘During almost fifteen centuries has the legal establishment of Christianity been on trial. What have been its fruits? More or less, in all places, pride and indolence in the clergy; ignorance and servility in laity; in both, superstition, bigotry, and persecution. (14) And further in the same document he wrote, ‘What influence in fact have ecclesiastical establishments had on Civil Society? In some instances they have been seen to erect a spiritual tyranny on the ruins of the Civil authority; in many instances they have been seen upholding the thrones of political tyranny: in no instance have they been seen as the guardians of the liberties of the people. Rulers who wished to subvert the public liberty, may have found an established Clergy to be convenient auxiliaries’

“John Adams seemed to be clearer in his deistic leanings, writing ‘Twenty times in the course of my late reading, have I been upon the point of breaking out, ‘this would be the best of all possible worlds, if there were no religion in it’.(15) He also wrote this anti-Catholic letter to Thomas Jefferson in 1814 ‘Cabalistic Christianity, which is Catholic Christianity, and which has prevailed for 1,500 years, has received a mortal wound, of which the monster must finally die. Yet so strong is his constitution, that he may endure for centuries before he expires.’ And in the treaty with Tripoli which he signed it stated that ‘The government of the United States is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion.’(16)

“Benjamin Franklin was an acknowledged deist. In his autobiography he wrote, ‘Scarcely was I arrived at fifteen years of age, when, after having doubted in turn of different tenets, according as I found them combated in the different books that I read, I began to doubt of Revelation itself.’ And further, ‘...Some books against Deism fell into my hands....It happened that they wrought an effect on me quite contrary to what was intended by them; for the arguments of the Deists, which were quote to be refuted, appeared to me much stronger than the refutations, in short, I soon became a thorough Deist.’ And he certainly showed that he had reservations when he wrote from London (17) ‘If we look back into history for the character of present sects in Christianity, we shall find few that have not in their turns been persecutors, and complainers of persecution. The primitive Christians thought persecution extremely wrong in the Pagans, but practised it on one another. The first Protestants of the Church of England, blamed persecution in the Roman church, but practised it against the Puritans: these found it wrong in the Bishops, but fell into the same practice themselves both here and in New England.’

“Some question the beliefs of George Washington. He often accompanied his wife to church but left before the communion part of the service. He also spoke of God and Providence, but Dr. James Abercrombie, the rector at St. Peter’s Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. Said that Washington set a bad example by leaving at communion. When he was asked about the first President’s beliefs he said ‘Sir, Washington was a deist.’ And relative to America being a Christian nation, Washington said that ‘The United States of America should have a foundation free from the influence of clergy.’ This may indicate a deistic approach to government, or at least that religion should not be a part of the government of America.

“Thomas Paine was another important person in the founding of our country because of his gadfly stinging of the intellectual populace toward revolution with his pamphlet Common Sense.

His deistic beliefs, laid out in his Age of Reason, were powerful stimulators of 18th Century American and French thinking. In The Age of Reason he wrote ‘My own mind is my own church. All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit.’ And ‘Whenever we read the obscene stores of the Bible, the voluptuous debaucheries, the cruel and torturous executions, the unrelenting vindictiveness with which more than half the Bible is filled, it would be more consistent that we call it the word of a demon than the Word of God.’ And further, ‘...when I see throughout the greater part of this book, the Bible, scarcely anything but a history of the grossest vices and a collection of the most paltry and contemptible tales, I cannot dishonor my Creator by calling it by His name.’ Then later, ‘Of all the systems of religion that ever were invented, there is no more derogatory to the Almighty, more unedifying to man, more repugnant to reason, and more contradictory in itself than this thing called Christianity.’



-- “The religious right wants the country to be called ‘Christian’ and to strongly advocate their particular religious beliefs in the schools and throughout the society. Many would like the theory of evolution banned from the science curriculum and abortion banned from the medical establishment. A number of Republican candidates for national and state offices have been outspoken in their desire for Christian values to permeate their society. But others argue that so many people call themselves strongly religious, believing in a judging God, but act quite differently in real life. Some have cited former U.S. Congressional leader Tom DeLay who in 2006 resigned his congressional seat under a cloud of felony charges for corruption, criminal conspiracy and money laundering. He was upfront about his own strong beliefs in Christ and in prayer and wanted religion in the government saying ‘The people that go to church understand that a country has to be based on some sort of religion and fear of God because they understand that.’ In spite of the Constitution’s provisions separating church and state, he saw it differently, saying, ‘I don’t believe there is a separation of church and state. I think the Constitution is very clear. The only separation is that there will not be a government church.’ And in what many would call an anti-scientific approach to evolution because of his religious beliefs he said that the high crime rates and tragedies in the U.S, like the Columbine assault, will continue as long schools teach children ‘that they are nothing but glorified apes who have evolutionized out of some primordial soup of mud.’ And again on this ‘Guns have little or nothing to do with juvenile violence. The causes of youth violence are working parents who put their kids into daycare, the teaching of evolution in the schools, and working mothers who take birth control pills.’ ‘Only Christianity offers a way to live in response to the realities we find in this world.’”



—“It makes me wonder why so many Christians want a Christian state when Jesus told Pilate that ‘My kingdom is not of this world.’ (18) But I would have to admit that the tax breaks given to churches, even mega-churches, make religious preaching a very lucrative job. I wonder how many of those TV evangelists and mega-church preachers practice what they preach. They get divorces even though man should not put asunder what God has joined together. They get caught with prostitutes and drugs. But luckily their God is merciful and forgiving to them, and to their followers if they tithe generously.”

WHO GETS TO GO TO HEAVEN?

“Well let’s move on. Have a question Ray, if we are going to be believers, who gets to heaven? There was a recent survey in the U.S. that showed that 95% of the citizens believed in God, but only 75% thought that their families would go to heaven. Why do you think that would be?”



--"Lee, why are you so skeptical? But let's look at some belief systems. The pantheists don't believe in heaven, if they are Hindus they generally believe in reincarnation until the person has lived a truly good life, then he just becomes one with god. So no Hindus would see their families in heaven.

"Deists wouldn't believe in it. Neither would agnostics or atheists. Based on that Baylor study, that might include many of those non-traditional believers.

"The theists, primarily the Christians, Jews and Moslems, have a corner on salvation. We Christians know that according to John, Jesus said "I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (19) Also 'salvation is found in no one else' it says in Acts 4:12. As I understand Islam, the Koran says 'Nay-whoever submits his whole self to Allah and is a doer of good He will get his reward with his Lord; on such shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.' (20) And also 'Who can be better in religion than one who submits his whole self to Allah, does good, and follows the way of Abraham the true of faith? For Allah did take Abraham for a friend.' (21)



--"The Catholic Church has long held the idea that unless a person was baptized he or she could not enter the kingdom of heaven. St. Augustine of Hippo in the Fifth Century wrote that unless one was baptized he would be doomed to hell. This seemed a bit harsh for a merciful God, so in the Twelfth Century the concept of "limbo" was developed. Pope Innocent III, who ruled from 1161 to 1216, liked the concept and published a Body of Canon Law in which he stated that those in Limbo would suffer "no other pain." Recently there has been more reaction against this idea. And with the recent idea that a fertilized ovum has a soul. Then there is the conclusion from the Vatican Council of 1962 to 1965 that non-baptized Catholics can enter heaven. So the idea that unbaptized fetuses or babies won't get in seems rather illogical. And now Pope Benedict pretty well dropped the idea of a Limbo.

"In fact if God is all-merciful how can good people of any persuasion be unrewarded in the afterlife? If God is vengeful, you can see how only the chosen group can be rewarded. But is that chosen group Sunni, Catholic, Orthodox, Methodist, Shi'ite, evangelical, conservative or some other sect of whichever religion is God's favorite. But they all trace back through Abraham. Where did God choose the favored path—and how much devotion is necessary within that path to achieve salvation?

"The deists of course don't believe in a heaven, so maybe they won't make it."



—"Of course you can't get to heaven if you are a sinner unless you have been forgiven. Naturally we have a way to be forgiven in confession.



—"I understand that even in the Pope's backyard that 60% of the Italians don't go to confession. Is it because they aren't sinning like they used to or do they think they can get forgiveness directly from God or from their therapist?



—"I won't dignify that with an answer to your sarcasm, but it is true that not as many people go to confession any more. It's generally not the Saturday night ritual it once was. But let's look at sinning. The Ten Commandments give us a good basis for setting our moral standards.

Then Pope Gregory the Great enumerated the seven deadly sins in the Sixth Century. You probably remember them. They were: extravagance or lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy and pride. You can see that there is an overlap with the Decalogue. Naturally we try to develop the virtues that counter those seven vices. So we teach: chastity, abstinence, temperance, diligence, patience, kindness and humility. These are primarily individual vices and virtues. But the modern world presents more problems so Pope Benedict has given us a list of seven more major sins that deal with our responsibilities to our societies and that effect our duty to our Creator in additional ways.

“The new sins include: genetic modification, human experimentations, polluting the environment, social injustice, causing poverty, financial gluttony, and taking mind altering drugs.



—“Does financial gluttony mean making too much money? If so does the Catholic Churches’ riches fit here, or is the church immune from sinning? And I wonder if the Church is causing poverty when it refuses to give its riches to people below the poverty level. And does genetic modification include the modifications to plants that allow greater yields per acre so that more poor people can be fed?

“Is Bill Gates a financial glutton when he gives a higher percentage of his wealth to charity than does your church? But I can certainly see that taking illicit drugs would take your mind off any thoughts of God or others. And polluting the environment is certainly a negative. Do you think the church will stop signally with smoke from the Sistine Chapel when a new pope is elected? And will the Pope-mobile be hydrogen powered soon? And I wonder if the Church’s decrees to have more children in Africa and South America is causing poverty in those areas? And does this help to create or perpetuate social injustice? I actually agree with several of the new sins, but I think we have a sinner casting the first stone.”



—“As long as you agree that drug taking and social injustice are bad maybe there is some hope for you. Look at the forest, you’re concentrating on one or two trees. We all have to be more socially concerned today—and the major problems to be solved are obvious.

DEISM



--“Wanda, let’s move on. Can you explain deism a bit more? It keeps coming up in our discussion.”



--“As I said before, deists believe in a creator who isn’t involved in the world. They either rely on the tradition that there is a creator or they rely on reason, primarily the argument from design. They don’t rely on faith, so scriptures are meaningless. In fact it is often the inconsistency of the scriptures and the immoral actions of those who say they have God’s revelations that drive them away from organized religions. Their belief is therefore that God is not at all concerned with humans and how they act. If He were, He would have given consistent revelations and made certain that they were followed.

“Their values therefore come from themselves, as self centered, or from the ideal society they prefer. There is no divine revelation, no miracles, and no punishments or rewards from God. The so-called ‘freethinkers’ of England in the 17th and 18th centuries were the major protagonists. They wanted to believe in a creator but just couldn’t accept the supposed revelations.

“As opposed to some American evangelical Christians who believe in creationism but not evolution, most deists believe in both. Evolution is part of the creative process. The precision of the universe from the sub-atomic levels to the galaxies, and from amoebas to Nobel laureates strongly implies, if not necessitates, a creating mind.

“Often the deists were merely critical to the Old and New Testaments, to prophesy, miracles, and revelation so they tossed them out, along with the beliefs of Islam. But they seldom looked at the possibility of a pantheistic supernatural.

“Einstein gave us a more modern view of a deistic god when he said: ‘My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable superior spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive.’

“As you might expect, theistic religions, such as the Catholic Church, saw deists as infidels because they didn’t believe in revelation or in the theists’ view of it. In fact the last victim of the Inquisition was a deistic school teacher named Cayetano Ripoll in 1826. Six years after his execution the queen mother declared the Spanish Inquisition finished—after 354 years.

“You don’t hear as much about deism today, it seems that most people who would have been deists have gone to agnosticism or to atheism. Some may have even become theists. It seems that if they believe in a creator they want an involved relative, not just an absentee landlord.

“Einstein said ‘I believe in Spinoza’s God who reveals Himself in the orderly harmony of what exists, not in a God who concerns himself with fates and actions of human beings.’ Then he set out his ethical ideal for us saying ‘A human being is a part of a whole, called by us ‘the universe’, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest... a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.’

PANTHEISM AND PANENTHEISM

“Let’s take a quick look at pantheism to complete our look at god based assumptions. Pantheism means that ‘all is god’ or ‘god is all.’ It is from the Greek words ‘pan’ meaning ‘all’ and ‘theos’ meaning ‘god.’ So god is the totality of nature, the totality of the universe. It is one of the oldest deeply philosophical positions held relative to supreme beingness. A related concept is ‘panentheism’. It comes from the same Greek words but ‘en’ meaning ‘in’ is inserted, so it means ‘all in god’. God is the animating force of nature, its soul. But god is not synonymous with nature. It is sometimes difficult to differentiate between the two when reading ancient books.

“While primitive religions tend to be either pantheistic or panentheistic, they commonly appear to be polytheistic as they may worship many aspects of their pantheistic or panentheistic god. It is common to see the sun, moon, trees, or certain animals as having special relationships to the god in nature or the god of nature. Then other aspects of the One may become gods or goddesses, such as gods of the harvest, hunt, or war.

“The native Americans in North America were generally pantheistic, while the South American Indians were generally panentheistic. Yet the Cherokees were monotheistic. The Central American cultures of the Aztecs and Mayans seemed to be polytheistic. Obviously if cultures are somewhat separated their ideas of religion are likely to vary.

“Reading the Hindu Vedas or the Bhagavad-Gita gave the ancient Hindus a pantheistic outlook from some time between the 4th and possibly as early as the 15th or even 25th century BCE. But some of their scriptures seem panentheistic. But in Hinduism we can see strains of both approaches, depending on which scripture we are reading.

“Among the ancient Greeks we find writers who were pantheistic, panentheistic, polytheistic and monotheistic. In Judaism, while it is largely monotheistic, we can find evidence of panentheism, with a God that is the force behind all nature, in early orthodox writings and in later Reformed and Conservative Jewry. But we also find pantheism, especially in the Kabbalah.

“We find pantheism in Christianity also. There are a number of Christian mystics in the West. Panentheism is more common in Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Here God is both the creator and the creation, but not a ‘miracle making’ god. God’s energies are essential to keep Nature humming.

“In Islam, Sufism has pantheistic elements in its beliefs. It was probably influenced by Indian and Persian pantheism.

“Uniting with God is called a ‘mystical experience’ and is commonly found in the ‘holiest’ people in most religions. In Christianity the mystical experience takes two forms. In one the God is monotheistic and the mystic reaches out to God and experiences Him. In the second, and more commonly experienced, the mystic melds into a pantheistic God. Quite commonly mystics from the several religions will write similarly about their experiences with the pantheistic reality. The mystic experience can be achieved through prayer, through contemplation, thru chanting, or through dancing, as do the whirling dervishes of Sufism.

“With god either in everything or being everything you don’t have a god dictating morals. In fact there is often a strong belief that we don’t have free will and are really determined in everything we do. There is no heaven, and afterlife is merely becoming again the universal being, like a drop in the ocean, indistinguishable from the whole.

“Theism, of course, requires free will so that the person can follow the dictates of God and enter Paradise. However if you are god and everything else is god, you would not want to harm anything. To harm anything is to harm yourself. We must therefore respect everything. The strongest advocacy of this idea is found in the Jain religion, especially by its founder Mahavira in the 6th century BCE. He avoided eating meat, but he would also not eat living plants. He would, however, eat plants that were no longer living, such as fruit that had fallen from a tree or plants that had been partially eaten then discarded. He also wore a cloth over his mouth to prevent him from swallowing insects.

“Since everything is god or god is in everything, all religions are accepted by the true pantheist. This is the reason that Hindus are generally tolerant of all religious paths.

“Since the pantheist does not accept the theistic ideas of a merciful or vengeful god, an omniscient or omnipotent god, the existence of evil or immortality, the values for a pantheist tend to be derived from one’s oneness with nature and for existing comfortably in a peaceful society.”

AGNOSTICISM



-- “Dr. Wang, I mean Wanda, we humans must believe in something or we wouldn’t be called homo sapiens. The problem is that we often believe without good reason just because someone told us to. What about those of us who doubt?”



-- “Right Lee. So let’s look at the doubters, as you call them, for a moment. We are getting more and more of them so they are becoming more of an intellectual and political force. It seems that as people become more aware of some of the sciences, particularly astronomy, biology and geology, and as they try to fit their scriptural beliefs into the sciences which to them are more real, we get more agnostics and atheists. Then there are the deists who seem to be partway between the theists and the atheists and often become more agnostic on their way to atheism.

“The roots for the word agnostic are from the Greek ‘a’ meaning without and the Greek word for knowledge. It covers those who believe it is not possible to know whether there is a god and those who are skeptical relative to a supreme being but are not atheists. The many logical and historical holes in the so-called revelations of traditional religions lead him or her to not accept revelation. So an agnostic, while doubting, may lean towards either theism or atheism, but just believes there is not enough knowledge to go all the way in either direction.

“Agnostics are often influenced by the refusal of conservative religious people to accept the theories of science, such as evolution. They may also be influenced by the seeming lack of mercy by the Judeo-Christian-Muslim God in allowing so many deaths to innocent people in wars and natural disasters. They often also may evaluate the lack of mercy among believers in such things as suicide bombings and the killings of doctors at abortion clinics, along with the behavior of people who profess to be strong believers but who cheat and lie in government or from their pulpits. Did you ever think that the gospels don't ask us to be intelligent and to examine the propositions presented. Rather they threaten us. So fear, not facts, compel the actions and beliefs of many theists. This doesn't sit well with many thinking people, so they begin to doubt.

“The greatest problem one must confront in leaving behind the traditions of the religions in which we were born and raised, is giving up the hope of an afterlife. Psychologically we cannot see ourselves as not existing. And, as long as we are hoping, why not hope for a Happy Hunting Ground, an ideal life across the River Styx, or a life with our Creator on the other side of the Pearly Gates. I cannot be content thinking that I might be holding to beliefs that are not true. I would rather admit that I don't know.

“But for those of us who have overcome our traditions through our reasoning and therefore had to eliminate our hopes for celestial longevity, can only be content that we are living our lives according to the highest gift of humanness—our power to reason. We can therefore live our lives for the present and for our own futures and the futures of our progeny. Our values and morals have to be thought out rather than accepted from revelation. This gives us more control over our lives.

“In your country only about 5% of the people are agnostics or atheists. In Europe over 25% of the people fall into this category. And here in Kino it is nearly 100%

“You can tell what people really believe by watching their actions, not by listening to their words. If people really believed in a Supreme Being who would judge them and reward them or punish them according to their actions would we have drug sellers, pornography purveyors, murderers, wars, gang fights, corruption in business and government, harassment, stinginess or any of the other vices that the prophets have abhorred? The truth is that there are few real believers. Actually most people are either atheists or agnostics. Possibly we can see here the truth of Toynbee's observation that ‘Sooner or later, man has always had to decide whether he worships his own power or the power of God.’

”The late astronomer Carl Sagan was often asked whether he believed in God, he always answered that it depended on how you define God. While some thought he was an atheist, he said that atheism is stupid. His wife and collaborator said that his view could be considered to be agnostic, although she was an atheist. But he could see that the argument for design in the universe had possibilities. He said that today's religions haven't accepted the reverence for the universe as its mystery is being discovered by modern science.

“The Bible and the Koran really don't dwell on the wonders of the world and the universe. We might think about what Mikhail Gorbachev said ‘To me, nature is sacred. Trees are my temples and forests are my cathedrals.’

“At any rate, agnostics don't accept the teachings of religions. But as the French philosopher Rene Descartes told us ‘any person who actually tries to think would have to try to cut the chains of traditions and analyze what history and science tell us. If you would be a real seeker after truth, it is necessary that at least once in your life you doubt, as far as possible, all things.’”



—“It seems to me that most people are engulfed in their own little worlds of belief, They know that anyone who believes differently is just wrong. So we have a billion Hindus believing in pantheism. A billion Chinese believing in ancestor worship. A couple of billion Muslims and a couple billion Christians believing in their own brands of Mid-Eastern monotheism. Then we have Judaism, Sikhism, Bahai, Shinto and others that may seem like major players but

each has less than 1% of the world's population as adherents. Most people see only the truth of the religion of their parents.

"Should we judge a religion on how fast it is growing? If so, Islam or Scientology would be the true faith. While Islam was founded in the Seventh Century and reached 200 million believers by 1900, it increased 500% in the 20th Century and is over 2 billion today and growing. Scientology was founded in 1952 and had between a half million and 800,000 members fifty years later. Consequently it is the fastest growing religion. But it is not yet large enough to be a major religion.

"Does pantheism make sense to us. Can we believe, with the Hindus, that there is a god that permeates the universe in a way that we must respect every element of our world, from photons to galaxies? Can we believe in the Bible? Is there evidence for a worldwide flood that wiped out all land creatures except for Noah's passengers? Can we believe in Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus and the way he changed the direction of Jesus teachings from Judaism? Can we believe that there is a god who is both vengeful and all merciful? Should we judge a religion by its most fundamental believers? Should we believe that people can only do good if they follow a religion that was revealed to just one person? I'll tell you, these questions make me doubt. But it is so hard to go against what I was taught growing up. So since I don't see the proofs that religions hope I will see, I guess I'm an agnostic, maybe leaning toward atheism. I have to remember Voltaire's remark that 'Doubt is not a pleasant condition, but certainty is absurd.'"



--"Yes Lee, great thinkers have always been opposed by mediocre minds. The masses of people want a simple consistency for their beliefs. They don't have the time nor the inclination to think for themselves. And with a neat package of Sunday school pictures it is easy to answer all the questions that the great thinkers of the world have never been able to answer. This gives a fanatical certainty to the religious neophyte, so they don't have to try to answer the enduring questions of philosophy and religion. But intelligent people are more effectively judged by their questions than their answers.

ATHEISM

"Now gentlemen let's discuss atheism—it's a sure path to Hell in your country and the road to heaven in ours.

"Atheists seem to come to their beliefs several ways. Some look at the so-called holy scriptures, assess the historical authenticity of them, analyze their internal inconsistencies and decide that they can't be true. Some look at science, such as the big bang or evolution, see the high probability of them and contrast them with the improbability of the various scriptures. Some evaluate their happy lifestyles and compare them to scriptural prohibitions of their behavior, then drop any religious beliefs. Some look at the massive harm done to society in the name of religion, such as their continued fight against new truths, then decide that such religious beliefs cannot be ordained by a loving or intelligent supreme being. It may be the religious wars of the past or present or social ideas, such as abortion or stem cell research, that makes some decide that a god can't be so stupid as to oppose things that are essential for an intelligently run social system.

"Atheists generally are reacting against the problems and practices of theism. Scriptures are so often contradictory within themselves and also when they are compared with scriptures from the various religions. Were they revealed by different gods? Or if there is only one god how can that creating god, who is all knowing and all powerful as well as all merciful and all-good, allow wars, famines, terrorism, tsunamis, rapes, murders, genocides? Then, since evolution is factual and the religiously conservative idea that the world was created 6,000 years ago is absurd, the organized very fundamental religions must be in error. They must also be evil, considering the inquisitions, jihads, wars, torturings and martyrings. We believe that religion is a remnant of our human intellectual infancy? Therefore the theistic God of the Jews, Christians and Muslims must not exist. This is a blasphemy to the great majority of tradition-bound non-thinking people, but as George

Bernard Shaw said ‘All great truths begin as blasphemies’. Really, how many people have really read, studied and evaluated the scriptures and the history that they say they believe in? It’s amazing how many people worship the maker of the world instead of the maker of the infinite universe. Is it possible that the maker of the universe also created the God that made this world in seven days?

”Atheistic scientists like Einstein often use the word God to infer the infinite, knowing that most people can relate to the word God. When Einstein wrote that he didn’t believe in a personal god it upset the religious multitudes. His analysis of the universe flew in the face of the monotheistic basic assumption of his less educated but more hopeful countrymen. But it confuses the issue to use a different meaning for the word ‘God.’ It’s like calling a pea a watermelon.

“Atheists believe that this is the only world we will ever have—so they often try to make it a better place. Many atheists call themselves humanists. They look to the human values, the societal values that they think are essential, then live their lives. Their basic values are the same as those in most religions—being honest, not murdering, doing unto others, they just don’t require the laws of a God to tell them to do it. People should be able to agree on a set of values for their society—and they would be pretty much like the Ten Commandments in terms of murder, stealing and lying.

“Atheists make up a high percent of the Russian and Czech populations, probably because atheistic Marxism was a factor in their countries for many years. But that doesn’t explain the relatively high number in France or Germany. And Norway, with its state religion of Lutheranism, is quite atheistic. The last statistics I saw were in 2008. They showed that 44% of Norwegians believed in God, 29% were agnostic, and 27% were atheists. When it came to a belief in an afterlife only 34% believed in one, 38% didn’t and 28% hadn’t made a decision. Then when it came to the belief in whether Jesus rose from the dead, the most important belief in Christianity, only 30% believed in it, 38% didn’t and 33% didn’t have an opinion. The survey was conducted by Norway’s major newspaper, (22) The newspaper does the survey every two years. The percentage of atheists in the population had increased by 3% and the percentage of agnostics by 5% from two years earlier.



—“But 85% of Norwegians are members of the state Lutheran Church..”



—“This is because most Norwegians have been signed into the state church at birth and to remove themselves from the church roles is a bureaucratic process that most people don’t think is worth the trouble.

“A recent survey showed that Sweden was the least religious country with 85% non-believers. Vietnam was next, followed by Denmark, Norway, Japan, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, South Korea and Estonia, with 49% non-believers.

“In 2005 52% of Europeans said they believed in a God, 27% believed in some sort of life force, and 18% said they believed in neither. (23) There were huge differences by country with 95% of Maltese believing in God and only 16% of Estonians having such a belief. While a survey done several years earlier showed only 15% of Swedes believing in God, the Eurobarometer survey showed it to be 23%. The Czech census in 2001 showed 59% with no religion while 32% were religious, the remainder didn’t answer the question.

“Polls in France show about a third of the people to be atheists and between 14 and 32% as agnostics. In the UK polls have shown that about 40% of the people don’t believe in a god. And the younger people believe much less often than the older people. Is this because they are not bound as much by tradition, they are better educated, or they have less life experience?

In Spain there are only 11% who are non-believers and 6% who are outright atheists. But it depends on where you live. In Catalonia, for example, there are 22% who are atheists and 16%

who are agnostics. In Russia 32% were atheistic or agnostic, but of the 58% who said they were Christian, 42% had never been to a church.



—“In sociological surveys there are a number of factors that can influence the findings. The survey might be skewed by having too few respondents, by having questions that may be misinterpreted, or by not taking a representative sample. If you take a survey in Brooklyn asking 200 college students if they believe in the Judeo-Christian God your sample is too small and too similar, and what do they think of when you say Judeo-Christian God? Is it a God that rose from the dead? A merciless or a merciful god? A God that created the world in 4004 BC or created the universe 14 billion years ago. Is it a God that created all species at once or a God that guides evolution? And when the idea of a belief in a life force is asked, that life force is never defined. It’s almost like saying, are you for ‘love’ or ‘goodness.’ Is it a Hindu-like pantheistic over-soul concept. Is it only a stopgap between having believed in a creating god on the way to an agnostic or atheistic position? How can you ask questions or interpret answers when you haven’t defined your terms?

“I don’t know any of the particulars of these studies, but the British Broadcasting Company in 2004 found that 10% of Americans didn’t believe in God. The next year the Gallop Poll found that 5% of Americans did not believe that God exists. A few years before that the ARIS report was that 14% of Americans were not religious but of those only a half of one percent were agnostics and fewer still were atheists. So who do we believe? In Canada their census data showed that 16% had no religion, but the cities had much higher percentages than the rural areas. Atheists and agnostics make up 20 to 30% of the Canadian population.

“When we look at scientific studies of any sort we have to ask two questions. How valid are the results and how reliable are they. By validity is meant is it measuring what it says it is measuring. By reliability we mean if the same test is redone, will it have the same results.



—“Good point Ray. If we ask ‘do you believe in any sort of supernatural power or life force?’ and the person says ‘no’ we definitely have an atheist. But if they say ‘yes’ to ‘do you believe in a supernatural God or a life force?’ we may have some sort of a believer, but we don’t know what they believe in because we haven’t defined the terms. Is it the God that destroyed the world by a flood? Is it an all-forgiving God? Is it a deistic god that is not concerned with people? Is it a pantheistic totality of the universe? These problems of defining terms affect both the validity and the reliability of the test.

“Then we are not measuring the strength of the belief. If one person says he believes in God, goes to church regularly, and practices a great deal of charity, his belief is undoubtedly stronger than one who says she believes, but continually steals and lies and never attends church. Is that second person really a believer or is she only mouthing what the majority are saying?

“If we ask a thousand people in northern France some questions one year then the next year ask a thousand people in southern France the same questions we may not be able to generalize the results. Even if we asked the same thousand people the same questions two different years, the answers would probably not be the same. Some people would have changed their minds. So the reliability of the test would not be 100%.



—“On the other hand, religious leaders, particularly many Catholics, say that atheism is declining. They say that new religions are taking the place of some of the traditional religions. While they haven’t cited the sources or the methodology of their research, much of the

reasoning seems to revolve around the former required atheism of the USSR, which when it ended allowed some of the citizens to readopt religion

“They go on to say that the problem is more of an attitude of indifference not an abandoning of a belief in God. And the increasing disbelief is in the Western world, particularly Europe and Canada. They mention that this is not true in Asia, Africa or South America.”



—But don’t you see that it is largely a question of education. Of course tradition is also a factor. The Russians and Chinese are quite atheistic, probably because of their more recent Communist governments and their atheistic education. But in Japan, South Korea and Europe it is far more likely that their more extensive educations have overcome their religious traditions. But your Catholic reports ring true in that an idea of a god is just not important to many educated people.



—“As we said earlier, no survey can be completely accurate. But on another note, it is strange that the four Nordic countries all had state churches, all supported by tax money. Even though Sweden separated the state from the church in 2000, it still supports it.

“A surprise on that survey I just mentioned was that Israel was 19th with 37% of people being non-believers. It was no surprise that the U.S. was way down the list at number 44, with between 3 and 9% being non-believers. The survey also concluded that generally the higher the non-believer ratio, the higher the health integrity of the society, with less homicide, less poverty, higher literacy rates and so forth.



---“And Norway is probably the most giving country when it comes to foreign aid. Is it the Christian part or the atheistic part that is doing the giving? They probably both approve of it! Wanda , I often don’t know what to call myself. I guess I’m not an agnostic. I don’t think there is any sort of supernatural. So am I an atheist, an antitheist, an a-pantheist or an a-deist? But maybe that’s beside the point.”



—“I can’t help you there. But I think that more people are moving in your direction. I would guess that your Founding Fathers would be with you today if they weren’t 200 years ago. I think that the deism of many of them was a compromise between the blind theistic faith of the Middle Ages and the criticism of that faith by the philosophers of the Enlightenment. Today with the certainty of evolution and the theories of the astrophysicists, I think that yesterday’s deists would more likely be today’s atheists or more correctly put, materialistic scientists who don’t even concern themselves with a supernatural creator. Why should they concern themselves with trying to disprove a hypothetical being. It would be a waste of their time.”



—“Anyway, why do you think there is such a difference in the unbelievers and believers between the U.S. and Europe?”



--“It has been hypothesized that it is your elementary and secondary education. Is it possible, gentlemen, that the fact that your education is controlled through local school boards may be responsible for your low level of educational achievement in reading and science. When

there are no educational requirements for running for a school board you can have people with no higher education. When this is true you might guess that science might not hold a high place in the local curriculum. While each state may mandate certain programs, if they are to be carried out it would be at the local level. Your high school students rank 24th in math and science among the developed countries, that's next to last, even though over 80% of Americans graduate from high school. In contrast, the European schools are generally state run, often with identical lesson plans daily across the whole country. You might guess that with people with doctorates in the education ministries planning the curriculum, that the average student will be exposed to a complete curriculum which is current both in terms of the curriculum and the teaching methods.

“Then there is the required daily Pledge of Allegiance to your flag and the daily repeating of ‘this nation under God’ that is undoubtedly a factor. Then there are the opening prayers at so many of your meetings. Your minds are constantly programmed to believe in something that can't be proved.

“And even though over a quarter of your high school graduates will eventually have a bachelor's degree from college, your country still has a very low literacy rate. You have probably seen the results of tests given to both high school and college graduates which show a real lack of a basic understanding of the world by American students.

“But of course all colleges are not equal. While you have 17 of the top 20 universities in the world, you also have a number of very low level schools. Many are religiously funded schools where academic freedom is not allowed. Still your top people are among the best in the world. No country comes close to the U.S. in producing Nobel Prize winners. The U.S. has well over a third of them.

“I think there are three types of people who become atheists. The first are the empirical scientists, especially those in astro-physics, astronomy and biology. They see both the order and the disorder in the universe. And when they compare the infinite universe with the finite descriptions of God they see in the Bible and the Koran, their knowledge of the universe wins out over a creating god, especially a God that created the universe in 4004 BC as is so commonly believed. The certainty of evolution and the later development of the more advanced species is undoubtedly more scientifically certain than creating all of the species at one time a few thousand years ago. And there definitely wouldn't have been room for all of the 13 or so million species in Noah's ark—even though over half of animal species are insects.

“Then I think there are those who would like to assume that if there is a God, it is merciful, but they see the God-inspired wars of the Jews in the Old Testament and the unending battles in the name of God during the last two millennia by the Christians and Muslims of various stripes. How can believers in a merciful God kill those within their own religion or those of other religions?

“Then there are those non-believers who seem to react psychologically. Their self-centered, often hedonistic, behavior in sexual and other sensual gratifications makes more sense to them than following a life of denying their appetites today and betting with Pascal that they should live the virtuous life today and wait until they die to see if there is a heaven.

“The first two types are more intelligent and educated than the average person. They have thought their way into their belief system using the evidence available. A Danish study (24) found that atheists are 5.8 IQ points higher than the believers in a God. The average IQ score is 100. So between the score of 100 and 105.8 there would be about a 15 person difference out of 100 people, since IQ is measured in standard deviation percentiles, not percentages. The middle percentiles, between 90 and 110 IQs would include 50% of the population. The percentiles between 80 and 90 and between 110 and 120 would each include 16% of the population. So a 5.8 IQ difference would be more like 7 or 8 people out of 100. The percentiles between 70 and 80 and between 120 and 130 would each include 7% of the population. So a difference here would be only 2 or 3 people out of a hundred. And there would be only 2% of the people below 70 and 2% above 130. So at these levels a 5.8 IQ difference would be negligible.

“In your country it is generally a negative to tell people that you are an atheist or an agnostic. If atheists decide to come out of their creationist and celestial closets they will face the same condemnation of those who sided with Copernicus and his heliocentric theory or with the pre-Christian Eratosthnic proofs that the earth is round. It is very hard to change, and the less intelligent and less informed you are, the harder it is to change in any area. So while many people have the intelligence to reject a belief in a creating being, there are far fewer who have the courage or the desire to proclaim their personal beliefs even though doing so might reduce the religious belief system that has caused your society so many problems.”



—“There are several groups that are not in the closet, Wanda. The Freedom From Religion Foundation organization works to keep God out of government. It has often been successful in the courts in fighting governmental financial support for religions and work done by religions. Its co-presidents include a former fundamentalist minister who became an atheist.

“It makes me wonder, did God make man or did man make God? Or as Neitzsche wrote in Twilight of the Idols, ‘Is man a mistake of God’s or is God a mistake of man?’



—“We in Kino believe that primitive humans needed a certainty, so they invented gods in their myths. It was an easy way of explaining life and its problems. As we have evolved socially we have merely evolved our ideas of a creating being. Look at the roots of today’s religions, they go back over 2000 years. But they evolve with more complicated ideas of a soul, of a virgin birth, of a genetically transferred sin of Adam, of dogmas and fatwas that the founders of the original religions couldn’t have foreseen and probably would disapprove.

“One of our poets put it this way:

Is there heaven or is there hell?
No book nor sage can really tell.
The good, the bad, and seeking right
Are in ourselves, to see the light.

“We place our hope in ourselves and we blame ourselves when we fail. There is always a cause of calamity and success. We can’t evade the reality by merely saying it’s God’s will.

“It seems to me like turning on your television set. It works, you don’t have to know about all the circuits and science behind it. So if somebody tells you there is a god that created your universe, you just believe it. Only those who question the beliefs and their origins have doubts.

“Imagine that children were read only the stories of ‘The Three Little Pigs’ or ‘Red Riding Hood’. They were told by their mothers that the stories were true. Don’t you think that they would all believe in the ‘big bad wolf?’ Why do children in the West generally believe in Santa Claus, Father Christmas, or some other jolly elf that brings presents at Christmas time? Obviously their parents told them to believe, so they believe. Then one day the parents say ‘April fool!—there ain’t no Santa Claus.’”



—“Don’t you mean ‘December fool?’ But seriously, it is clear that traditions throughout the world leave people with quite different beliefs. The Hindu child in India likely believes in Brahma, Vishnu and other gods of the Hindu pantheon. The Incas and Aztecs had not known of the God of the Mid-East. People of the Caribbean may mix Christianity with Voodoo. The Koran perpetuates the earlier primitive beliefs in jinns as it reveals a single creating God. Powerful myths are difficult to counter and impossible to disprove. We can’t disprove that Kali or Ahura Mazda exist. We can only look for evidence for them. We find that evidence in the

scriptures of the Indian and Persian cultures. A Jew, a Christian or a Muslim would immediately dismiss their reality, just as a polytheist can dismiss the monotheistic god of Israel and Arabia.

“Your country is officially atheistic. Why don’t you work to reduce the theistic beliefs of other countries. It is certainly a danger to you when many in the West believe that the God of the Mid-East sanctions everything they do—from wars and democracy to globalization and population control.



-- “While we are atheists, we are not running around yelling that ‘there is no god’. It is rather eliminating the god hypothesis from our ethical system and adopting a self-centered or society based ethical system that is our concern. There is no question that Western religion empowers those without power. An unproven assumption once accepted gives certainty to all—without having to think.



--“It is certainly easier to be self centered than deeply religious, because as you intimated, all things are permissible if there is no God. So drug use, illegitimacy and crime are much more likely to be realities. A deeply religious belief will discourage these anti-social behaviors.”



---“In the last major study I saw father, American youth, who supposedly are more religious than the Europeans, have a higher rate of illegal psychoactive drug use. The study covered over 100,000 youth in 31 countries. 41% in the U.S. compared to 17% in Europe, had tried marijuana. 23% in the U.S. versus 6% in Europe had tried other illegal drugs. Even in the European country with the most drug use it was only 40% as high as in the U.S. Even in the Netherlands, where marijuana use is legal, its use was only 2/3s of the U.S. rate and Holland was only fifth in Europe, behind Ireland, France, the Czech Republic and the UK. And the Irish are the most church going in Europe. Of course the French and the Czechs have about 20% of their populations who say they are atheists. This is fairly high by European standards. The European youth did drink alcohol and smoke more often than your Americans did, however. But 26% of your teenage girls have sexually transmitted diseases, 50% of Blacks and 20% of Anglos and Hispanics. The 26% rate is fifty times higher than had previously been estimated.

“The U.S. teen Chlamydia rate is fifty times higher than that of France. The gonorrhea rate is 75 times higher than that of France and Germany. The syphilis rate is more than triple the European rate.

“The teen pregnancy rate is four times higher than that of France, And France has the highest rate in Europe. The teen abortion rate is 3 times that of France and 8 times that of Germany. And while Americans start their sexual experiences only a few months earlier than Europeans, they are more likely to have multiple partners in a year. Boys are four times more likely and girls twice as likely.

“In the last 200 years theistic belief has reduced markedly in most of the developed countries. The USA is a major exception. And while the priests and ministers, along with political leaders, repeatedly warned of a rapid decay in morals and a rise in crime, the actuality has been 180 degrees different. Crime and drug use in the U.S. are far higher than in other developed countries. Additionally the more secular countries offered their citizens more universal health care and more parenting benefits, such as governmental stipends for children, time off with pay for new parents, et cetera.

“The UK, France, Japan and the Scandinavian countries are examples of societies with low murder rates, less sexually transmitted disease and lower rates of abortion. In fact in category after

category the U.S. shows itself to be a more dysfunctional society than the less religiously oriented countries. This is true even though its per capita wealth is greater than nearly all developed countries. In general in the richer democracies, higher rates of belief in, and worship of, a creator correlate with higher rates of homicide, juvenile and early adult mortality, STD infection rates and teen pregnancy.

“Another thing that research shows is that your young people have twice the number of non-believers as your older population. This might be because more are educated. And African-Americans, who have less education on the average, have twice the number of believers as the Asians, who tend to have more education. It is at least conceivable that more education leads to more critical thinking about the natural and the supernatural. Yes Father Ray.”



---“You make it sound like believing in God is a sign of ignorance. My experience is that the smartest and most educated people I know believe in God. And I’m not just talking about my university education. Although Notre Dame is ranked as the 18th best university in America, ahead of Cal Berkeley, which is 20th, and UCLA which is 25th. Hate to rub it in Wreck and Con but my university is seven points better than you in education and a lot more than that on the football field!”



---“I didn’t mean to upset you, Ray. There are certainly intelligent, educated and thinking people on both sides of the issue. But we are talking about non-provable basic assumptions. I just wanted to comment on the fact that non-believers are increasing on both sides of the Atlantic in the developed countries where the education should be the most effective.

“Is it because the Europeans have experienced more recent wars on their own soil—WW 1, WW 2, and the Soviet takeovers, so that they don’t have the feeling of a merciful Christian God? Is it the existential non-god assumption that we should eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die? Is it a higher level of critical thinking? I don’t know.

“Atheists are often highly skeptical of people who say they believe in God but who then act in a totally opposite way. I already mentioned the vocally Christian former U.S. Congressional leader Tom Delay, whose actions seemed to be somewhat against the moral code of Jesus. Another religious Republican, Mark Foley, resigned a few months later. He had been soliciting sex from one of the boys who worked in his office. He had previously said that ‘I have said repeatedly that in this country we track library books better than we do sex offenders.’ He flaunted his strong religious values saying ‘I am and have always been a strong proponent of public education. But by the virtue of its very nature—publicly funded schools cannot offer the type of spiritual education that Catholic schools have long provided.’ He had also bragged about his own values saying that ‘At Sacred Heart, I was taught how to be a better citizen because of their focus on discipline and moral values.’ And again he emphasized the importance of values education saying ‘By offering an education centered on values, the faculty in Catholic schools can create an interactive setting between parents and students that is geared toward long-term healthy character and scholastic development for all enrolled children.’

“So you can’t judge people by what they say, only by what they do. As another example, U.S. Congressman Randy Cunningham who said he ran for Congress ‘in 1990 because I was fed up with politicians who took advantage of our trust and put powerful special interests ahead of those who elected them.’ Then in the course of his 15 years as a congressman proceeded to take bribes and evade taxes amounting to millions of dollars. Regarding which the U.S. attorney said that ‘He did the worst thing an elected official can do – he enriched himself through his position and violated the trust of those who put him there.’ Then she added that ‘It is clear from the facts set forth in the plea agreement, facts that Mr. Cunningham admitted in his guilty plea, that this was a

crime of unprecedented magnitude and extraordinary audacity.’ For this he was sentenced to several years in prison. He lamented his actions once he was caught and said ‘I cannot undo what I have done. But I can atone. I am now almost 65 years old and, as I enter the twilight of my life, I intend to use the remaining time that God grants me to make amends.’

“Look at devout Muslims defying the Koran by killing Jews, Christians and other Muslims in terror attacks. Look at the number of Catholic priests accused and judged guilty of child molestation. Look at the Inquisition and the torture and burning of witches and heretics. Look at major preachers preaching against homosexuality and drugs, but participating in both. Look at the Israeli’s killing thousands of children in their massive attacks on Muslims and Christians. Is that an eye for an eye or is it murder, according to their scriptures? Look at the devout Jewish lobbyist Jack Abramoff who pleaded guilty to federal charges of conspiracy, fraud and tax evasion in a corruption probe that has linked him with lawmakers from both parties

“We can certainly argue that these individuals who proclaim to be Christians, Muslims or Jews are not really what they say they are because they don’t follow the creed of the group that they say they attach themselves to. They are really self-centered individuals attempting to frock themselves in a mantel of religious acceptance. But on looking closely we see no mantel. These emperors really have no clothes!

“In your country could a person who said he was an atheist get elected when he disclosed his anti-god philosophy in an overwhelmingly Protestant Christian country?”



--“Probably no, but we have had Jews elected to the Senate and a Catholic president. And we recently had one congressman admitting that he was not a believer.”



--“But the Jews and Catholics at least fell into the Judeo-Christian tradition. In fact in the U.S. if you want to get elected you must say you are a believer. To deny a strong religious faith would be political suicide. Just as in my country to say you were a strong Christian would be political suicide because we are a nation of atheists. So you must tell the electorate what they want to hear, not what you believe.”



--“Dr. Wang, as a priest I naturally am a strong believer. And as a person with some competence in science, I would argue that you can’t prove that there is no God.”



--“Right father. At this point in our history we can’t prove the non-existence of anything—a supreme being, a green goat on the other side of Jupiter, the idea of reincarnation or whether a heaven exists. There is weak historical evidence for reincarnation, but is it true or just happenstance. The same is true of a supreme being. If we believe the holy books and the apparent miracles we have heard about, these are types of historical evidence. What if the miracle has happened to us or to a close relative. What if a cousin was blinded when she saw her child run over by a car. Then when she was touched by a healing minister and believed she would be healed she was healed, was it really the hand of God or was it a mental cure for a mentally induced condition? What if a war veteran can no longer see or lift his arms because a best friend died in those arms and his mind never wants to see a best friend die and his arms never want to experience holding a dying best friend, then later he is cured by a psychiatrist or a religious healer, what level of miracle is that?”



--“Our Church is very skeptical to modern miracles. For example thousands of people say they have experienced miraculous healing at Lourdes, where St. Bernadette had seen the Virgin Mary. The Church has only recognized about 70 of these as being scientifically miraculous. Some of these have been very recent.”



---“I have to admit that the story of the healings at Lourdes has always fascinated me. I wonder if there isn’t some other explanation such as the power of mind over matter. But the instantaneous healings of cancers and multiple sclerosis make me wonder.

“Still I question historical evidence more than empirical evidence because the facts of empirical science are more demonstrable and speak for themselves. But it has usually taken a long time for the truth to be accepted. Just like the discoveries of Copernicus, Galileo, Darwin and Leakey—when the truth goes against one’s deeply held beliefs, those new facts are too intellectually uncomfortable to accept. Just look at the Catholic Church’s inquisition of Galileo for proclaiming the absurd idea that the earth revolved around the sun, when everyone in the Church knew that the Earth was the center of the universe. The Church authorities wisely brought him to the inquisitional court, tried him as a heretic, and forced him to recant his heretical theories. But then in 2008 the universe changed, or the Pope’s view of the universe changed, and Galileo was hailed as one who helped the faithful to better understand and ‘contemplate with gratitude the Lord’s works.’

We seem to be much more able to accept science in our living rooms than in our minds. We have no problem with television, mobile phones, or automobiles. because they are practical and aid our living. Yes Commander”



--“If I may interrupt your line of thought, my father told me that in 1962 he visited the Soviet Union with a youth hostel group. Some in the group knew about the Museum of Religion and Atheism. The Intourist guide said it didn’t exist, but they found it in Leningrad in the former Kazan Cathedral. It was the government’s attempt to prove that atheism was true. He said that when they entered the museum they first saw pictures of primitives worshiping gods in volcanoes or oceans. We all know there are no gods in volcanoes. Then there were pictures of gods like Thor, Jupiter, Zeus and the rest of the primitive pantheon. Of course they all knew that these were merely myths believed by many in the past. Then there were pictures of the Old Testament. But of course being brought up Christian they knew that Judaism wasn’t the true religion. So that brought them to Christianity. There was a large room filled with things to prove that Christianity was not ‘Christian.’ There was an icon of the Virgin that cried, but when you swung it away from the wall you could see the metal tube up the back of it that the monks forced water through so that it came out of small holes in the eyes. ‘Glorioski! The peasants were experiencing a miracle!’

‘But most of the room was filled with hundreds of torture instruments like thumb screws, iron masks, a rack, and metal spikes that would be forced under the finger nails or inserted into body organs. But the main exhibit was a tableau of an Inquisitional court with three white robed inquisitors with tall cone shaped hats, looking like Ku Klux Klansmen, sitting behind a table. The heretic was held by a burly jailor who was forcing him in to a metal chair with hundreds of spikes on the seat and back. Meanwhile another masked man was heating a branding iron in a fire. Hopefully the tickling of the spikes and the warmth of the brand would entice the non-believer into accepting the true Catholic faith. Some of my father’s comrades thought this was not the way that Jesus would have done it. Of course that was the point of the exposition. Christianity is

unchristian, therefore there is no God. Then as they proceeded to the last room there was a model of Sputnik hanging from the ceiling. Obviously science, not God, was the path for the intelligent.

“It was obvious to my father that the logic of the exhibit was faulty. Certainly even if the Christian God does not exist, it doesn’t disprove that some supernatural being exists. On the same visit he was able to talk with professors of communist theory at the University of Moscow. He argued, as you have, that atheism is not a scientific position because you can’t prove the non-existence of anything, and they agreed.

“I went to Leningrad and Moscow in the mid-80s to look for the museum. All of the exhibits on atheism had been removed. And I understand that now it is a working cathedral again.”



--“I have heard about it and would certainly have loved to have seen it. But let’s continue with the idea of atheism and contrast it with your religious country. There seem to be many politicians and religious leaders in your country who believe that a religious country is a more moral country. The idea that materialism leads to “cultures of death” is the official opinion of your church, father. Pope John Paul II said that “the pro-abortion culture is especially strong precisely where the Church’s teaching on contraception is rejected”



--But doctor, how can you disagree with that? People who really believe in a judging God and follow the morality laid out by the Church will certainly lead a more moral life. And I’m not just talking about Catholics here!”



--“But father, the research in your own country indicates that your apparent strong belief in a creating theistic God is counter-productive to having a crime free society. (25) If it is true, as so many argue in your country, that being a religious country makes it a more moral country, the evidence does not seem to agree. And you have a very religious country, according to the surveys. The level of and type of religious belief in the US is the highest of any developed country and it parallels the levels of belief in the developing countries and the Third World. But in spite of your religiosity the other developed countries have less illicit drug use, less sexually transmitted disease, fewer teenage pregnancies, fewer abortions, and fewer murders. And other socially desirable realities are definitely reduced when the traditional religious beliefs are minimized or absent. Teenage gonorrhea is 6 to 300 times more prevalent in the USA than in the various European countries. These diseases have been nearly eliminated in secular Scandinavia. Adolescent abortion rates are higher in populations that believe in a creating God and which don’t accept evolution.

“I don’t know if this fact relates to present day America but murder rates were very high 200 years ago when all countries were theistic. In secular countries murder rates have plummeted to historic lows. However theistic Portugal has rates much higher than the nearby secular countries. Student mass murders are rare in Europe and their rate is declining, but the USA’s rates are far higher than all of Europe.”



—“It reminds me of what Voltaire wrote, that “As long as people believe in absurdities they will commit atrocities’.”



--“Are you trying to say that religious belief causes murder or illicit sex?”



--“Of course not, Father. I’m saying that it merely indicates that traditional beliefs in the scriptures as holding all of truth and being against any scientific findings that may put some of those beliefs in question. It may be counterproductive to developing the type of society that the religious people and everyone else want.”



—“I just don’t believe it!”



--“But the atheists do, father. Yes Commander?”



--“Wanda, these may not be because of the religion but because of the lack of religion in what should be a religious country. For example, the statistics you cite deal mainly with the young people, while most of the older people are the ones who are religious. I’ve heard that there has been a serious loss of young people from the evangelical ranks. Whether it is because of self-centered values or more science education, I don’t know. But there apparently has been a big drop in ‘strong Bible believing Protestants.’ I saw one report that the number of Bible believing youth had dropped from 65% during World War II, to about 35% for the ‘baby boomer generation born in the 50s and 60s, and some alarmists say that the number of youth in this category is only about 4%, but my guess is that it is nowhere near that low.

“It is certainly difficult for anyone to fight off the immediacy of seeking pleasure now when you have the sexually explicit media bombarding the eyes and ears, and advertisers telling us all the things we must have right now. Then when you have some of the conservative religions taking anti-scientific positions, like being against the theory of evolution, you can see the intellectual pushing and pulling of the young minds. It reminds me of a former student who told me that in the university she lost both her virginity and her belief in God.

“The mega-churches and tele-evangelists seem to attract more of the older crowds. I’ve seen a number of strong Christian youth groups, so it is obvious that many are bucking the non-believing trend. But as more youth side with the non-believers, peer pressure certainly will take its toll. And there is the fear that the States are becoming ‘post-Christian’ like Europe.”



--- “Gentlemen, one more bit of food for thought, relative to the acceptance of the fact of evolution, the least religious country, Japan, accepts the findings of science the most. But the more religious a country, the less it accepts the fact of evolution. Still, as I said before, atheism is not a scientific theory because a scientist is not concerned with advocating a position that can’t be proven. Some say that the farthest that a true scientist can go is agnosticism, leaning to the side of no creator. But then a person could accept the assumption that there is no god. This would make him an atheist. But it would be a philosophical position, not a scientific position. But it certainly has a good chance of being true.

“You could take another tack in terms of how a scientist could try to attack the question. Instead of trying to disprove the theistic beliefs you could start with assuming a god hypothesis then try to prove it with the various sciences of biology, physics, cosmology and such. You could even look for verifiable historical evidence. Then, if there isn’t enough evidence to prove the hypothesis you could just dismiss it. If there isn’t enough evidence then you could be an atheist. So trying to disprove theism might leave you an agnostic, but failing to prove a theistic god could leave you an atheist.



—“I wonder if Leonardo da Vinci was an atheist? In the 13000 pages he wrote there was no mention of God. And on Sundays he didn’t worship, he worked. And top scientists today seem to be more vocal about their atheism. Steven Weinberg, a Nobel prize winner in physics, warned that ‘the world needs to wake up from its long nightmare of religious belief.’ His thoughts were echoed by a Nobelist in chemistry, Sir Harold Kroto, who called on the John Templeton Foundation to give its next \$1.5 million prize for “progress in spiritual discoveries” to an atheist. Certainly the atheists are becoming more vocal in their anti-religious philosophies and their call for humanitarian, rather than God based, ethical and political systems. In fact it seems that many atheists are not just sitting back and taking comfort in their lack of belief. They are fighting the theistic beliefs because they see them as absurd and counter to a thinking society.



—But do they point to the good done by religions? Most of the hospitals in underdeveloped countries are supported by and manned by strongly religious people, supported by churches. And what about the terrorism done by atheists and non-believers. Look at the millions killed and tortured by Stalin and Mao. And Pol Pot’s atrocities were certainly not religiously inspired.”



—“I agree with you on those points, Ray, but without fanatic religious people we wouldn’t have suicide bombers, the September 11 destruction of the Twin Towers in New York, the war in Iraq. And maybe more important we wouldn’t have the Catholic and Muslim pushes for more babies. I think that’s the worst thing done to the world in the name of religion.

“Militant atheism is trying to convert people to the no-god hypothesis. It is no longer merely enough for one to quietly and perhaps ashamedly say that he doesn’t believe in a god. Now people are asked to fight the idea of god as a non-rational belief.

“Newborns misshapen with birth defects, innocents killed or maimed in wars or accidents, and grievous sins foisted on us in the name of god or religion, all make people doubt that a merciful or intelligent god exists.”



—In my area we have a group of atheists and agnostics that meets on Sunday mornings to discuss new findings in science, ethical approaches to a better society, how to raise our children as more effective ethical beings, problems with our current society, like drugs and gambling. It is attracting more people. They are even talking about getting a resident minister, a philosopher-administrator. People like to be with people. People like to develop ethical guidelines for their behavior. But these meetings are for educated people. Primitives definitely need a god or gods and an afterlife to give meaning to their uneducated lives.



--“While atheism may not be a scientific position, because you cannot disprove the existence of anything, theistic religions are certainly not scientific either. So we have two non-scientific points of view, the theistic and the atheistic. The theists say that they have historical evidence for a creating being and the atheists are saying that that historical evidence is not strong and that it is in conflict with itself over and over again. So the atheists and agnostics just say, let’s drop the god assumptions out of our thinking and use the more evident self centered and society based assumptions.

“While atheism may not be a scientific position, belief in a supernatural being has decreased among American scientists during the last century. In 1914 about 25% believed in a personal God by 1998 it was only 7%. Relative to the idea of immortality, belief dropped from 35% to 8%. (26) About twice as many mathematicians believed in a god than did biologists or physicists.

“Just any education is not the key to questioning any creating supernatural entity. Lawyers’ educations do not explore evolutionary biology. A medical education does not make you an expert on astro-physics or cosmology. To have the tools to question traditions you should be an expert in logic, in comparative religions, in cosmology, in evolutionary biology. Would a high school or college graduate have such expertise? On the other hand do they have the gullibility to believe the myths of their mother?”

“This education criterion is probably why atheism and agnosticism are growing in the developed countries but religion, particularly Islam and Christianity, are growing in the Third World. Higher birth rates and less education, when agitated with missionary zeal, are increasing the total number of monotheists on the planet. The ignorance of the tribal populations, the reality of poverty, and the hope for a hope that sounds better than what the tree spirits can give, increase the populations of believers.

“To believe in a supernatural that is so infinite that the greatest theologians can’t make it intelligible is a huge stumbling block for a thinking person. Then there are so many ideas of a god, based on one’s culture, that people can’t agree on a definition.



—“Does that mean that there are many kinds of atheism, depending on which idea of god that you don’t believe in?”



—“That’s one way of looking at it Lee. Another way is to lump all the unbelievers together. If we put all the agnostics, atheists and others who don’t have any religious belief in one big non-believing box we would have about a sixth of the world’s population. That’s a lot more than you Americans can fathom. However you Americans are in the mainstream since Christians are almost a third of the world’s population. But the Muslims are just about to pass you. Throw in 2/3rds of a billion on Hindus and a third of a billion Buddhists and you have most of the world categorized. The Jews, for all their visibility, are only about 14 million, less than a third of one percent of the total. That should surprise your citizens!



—“I see that we have a gigantic problem with ‘political correctness’ here. When you say there is no god, or that we should plan our individual and social lives without the assumption of a god, it steps on billions of toes, it is certainly more difficult for an atheist to come out of his godless closet than for a male homosexual to come out of his womanless closet. I guess that’s because the assumption that a god exists is stronger than the assumption that all men should be heterosexual. Today we are so afraid of retaliation if we say something that a person or a group of people don’t want to hear.

“Look at the trouble the pope got in when he quoted somebody from a few hundred years earlier who said that there was violence in the way Islam had been advanced. What he said was true, but it upset people. The Danish newspaper cartoons, showing the prophet Mohammad in varying poses related to war, elicited violent outbreaks around the world. And while the Koran says nothing of such images, several hadiths do. Just as Christians look to Paul for additional teachings that the evangelists didn’t provide, Muslims look to the teachings of various hadiths to supplement the Qur’an. So images are forbidden in Sunni houses and at graves. But the scriptures don’t mention newspapers. I guess we have a problem in political correctness.

“Are we all made in God’s image? Are the dwarf and the giant, the imbecile and the genius, the limbless infant, and Siamese twins—all in God’s physical image? Are the souls of Hitler and Mother Theresa, of Pol Pot and Siddartha, of Jack the Ripper and Moses all in the same image? And when the theologians tell us that it is all in God’s Divine plan, how do they know? They seem to be able to see clearly the beginning of creation and our eventual life with our creator while overlooking the contradictions in the scriptures and the unholiness of their warrior saints. They can rationalize the existence of evil with the plotting of devils and jinns, but can’t rationalize the existence of a bi-polar creator who wipes out whole populations of innocent women and children for some sort of immorality, then mercifully forgives murderers, adulterers and ruthless conquerors.

“Should we look to the success of Buddhism with its peaceful, non-god based approach or to the wars of Islam and Christianity for our inspirations? Other than a promise of a hereafter with angels or virgins, what has religion done to lift the sights of our human destiny? Science has given us better ways to grow crops, a better understanding of our place in the universe, the blessing and the curse of television, and the internet. What has religion given us in exchange for the tithes it extracts?



---“What has religion left us? Look at the wonders of the world. The places of worship like the Greek temples on the Acropolis, the Buddhist shrines at Ankor, the magnificent Christian cathedrals and the incredible mosques of Islam—all stimulated by the highest of human potentials which have produced the pinnacles of human architecture. Look at the celestial achievements of the chisel and pallet—Michelangelo’s David and his ceiling of the Sistine Chapel or the Last Suppers of daVinci and Dali.

“Even in death there is beauty because of the reality of an afterlife. Look at the immensity and grandeur of the pyramids or the delicate exquisiteness of the Taj Mahal. From the aqua apron leading up to the flawless white marble mausoleum, to the semi-precious stones so delicately inlaid in the marble tiles of its interior—the final resting place of the Shah Jahan and his wife Mumtaz Mahal, the exalted one of the palace. This is the most beautiful of all buildings. It pays tribute to possibly the greatest love in human history, a Muslim love, a religious love.



---”That’s certainly true Ray. The physical remnants of religious sentiments are awe inspiring, but varying strong belief systems can also leave incredible monuments. The works of science put men on the moon, transport us thousands of miles in a few hours, give us incredible access to all kinds of information in a second on the internet. Isn’t Hoover Dam a beautiful structure? Aren’t the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial and the Statue of Liberty beautiful? So the incredible, the beautiful and the grand are not limited to any specific belief system.”



---“On another note, I’ve heard it said that there are no atheists in foxholes or on their death beds.”



---“I don’t know about that, but maybe you heard the story of the atheistic hunter being chased by a lion in Africa. The hunter fell down and the lion pounced on him and opened his mouth wide ready to devour him. The atheist yelled ‘Oh my God!’ Time stopped and a voice from the clouds said, ‘All your life you have denied my existence, but now as you are about to die you

call on me.’ The atheist thought that it would be hypocritical to ask now, but he yelled to the cloud ‘Can you make the lion a Christian?’ Time started again. The lion knelt and folded his paws in prayer and prayed ‘Lord, bless this food which I am about to receive.’

“So Ray we atheists may well stay true to our lack of faith even unto death. And I’m not ‘lion’. If I haven’t hoped for heaven, how can I be disappointed if there is none. Anyway, thank God I’m an atheist.”



--“Lee are you aware that there is an organization for atheists and others who believe in humanistic values for the world. The International Humanist and Ethical Union was founded in the Netherlands in 1952. There are three million members in forty countries. Their value system begins with the dignity of the human being as fundamental. They believe that everyone has the right and the responsibility to give meaning to his or her own life. They want to promote humanism as a non-theistic approach to ethical behavior throughout the world and to defend human rights. They want to promote the freedom of beliefs, both religious and non-religious and to keep church and state separate.

“In Kino we subscribe to this general idea, and we are humanistic. But we want a little more control of our society than they might desire. Also their aims are a little more geared to freedom than we think our orderly society can support.

“Ray, you may be interested in how we experience our wonder of the universe in a social way. It is something like Lee’s group. A weekend retreat is available to all where the wonders of the universe are discussed. It’s something like your Sunday church services, your Saturday Temple services or your Friday mosque services. But we don’t look at a supernatural being, we look at the wonders of our world. One week modern art might be discussed and illustrated, another time we might discuss the latest findings on evolution or the Big Bang. Another time we might look at philosophy. I think that people like to get together and share their humanity, so our religion relates to our world as we know it, not some revealed ideas that one or a few presented a thousand years ago. We look at what we know today. We gather to appreciate what we have and learn how to make it better, not to scare people into behaving ethically so they can be rewarded later.

“I understand that that would be impossible in your country because the Judeo-Christian God assumption runs so deep. It is believed by most without ever analyzing its historical roots or the contradictions in the scriptures. We have never had to fight the battle of trying to reverse the force of a theological tidal wave. With the belief so deeply held, I don’t see how your country can change. But then your people often don’t act according to what they say they believe, so maybe their beliefs are only skin deep. You don’t believe in pre-marital or adulterous sex, but you do them. You don’t believe in drugging your God-given mind, but alcoholism and drug addiction are astronomical. You don’t believe in cheating but your students continually devise ways to do it. We don’t believe in your God but we don’t have your problems. Because we appreciate our lives, we want to make the best of them.”



—“I applaud your efforts. Your collective thinking has removed a major stumbling block to social progress. But I hope that you are keeping your collective mind free, like Einstein said ‘The important thing is to not stop questioning.’ But history seems to show that a people will arrive at a temporary truth then think they know it all so they stop questioning and advancing. Whether we agree with Hegel’s dialectic of ideas or not, we can only progress socially when we work to solve our honest differences. But how often has a group decided on a ‘truth’ then frozen themselves intellectually, then be willing to fight to the death for their old belief. We humans seem to have a great ability to delude ourselves with the trappings of our traditions and thereby blind ourselves to the open avenues for progress.

“As I think about it, it seems that atheists often arrive at their positions by looking at the absurdities of the religious scriptures and the immoral actions of the believers. It seems like the argument is that since religions are absurd and irrational I’ll believe the opposite. But maybe we should just take the position of LaPlace. After he explained his theories of the planets to Napoleon, the emperor asked him where God fit it. The scientist answered ‘I have no need for that hypothesis.’ We should probably all start with our mental tablets blank and let the preachers and theologians prove their positions to us—without the hocus pocus and mythology that any educated mind would certainly reject. Our problem is that every society nurses its children with the mythological milk of its geography. So the infant learns that god is vengeful, that god is merciful, that god is the universe, that god created the universe, that god is in the tree or the volcano, that god is internal or external. And all with more certainty than that he or she is the child of their mother.

“The curse of inadequate and unquestioned knowledge keeps us in a non-intellectual box. And it is very difficult to think outside this box that has the authority of tradition, my parents and the thousands of preachers who work to keep us in the box. But if we examine the ideas in the box thoroughly we may be able to break out. To do so we must study the whole Bible, the whole Koran and the whole of human history to see the inconsistencies in the religious thinking and the actions of the true believers. Then we can break out of the coffin of certainty and doubt. Then we can become truly homo sapiens.

With which myths and stories should we saddle our children? Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, the Tooth Fairy, the wolf who ate Red Riding Hood’s grandmother, the witch of Hansel and Gretel, the trolls of Askeladen?

“I wonder about all the people who say they believe in an afterlife. An afterlife has never been proven and we wouldn’t know about it until after we die.

“What if you were in Las Vegas and were playing blackjack and the dealer had had four black jacks in a row. Then someone came up to you and said that he read in a book that if a dealer had three blackjacks in a row it was absolutely certain that the next blackjack would come to the players, but only if they bet \$10,000 on the next hand. Would you do it based on the authority of that person and a book? What if he said you wouldn’t know how much you had won until after you died, then you would find out. Would you bet?

“What if you were hoping for big surf at the Bonzai Pipeline, but there wasn’t a ripple. Then a TV evangelist told you that the perfect wave would come at 4 AM and it would be the only wave for three weeks. You are exhausted and need a good night’s sleep. Would we find you straddling your board a couple of hundred yards out at 4 AM?

“But how many people believe in books that various people say are inspired by God? Books that were not even written down for hundreds of years after their prophets had died? How many people will believe these books are true even if they are full of inconsistencies?



—“It is amazing that any children can ever approach psychological normality when their little psyches have to try to fit their observations of the real world with the parentally provided mythology of fairy tales and the community imposed basic assumptions—whether they be of the supernatural, the society or the self!



—“Amen, brother. To try to think our way out of the quagmire of our early learning is a nearly impossible task. The intellectual comfort of a vengeful god who may allow us paradise and of a society whose laws and traditions accept and forcefully transmit the myth, chastising those of us who challenge it, is too much for the average person to confront. Why can’t we just let the child grow in a loving and real environment, free of the terror of gods, jinns and

other demons and free of wolves and bears and snakes that threaten their mental lives. Is it really the duty of parents to cast their children into the bottomless pit of fear and repression? We freethinkers don't think so.

"I would have to say that no church or religion I know makes any sense. They so often run counter to what they say God has said. Then the people change even though their scriptures don't. If there is a supreme being it hasn't yet revealed itself. Maybe as an atheist I just believe in one god less than the Mid-East monotheists do. After all, they threw out all the other gods that people have believed in throughout our history. And I throw out their idea. So I guess we are all atheists, it only depends on which gods we don't believe in!

"I wonder why political correctness stops us from criticizing someone's religious belief, but it doesn't stop us from criticizing his scientific belief. If someone believes that the world is flat we jump all over him. But there is more evidence that the world is flat than there is that there is a creating god. It's obvious that if the world was round the people on the other side would fall into infinity. But there is hard scientific knowledge assuring us that the world is a sphere. But there is no scientific knowledge of a creating or a merciful god. The evidence is merely some ramblings of various people called prophets. Then people, called pastors or theologians, try to make sense of these ramblings. They drop out those scriptures that they don't like and change or reinterpret others to fit their assumptions. Why should such scriptural contortions be revered? Should we really bow down to the invisible and the nonexistent? But I do have to give it to the religious leaders of the centuries. They have created cathedrals on quicksand but have nimbly propped them up as they sunk under the evidence of science or historical scrutinizes.

"I strongly believe that we should judge people by how they act, their practical ethics, not by their belief in a non-provable assumption."

SATANISM



--"What about Satanism?"



---"Modern Satanism may be harder to define than modern Protestantism. Some actually worship Satan, or appear to worship him. Others are merely looking for the shock value of being counter-culture. Some rock bands fit this category. You also sometimes have murderers or child molesters who blame Satan for their actions either to try to excuse themselves or to attempt to portray themselves as psychotic.

"The roots of Satanism seem to go back to the 1500s, when there is some evidence that it was invented by the Medieval church which taught that witches worshipped Satan and did a number of anti-social things in their rituals. It probably was most effectively conjured in the *Malleus Maleficarium*, written by two Dominicans, in which they accounted for the activities of witches as being slaves to Satan. It was here that witches were said to cause plagues, eat children, have wild sexual orgies and fly around on broomsticks. So the church sanctioned the burning or hanging of people they thought to be witches—somewhere around 50,000 of them.



--"But we still have a bunch of them flying around every Halloween!"



—"It was no joke to those who were tortured until they admitted their ghoulish crimes, then they were burned at the stake. Or some were given to Neptune to judge. They were

tossed into the water, if they sunk and drowned they were innocent, if they floated they were guilty and executed. These apparently included the mentally ill and the infirm as well as religious heretics.

“Satanists tend to be atheistic although some are, you might say, theistic—believing in the reality of Satan as a being who is supernatural. The Satan they recognize is a pre-Christian pagan male deity that exhibits exceptional male virility and sexuality. Most Satanists are not involved with the Christian or Islamic fallen angel idea of Lucifer. The ideas of hell and damnation are not a part of their beliefs. The Satan of Faust is foreign to their beliefs. Their rituals, if they have them, generally have nothing to do with theistic rituals, so the Black Mass, if practiced, would not be a legitimate ritual. Since most don’t worship anything supernatural, including Satan, any rituals would be meaningless. Rather they tend to honor the principles associated with Satan, such as being against organized religions.

“While some have believed that Satanic sects go back to ancient Egypt, particularly to the god Set, which might be the root word for Satan, it seems more likely that they are indigenous to the monotheistic religions of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam where having a supernatural personification of evil, or a source of evil, was easier for the primitive mind to understand.

“The morals of Satanists would be self-centered and against any God given morality. Although if they believe in Satan as a fallen angel, they must also believe in God. So the idea of Satanism doesn’t make much sense as a basic assumption.”

AN IDEA OF A BETTER SOCIETY AS A BASIC ASSUMPTION



---“The third type of basic assumptions that we might use to determine our values, our morality, come from what we think is the best type of society to live in. Our ideas of ideal societies are often based on non-provable assumptions, although some aspects of an ideal society may have strong sociological or economic evidence that supports them. To the extent that there is strong evidence for an aspect of a society that part is not a basic assumption. For example if it can be proven that when people vote for their leaders they are less likely to revolt, or they are more likely to be satisfied with their leadership, then the right to vote as an element of the ideal society passes from an assumption to a probability.

“Constructing an ideal society, a utopia, requires examining a number of factors—political, economic, the possibility of peace, social relationships, the role of government, the possibility for immigration, the role of religion, and a number of other elements of existing and proposed societies.

“We are talking here of proposing ideal societies, not necessarily sanctifying existing societies where right and wrong depend on culture or religion. Societies which approve of cannibalism are hardly ideal, at least for the entre’! Then we might wonder about societies that allow polygamy, with multiple husbands or wives.

“Some of the great ethical theories, that stress how people should treat each other in a society, have been proposed by people who believe in a God but don’t use a God based ethical approach. Immanuel Kant is probably the best example. He said that we should never treat people as means to our ends because every person is an end in himself. But you can see that such an idea requires that we somehow must be equal. But without him specifying why, it is obvious that if we have equal souls, we are equally ends in ourselves. Another societal approach to ethics is the theory of social contract. Here the individual gives up some rights to the government in return for protection and some other rights. Jean-Jacques Rousseau was religious and was a major contributor to this theory. John Locke and Thomas Hobbes were the other persons in the trinity of social contract theorists. They were less religious, Locke being a Unitarian and Hobbes having some

religious leanings, though insistent that religion be separated from government. Generally these approaches to values were judged by the intentions of the person doing the action..

“On the other hand the Utilitarians, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, placed results as primary. These men were not religious. Their criterion for a society was to give the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Mill went farther than Bentham by enumerating some varying qualities of pleasure, with the mental pleasures being more valuable than the physical.

“Concepts for ideal societies, or utopias as they are often called, have been around since at least Plato’s time. He suggested that the state should be supreme and that in order to make that occur the family had to be eliminated. The family was a fundamental source of selfishness so for the primacy of the state to be achieved, the elements of selfishness at lower levels could not exist. Males and females could mate when they were old enough, but their babies would be raised and educated by the state and the parents would never know their children. Then the state educated all of its youth to the levels of their potentials. The less intellectually endowed soon left school and became the producers of wealth—the farmers and artisans necessary for the economy of the society. At a higher level of schooling the guardians of the wealth would leave school and protect the wealth as soldiers and higher level government employees. After fifty or so years of education, the wisest people would be available to rule. Naturally there would be few of them. These were the philosopher kings.

“Augustine and Moses had ideas for ideal societies using the pronouncements of God as fundamental to the utopia. Bacon wanted an ideal society based on the principles of science. Bellamy wanted a socialism in which everyone picked his own employment, if educated and competent. The workers in the less desired jobs worked fewer hours, the workers in the more desired jobs worked longer. So if a brain surgeon, working 60 hours a week, wanted more time off for golf, he could become a garbage collector, since they only worked ten hours a week. If garbage collecting became too desirable, the hours were increased.

“One of the few utopian ideas that elicited some real political interest was the economic utopia proposed by Karl Marx. As you know, Marx said that the workers would eventually get tired of working for the people who made money just because they had money, the capitalists. The workers would then revolt and begin a socialist economy where payment was ‘from each according to his ability to each according to his work’. (26a) The USSR was working within this socialistic framework. Marx then said that eventually the economic system would be what he called communism, where the gauge would be ‘from each according to his ability to each according to his needs.’ (26b)No large societies have ever attempted this. A few small religious groups, such as in monasteries and convents, have done it,.



—“It’s strange that only a few small religious groups have been able to achieve Marx’s ideal, yet he said that ‘religion is the opium of the people.’”



—“True. For communism to work you would have to have a truly loving and selfless community. The Soviet socialism broke down because the people were selfish, as nearly everyone is. They wanted more goods for their work. They wanted the freedom to travel. They wanted the self-centered individual freedoms that their Leninist government had taken from them.

“While not a utopian ideal, the concept of democracy has gained many supporters in the last quarter millennium. The idea that democracy is the ultimate system of governing is a concept that accepts certain assumptions such as: that every individual has equal value—at least when choosing his government, and the idea that the people know best what is good for them or for their society. Remember that democracy is about voting for your self interest. People will need to be taught that they can’t always have things their way because the majority rules. Hereditary monarchs tend to

dislike this theory, but they, as other totalitarian leaders, can boast of their efficiency. They can get things done NOW, without waiting for parliaments or courts to initiate, to amend or to stop a proposed action.

“Kino, on the other hand, is based on the idea is that a smoothly functioning and economically growing society is worth a certain loss of personal freedom. So far our citizens have accepted that reasoning and accept a large degree of totalitarian control. You cringe, Commander.”



--“That wouldn’t be tolerated in the U.S. My country has taken the approach that the self-centered values often better serve the society, so the best society is that government which gives a great deal of freedom, even license, to do whatever one wants to do. The individual freedom to experiment has given us the auto assembly lines of Henry Ford, the electric light and the other inventions of Thomas Edison, and the development of computers and the internet, Microsoft and Google. But that complete freedom has a negative side because we are allowed to make money in nearly any endeavor—pornography, technology, purveying violence in the media, selling guns and many other means of moneymaking.

“This is not to say that we don’t have certain laws to protect some of the people some of the time. We sometimes even put criminals into jail. In fact we have more people in jail than any other country. The major drug sellers and the tax cheaters, and some murderers and child molesters may find their way to the cell blocks. But how many are not caught or get away on legal technicalities. Just look at the famous Miranda decision. (27) The U.S. Supreme Court abandoned the long held premise that ‘ignorance of the law is no excuse’ and required that each person arrested be told his rights. Miranda, of course, didn’t realize that when he raped, robbed and kidnapped he had violated the law. The Miranda rights concept was then adopted by many Western countries. So Miranda, the rapist served several years after his retrial only to be himself murdered some years later. So often we place individual desires, or rights, ahead of the good of the society. We then hope that society will be better because the individuals have more rights. Of course we hope that they will use their rights responsibly

“We give many people excuses for their anti-social behavior when they come to trial. So a murderer has an excuse if he has eaten a Twinkie cupcake that made him hyperglycemic and overexcited. A man who kidnapped and seriously maimed a young girl is allowed to go free because we know he won’t do it again. And for a woman to cut off her husbands genitals is perfectly acceptable if she was afraid that he might hurt her again. But did she attack the proper body part? Was he guilty of punching her with his penis? If he was guilty of hitting her perhaps she should have cut off his arms. If he had kicked her shouldn’t she have cut off his leg? If he had only insulted her perhaps his tongue would have been a better target for dismemberment. Or what about just cutting the legal marital ties through divorce? So temporary insanity gives us each an excuse to commit mayhem.

“We admit that our government is often directed by rich special interest groups, like oil companies, farmers, unions and even the Native Americans. We admit that large campaign contributions can make the lawmakers make equally large concessions to the donors. Still, my country has not, and would not, allow for the nearly totalitarian government which decides the rules of society. In fact my country has become more and more self-centered in its values. Every person, child and adult, prisoner and producer, cites the ‘rights’ that our courts have read into our Constitution. We have the right to view pornography at nearly every age. We have the right to carry guns. We have the right to retaliate violently with little fear of repercussions.

“We have increased the rights of deserving minorities, such as African-Americans and Hispanics, while concurrently expanding the rights of some minorities which may not be so deserving, particularly the criminals and illegal aliens. We even help prison inmates to become stronger rapists and robbers by allowing them to lift weights while imprisoned. While our society will be advanced in the long run by equalizing opportunities for all law abiding citizens, the

majority is running scared because of court rulings that allow the criminals, for whatever reason, to roam the streets and practice their malevolent inclinations.

“Our court mandated values are seldom universally desired and, with the exception of some Constitutional values like freedom of speech and freedom of religion, are seldom written down. And those freedoms are expanded or contracted depending on the court that is deciding on an interpretation. So you have freedom to advocate Nazism and the principles of the Ku Klux Klan but not the right to incite an immediate insurrection. You have the right to take an illegal drug if it is part of your non-Christian religion (28) but not to take up serpents and drink poison which is in our Christian Bible in Mark 16:17,18. (29)

“But occasionally someone makes a clear expression of a societal value, such as was made by former Secretary of State Colin L. Powell when he said that George W. Bush’s proposed changes in the interpretation of the rules of the Geneva Convention were immoral. Bush wanted to use interrogation methods on terrorists that most people think are defined as torture. Powell had used America’s and the world’s standards for morality—societally based morality. Powell said in an interview, ‘whether we believe it or not, people are now starting to question whether we’re following our own high standards.’

“We, in America, think that all societies should follow us, because we are as near to perfection as a society can be. As an example, just before I began my voyage there was a great uproar from some people because an 18 year old American citizen, a resident of Singapore, was subjected to a fine, some time in jail, and was to be struck six strokes with a cane. He had merely spray painted a number of cars that didn’t belong to him. This, we should understand, was merely a boyish prank which many in my country have learned to accept. The ever-present graffiti and tagging in our cities is such a testimony to artistic free expression—and ostensibly to the street artists’ First Amendment rights of free speech.

“The fact that the young man should be struck by a cane was abhorrent to a great many of my fellow citizens. Our government interceded and asked that it not be done. The Singapore government, in deference to our omniscient and omnipotent American politicians, reduced the caning to four strokes. The young man did not die, but he found it difficult to sit down for a few days. Many of my fellows applauded, but many were appalled. Such a punishment was surely “cruel and unusual” and was infringing of this young artist’s human rights. I wonder if we would have approved if the Singapore court had ruled for capital punishment? That certainly fits within the American judicial system!

“The government of Singapore answered these charges when the Home Affairs Minister stated that ‘Nobody takes any joy in carrying out these strict punishments, be it imprisonment, caning or execution, but it has to be done. It must be done. Laws will not be effective if the penalties for flouting them are not sufficiently strict.’ He further said that ‘while we believe that an individual has certain rights, the overriding consideration has to be what is in the community’s overall good and its long-term interest. The fundamental question we ask ourselves is, who should pay the price for a crime, the criminal or the victim?’

Are all cultures equally good and valuable? Is the culture of radical terroristic Islam equal to the peaceful socialistic welfare state of Norway. Is the laissez faire capitalism of the US equal to the socialistic paternalism of France. Is the relative freedom of the UK and US as good as the strictness of Singapore? How valuable is multiculturalism? Is listening to an opera as valuable as listening to hip hop? Is orthodox Judaism equal to conservative Judaism?



---“Commander, you obviously recognize that there are several criteria that ideal societies must consider—economic interests, enforcing the Golden Rule, balancing personal interests against societal interests, the importance of education, the availability of health care, and of the care for the elderly. There is also the question of how important are each of the often antithetical goals of liberty or equality. In your country you seem to think you can have both.



---“Yes we’re going to get into that dichotomy of whether we should follow the path of liberty or equality when we get to the United Colonies. We are scheduled to meet Dr. Kelsi Connor there. Do you know her Wanda?”



--“Kelsi and I have been friends for years. You will certainly be able to add another dimension to your basic assumptions when you start looking at liberty or equality. You will encounter again the self-centered, God-based and society based assumptions.”



--“I’m sure I’ll be even more confused after that discussion.”



--I’m sure you will. The more you know, the more that you know that you don’t know. Absolute certainty is only possible with a very narrow mind.”



-- “Like my old professor, Dr. Woellner, said, ‘a mind made up ceases to exist.’”



—“Exactly. Oh, there is one more problem that the ideal society has to wrestle with— population control. But then all the social and economic problems of the society have to fit with God’s wishes for those who are believers. And Commander, you would probably add criteria for licensing parents, wouldn’t you?”



—“Definitely.”



—“One more thought, Wanda, it is clear that for some who have ideas of a utopia it can develop the fervor and fanaticism of many religions. Communism, Nazism, materialism or fascism can be followed with a zeal once thought to be reserved for religion. Popular leaders who control the masses like Hitler or a pope can whip up at least some of their followers. And others, like Lenin and his Bolsheviks, though not popularly elected, can excite some to follow their ideas with ruthless passion.”

THE SOURCE OF POWER IN A SOCIETY



--“Unhappily that’s too often true Con. It is the powerful leaders who lead the masses. But let’s assume that the people have somehow arrived at a consensus of what a society should be doing you have to figure out how it can best be accomplished.”



--“Maybe a benevolent dictatorship or oligarchy would be more intelligent and more effective than our American special interest financed republic.”



--“If we want a dictator, how would we choose him or her? Through violence, like most other dictators are ‘chosen?’ Maybe a theocracy would be best. Use the Judeo-Christian scriptures as the law. Or the laws of Shari’a give us an Islamic plan for a just society. But the older democracies are based on secular principles and the separation of church and state. However both fundamentalist Islamic states and evangelical Christians in America want what they believe are God based morality to direct their societies.



--“But no matter what values a society fosters, some people will be unhappy. If the societal leaders plan for the future, people who want more now will be upset. In the U.S. your future is severely endangered because you have reduced your taxes, kept your retirement age too low, and indulged in expensive wars which have increased your national debt to a point where you will probably never be able to pay it off. Norway, in comparison, has paid off its national debt. It fosters peace rather than war, it has high taxes, and it has a higher retirement age. The Norwegian government has invested its profits abroad so that when the oil and gas in the North Sea are exhausted there will still be money to run the country. So you have prime examples of a country concerned only with the present and a country concerned with both the present and the future.”

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF A SOCIETY

“The basic assumptions of a society are often the choice between using the God basic assumptions as the fundamental values or using self-centered values. The self centered values usually relate to liberty, and the freedom to do what you want as long as you don’t interfere with other people’s freedom. Creating a workable balance is a job for King Solomon. The God based society is easier to create, you can simply pull its laws from the scriptures. But then scriptural laws often conflict, like whether we should avenge an action with an eye for an eye or whether we should turn the other cheek.

“A few years ago in Germany a judge used Koranic law in a case and angered everyone. A German born Moroccan woman who had married in Morocco, filed for a speedy divorce because her husband was constantly beating her and threatened to kill her. The female judge ruled that in Morocco it was common for men to beat their wives and that it was sanctioned in the Koran. Other judges removed her from the case because the Constitution is the primary standard in Germany. They were backed up by Muslim clerics who stated that the 7th Century phrase had no place in today’s religion.”



---“It seems that you can’t please anyone these days!”



—“Probably the kind of decision you would make if you were on the bench, Lee. Here is another assumption. Who is to be allowed equality or liberty in the society. Should women have equal rights with men? At what age, or level of maturity, should a person attain citizenship? Should there be sub-citizen people, such as slaves or illegal immigrants? Should people be treated equally if they are not equal?”

Lee squirmed in his chair, then blurted out:



--“Equal in their economic contributions, their social contributions, or what? Does just being born make you equal? If we all have equal souls are we equal? And if so what proof is there that we have a soul—or that they are equal?”



-- “You’re right that we can’t prove that we have a soul or what sort of a soul, but if the society is to accept the idea of a soul you can’t have the separation of church and state. A secular society can’t base its actions on a theistic idea of a monotheistic religion, leaving out non-believers, deists and pantheists. Maybe we just need to tell everyone they are equal, give them an equal vote, then go on running the society giving the real freedoms to business, to the politicians, and to other elites like the unions and the military.

“Then there is the question of how much should one society be concerned with another. How much should a European society be concerned with what is happening in Africa, Southeast Asia or even the country next door? Obviously when a country declares war on you, your society had better be concerned, but what about a pre-emptive attack on a country you think is a threat?

“Should the people in your country have equal freedom or equal rights to food and shelter? How should you treat criminals in jail or condemned to death, how about the homeless on the sidewalks with no food, the needy children of unfit parents? Certainly none are being treated equally to the full-bellied well adjusted people with good jobs! And the prisoners get three square meals, while the honest homeless don’t!



-- “So we are certainly not treating people equally. But there is much more to developing an ideal society. There are so many economic issues. There are political issues. And we are generally merely assuming which is the better way to go. But what we are now assuming may eventually be proven or disproved. Whether we should base a society on liberty or equality may be provable. Was the more equalitarian Marxist-Leninist Soviet Union more successful than the societies that allowed more freedom, such as the U.S., U.K., Germany and France. Will free trade or protectionism be better for the U.S., China, or the EU, and which will be better for the world society? What is the better ideal, looking out for my own country or looking out for the whole world?”

“Do we try to integrate the immigrants into the society, requiring them to learn the customs and language, and possibly the religion, of their new country. Or do we take the salad bowl approach in which we even allow the immigrants to continue the exclusive use of their native languages and develop their own geographical cultural sub-societies—the Chinatowns, Koreatowns, and little Italys that slow integration for generations.

“Should we mold the new to the old? Or will we find more strengths in promoting the diversities?”



--“How do we or should we judge a society? Is it riches? Then Luxemburg or Norway come out on top. Is it Muslim God-based? Then Saudi Arabia, or the former Taliban Afghanistan might come out as best. If it is Catholic then the God-based Vatican City might come out on top.



-- "I see another problem. When a large group wants to leave the nation should they be allowed to secede? Abraham Lincoln said 'no' when the southern slave holding states wanted to secede from the United States. He fought the Civil War to win his case. When wars and riots in the former Yugoslavia were stopped, the country was split into several ethnically and religiously diverse countries. Slovenia was 91% Slavs and 96% Roman Catholic. Croatia was nearly 80% Croats and nearly 80% Catholic. Bosnia was the most diverse with 40% Muslim, 30% Orthodox and 15% Catholic in a much more ethnically mixed region. Kosovo was 80% Muslim and about 10% each of Catholics and Orthodox, in their society which was 90% Albanians. And Macedonia is two thirds Orthodox and one third Muslims in its 70% Macedonian and 20% Albanian population. Such differences tend to be problems in a society.

"Both ethnic and religious differences can be divisive. The non-Catholic non-Croatians are more likely to experience negative prejudices when living in Croatia. The non-majority groups in Bosnia will each likely vie for power. When India was divided into Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan and Bangladesh in 1947 it was hoped that the religious rivalries would be eliminated. But not all Muslims moved to the two new Muslim countries so antagonisms remained and fermented. Kashmir has been a continual problem, then the Muslim bombings since the 90s have increased the problem. There seems to be no solution without removing everyone in a minority ethnic or religious group from the majority region."

"In the U.S., perhaps because of the influx of people from around the globe and the official separation of church and state in the Constitution, earlier prejudices have often died out, especially among those of middle class and above who don't have to compete for power in the society. In America, for most people, being a Catholic, a Baptist, a Jew or a Hindu is not a major differentiating mark. Where we live and what we do is much more important for our identity.

"Then there always the problem of having an ethnic or religiously based democracy or a citizen based democracy. The irrational prejudices, that will probably always exist, must give way to equal educational opportunity then to honest civic and economic achievement. New democracies today tend to start with religious interests, with the dominant religion controlling the politics, or with poorer lower social class majorities wanting to bring down the economic 'haves' who have been running the show. There are so many unanswered questions relative to forming an ideal society. How high can taxes go before the financial kingpins will leave the country for greener economic pastures. How many economic 'entitlements' will keep the lower classes content watching their televisions and not rioting in the streets. How can the cream of every ethnic and religious group be allowed to rise to the top and keep them from fomenting discontent among the rabble?"



—"In most democracies the basic assumptions of the leaders will often go a long way in determining the direction of the country. Their basic assumptions may haunt us in every area of life. Our elected leaders have them. Judges, whether elected or appointed, have them. When a judge in the U.S. or the UK decides a case on the permissible 'common law' he has the laws and the court decisions of the world to search through to justify his own position. We would like to think that he decides based on the Constitution and the laws developed by the elected legislators. Why did the U.S. take the evangelical turn it did from 2000 to 2006? Whatever the reason, that turn affected the national and many state legislatures. It affected the U.S. Supreme Court when conservative religious judges were appointed to fill the shoes of departing moderates.

"By contrast in the countries that use the Napoleonic law approach, you merely look at the law and see if it has been broken. But it's not that simple in common law countries because you are

never quite sure what the law is or will be until a judge rules on it generally applying his own prejudices. Then if you take the case up the appellate ladder the ruling can change at each step.”

“So do we emphasize equality or liberty? Diversity or cohesiveness? The religious or the secular? The common law or Napoleonic law? The present interests of the society, like business and jobs, or the future interests of society, like the reduction of climate change and reducing population? You have citizens on both sides of every issue—or there would be no issue!

TYPE OF GOVERNMENT



—“Who should lead the government? What about monarchy?”



—“Old fashioned iron-willed kings were never that popular with the peasants. Modern monarchs are not too bad but they cost a lot. Should the people pay millions of dollars a year, provide castles and palaces, and bow down to a vestige of the past whose principle duties are to open bridges and christen ships?



----“”But they give a country a figurehead, like a flag, to give more meaning to their state. Kings give us that link to the past like when we had Charlemagne and Arthur.”



---“We also had Henry the Eighth and Ivan the Terrible.



—“Why must that preferred figurehead be male? Or be anointed only because of bloodlines? It seems that this is archaic in today’s world. Look at Queens Elizabeth and Victoria. They ruled as well or better than most male kings. It seems that males want to conquer while females want to culture. Which is preferable? Japan almost had to degrade itself when the emperor’s sons could not produce a male heir. But before new legislation was passed to allow female succession, the gods intervened and an all important Y chromosomed sperm impregnated a princess.

“Should it be a democracy, or a democratic republic, like most modern countries have? Should there be checks and balances between the legislative, executive and judicial systems? Is a judicial system democratic when the judges are appointed politically for life terms? Should one, three, five or nine judges be allowed to rule on an initiative passed by a direct vote of the people or on a law passed by the elected legislature? Should a single president or a 5 to 4 Supreme Court majority be allowed to overrule the popularly elected several hundred legislators? It may work, but it is not democratic. There are so many questions about our simple system!

“What weight does the will of the people play in a democracy or a republic when the citizens sponsor and vote on an initiative then a politically appointed judge, seeing Constitutional guarantees from his own point of view, invalidates the will of the people? The judge’s God-based or society based assumptions overrule the majority. Is that democracy? I don’t think so.”



— “But the majority may have voted to infringe on the rights of minority citizens, like blacks or Hispanics...”



—“Or illegal immigrants or criminals or terrorists! And what about the rights of those presidential candidates that win the popular vote and lose the election because of the non-democratic electoral college reality?”



—“Let’s agree that by democracy we mean a government in which all the decisions are made by the citizens, and by a republic we mean a government in which the decisions are made by the elected representatives of the citizens?”



—“Right Ray. Look at what happened in California to their democratic vote. In 1994 Proposition 187 was passed by nearly 60% of the voters. It would deny illegal immigrants social services, health care, and public education. The Republican governor supported it. A Federal judge immediately issued a temporary restraining order to stop it until a trial was held. At the trial the judge held that under a recent 5 to 4 Supreme Court decision Plyler v. Doe (30) illegal immigrants were allowed public education in Texas. It also held that the state could not enforce illegal immigration. It was the federal government’s responsibility.

“California’s Attorney General appealed, but didn’t pursue the appeal as fast as he might have. In the meantime, a liberal governor, who had opposed the proposition was elected. Governor Grey Davis stopped the appeal. So one federal judge and one liberal governor were able to counterbalance a huge majority of the citizens. So much for democracy!

“Then again in California in 2008 the California Supreme Court, by a 4 to 3 decision, overruled the vote of the people. Sixty-one percent of the people had voted against same sex marriage in 2000, 4,618,673 votes were against the measure and 2,909,370 votes were for it. So one judge’s opinion overruled the votes of 1,700,000 people.

“In California the Constitution had continually defined marriage as between a man and a woman. It did however have domestic partnership laws that gave homosexual couples in a domestic partnership the same rights that heterosexual couples had in a marriage. This included community property and state tax considerations. The case involved, in effect, renaming domestic partnerships to marriages. The plaintiffs sued under the California Constitutional provisions giving the rights to privacy, free speech and equal protection. The four judges ruled that ‘equal protection’ trumped the traditional Constitutional definition of marriage.

“Or look at the electoral college in the U.S. several presidents have won the popular vote but lost the election because of a voting system that made sense in the 1700s but makes no sense now. It is certainly not democratic—especially in today’s world. Look at the U.S. election in 2000. Al Gore had the most votes, a half million more than Bush. Ralph Nader got a number of votes that would have gone to Gore if Nader hadn’t run. Should there have been a run off without Nader? Look at the how the world is and how it might have been if there had been a truly democratic election. No war in Iraq, reduced terrorism, a far lower national debt, the realization of global warming and an eight year head start on reducing CO2 emissions, a globally positive perception of the U.S. rather than the globally negative one that the Bush administration had wrought. The people were right. It was the process that was defective.

“But it is easier to make a political plan and to limit the candidates’ appearances when you are merely fighting to win the popular vote in a few key states rather than winning the votes of the nation. The vote of a citizen of North Dakota should be equal to the vote of a Californian. But the Electoral College will be around for a long time. To hell with the people, government should go to the shrewdest political machine. What do the people know anyway?”



--“Right. The Electoral College and the so-called checks and balances of three branches of government seem to remove the citizens from any immediate control of their government. With the Republican victories in the 2000 elections, former Republican Secretary of State James Baker said in 2006 that they ‘owned’ all 3 branches of government. Even with the setbacks in the 2006 Congressional elections, the Republicans owned the executive and judicial branches.”



--“Yes, our so-called democracies have some problems. But let’s look at another problem that has occurred when similar groups try to separate themselves geographically from other groups. It is usually difficult, if not impossible to divide land areas according to the interests of just one group. Look at the problems between Taiwan and mainland China, Israel and her neighbors, North and South Korea, India and Pakistan or Quebec and the rest of Canada. How can a society solve these problems of power, jealousy, economy, or how can it bridge the gap of human pettiness?”



--“To make it simpler we can make the society God based, with only the one true religion. We can base it on democracy, or rather a republic, where the representatives are popularly elected. We could make it an oligarchy of the wisest citizens as Plato suggested. We can base it on economic equality as Karl Marx wanted. We could base it on science as Bacon proposed. We can use the Scandinavian welfare model. But no approach to society has yet been universally acclaimed by the citizens.

“To have an effective and intelligent legislature we should probably require that every representative of the people has a PhD in economics, astro-physics, evolutionary biology, philosophy and history. But the huge majority are lawyers. So they should be pretty competent in writing criminal laws and contract law, but they have certainly fallen short in education and balancing spending and income.

“Maybe Plato had it right. We should advocate philosopher kings!”

USING GOD’S LAWS FOR SOCIETY



--“It is not enough to believe in the same God. Every religion and minor denomination have either emphasized different scriptural verses or have teachers or prophets who have added new teachings and interpretations to the scriptures. These then become the gospel for the believers of the sect. If a pope says kill the infidels, do it. If an ayatollah says kill the infidels, do it.

“Some Moslem states, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, still have a strong God basis for their Qur’an based laws. But secular Muslim states such as Pakistan, Turkey, Egypt and Bangladesh are often the targets of fundamentalist terror groups who want Shariah-based governments.

“But traditionally Catholic countries like Spain and Brazil are finding the influence of the Papacy reducing. Self-centered morality has become more desired than following the pronouncements of an aged and celibate pope. This may be because the enticement of pre-marital or adulterous sex, or homosexuality, or the fact that contraception and abortion have become more commonly necessary and accepted. The ‘here and now’ pleasures have become more rewarding than the papal promise of getting your ‘pie in the sky—bye and bye.’ Singing and dancing, films and TV, public friendships, sports and recreational pastimes all create stumbling blocks for those pursuing a celestial hereafter. The self-centered assumptions are generally more believable than assuming a merciful law giving creator.

‘Some societies are God based, like some Muslim countries, Israel to some extent, many earlier European states—and to some extent the United States. But today this is not as common as it once was. For example in the UK Tony Blair, the devout Christian, was advised by his cohorts to stay away from the God concept because in England they ‘don’t do God.’

“Strong believers want their unseen God to rule their societies. The unseen but assumed God may not have much input into economic issues, but can generally keep women in their place! It’s difficult for most national God fearing leaders to get a direct pipeline to the Almighty’s ideas on farm subsidies and free trade, but it is easier to look to the past, when God handed down His revelations, to find His commands relative to capital punishment. Taking God’s name in vain, cursing your parents, or working on the Sabbath and adultery are all capital offenses. (31) Why aren’t the evangelicals pushing for these? Wreck, wouldn’t following your Bible help to quickly reduce the U.S. population?”



—“Hadn’t thought of it that way! I wonder if anyone is going to push for this.”



--“Not only governmental leaders, but also terrorists believe that they get their orders directly from God. Whether it is the Jewish assassin of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Muslim assassins of Anwar Sadat, the radical anti-abortion Christians killing doctors or patients at abortion clinics or the Egyptian terrorists killing tourists to their country. Any concept of a loving and merciful God is thereby trampled by the vengeful God. Psychologists may call it rationalization or psychosis but the terrorists know that it is one’s highest calling to do the work of God, since God can’t or won’t do it Himself. Somewhere hidden in the holy scriptures there must be a dictum to kill national leaders who are backed by the majority of their people, to kill doctors who want to help, or to kill peaceful tourists who want to learn about your society.”



--“Even countries founded on the basis of the separation of church and state may change. In the United States the God values have come into official government actions relatively recently. ‘In God We Trust’ has been found on coins since 1861 and on currency since the 1960s. And the phrase ‘under God’ was inserted into its ‘Pledge of Allegiance’ to its flag and its country in 1954 when the Catholic group, the Knights of Columbus, asked Eisenhower to put it in the Pledge.”



--“Is this because our education has become so specialized, when compared with the general humanistic education of our founding fathers, that people don’t have the philosophical background of men like Thomas Jefferson or the knowledge of practical science of a Benjamin Franklin? How many physicists, surgeons or lawyers have read Locke, Montaigne, Aristotle and Aquinas? Today’s students learn more and more about less and less until they know everything about nothing! They are outstanding researchers and technicians but seldom or never are they the universalists of the past like Aristotle, daVinci or Francis Bacon.”



—“Why haven’t the states of the West adopted the peaceful approach of the Buddhists or the Jains. War would certainly not be an option. But using the philosophical approach of the Buddhists or the pantheistic approach of the Jains does not give one the ultimate truths of the monotheistic religions. When your scriptures tell you that you know everything, you can become a

bit intolerant and be ready to kill to convert, to conquer or to clear the way to universalize your myths.

SOCIAL CONCERNS—DO UNTO OTHERS

“If we are looking to an ideal society as a basis for our ethical choices we have a number of existing and proposed societies. We can assume that some kind of monarchy is best, or possibly one of the republican forms of government, or maybe a true democracy. We can look at the economic systems, like communism, socialism or capitalism. Every system has some advantages and some disadvantages. Most of us want some say in how we are governed and we prefer some style of economic system. Do we want to shift for ourselves and work in a more laissez faire system like the U.S. or feel the safety net of a welfare state, such as in Sweden?

“Societies, except for the most totalitarian, will generally embrace some aspects of the Golden Rule. I won’t do this to you if you won’t do it to me. If we want to keep ourselves safe on the highway we adopt some rules. The right to speed in an auto or to drink and drive was allowed in the 1800s. Not today. A few societies tolerate no alcohol for a driveRay—a 0.00 blood alcohol level. Others allow 0.08, 0.1 or higher. And vehicle speed is generally regulated in advanced societies. Certainly when drivers drink less they can drive better. And both speed and alcohol are related to both the causing and the severity of accidents. And rules on murder, truthfulness, treason and adultery are as old as societies.

“Humanists rely on reason and science rather than religious revelations to come up with their ethical values. The values of not lying, not murdering, honoring one’s father and mother, or not stealing do not need a religious assumption to be honestly and strongly held.

“For the protection of the citizens harsher laws may be called for. When Tung Chee-hwa became Hong Kong’s chief executive he cut some civil liberties because he had seen what happened in the U.S. in the 60s with drugs, sex and civil disobedience. He felt that the loss of civil authority had been detrimental to America.



—“Wanda, if our hypothetical ideal society needs a basic law the U.S. has a perfectly good Constitution which any country can have—it is seldom used much in the US anymore. The separation of church and state, the rule of the judges over the legislatures, and the reading of foreign meanings into the words of the highly intelligent writers of the Constitution by partisan judges and lawmakers have all scarred or obliterated the original document. You can find any position you want in the Bible or the Constitution—just take a text out of its context. Ex post facto no longer applies to civil laws, as was intended by the Constitution. Freedom of speech extends far past the political ideas that once bound it. The right to bear arms like muskets or single shot pistols that provided ‘for the common defense,’ at the time of the Constitution, has been extended to AK 47s and other necessary arms by some state courts. And even a machine gun can fall under the protection offered by Supreme Court. (32), if the defendant didn’t know it was a machine gun!

“Generally the gun control cases decided by the Supreme Court have been centered on whether the gun was necessary for the state’s militia or whether the government hadn’t proved that the gun was particularly harmful. A conservative court will generally hold that the state can make laws regarding gun control while a more liberal court may believe a gun owner saying that he didn’t know the gun was dangerous! With 100 million AK 47s out there, and more being purchased at about \$30 each, maybe these will handle your population problem, Wreck!”

ECONOMIC CONCERNS WHEN ESTABLISHING YOUR IDEAL SOCIETY



--“That worries us, Lee. It seems that you Americans all think you are movie cowboys and that guns will solve every problem. But let’s look at another essential element of any ideal society, its economic interests. It needs taxes to operate the society. Can it collect more money as a communist state, where the state owns all of the means of production, as a socialist state, where it owns the major means of production, or in a laissez-faire state in which it gives freedom to businesses to fend for themselves?

“Would society be better if incomes were equaled? It would never happen in a secular society. The realities are that nearly all people are self-centered. They want more for themselves. The addict wants more heroin. The homeowner wants to remodel or to buy a better house. The teenager wants a better car. And the oil company executives want more drilling sites. Homeless, or multi-millionaire, we all want more of something—money, fame, power.”



“A devout Buddhist would renounce them all for inner peace. Should we therefore push Buddhism or should we recognize the Western passion for more and better of everything?”



---“The Communist Soviet Union, in spite of harsh penalties against it, had a great black market economy. It was often fueled by tourists selling their clothes, pens and other items to hotel personnel and others. And the Soviet Union never had equal salaries for its citizens. Everybody had low salaries, but where a factory manager might earn 400 rubles a month the worker might earn 60 to 80 a month. In the U.S. the differential between manager and worker might be much more, but the American worker could buy much more than the Soviet manager. Commander?”



--“Wanda, you certainly can’t believe that the craving for psychoactive drugs would diminish if we gave everyone the same amount of money? Do you believe that gambling would stop? Don’t you think that the aggressive people, who want more, would soon get much of what the lazier people had? People are not identical in values, in native intelligence or in psychological drives. Equalizing income won’t equalize our psychological natures. Whether we can eliminate abject poverty is one question, but to bring up everybody’s incomes to the middle then keep them there would be impossible without a huge overhaul of the collective human psyche.

“Protesters at World Bank conferences advocate eliminating poverty. Nice idea, but there’s not enough money in the world to bring everyone up to the level of a middle class worker in the U.S. or the E.U. The only way to reduce poverty is to reduce population so that the money of the world doesn’t have to support so many people. Then the chance that more money will reach a greater percentage of the world’s population is increased. Even if the money stolen by dictators in Africa, South America and the Philippines were returned from the Swiss bank accounts to the people who should have had it, it wouldn’t go far. The 20 billion dollars estimated to have been taken by corrupt African leaders, if divided equally among the population of Africa would be less than \$25 a person. While that’s almost a month’s income for many of the poorest, it won’t shift the poverty line if they don’t stop having babies. So forgiving the debts of African countries may be a friendly gesture, but perhaps the money once given by the West then stolen by the corrupt African leaders should first be returned to those for whom it was intended. Should there be an international law that money should be honestly earned before being put in a secret account?”

ECONOMIC EFFICIENCY



--“Your ideal society would certainly want people to have the opportunity to be economically productive citizens. Let’s look at what is going on in the world now and see what it may tell us about setting up an ideal society.

“Today’s societies in the advanced countries are more efficient than in the past. We no longer have two people running the cheese shop, three the bakery, two the vegetable shop, two the meat shop and one the fish shop and another two the pharmacy and two more the household wares shop. Now we have a supermarket that replaces ten of each of these shops and does it with 20 people rather than 140. Service industries have increased—restaurants, hotels, medical facilities, spas and gyms, pre-schools, other educational institutions, etc. But these too are getting more efficient with computers and robots doing much of the work that people used to do. Education is essential for many of these service oriented businesses. So what is happening is that today there are more people to do less work.

“In France the workers work 24% less than they did in 1970. In the U.S they work 20% more. Downsizing management increases the workload of those who still work. And the drive for more money pushes Americans to work longer hours and take fewer vacations so they can drive more expensive cars and live in bigger houses. Per capita income in France has dropped from seventh in the world to seventeenth. The 35 hour French work week, which was to reduce unemployment, has resulted in a very high unemployment rate.

“In 1996 French truckers held the nation ransom, blockading roads. They wanted retirement at 55. They got it. Part of their rationale was that it would help to reduce France’s unemployment rate of 12.7%. The same argument was used in the 1980s to reduce retirement age from 65 to 60. It didn’t dent the unemployment rate. Employers just refuse to take on more workers because of the huge costs they must pay to keep France’s welfare system floating—or rather floundering. National bankruptcy in the next 20 years is likely. In 2000 a European or American had to work to the age of 67 before his retirement contributions were sufficient to pay for his retirement. A retirement at any lesser age meant that somebody else had to pay. A major problem is that each year the life expectancy increases considerably, so each year we have to add more months to the retirement age, consequently today we really shouldn’t let people retire before 72.

“Another factor in developing the ideal economic society is how much can each worker produce. Often this relates to how many hours a year a person works. One of the most remarkable facts about Europeans is that they work much less than Americans. Europeans worked more than Americans in the 1950s and 1960s, when they were pressed in their war reconstruction efforts. Then there were the boom years when they could accumulate more goods. But then Europeans began to work fewer and fewer hours. While in the early 1970s Europeans worked about as many hours as Americans, today the French, Italian and Germans work about 1400 hours per working-age person per year versus about 1800 hours per person in the United States. This is due to fewer people in the workplace because they start later and retire earlier in some countries, their workweeks are shorter, they have more vacation time, and attractive full pay sick leaves are enticing for many who may not really be so ill. These factors vary from country to country.

“Additionally since the income tax brackets tend to capture more income more quickly as one moves up the pay scale, the desire for monetary rewards is chipped away since you keep less of what you earn. This is then combined with the desire for more leisure time. And these factors are often aided by union rules or state laws so that what is ‘fair’ labor practice for Europeans has changed over the last few decades and become more pro-worker and less pro-production..

“Working less and maintaining reasonable growth rates is possible if your productivity increases sufficiently. In Europe this has happened a few times since the 1950s. They produced more while working less. But in the last thirty years Europe’s productivity has fallen significantly

behind that of the U.S., partially because it was late in utilizing higher level technology, like computerization. But China sprinted ahead of all the Western economies. Society must aid business with incentives to keep production competitive. This is especially true in high wage countries which must compete with the less technological, low wage countries. It is still the end cost of the item that is of interest to consumers. And with free trade, the consumers are kings. If the countries' producers can't meet or beat the low wage foreign workers, they will have to fold their tents and quietly steal away.

“The older approach of protecting your inefficient workers and businesses, by imposing high tolls on goods produced more cheaply in other countries, is counterproductive to your consumers' interests and to world's economic efficiency.

“Another problem with many European states is an inflexibility in the labor market. Unneeded employees are difficult to release. ‘Job security’ negatively affects the dynamic running of businesses. By outsourcing production a company can reduce the costs of production while eliminating many of the headaches of hiring better educated local workers. Certainly the interests of the business are primary for the business owners. And while they would undoubtedly prefer to hire their own countrymen, it doesn't make good business sense if they can't shift directions when the market requires it. When Sweden and Denmark reduced the costs of firing workers, businesses functioned more smoothly and unemployment dropped. But when France wanted to make it easier to get jobs but easier for owners to fire workers, the people rebelled.

“Bulgaria has a law that makes employers wary of hiring women. If a woman is pregnant the employer must allow her to take off two years yet pay her full salary the whole time. I had a friend who hired a woman into a management job with a high salary. Within a month of being hired she announced she was pregnant and was taking her two years off. She had obviously been pregnant when hired. Her dishonesty and the government's forcing employers to be overly generous discourages employers from hiring any women. Who gains from this approach? Certainly not non-pregnant women! So is this a plus or a minus for the Bulgarian economy and for working women?

“Centralized planning seems smart, except that it hasn't worked, probably because economic science hasn't been able to figure out all of the minor fluctuations of a national or international economy. What if the price of oil increases by \$5 a barrel? What effect will that have on large steel companies, on every utility, on the local baker, on pension fund interest or on the change in interest rates? We are nowhere near understanding the effects of every micro or macro economic event on every facet of the local, national or world economy. We may never know all of the effects of all of the causes in our economic world. Does this mean that we should let the business world make its adjustments as it sees fit? Should national governments forget trying to control and protect their economies? We are not even close to knowing!

“Estonia recently moved ahead of Ireland in the State of World Liberty Index in economic and political freedom. The prime minister invited foreign investment and privatized the industries. People were first concerned about budget deficits but now there are budget surpluses.”

THE WELFARE STATE—CRADLE TO GRAVE BENEFITS



“Maybe the best economic system should include elements of the welfare state. Europeans in the welfare nations love their way of life. Welfare states allow nearly free medical care, long holidays, job protection, early retirement—but many people in the world are willing to work more than the Europeans—the Americans, the Chinese, the Thais. You can't get something for nothing.

“In the Far East not long ago people were working for slave wages and their cheap products were putting Westerners out of work. Then the Asian wages increased as did the workers' buying power. Their goods increased in price but they still undersold the Europeans and Americans. So

prices rose in the West but the Western wages stayed stable because the Western workers were not producing enough to even pay them their existing salaries and their welfare costs. And the skilled workers of the West would never consider working for the same wages as the skilled workers in the East. The desire of the developed world for cheaper goods from China and for cheaper services from India drained the riches of the West—like the Nile carrying the nutrients from the mountain to the delta.

“The Asian ‘have nots’ were being financially rewarded beyond their wildest dreams, while the ‘haves’ of the West were experiencing the monetary nightmares of inflation and recession. The euro and the dollar were less plentiful and those that circulated were worth less as devaluation shifted the real wealth of the world eastward. As the yuan grew from gecko to dragon and the Western currencies shrunk from elephantine to ant-like proportions, the paternalistic welfare states that were ‘resource-poor’ had to pay the piper for their years of living beyond their means. Those states that had pushed education and had been able to innovate technologically were not hit quite as hard. But the Asian work ethic, the Chinese national and individual commitment to scientific education, and the huge work pool of the Orient that still existed, gave the East the double barreled power of brains and brawn. The West couldn’t keep up.

“So the welfare waifs, the children of the baby boomers of the 60s and 70s, the beneficiaries of generous socialistic-state half of the Marxist ideal—‘to each according to his needs’—had to tighten their economic belts several notches, tone down their ‘needs’, and learn to live with less. And the necessity of working to survive, which their parents and grandparents had done many years earlier, re-emerged as the reality of human history. And the needs they now felt emphasized food and shelter, not exotic vacations and designer clothes.

“Some Western countries survived. Look at previously backward Ireland which leapt to the front of the pack in Europe by keeping its education sacred and embracing foreign investment and free enterprise. Of course it took its lumps with the recession in 2010. The socialist leaders in France and Germany were lagging farther and farther behind as the state governments bowed to the selfish wishes of the workers for more pay, shorter work weeks and earlier retirements. But it didn’t pull everyone into the mainstream. Just look at Germany with 13% of its citizens living below the poverty level of less than 1220 Euros a month

“Like the American consumer riding the easy credit of his plastic cards to bankruptcy, the socialists were spending more than they earned or more than they could ever earn. But for politicians, the desires of today’s voters are more important than the economic realities of tomorrow. In the past a government could just print more money and devalue its present currency. But today Germany can’t print more Euros because the Euro is a multi-country currency. It can only be devalued if all the countries agree that they want to devalue.

“It reminds me of a survey of European work habits. It showed that Norwegians worked fewer hours per year than workers in any other country. Norwegian journalists said it was because they worked harder—this got a big laugh from all the non-Norwegians living and working in Norway. In Norway summertime jobs end at 3 PM so people can enjoy the rest of the day in leisure, a day that in the summer ends when the sun goes down at midnight in Oslo and never goes down in the north.”



“Not that long ago I read that one in ten Norwegian workers had left work early and were living off the welfare system because of real or imagined physical or mental illnesses. (33) How much of a welfare system can a country afford? How early a retirement can an economy allow without it bankrupting the retirement system? How much money should be allotted to each citizen for health benefits? How short can a workweek be without destroying a country’s economy? How many vacation days can be allowed and not disrupt a company’s or a nation’s productivity? To what level can a government support free education?

“In a free market economy we let the chips fall where they may. This type of society is built on a foundation of liberty, of a freedom that has few if any bounds. In a welfare state if the chips fall unevenly the government will equalize them. If you get sicker than you might have planned for, the government picks up your hospital bills. If you live longer than expected and your retirement contributions are exhausted, the government picks up your pension payments. If you can't afford your higher education the government not only pays for your education but also for your living expenses. If you are old and infirm and can't take care of yourself, the government will do it.

“The governments of the more advanced countries have taken different approaches to handling the welfare needs of their citizens. Germany, under Bismarck, was the first country to bring in public health insurance. That was in 1883. It covered those who had been in the labor force. It is therefore sometimes called ‘the achievement model.’ If you had produced for the economy the government would look after you a bit.

“Other countries began to look at providing for the needs of some or all of its citizens, particularly for the needs of illness and old age, then they added care for catastrophic accidents then they added unemployment compensation. In Britain, the Beveridge model was developed to cover only those in greatest need. In southern Europe the ‘Catholic’, or subsidiary model, attempted to have the problems solved by the family or by local government.

“The Scandinavians have a model for their societies. This ‘Nordic model’ includes universal health care and free education to the highest educational levels, if a student qualifies. It also seems to include honesty, severe punishments for civil disobedience, such as violating driving laws, and reduced punishments for criminals—and no capital punishment. Gender equality is a major concern, as is a commitment to work for peace. The model gives long fully paid maternity leaves, long vacations, shorter work weeks and their unemployment benefits usually include full pay.

“This has worked well when the economies have been successful. Today there are some negative factors. Norway's GDP is 20% a result of its oil production which will be depleted in 20 years and its gas in 100 years. This gives a false picture of Norway's economy. The Finnish and Swedish economies have not been moving, and when they move it is often backwards. In the early 90s unemployment increased by 500%. If it had not been for Finnish Nokia and Swedish Ericsson mobile phones or Norway's oil these three countries would not have been able to support their welfare states at the same level. Nokia's earnings were equal to the whole national budget of Finland. And while the administrators of the company love their country and wanted to keep it in Finland in spite of the high taxes, most of the owners live outside of Finland and wanted a higher profit based on lower taxation in another country.

“The welfare states of the post-war times assumed that people would work when they were well and that they wouldn't be sick often. They did not anticipate the number of low income immigrants they would be taking in during later years. They didn't factor in that people would be living much longer. So while they had a hungry healthy bunch of young workers in the 60s, by the time the millennium changed, the cost of the welfare systems had gotten out of hand. It was nice that a new parent could take off a year from work, fully paid by the government. It was nice that sick leave and unemployment insurance were so easily available. But it was not nice that it all had to be paid for by raising taxes to take care of the aging population and the immigrants. Norwegians let the government know in 2006 that it wanted to keep its generous sick leave of 100% pay from the first day of sickness and lasting for a year. Sweden's sick pay is only 80% of full pay. The Norwegian approach has led this otherwise healthy nation to average 9% of its total workdays as sick days. So the government's generosity doesn't seem to increase workers' output!

“In the 33 years from 1970 to 2003 if we look at the comparative level of European prosperity, Sweden dropped from fifth to 14th, Denmark dropped from third to seventh, Finland dropped from 9th to 15th. At the same time Ireland rose from 21st to fourth, of course the recession back in 2010 took a heavy toll on Ireland.. The four worst performing economies have been Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Italy. Sweden has the world's largest public sector work

force, accounting for 56% of its gross domestic product. But this includes workers in the country-owned industries as well as people who work in government at various levels, so they are not all paper pushers.

“Job creation was zero in Finland and Sweden while it went up 8% in Belgium. Denmark did better when it made its labor force more flexible and allowed employers to fire workers more easily. Unemployment benefits were reduced making working more attractive and forcing people to work, even if the job was below their qualifications.

“The Nordic countries have many more people in their governmental public sectors. Denmark and Sweden have 34% of their workers in the public sector, Norway has 31%. But some other countries are much higher, like Egypt with 60% and Poland with 40%, but these are developing economies. Other socialistically inclined advanced economies like France and the Netherlands have 21 and 26%. In contrast, Canada and the U.S. have 18 and 16% of their workers employed in the public sector.



“But there is a problem in comparing public sectors because all countries don’t report the same public occupations and the various countries have far different percentages of people in the various occupations. For example in the U.S. the military is a high percentage of the public sector employment. Then some countries report only the cost of running the government, such as for bureaucrats, police and fire protection, road construction and such. Then the estimates of public sector employment vary considerably. Norway and Denmark report between 30 and 50% of their workers in the public sector, depending on how it is determined.



“Then there is the question as to whether there is income from the activity. For example the Norwegian government’s involvement in oil and gas production is a huge moneymaker. The research on armaments and their production in the U.S. makes money when they are sold to other governments and to war lords. And Wreck, you’d have to admit that those arms help to control the population in Africa and the Middle East!”



“But that’s not the way I want to see it controlled.”



“There are other differences, too, that make such comparisons inaccurate. For example, in the Scandinavian countries education responsibilities from kindergarten to the PhD level are nearly 100% state responsibilities. This is like China’s approach. By contrast, in the U.S. 10% of primary and secondary education is in the private sector and 20% of colleges are private.

“There are some other interesting comparisons made by various international groups or banking interests. Looking at the amount of work done by the public sector, Japan comes out as most efficient. It has a public sector of less than 7%. The U.S. was also efficient. Norway was about 15% less efficient than America. Denmark was about 35% less efficient and Sweden still less efficient. France and Germany were still less efficient. So the size of the public sector seems to be fairly closely related to governmental efficiency.

“Then some believe that the relatively high unemployment rates in the private sector are related to the lack of motivation to work because of the high level of total taxes, including income, sales and other taxes. In Denmark it is a 59% maximum income tax rate, in Sweden it is 53%, in Finland it is 53% and in Norway it is ‘only’ 51%. Value added or sales taxes may contribute a great deal to that figure. With a tax on food of 14 to 24% and value added taxes of 24% on all goods and services, this lessens the amount needed from personal income taxes. In the U.S. the

highest income tax rate is 35% on those earning over \$330,000 after they have subtracted all their deductions. In Norway the top national rate is 19.5% after \$110,000. But there is also a municipal income tax rate of 28% that begins at \$4,000. By comparison, the U.S. income tax rate of 28% would start at \$100,000 and the state income tax rates are quite low.

“Economic projections vary but here is an example of one scenario. The researchers, in surveying 130 countries concluded that when the total tax revenue of a country reached 43.2% of its gross domestic product the total tax revenue actually decreased. They also concluded that the highest productive level of income tax was 22.5%, of sales tax was 12.5% and on taxes on international trade, such as duties, was 13.2% but the maximum economic growth occurred when the income tax was 11.9%, the sales tax at 4.6% and the trade taxes at 9.4%. The study also found that the maximum tax that will allow for maximum economic growth was 19.3% and a tax of 45% of the GDP was a negative influence on growth. (34)

“Furthermore, if a country chose to tax at the rate of 43.2% to get maximal revenues, rather than at 19.3% to maximize economic growth, its growth rate would drop from 2.4% a year to 0.4% on the average. In forty years the country that reduced its taxes and maximized its growth would be bringing in as much money as the country that maximized taxes, but the citizens in the growth economy would have three times the after tax income than the higher taxed citizens.

“Of course other variables change the growth rates. If the country borrows from foreign sources, rather than tightening its financial belt by cutting expenses, it can make a big difference in the growth rate. If it finances wars or foreign aid in amounts that exceed its income, it will have a negative effect on the economy. You just can’t have it all!

“But in our modern democratic welfare states we think we must take care of the older people, not only because they have promised to but also because there are lots of older voters and they turn out to vote in much greater numbers than do the younger ones.

“Then we have become use to a number of perks that keep our legislators re-elected. In the U.S. what is called social welfare in some countries is called ‘entitlements.’ Programs like food stamps, rent subsidies, Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid are not demanded in the Constitution but they far exceed in expenditures of the Constitutional mandates to provide military and naval forces and to fight piracy.

The best countries to live in, according to the United Nations Human Development Index are: Norway, Iceland, Australia, Ireland and Sweden, with the U.S. at number 8 and the UK at 18. All are considered to be welfares stare, with three of the top five following the very generous Nordic model. Of the bottom thirty, 28 were in sub-Saharan Africa. Wreck, makes you wonder how many children would have chosen to not be bon in Mali or Zimbabwe. Maybe their little souls could have waited for welfare state parents, but there’s probably a long waiting list in heaven.



--“The major political and economic problem is that once you have given somebody something it is difficult for them to let go once they are used to it. If I lent you a bicycle last year and you use it all the time, but I want it back so I can sell it to feed my family, you may understand—but you’re not happy with the situation. So in setting up your ideal society you had better consider your taxation rates. Let’s talk about a few other areas you need to consider—and how they can be paid for.

RETIREMENT PENSIONS



—“The percentage of people over 65 in the States was about 12% when I left the planet, it is 16% today and in 15 years, in 2035, it will be 20% of the population. And of course they will all live longer.

“While in earlier times people generally received fixed pensions in many European countries, the UK determined to make pensions dependent on contributions. Many countries have followed that lead. So working more years and at a higher salary will result in a higher monthly pension.

“Japan is less generous than most countries, but the Japanese save very efficiently. They are disciplined enough to not have to have a grander house every few years and every new electronic gadget as it rolls off the assembly line. But the Western consumers, in their impatience to contribute sales taxes to their governments, have little left but credit card debts when they reach retirement age so grandma government has to dip into her cookie jar and ante up an adequate allowance for the lifetime of the pensioner.



--“A strange pension concept developed in many countries where women, the so-called weaker sex, were allowed earlier retirement even though they live several years longer than men. It makes about as much sense as dieting on beer and pretzels.



—“The simplest solutions to this problem would be raising the retirement age. The U.S. has no mandatory retirement age. Denmark and other countries have eliminated theirs. In Norway some have sued the government to let them work past 70. They lost in their earlier attempts, so dynamic contributors were put out to pasture. Then in 2009 the government caught up with necessity. They already had the world’s latest retirement age at 67. The U.S. and Canada were at the same level. European countries have been raising their pension ages, but the unions generally fight it. France encountered all kinds of strikes when President Sarkozy wanted to raise the retirement age from 60 to 62. The Greeks rioted when their pension age was raised from 62 to 65, because of their government’s ridiculous financial problems which brought them close to bankruptcy. This will be the story in country after country as the governments will have to raise retirement ages.”



--“Where do unions and other special interest groups think the government will get the money?”



—“A second obvious need is to have the workers pay monthly the amount needed to pay for their own pensions without the government having to pick up the tab for the workers’ underpayments. But although our lifetimes are increasing at the rate of almost 3 months per year, we still can’t predict the inevitable speed of the increases as medical science advances with stem cell research, organ transplants, cancer cures and lifestyle changes. But governments are much too slow to catch up with the present. For example in the next 70 years the U.S. will spend about \$43 trillion on Social Security and medical expenses that were only partially paid for by the recipients.

“Social Security took in fewer dollars than it spent in 2017, and in twenty years, by 2040, the contributions will pay only about 75% of the benefits. By that time the trust fund will be exhausted. The obvious way to maintain the benefits is to increase the payroll taxes to 16% from 12.4% with half being paid by the employer. Another way is to reduce the benefits by 13%. Or, a combination of the two might be employed. Of course if the life expectancy increases considerably these proposals will have to be modified.



—“I think it’s worse than you indicate Lee. By my calculations Americans are generally not paying enough to fund their benefits. The lower earning people get a higher amount back than do the rich. My accountant tried to explain it to me in general terms. As I remember, if you averaged \$2,000 a month in your top 35 years of work your monthly Social Security pension would be about \$1100, if you had averaged \$4,000 a month your pension would be about \$1,800 a month, and if you had earned an average of \$8,000 a month your pension would have been only \$2,400 a month. The more money you made the more it was indexed downward.

“For simplicity’s sake, let’s assume that each of our hypothetical people worked at that salary for the full 50 years of his or her working life. The person earning \$2,000 a month would have paid in about \$150,000 in contributions. This would make his pension payments for about eleven years. But anyone reaching age 67 is expected to live another 15 years. I’m sure you know that for every year you live your life expectancy increases. So at birth if the U.S. the life expectancy is 75, by age 67 one’s life expectancy is 82. Anyway, the person who earned \$2,000 a month would have to dip into the government’s till for the last four years. The person who earned \$4,000 a month would have paid in enough to pay him for almost 14 years. But the person who averaged \$8,000 a month would die before using all of his contributions.

“But what I just mentioned did not include the interest on the funds that are placed in Treasury bonds, which is a plus as long as the U.S. government can pay its debts. But there are additional drains on the funds, such as payments to surviving spouses and children and extra expenses for some covered individuals. All in all, it is a net negative!

“The point is that people must pay for their retirements. They need to contribute more or retire later. Swedish workers contribute nearly 19% of their wages, but Americans contribute less than 13% of theirs, counting their employers’ contributions. We had better wise up.



—“A few countries have other weapons to combat the costs of an aging population. Spain, for example, has relatively few women in the workplace. Adding them to the labor force could increase the number of workers contributing to the welfare of the older citizens, but of course they will be added to those needing benefits when they retire. Another approach would be adopting Third World children. They could add to the workforce without adding to the world’s population. Natural resources, like Norway’s oil, can delay the financial day of reckoning until they are exhausted.

HEALTH CARE



—“Health care is definitely a concern in modern societies. But the problem of insufficient finances continues to thwart it. Maybe we can borrow more money from China. Or maybe we can just import some acupuncturists and some ginseng and junk this Western medicine model.



—“Are we ready for socialized medicine—with lower paid doctors working shorter hours; with fewer hospital beds; and with drug choices and diagnostic tools limited by the state’s budget. My American friends in Scandinavia say they much prefer the care they get under Medicare or their private insurance in the U.S. to the socialized care. They feel they have better doctors and get much quicker care in the U.S. Many operations that are not life threatening in the

Nordic countries are put on hold. In Norway a person on a waiting list for an elective operation for two years can opt to have it eventually done in Denmark or the UK. Then as long ago as 2008 medical care in rich Norway was being reduced because of a lack of money in the budget, More money was budgeted for kindergartens. So more taxes were proposed.

“And I hear that the required co-payments for their family doctors in Scandinavia are higher than what my friends pay in the U.S. In fact many U.S. doctors waive the payments. Also dental care, chiropractic and many other treatments are not covered under most socialized programs but are usually covered under many U.S. insurance programs.

“Nordic doctors work their 7 hour days for the government. Patients usually get much more time with a doctor once they get an appointment, but it might take a month or two to get that appointment with your family doctor and longer if you are referred to a specialist. A doctor can work a second job with a private clinic if one exists in her or his area. But the state doesn't pay a doctor more to take more patients. If you are sick on a weekend you must go to an emergency clinic. In the U.S. doctors are often associated with a medical group and one of the group members is always 'on call' during the evenings and on weekends. If it is a specialty, like a cardiology medical group, you get a specialist. In the Scandinavian countries you will probably get a general practitioner after your 3 to 8 hour wait at the walk in clinic. But real emergencies can get much quicker treatment.

“I have to admit though that the best care I ever received was in the Diakonhjemmet's Sykehuset in Oslo. I was a student tourist and had a medical emergency. I was hospitalized for five days, had a bunch of tests, even CT scans and there was no charge. If I had been Norwegian the insurance payments would have come out of my 7 ½% monthly deduction from my pay and my taxes. If I had been a non-working resident I would have paid a few thousand dollars a year for the insurance. .

“The U.S. spends about \$7000 per person per year on health care. This is 15% of its GDP. The Scandinavian countries spend about half as much in dollars and about 2/3s as much of their GDP as the U.S. I know that medical costs are higher in America when they are not paid for by insurance, but they are usually immediately available.

“The U.S. citizens working in big companies and in the public sector have health insurance. Older workers have Medicare. The poor have Medicaid. But those working for small companies are often not covered. The federal government initiated a health insurance program for the children of those not poor enough for Medicaid, but funding was insufficient. Just one less war and it could have been fully funded.”

“Should everyone be equally entitled to expensive health care? AIDS patients in developed countries can expect to live 25 additional years at an additional cost to society of \$600,000 each. Should society pay if the victim picked up AIDS from injecting illegal drugs in an unhealthy way, or through indulging in sex practices that he knew were extremely risky? What if it was picked up innocently from an infected mate or an infected blood transfusion?

“What about heart transplants or coronary by-passes for lifelong smokers or those who ate too much fat or seldom exercised?

“Should relatives who want maximum treatment for a comatose patient, who has been vegetative for a month, pay half the cost in advance for the next month, increasing 10% each month to 100% in 6 months. Should they pay for their desires?

HEALTH CARE AND AGING POPULATIONS



—“Socialized medicine carries huge social costs.
“Health care costs, as a percent of gross national product are increasing in every country. They have to be included in developing our societal utopia. But obviously they come at a cost.

America's expenses are about the highest percentage of GDP in the world and they don't even have socialized medicine. If the pattern since 1960 is any indication, increases could be substantial. In fifty years the percentage of America's GNP spent on health care has tripled. Still its life expectancy is lower than any developed country except the Czech Republic.

"Medicare cost was 2% of the gross domestic product when I left. Now it's 5% and in 30 years, by 2050 it will be about 10%. So while Social Security is under-funded by \$7 trillion, Medicare is under-funded by \$37 trillion. Medicare is a much bigger problem because health care costs increase substantially as we age. In 2005 Medicare's costs were almost 3% of the GDP, or 60% of that of the Social Security costs. Today they are greater than the expenses for Social Security and they will rise to 11% of the GDP in sixty years, in 2080. The fund was exhausted this year and every year from now on will be a deficit year unless health care costs are reduced or contributions are increased.

"You and your employer split the 3% Medicare tax. By increasing the tax to 6 ½% or reducing the benefits by 50% the fund can be solvent. (35) If people live longer or if the costs of health care increase considerably because of new diagnostic tools, expensive drugs or life extending devices, the costs to the Medicare fund increases. Organ transplants, the costs of artificial organs like hearts or other body part replacements like knees and hips, or techniques to reverse obesity are all factors that increase expenses.

"Rich, debt-free Norway's health care system had to cut \$200,000,000 from its budget. So there will be fewer operations, fewer expensive drugs, and less care generally. Did you know that in rich Norway, as far back as 2008, they started cutting benefits. Psychiatry was cut, as was heart care, emergency clinics and some child neurology benefits. Hospitals were closed. Norway wanted to keep its budget balanced rather than borrow from China and develop a national debt. The cuts came at the expense of other budgetary considerations like developing more kindergartens. It's sobering to realize that a country with no debt is balancing its budget while countries with huge deficits refuse to balance theirs.

"While the U.S. has significant problems in caring for the aged, other countries are worse off. In Japan, for example, the number of people aged 65 and above today is about one-fourth of those ages 15 to 64. By 2050, Japan's senior population will equal almost two-thirds of the working-age population, compared with slightly more than one-third in the USA. A few countries, such as Sweden, have taken early steps to cover the cost of health care and retirement for their aging population. They have retooled retirement plans, tying benefits to contributions, raised retirement ages and increased taxes. They have also reined in health care costs."



—"But the welfare state in Scandinavia has increased benefits to parents. I'm sure you don't like that idea Commander."



—"It's either a selfish way to try to increase the indigenous population or it is a generous way to keep up the human tradition of thoughtlessly reproducing itself. New parents are guaranteed 480 days leave from work from a child's birth to his or her eighth birthday, 390 days of it at 80% pay. Then parents are given monthly allowances for each child which can amount to between \$110 and \$400 per month. Of course all these benefits are paid for by taxes. The maximum national and regional tax in Sweden is 56%, compared with about 43% in the USA. Unlike the USA, Sweden also has a value-added tax of 25%. VAT taxes are a national sales tax. But state sales taxes in the USA only range from zero to 7.25%. The U.S. wants to tax the workers rather than the buyers.

WORKING AND RESTING IN THE WELFARE STATE



-- “There’s more to a welfare state than health care. The working hours are generally reduced, sick leave increased and vacation time increased. Labor unions for Volkswagen got the company to cut the workweek to less than 29 hours a week for a full week’s pay in 1994. In 2006 the workers agreed to work 33 hours a week at no increase in pay, when the company threatened to take more production out of Germany. In Germany, as in other socialistically leaning countries, workers have a say in the management of the company. That’s letting the inmates run the asylum.

“France dropped its hourly workweek from 39 to 35 hours at no decrease in pay. Unemployment which was supposed to drop actually rose and is now the highest in Europe.. It’s obvious that if a worker is working to capacity he will turn out more product in 40 hours than in 35 hours. Americans work up to 30% more hours in a year than Europeans probably because Europeans are more concerned with leisure time.

“The average American and Japanese works 1815 hours a year, Norwegians average 1380, Swedes 1580, and Germans 1445. And the Dutch work the least. On the other end of the working scale, Koreans worked 2400 hours.

“In some transition economies, hours worked reflected both the ongoing shift from agriculture to manufacturing and services, as well as away from centralized economies. Workers in the Czech Republic, for example, put in 1,980 hours in 2002 - despite hefty decreases in the work week in recent years - they thereby worked the longest hours within OECD economies along with Slovakia with 1,978 hours and Greece with 1,934.

“Ireland provides a good example of the changing pattern in working hours that occurs when an economy moves through the development process. Along with shifting from an agricultural based economy to manufacturing and services, hours worked by the people in Ireland fell from just above 1,900 in the 1980s to 1,668 hours in 2002, a drop of nearly six 40-hour workweeks per employed person. Still they doubled productivity per worker during those twenty years.”



-- “Are unions a positive or a negative force in society? Ninety per cent of Frenchmen are covered by collective bargaining unions. In the UK unions represent 35% of the workers. In the US it is close to 10% in the private sector, but higher for government employees. Unions tend to look out for the selfish desires of their members. But since they don’t own the company, they can’t control it if a company wants to locate to another country. Because of this, business owners often get labor concessions when they threaten to take their production to East Europe or farther east.



-- “In the ideal society that we are trying to construct, we need full, or nearly full, employment. In terms of employment, comparing the US and the EU, in the 25 to 55 age group, employment rates are about the same in the U.S. and Europe. However in the under 25 age group America is at least 25% more effective and in the age groups above 55 America is often as much as 300% more effective in employing people. Part of this is due to the earlier retirements possible in Europe, part is due to a more flexible work force in the U.S., and part is due to the artificially high wage rates in Europe. For example the minimum wage in Norway is more than twice the rate of that in the U.S. In fact a person earning the minimum wage in Norway can make over \$30,000 a year.

“Unemployment is caused by a lack of buyers for a country’s products. A country not having the intellectual or political ability to create the technology needed to stay ahead of its competition, or people lacking the will to work, will fall behind. That lack of will to work can be

caused by low purchasing power per hour worked or by sheer laziness and self centeredness, knowing that the state or the family will meet one's survival needs

“Some European countries, including Denmark and Norway, have reduced unemployment. But in the social welfare states sometimes the public sector is the employer of last resort. Other times the economic dynamism of the country is the cause of reduced unemployment, as in Ireland.

“Unemployment rates can be deceptive. It should be reported as private and public employment. Private employment produces salable products while government employment, unless it is in socialistic production enterprises, eats up tax dollars or increases government inflow from its activities like toll collectors, parking ticket givers, and other tax collectors.

“We have to have a public sector of employment for teachers, police and government workers. But how big should it be? Of all persons employed, the public sector employs a high percentage of people in many countries, for example Norway's 31% and the 34% in Sweden and Denmark. Most European countries are in the low to mid-20s, with America and Canada in the mid-teens. Many developing countries are much higher, but since the figures don't indicate the number of subsistence farmers, it is difficult to get an exact picture of public sector employment across the world. Then there are the variables of how many in the public sector actually earn money from their employment, rather than just draining the country's coffers. Norway's oil workers are huge contributors to the Norwegian economy, while their police are not producing any marketable products. Then their government researchers and professors may be contributing indirectly to marketable products.



—“What are the obstacles to a welfare state utopia?”



—“I see a couple of stumbling blocks. One that we see in every country, except possibly Norway, is that they don't tax enough to pay for their services. And secondly, in a democracy where you have a high number of people working for the state and not producing goods or marketable ideas, they are not going to vote for a change. They usually cannot see the economic needs of their societies.

“The politicians sometimes have to tackle the unpopular idea that people have to work more or that taxes have to be increased or benefits decreased. Yet the citizens of the developed countries want it all. They want the luxuries available to the longer working and lower taxed Americans but they want the welfare state perks that the Americans don't have. The self centered desires, to be fully available to all, requires a big Daddy Warbucks dishing out an unlimited supply of money to those hundreds of millions of Little Orphan Annies not willing to work for their keep. And people want to be rich. Poverty is not an objective of the welfare state.”

POVERTY IS RELATIVE



—“Poverty is a highly relative concept. For example when we compare American poverty rates and what their poor own, we find that 40% of the Swedish population would be in the poverty class of America. Yet only 12% of Americans are in that class. And you can imagine that a far higher percentage of other European countries would meet these poverty criteria.

“What does it mean to be poor in the USA? Major surveys of living standards carried out in the USA at regular intervals show the poor to have a surprisingly high standard of living; if we think only of material comforts. 45% of American poor own their own homes. 70% own a

color TV and 55% have two or more. 73% own automobiles. 76% have air conditioning. Such percentages would be middle class in much of Europe.

“Another factor to consider is the amount of space the average household occupies. The average impoverished American household has 1200 square feet, 120 square meters, compared with 1000 square feet, or a 100 square meters for the average European family. So it is obviously better being poor in a rich country than in a poor one. (36)

PENSIONS

“Pensions are generally more generous in the socialized countries of the EU. American Social Security pensions replace only 42% of the average worker’s pay. Retirement checks amount to about \$1000 a month for a worker and \$1500 for a worker and spouse. For a third of American retirees their Social Security checks are all the retirement benefits they have. For two-thirds of the population it is the major part of their retirement income. On the other hand, for California teachers who have taught 40 years, they will get more than 100% of their teaching salary.

“In the US most people retire at 65 or 66 when they can get full Social Security benefits, but some opt to retire at 62 with a lower pension. In EU the average age of retirement runs from 55 to 62, depending on the country. In Norway full retirement, which is about two-thirds of one’s working salary, is possible at age 67. That was about the right age to balance contributions with retirement income 20 years ago, but people keep living longer. When people retire before that date, when their life expectancy is greater than their retirement contributions, the society will have problems funding it. And both the US and Europe are on ‘pay as you go’ systems that require enough workers contributing to pay for the retirees. With people living longer and fewer workers, all the retirement systems are in trouble. Rather than putting retirement contributions into the yearly state budgets and spending them, what is needed is a program like California has for its public employees and teachers. The contributions go into a pot, then they are invested in stocks and real estate which makes the pot much bigger. Both California systems are worth well over \$100 billion, much of which comes from investing.

SICK LEAVE



—“High sickness rates in Norway and Sweden show that more Norwegians than other Europeans take sick leave. A couple of theories as to why this is true are that: they don’t take enough vitamin C, they touch everything and contaminate themselves with the germs of others; that there is no reason to work when their pay for not working is as high as for working, and that the welfare state has made them mentally weak. In Norway workers get full pay for every day they are on sick leave, and they don’t need a doctor’s note to verify their incapacity for two weeks.. Chintzy Sweden gives them nothing for the first day then only 80% thereafter.



—“Your welfare state weakness theory is not borne out because workers in Denmark and Germany take the least sick leave in Europe even though Danish workers get full pay for the first five weeks, only then is their pay is reduced.

“Norwegians get 4 to 6 weeks of paid vacation and 11 paid holidays, so the work year is about 45 weeks. Of that, the average Norwegian takes sick leave a little more than one day every two weeks. This is a bit more sick leave than the average Swede takes and about three times the amount of sick leave taken in Italy or Portugal. And it’s about seven times higher than the foreign workers in Norway take.

“Long term sick leave is more prevalent than is short term sick leave. I hear that a large percentage of Norway’s two million work person force is on unemployment because they can’t work. Maybe I should say ‘won’t’ work in Norway. When you are too sick to work you can

recover your health in any sunny vacation spot—and the checks from the European welfare wallets will find you under your beach umbrella. But often those who were permanently incapacitated when they worked in the frigid north are revitalized during their sojourns in the sun, so they open businesses in Spain and Thailand. But Norway keeps sending them their unemployment checks. The director general of the National Insurance Administration, that distributes unemployment benefits, recently said that 20 to 25% of the work force is not at work. This costs the Norwegian government well over \$12 billion a year in payouts.

“It might be unexpected, but when they work, Norwegians are highly productive. In fact the country’s economy was ranked by the World Economic Forum as the ninth most competitive a few years ago. They ranked ahead of Japan, Britain and Canada.



—“Has the welfare state reduced people’s self centeredness or just redirected it from working to acquire more things to feigning illness to increase one’s vacation time. The work ethic seems to have given way to the play ethic. When some industries have 15 to 20% of the working year taken in sick leave, one wonders.



—“The Norwegian government sought to have the employers pay part of the costs for sick leave, but unions and businesses howled. After all that should be a government expense.

“Then there is the extensive vacation time in many European countries. In addition to the national holidays that all countries enjoy. Denmark, Finland and Austria give six weeks of paid vacation, France and Germany give five. The UK, Ireland and most other European countries give four weeks, as does Australia. Brazil gives four and a half weeks, but Columbia and New Zealand only give three. The U.S., Canada and Japan are far down the list averaging two weeks, with Mexico giving only one week. Vacations are certainly appreciated, but they do cut into a nation’s productivity—ad so to its competitiveness in the global market. Maybe the United Nations should step in to require equal vacations and take away the economic edge of the non-vacationing countries. But then maybe the poorer countries or businesses can’t afford to pay for the long vacations, or any vacations. Naturally every welfare benefit costs somebody money, and that is the consumer or taxpayer.

“The realities of the expensive benefits are setting in? In Sweden, the 2006 election brought calls of change for lower taxes and with resulting lower benefits. This naturally upsets the labor unions and many workers. The Swedish unemployment rate varies between 7 and 15%. and in the young adult ages only about 30% have full time jobs. This is a trend in Europe even though there is often a scarcity of labor. The Swedish government is reducing unemployment benefits to induce people to work. Even so, they still propose to give high unemployment benefits for 300 days of unemployment, only then do they reduce it to 65% of their working pay.

COVERING THE COSTS



—“Health care, retirement pensions and education are certainly concerns, but the society has to pay for them some way. Norway has its state owned oil and gas production and Sweden can tax Ericsson, but these financial cows may not last forever. A society has to be able to pay its way year after year. With high wages making many Nordic products overpriced in the world markets and with high taxes often driving out those who selfishly want to keep more of their income, and with the yearly per-person output reduced because of short work weeks and more vacation time, exports suffer unless you are manufacturing things that nobody else can make.

“The productivity in Europe keeps dropping compared to the U.S. Even where the hourly production per person is about the same as in the U.S., as it is in France and Germany, the number of hours worked is so much less in Europe that the yearly productivity per person is way below that in America. This results in the fact that European goods are more expensive than American made goods, so there are fewer buyers. Just like the Chinese are producing items for less money than Americans, Americans produce more cheaply than Europeans. When people rationalize that ‘this is the way we’ve always done it’, it doesn’t cut the mustard. It is not an effective reason for continuing on the path. People have to realize that they must take a different road if they expect their societies to be economically competitive in today’s globalized economy.

HIGH TAXES

“Financing a welfare system requires extremely high taxes from a fully employed populace who earn high incomes. In Norway individual gross incomes are very high, about the same as in the U.S., but their buying power is not as great because of the high taxes. On the other hand the high incomes of Americans come in part from borrowing internationally, so that their immediate taxes are not increased but they will have to pay eventually. In either case, commonly manufactured goods or agricultural products produced in the West cost more than those of many less developed countries, so it is more difficult to sell goods produced in the West without borrowing more money to pay farm subsidies and larger business loans to increase the technological advantages of the U.S. workers.

“The high taxes make living more expensive. With a 25% value added tax in the Scandinavian countries and high personal income taxes, shopkeepers, restaurateurs and hoteliers must charge more to pay higher wages to their employees and to keep a higher profit for themselves. This has resulted in Oslo and Copenhagen being two of the three most expensive cities in the world. And of the ten most expensive cities in the world, eight are in the more socialistic countries in Europe, the other two are in Japan.

“Most European countries get 10 to 15% of their taxes from sales taxes, compared to about 5% in the U.S. And their personal income taxes are also very high. So welfare state benefits are being paid to a large extent by those who get the services.”

BALANCING THE BUDGET—TAXES FOR YOUR IDEAL SOCIETY



-- “Once you decide on what your ideal society will offer, you must determine a budget to finance it. Then you must tax to pay for it. Those who want their society based on economic freedom want fewer taxes. Those who want more economic equality want more taxes so that those who do not earn enough to support themselves throughout their lives must be supported by those who earn more than the society thinks they need. Then you have to factor in paying for extra expenses such as society’s infrastructure and defense.”



---“What would be the infrastructure you are talking about, Wreck?”



---“There is the expense of government such as embassies and international relations. There are defense expenses such as research, munitions manufacturing, and the expense of a standing army. Then you have highway and railway building and maintenance. But these can be paid by ‘use’ taxes on vehicles and fuel. Public transportation may have to be subsidized by general taxes. Then you have government employees. You assume that the more you have the better your services, but the more government employees, the fewer people there are to produce

wealth for the society. Teachers and education require huge amounts of tax money. Naturally if you are going to have free or inexpensive education from the pre-school ages through the doctorate it will cost more money. Will your society provide universal health care, health care only for the poor or aged, or none at all? The U.S., even without a national health insurance, spends about 50 to 100% more of its gross national product on health care than most of the social welfare countries do on their health care. Its doctors earn more and its hospitals cost more, but its effectiveness seems to be better, if you can afford it. We Americans also spend more for the same drugs than do the countries with socialized medicine.

“It’s really not fair that the individual American consumers must pay a higher percent of the drug research costs than the consumers in other countries where the country negotiates a lower cost per dose by massive buying and by making one manufacturer bid against another for somewhat similar drugs. So in a socialized medicine country the consumer may not be able to get the best drug, especially if it is more expensive. Then in the U.S. the drug companies employ massive sales forces that run up the prices of the drugs. But at the same time these well trained sales people can inform the doctors of the various advantages and disadvantages of the newer drugs, so the American doctors are better informed about the most recent drugs and they have them available. Often newer drugs are not even available in other countries, particularly if they cost more. It often isn’t economically feasible for the pharmaceutical companies to introduce some drugs abroad. They just have to let the information on the drugs trickle over from the U.S.”



--“But Commander, on the other side of the coin, there are effective drugs freely available in other countries that your FDA has not approved. And sometimes this approval is withheld because the drug runs counter to some pet ideas of your president.”



“True. But let’s get back on track. We were talking about taxes.

“Governments must tax to provide the services that the society needs. But first it must decide what it needs. It definitely needs salaries, buildings and operating expenses for whatever it determines to be necessary. Military expenses are usually considered essential. Law enforcement and judicial systems, some public works and some level of education are usually considered essential. But what about recreation? Golf courses can pay for themselves. But what about parks and beaches? How much health care should the government provide? What about roads? Should the drivers pay vehicle and fuel taxes to pay for them? What about pensions and unemployment benefits? Should the employers or employees pay for these? Should the producers of the waste pay for waste management? Should homeowners pay for garbage pick up and should the utility companies pay for cleaning up their greenhouse gases?

“We all know that it is the consumer who eventually pays for it. The taxes are just clumped in there with the other costs by businesses, then the profit is tacked on and the consumers who want the product pay for it.

“Governments can get their money by taxes, fines and legal gambling like lotteries. People don’t seem to mind when the government makes money from gambling, whether it is a tax on wagers made at the horse or dog track, or a percentage of the ‘house’ in a casino or a lottery. Certainly internet gambling cannot be tolerated. It is immoral—and it cuts the state’s take from its gambling interests.

“Fines are endured more than are taxes. But should the fine hurt? In some Scandinavian countries the fine is a percentage of your income. I heard of a rich motorcycle speeder who paid a \$200,000 fine. That could hurt!



—“You’ve heard that a fine is a tax for doing wrong while a tax is a fine for doing well.”



--“Well said Lee. Now let’s look at some government expenses. Should your society subsidize farmers for growing unprofitable crops, or for growing nothing? If society wants to reduce air pollution and increase population mobility should there be public transportation? And if so, should it be paid by the users entirely or by taxing other vehicles, or should it be supported by general tax revenues? Modern societies usually want some type of income redistribution, such as food and housing and general living expenses for poorer people.

“To pay for these we can tax income, both labor and investment. But taxing it too high eliminates or reduces the motivation to work or to invest. We can tax property, like homes, corporations, buildings, land, cars, furniture, and investments held. These can be taxed yearly or when they are sold. We can tax every person in the nation. This type of tax goes back to Biblical times. We can tax consumption with sales taxes or value added taxes on goods or both goods and labor. We can tax rich people’s incomes when they die. We can tax the high ticket unnecessary items like vehicles, furs and jewelry. We can tax things that are negative for a society, like alcohol, tobacco, junk food and gambling. In many countries food is taxed, in others it isn’t. Some believe that the fairest tax is on land.

“Those on the economic top of society usually prefer consumption taxes and lots of deductions. Consumption taxes fall heaviest on the poor. The poor, of course, want the rich taxed more. So in your ideal society what types of taxes would you advocate. Remember that higher taxes tend to reduce the activity taxed. Taxes on businesses may force businesses to move to a lower tax country. Too much tax on income reduces the desire to work unless working is necessary for survival.

“A couple of other things can help. If productivity increases, possibly through the efficient use of robotics and computers, this can increase the wages and the taxes of the workers.”

“When determining your ideal income tax for your ideal society, you might want everyone to pay the same proportion of their income. This would be flat tax, probably with no deductions allowed. This has worked well in Estonia and some of its neighbors, like Russia. You might want a progressive tax in which as income level rises the tax rate rises. So for the first \$10,000 the tax rate would be the same for everyone. Then for the next \$10,000 the rate would go up and all who earned \$10 to \$20 thousand, and so on for each income level. There will probably be a top level in the 40 to 60% level. A few years ago in a country with an 80% top tax rate many in that tax bracket just decided it wasn’t worth working, so they vacationed for several months a year. This, of course, reduced the economic output so the government reduced its top tax rate significantly. Another type of taxation reduces the tax rate as the income rises. In this approach the people are more likely to pay the actual costs that the government incurs on their behalf.

“When taxing income, if withholding taxes are used to collect money from employees you are guaranteed some income. But shop keepers around the world often don’t declare the cash they take in. They commonly give you a discount for cash because they don’t have to pay the credit card fees and they won’t pay income taxes on what you paid. To avoid this you might have to have everyone in your ideal society use a credit card so that there would always be a record. But since credit cards always carry a fee, another type of card might be required to register the transaction. Rich people may use tax shelters if they are available. They may run their investments through foreign banks that don’t report income to any country. So taxing the rich, even if taxed minimally, is often like trying to catch a greased pig at the county fair.



-- “But doctor, in spite of the loopholes for the rich, in the U.S. the top 1% of taxpayers pay a third of all income taxes, the next 9% of earners pay another third, so the lower 90% of wage earners pay only about 30% of all income taxes.”



--That’s a good point Con. In most advanced countries the tax burden falls most heavily on the rich. But the socialized countries also get a hefty amount from the poorer consumers. When we look at the percentage of the total amount of money a society makes that ends up as taxes we find that Denmark and Sweden are taxed the heaviest at 48 and 47% of their gross domestic product, France is at 43% and Norway at 41%, (36a) Ireland at 28%, Japan, South Korea and the U.S are in the mid-20s and Mexico at 20%. When you look at the percentage that comes from business profits and income we find Norway at 22%, Sweden and Denmark at 20%, the U.S. and Ireland at 13, France at 10, Japan and Korea at 8 and Mexico at 5%.

We can also compare Estonia’s 23% flat tax on corporate and individual incomes and its 18% sales or value added tax to Denmark’s 24% corporate tax but a personal income tax of 38 to 59% and a sales tax of 25%, or to Mexico with a 29% corporate tax, a 3 to 29% personal income tax and a 15% sales tax or to Monaco’s 33% corporation tax with no personal income tax and a 20% sales tax. Then there’s the United Arab Emirates with none of these taxes. They get their money by taxing banks and oil producers. So it’s a good idea if your ideal society sits atop millions of fermenting dinosaurs and is oil rich.

“Then some suggest that to equalize incomes a bit there should be a negative income tax where poor people are paid money rather than taxed. The question again is do you want to emphasize liberty and economic productivity or do you want equality based on the assumption that somehow all people are equal so they should have equal or nearly equal incomes.

“In setting up your ideal society there is a limit to how much the government can tax and keep its economy humming. Individual ideas and selfishness start companies—but highly socialistic governments may tax them to death with short work weeks, year long paid maternity leaves, and long paid vacations. The cost is too high to start up and run the businesses that will employ people and will contribute to the society. Under communism the businesses couldn’t even start.

“Society has to consider that income must be produced. Farming and manufacturing produce income. Civil service work does not. Since teachers prepare some people to become producers, they are a necessary expense. Police, firefighters and soldiers protect the wealth. But many civil service jobs are not productive of income, they merely help to run the society. Meter maids issuing vehicle parking citations, toll and tax collectors, and county appraisers are such people. Some may make society run smoother, like building and safety inspectors and road builders. All are necessary but all reduce the actual income earned by the total society. We can’t lose sight of the fact that all of society’s expenses are paid by the profits of the business enterprises, both the privately and the publicly owned, and the farmers.

“Once we decide what we want to tax we can then collect the taxes in money, as is usually done, or in labor. In advanced societies it is much simpler to collect money, if it can be easily wrested from the potential taxpayer. In earlier days serfs gave a part of the fruits of their labor to the landowner as their tax.”



--“Did you know that research shows that economic growth is inversely proportional to tax rate. For businesses the higher tax rate makes starting or expanding a business less economically enticing because, this may sound strange but, the objective of a business is

generally to make as much money as possible. Why start or conduct a business in a high tax nation when you can do it in a low tax nation?

“For the worker, he or she is ‘in business’ to make as much money as possible for the work done. The question for the worker is whether he wants to make his own decisions about his health care and retirement or if he prefers that the government does it. If he wants health care and retirement benefits it will cost money. Where can he get the biggest bang for his buck?

“Several scientific studies have indicated a clear relationship between high taxes and low economic growth. Case studies confirm this direct connection; high taxation brings weak economic growth while low taxation generally brings high economic growth.

“It was demonstrated in the U.S. where the twenty-five states with the lowest tax pressure had an economic growth rate per capita that was one third higher than the rest of the states. Sweden, with a very large public sector and a tax burden that is higher than any other country in the world, is perhaps the best example of the direct relationship between taxation pressure and economic growth.

“A doctoral thesis in Sweden showed that there is a clear correlation between the size of a country’s public sector and that country’s economic growth. The larger the public sector, the lower the economic growth. 1% more of Gross National Product to the public sector means 0.23% less economic growth. (37) Since 1970 Sweden has increased taxes considerably, from 40 % of GDP in 1970 to 53 % in 1998, and is today the only OECD-country with a total tax pressure including social security contributions above 50 %.

“In Ireland the taxes were cut from 53% in 1986 to 35%. This resulted in a 50% increase in jobs and an average wealth creation of over 5% per year. So in twenty years it jumped from 22nd to 4th place in the OECD prosperity ranking. As its wealth increased the total taxes collected increased so the social welfare benefits were not reduced and were often increased. The Irish taxation model has shifted from taxing labor to taxing consumption. Its value added tax is 21%, but it is still below the Nordic countries level of 25%.

“The Irish approach is now seen as the most efficient. It surpasses all other EU members in prosperity, job creation, social expenditure and productivity per working hour. In spite of the facts showing that the Nordic welfare model is economically negative. The idea that the government will give you more and more even if you work less and less, is appealing to many selfish people in a democracy.

“Obviously when you tax production you limit productivity. Europe has more ability to produce per worker because of more efficient technology. But the less efficient production in China, Thailand or Vietnam is more than made up by its lower wages and lower taxation which gives a lower cost per item. Tax what you don’t want. If you don’t want jobs, savings, citizens with disposable income to fuel a country’s economy, raise taxes. If you want to encourage something, don’t tax it. Just compare the Asian tax rates with the European. The income tax rates of China are 5 to 40%, in India 10 to 30 and Japan 5 to 40 and their value added taxes are 17%, 12.5% and 5%.

“Looking at our country, you may read that 15,000 new jobs were created, but if the work force increased by 25,000 because of immigration or people returning to the work force, you have an increased unemployment rate. And when George W. Bush passed tax cuts, while it did increase corporate profits and the incomes of the top 20% of wage earners, wages stayed flat and inflation inched up, the average household income was reduced and the yearly deficit stayed incredibly high. And to the chagrin of many economists, the economy sagged.

“Cutting expenses, while it seems logical, does not get legislators or executives elected. The politically savvy thing is to do is to pull the political wool over the voters eyes, promise more spending and more tax cuts.”



-- “If you handled your home finances like that you’d lose your house or go bankrupt. But moving to another issue, some of us don’t like paying for the military or for farm

subsidies or for the education and health care for illegal immigrants. Should our ideal society give us the option of where our contributions go? If it were a real democracy maybe that's the way we should do it. I give all my tax money to government research and you give all yours to the university system.



---“What about taxing churches? In the U.S. churches are often given tax free privileges. This is commendable if you want more churches. But churches and church businesses don't have to follow many federal laws that other organizations must—like equal opportunity employment.

“Under the Bush administration church sponsored groups, such as charities, were given multi-millions from administrative funds. When these church contributions were challenged in court, the Bush appointed conservative Supreme Court judges ruled that it was OK. (38) Taxpayers have no right to sue over a church and state issue when the administration has used its own discretionary funds.



—“Your nation, and many of your states, allow religions to avoid the law. Often religious school teachers don't need teaching credentials, and their pre-schools and schools may be able to avoid state safety regulations. Religious freedom to operate schools and pre-schools is secondary to child safety which is required in non-religious schools. Income taxes can usually be avoided. They may be immune from civil rights laws and may not be sued. Several hundred exemptions and preferential treatments for religions and their social services have been passed by your federal government recently. Although there are some politicians who would like to minimize or eliminate this state subsidy.



---“There was a recently passed federal law that eliminated federal taxes on members of the clergy for their housing allowances, which is about a third of their compensation. This was done because of their service to society. But others who serve society, like ghetto teachers, nurses or other people in non-profit organizations who do more than ministers for your society—and they don't get housing allowances.”

“Along that same line, only one state requires churches to pay unemployment insurance. So in all the other states a church employee who loses her job gets no unemployment benefits. So in effect, the churches are cheating their employees while enriching themselves. Many states also allow church publications to avoid sales taxes. But some courts have found that such a tax break violates the First Amendment's prohibition of establishing a religion.

“Often the churches enter into businesses with tax breaks and without regulation and compete against other businesses that don't have such preferential treatment. Both statutes and court decisions have helped them to do this. The powerful religious lobbies are not only not separated from the state but they are often powerful movers within the government. So many religions get a great deal of financial support.



—“As opposed to your country where there is supposed to be a separation of church and state, Norway has a state religion. The government supports its church, the Lutheran church, but it also financially supports every religion and the humanist organization with a financial amount equal to the per capita registration of its membership. The federal government gives \$200,000,000 a year to support the ministers and bishops. Then from the federal money

given to the communes to run their governments, another \$300,000,000 is given to churches to pay for buildings and the salary costs of other church workers. The total amount is about $\frac{1}{4}$ of 1% of the total national budget. 83% of the population is registered as Lutheran, 4% are other Protestant denominations, 2% are Muslims and 2% are humanists and 1% are Catholics.”



—“If we are going to give tax breaks to churches and church businesses because some people think they are valuable to a society, should we give tax breaks to symphony orchestras and operas and to their musicians and singers? How about secular private schools and hospitals? What about fitness centers and their owners and employees. How about super markets? Food seems to be somewhat important for a majority of the people. According to this, ‘it’s good for society’ line of thinking we shouldn’t tax doctors or nurses, grave diggers or street cleaners—and certainly not trash collectors! But whether the object of religious spending is pro-society or not, contributions to American churches are deductible to Americans’ income taxes. That is sure another pro-church windfall when there is supposed to be a separation between church and state.”

ECONOMIC GROWTH RATE



—“Let’s get back to the economics of societies and how they tax and borrow. The way we measure growth rate is by determining the Gross Domestic Product, or GDP, of all goods and services produced in a country. Then we can divide that by the number of people. The GDP of the United States has been increasing faster than that of the EU countries but so has its population. So when you take the per person percentage of the GDP the US and the EU are about even. The U.S. has had too many immigrants who don’t contribute effectively to the GDP. Now, in spite of the low producing immigrants, the per person GDP in the US is again topping the EU. But you can’t lump all the states or countries together. California produces more GDP than Mississippi, and Ireland produces more than Italy.

“There were some real success stories, like Ireland and Estonia. Many countries sought to learn from them. Estonia was the new kid on the block. It had made amazing progress since it was freed from Soviet dominance in 1991. Its economy was increasing faster than China’s. Monthly income is low for Europe at \$650 a month. Productivity is not up to Western Europe’s standards but its low wage more than makes up for it. It started with a flat tax on income of 26% and has been dropping it steadily. It has no tax on corporate profits. It has a budget surplus and its national debt is decreasing rapidly. There was the question of whether they should copy the welfare state programs of its neighbors. Birthrates were down but are now rising, possibly because mothers get 15 months of maternity leave at full pay. Then the recession of 2008 hit and the high flyers crashed harder than the more established economies. Can these countries teach us something that we can use for our utopia?

REAL WEALTH PER PERSON

“But right now those of us in the West are leading pretty good lives, and we think that what we experience today will obviously continue forever. Few of us concern ourselves with the macro-economics of our globalized world. But look at what we know about Europe and the U.S., in terms of purchasing power parity or PPP, the Americans are about 40% richer than the Europeans. This is primarily because more Americans work and they work about 20% more hours per year than the average European. They also enter the work force earlier and work longer before retiring. So while the Europeans produce about as much per hour worked, they just don’t work as much.

“There is a European report that showed that if we compared the purchasing power of European countries, with the exception of Luxembourg, to the 50 states in the U.S., European

countries would compare quite unfavorably. Denmark would be the twelfth poorest state, France, Germany and Italy would rank in the lowest five states. If the Europeans ever decided to work more and vacation less, they would probably catch up with us.

“Both the U.S. and Europe are technologically superior to the developing countries. As an example, the average US agricultural worker, because of mechanization, produces about 650 times what a Vietnamese farmer produces. So if we reduced our wages and lowered our standard of living we could probably compete with China and Thailand. But of course nobody wants to regress for success.

BORROWING

“The US borrows from Asia and Europe to fund its economy. American growth is funded to a large degree by foreign borrowing which keeps U.S. taxes low. Like their government, U.S consumers spend more than they earn. Annual interest on the U.S. national debt is about 40% of the individual income tax receipts or 25% of all governmental receipts.

“The U.S. should copy northern Europe in keeping its borrowing down and raising taxes to pay for what it spends. The EU should copy the US in working long enough to pay for what they get and they should reduce the public sectors of their states to reduce taxes and make working more worthwhile. The childcare incentives of many European countries are also counter to the needs of the world.

BUDGET DEFICITS AND NATIONAL DEBTS

“Public debt, as a percentage of gross national product is: 209% in Lebanon, 176% in Japan, 108% in Italy, 105% in Greece, 100% in Singapore, 67% in Germany, and 65% for the U.S., France and Turkey, 50% in Sweden, 45% for Denmark, 28% and Ireland 22% Estonia 3% and Hong Kong 1%. (39) The U.S. percentage doesn't look so bad, but because it has the world's largest economy and it has a perennial trade deficit, it should be something to worry about. Its low taxes haven't made its products cheap enough for many other countries to buy. Look at the high tax Nordic countries with much less need to borrow abroad. China, with the world's largest foreign exchange reserves, in excess of a trillion dollars, with three quarters of it in U.S. Treasury bonds, isn't borrowing much!

“While the U.S. debt is high at 65% of its yearly gross national product, compared to Norway's zero percent and Australia's 16%, it is about the same as France's and Germany's. Yet it is only about 60% of Italy's and only 40% of Japan's. Japan will spend 25% of its GNP on its aged population by 2050 and may have debts of 400% of GNP in ten years, in 2030.

“A hundred years ago the U.S. national debt was three billion dollars or \$30 per person, now the debt has increased 3000 times while the population has only tripled. So the per person share has only gone up 1000 times to \$30,000. Even after World War II it had gone up only 60 times, then it reduced a bit through the Truman to the Johnson presidencies. Then it more than doubled through Carter's term to \$4,500, then more than doubled during Reagan's eight years. It jumped another 50% to \$17,000 per person during the four years under the first Bush, rose almost 20% more during Clinton's eight years to \$20,400, then increased much more under George W. Bush to about \$30,000 per person, nearly three times the per person debt of the average Englishman. Bush increased the national debt by over 60% to well over nine trillion dollars.

“It seems that the tax cutting strategies of some presidents, while it gets them votes, do not stimulate business enough to stabilize or reduce the national debt. And they are not aided by congresses that continue to spend more than they take in. It may be a hard lesson, but there is no such thing as a free lunch!”



—“So every American man, woman and child owes about \$30,000 as their share of the national debt? The Founding fathers were against a national debt and intended, as Alexander Hamilton said, ‘the extinguishment of all debt.’ And as I remember, Thomas Jefferson wrote, ‘I place economy among the first and most important of republican virtues, and public debt as the greatest of dangers to be feared.’ But the spendthrift sons of the Founding Fathers have not followed their prudent path of fiscal responsibility. The credit card mentality of our national leaders preceded the introduction of the Visa and American Express credit cards, but its birth seems to have affirmed the banker’s imperative to spend now and pay later. Thank God we’re not paying credit card interest on our national debt! 3 or 4% is more than enough.

“Why can’t I just have the government finance my credit card purchases? I’d save 15% on my yearly interest so I could spend even more!



--“Spoken like a true American politician, Wreck. We pay over \$400 billion in interest per year. With 135,000,000 income tax payers, this equals over \$3000 per worker per year for interest on the national debt. Of that, over a quarter is owed to foreign governments, mainly China and Japan. With the money we spend for interest on our debt we could pay for 70% of the Department of Defense budget or could fund most of the Social Security deficits.

“Where will it stop, the percentage of net salary owed on the debt has gone up every year for many years. What we owe on the national debt to foreign interests comes out to a debt of \$7,500 for each man, woman and child. And we owe American bond holders about \$25,000 for each of us.

“For our utopia we obviously need to decrease spending or increase taxes without making such economic waves that working capital will not surf away from the country and that workers will not be so discouraged by higher taxes that they will opt for more time at the beach.



--“You don’t want to get into the predicament that some countries have had to endure like bankruptcy or devaluing their currency. The main problem is that people don’t like changes in what the government has promised. But looking at the real world, in your country a real leader must emerge from the politicians and convince the people of the reality of national economics. You simply don’t have the resources to fund the benefits you’ve been promised.”



—“Politicians spend to grease the wheels that drive their campaigns while they lie about the cost of the grease to those who are paying for it. For example the American tax cuts from 2001 to 2006 gave every middle income American a tax cut of nearly \$1900, which was loudly proclaimed by the U.S. President. But at the same time the added national debt burden from the wars and other expenses added about \$9000 to every individual’s share of the national debt. So rather than saving money, the individual actually owed about \$7,000 more than he did before the tax cut. Only one group actually gained. That was the top 1% of population in wealth, those earning more than a million and a quarter dollars per year. That top 1% got a tax cut of over \$85,000 while their share of the added debt was about \$55,000 so they actually pocketed a savings of about \$30,000. But for the average American, for every dollar in tax cuts gained there was a debt of \$3.75. Obviously when you borrow money for a tax cut you just give yourself a major tax increase.”



—“But there’s another major negative, as the former head of the Federal Reserve Board Alan Greenspan said, the growing federal debt can ‘drain funds away from private capital’ eventually slowing the growth of living standards. So by living beyond our means we are shooting ourselves in the foot and shooting our children where they carry their wallets.

“On the other hand, a dollar today buys less than half of what it did twenty years ago and it is only worth a tenth of what it was worth 50 years ago. The monthly CPI report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows this. So maybe we just have to wait until the dollar is worth nothing, then pay off all our debts in one day! If we want programs we have to realize that we will pay for them. We are either taxed now or later. If we borrow from other countries to fund our desired programs we will pay interest yearly and eventually have to pay it off. If we borrow too much we just devalue our currency. The world’s bankers did it to us during the George W. Bush years, dropping the value of the dollar by 50% against most countries currencies. So foreign imports, like oil, and foreign travel cost us much more. There’s no free lunch! We have to pay for what we get.”

CRIME AND ITS COSTS



—“Crime should certainly be minimized in our ideal society. It is a huge cost for many governments. There is the cost of the crime, which may include: injuries to victims that require hospitalization, the victim’s loss from being absent from work, and he may be incapacitated for some time—possibly for life. If the society has to pick up hospital bills or aid to the victim’s family, that adds another cost. If the victim paid for insurance, the insurance costs go up and that is reflected in the business costs of all businesses and is reflected in the consumers’ costs.

“A street gang not only fights and kills, they increase hospital costs for all because the cost of free treatment for gang bangers is reflected in the other charges the hospital makes and the insurance companies charge. If a gang sells drugs, the costs are reflected in the policing and in the jail time of the sellers and users. If the users get medical or psychological treatment it comes at a cost. So the costs of crime go well beyond policing and jailing the criminals. Then when you have anti-social groups you can expect them to act anti-socially in as many ways as they can, from robbery to murder and from drug manufacture and sales to protection rackets.

“Organized crime activities seem to have sprung up in most countries. Illegal betting, protection rackets, smuggling, pornography, and the white slave trade all cost society in money and in human hardship. Then there are the drug cartels. And of course you have the white collar crime that has cost investors billions.

“So called mafias yield a great deal of power through fear and finances. While their influence is small in countries like Norway, it is gigantic in Russia, Columbia and South Africa. These anti-social organizations are often better financed than the police departments, and because of corruption, they often control the police and the government. Maybe Robin Hood would have been considered a Mafioso in his day, but he robbed the rich and gave to the poor. Today’s mafias rob everybody and control much more than any utopia can tolerate.

“Russia has about 5000 contract killings a year. Fearless investigative journalist Anna Politkovskaya’s murder in 2006 was a sensation because it hit the world press. But she was just one reporter who ruffled one or two corrupted feathers, but there are lots of trees full of buzzards waiting to swoop down on the righteous.

“Anyone charged with a crime in an advanced society costs that society huge amounts in judges’ salaries, court costs, police time, public defenders, and jail or prison costs. With the average prisoner costing over \$25,000 a year to keep in jail and with the costs of building prisons

at about \$50,000 per cell, we have a considerable expense. Then we have the parole system with parole officers and their bureaucratic expenses.”



—“We can all experience crime. It’s not like it is so far removed from our daily lives. It’s closing in on us rapidly. Burglaries, often caused by drug addicts, cost us and the insurance companies. Street crime is rising. I always felt safe walking the streets in Soviet Russia. My only fear was the KGB. While they had called me in several times I was always treated kindly. But today you fear for your wallet, if not your life. On my last visit to St. Petersburg I had just left the subway and was riding the escalator up to the street level. All of the sudden both my arms were pinned to my side and I saw that I was surrounded by five men. At least two were picking my pockets. Then when we got to the street they disappeared in all directions. My friend was a few meters behind me and didn’t notice a thing. We went to the police department to report it but they wouldn’t talk to us unless we paid a 1000 ruble bribe. We paid but there were no results from their filing the report. So we have crime in and out of government.

“I read recently that in Baldwin Village, where I lived as a child in Los Angeles, a three year old girl was purposely shot at point blank range so that her killer would have passed his initiation for gang membership.”



—“But what about corporate crime? Look at Enron and WorldCom, look at the fraud, embezzlement, insider trading, lobbyist graft of politicians and other ways the people at the top fleece the little investing or voting lambs. In the past they have often been able to get off with a slap on the wallet, if they show sufficient remorse. Now with sentences of 15 to 25 years for fifty and sixty year old CEOs and 3 or more years for politicians who have abused their office for financial gain, some of these major league crooks are re-drawing their maps and taking the higher road. If there’s no penalty or little chance of getting caught, self centered values will often rule. But if prison is a viable option, self centered values may take us in another direction.

“Look at the punishments offered for crimes, death or a life sentence for murder, or twenty years if you fraudulently lost billions of dollars of your employees’ pension funds or of your investors’ money. Compare that to a felony conviction of 6 months to two years for possessing four ounces of marijuana in Texas.

“When looking at the negatives for your ideal society you may decide that stealing a few billion dollars of people’s pensions might merit a higher prison sentence than possessing marijuana or helping somebody commit suicide when you are aiding them to fulfill their deepest wish. Maybe such a financial crime should be punished more severely than murder.”

FOREIGN AID AND GLOBILIZATION



—“Is your ideal society going to help other less affluent neighbors? Will you budget for giving food to poor countries? Will you send in Peace Corps type people to help people help themselves? Will you forgive the financial debts that some countries owe you? Will you help to develop other countries’ infrastructures? Will you allow outsourcing of labor intensive jobs?

WAR OR PACIFISM

“Will your ideal society be prepared to defend other states’ freedoms or will you take the pacifistic route and hope to avoid the conquerors that appear every generation? Pacifism, as emphasized by Sweden or Switzerland, is not necessarily a position that promotes peace. It just

saves your hide from being whipped. Standing by while dictators take the freedom of their own citizens then enslave the people next door may protect you for a while but you will eventually be snared in the ogre's web. When should Hitler have been stopped? Attila? Saddam? You may keep the warriors from your door for a while but when will they want to take over your living room? Certainly the surest way to conciliate a tiger is to be devoured by him!

“If you have a war, is it really a big deal if some people are killed? The Scottish philosopher David Hume said that the life of a man is no more important to the universe than the life of an oyster. The friends and family of the person killed may shed a few tears, as will his creditors, but who will remember him or her in a generation? If we take Hume's approach, or the approach of any leader who starts a war, neither soldiers nor non-combatants need be considered.

“That brings to mind Voltaire's observation that ‘It is forbidden to kill; therefore all murderers are punished unless they kill in large numbers and to the sound of trumpets’”

THERE ARE NO ANSWERS



—“I don't think there are any right answers to what a society should be like and how it should be taxed. That's why voters tend to toss out liberals for conservatives, who have all the answers, then they toss them out for the liberals who have all the answers. The truth is that the only ones with the answers to societies' problems are always out of office! It's usually lower taxes versus more services or unemployment or immigration issues. Perhaps we can see a strong possibility that the economic theory of when you tax high you generally have weak economic growth and if taxes are low you are more likely to have high economic growth. But which taxes and at which tax rates does each occur? Should you have low taxes on corporations to bring them into your country? Should there be low taxes or a flat tax on labor to attract hard working laborers? Should you tax the consumers higher to get the money necessary to run the government or tax them lower to increase spending, hopefully keeping the money in rapid circulation and possibly gaining more tax revenues from increased individual worth”



—“I think things are complicated by the evolution of modern democratic thinking that the individual is primary—rich or poor, young or old, productive or non-productive. This makes the welfare state have some appeal. But since the modern welfare state requires a tax burden of around 50%, many of the rich, productive and young citizens leave for greener, less costly, pastures. If your ideal country is lucky enough to have lots of oil or you have creative minds who can develop products that are universally desired, like cell phones or software, you may be able to survive. Or maybe you can provide a universally needed service like gambling or vacation destinations.



—“Sweden is a bit shy of bikini weather in December so maybe we should make Monaco or Las Vegas the site for our ideal low tax, high income society.



—“It seems that ‘use’ taxes make sense for at least a part of a government's income. We should tax cars and fuel heavily to provide for road building and repair and for the gasoline exhaust clean-up technology needed? We should also have higher taxes on luxury items. Then should people provide their own health and pension insurances?”



—“OK, we’re taxing. But we haven’t answered the type of society we want. And we all know that we will never get universal agreement on anything—health care, pensions, education, the military or any of the other hundreds of things a society needs. On top of that, modern economies are tricky to manage. We need fewer farmers because machines do so much of the work. We need fewer production workers because robotics and computers increase the output of each worker. So fewer people are needed to produce wealth. But how many purely service jobs can a producing economy employ? How many waiters and cooks, manicurists and barbers, doctors and nurses do we need? Then, of course, people keep wanting more goods and services. I guess the one thing we must have is more creative minds! If we could only predict the future of micro and macro economics—without error.”



—“Wreck, maybe we can perfect a software program that will predict society’s needs and potentials. Formula One auto racing teams have computer projections that guide their decisions regarding combinations of wind, weather, fuel levels, anticipated reactions of other competitors to varying situations. Prediction software is being used more in business. It has been used for years in football, figuring down, distance, score, position on the field and such. But predicting micro and macro economics for the globe is so complicated. Populations in each corner of the earth must be analyzed in terms of growth, economic output, consumer needs, etc. Weather is a big factor. Rain, sun and wind, are certainly considerations. Then there are natural disasters like tsunamis, hurricanes and forest fires.

“Then what types of taxes should we employ and what should their effective rates be, then individual productivity in every geographical and technological area. There is also the status of the bureaucracies, their costs and their effectiveness. There is even the need to plan for future developments. How many in 1960 could have predicted the computer and the internet and what they have done for today’s world. Who in the 1800s could have predicted today’s air transportation and the trips to space? Predicting what will happen tomorrow is impossible today. But the modern world requires accurate predictions to stabilize the world’s economy.

“So if we are going to base our ethics on a societal basis there are millions of things to consider. It isn’t enough to say we’ll have a republic, or a communistic economy or a welfare state. So I guess we will have to go about it pragmatically, one issue at a time—sales tax, abortion, farm subsidies, tax credits. But at least we know that there is a basic assumption for ethics that is based on group interests. Too bad we can’t be sure and know all the psychological, sociological or economic variables that we should consider.

“Trying to develop a realistic utopia today is so much more complicated than those classic utopias of Plato, Bellamy, Bacon or Campanella. They tended to look at just one or two aspects of society. But a realistic utopia would have to consider economics, political science, religions’ influence, philosophy, , genetics, sociology, psychology and a number of other variables. It is so complicated that I don’t see how we can even use society based assumptions. I think it is even more complicated than the religiously based assumptions. Both have too many variables!

THINKING EFFECTIVELY

HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT WE THINK WE KNOW?



--“Well we’ve looked a bit at basic assumptions that are always fundamental to our thinking. And as you said Con, they’re not as simple as they might appear on the surface. A god based assumption might be theistic, polytheistic, pantheistic or a number of other possibilities. A society basic assumption might include various economic possibilities of a society, political possibilities, problems of liberty versus equality or civil rights versus the safety of the population. So each basic assumption will vary with the individual ‘assumer’. Two Muslims may very well disagree on their basic assumptions, just as two Christians might. So what we are assuming can vary greatly even if we think that we are assuming the same assumption.

“But before we begin to do what we call ‘thinking’ we must look at the evidence available to us that will build on our basic assumptions. The better the evidence we use, the better the chance we have of leading an intelligent and fulfilling life. And the evidence we use will vary even more than will our basic assumptions.

“Any basic assumption can be the ladder up to happiness or down to despair, depending on the truth of the evidence we use and its applicability to our assumptions and to our lives. But some evidence is better than others. We can look at empirical evidence, evidence that is provable over and over again. Then there’s historical evidence that happened once and that may or not have been eye-witnessed. Of course our traditions, both religious and secular, are extremely important and controlling in our lives—even if they may actually be harmful to our functioning. Then there are the ideas that come from religious or secular authority. And we shouldn’t forget that reasonable ideas are often found in philosophy. We might even count on our common sense—but common sense is actually quite uncommon because we generally mistake our feelings for thinking.”



-- “How verifiable is the evidence. This should be our major concern. Is the historical evidence that Socrates or Jesus lived as strong as the evidence that hydrogen and oxygen are the ingredients for water? For over two millennia Socrates’ prison was considered to be on the Pnyx, a hill across from the Acropolis,—now it is considered to be in the agora, on the other side of the Acropolis. How accurate was our historical evidence? Is the evidence presented on the 6 o’clock news in New York as verifiable as that put on the BBC in London. Is the fact that the electric light generally comes on when you flick the switch as verifiable as the claims of politicians that they have improved the education in your country? Was the flood in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina as verifiable as the Biblical flood of Noah?”



—“Thomas Jefferson said “I was bold in the pursuit of knowledge, never fearing to follow truth and reason to whatever results they led.” Now, at the University of Virginia, which he founded, scientists have looked for evidence of reincarnation, ‘near death’ and ‘out of body experiences’ and other paranormal experiences. It is not uncommon for dying people to experience a bright light and see a loved one or a religious figure such as Jesus, Buddha or Moses, or a person or two dressed in white. The Vatican has confirmed that Pope Pius XII had such an experience and saw Jesus, who told him that his hour for death had not yet come. How verifiable is this parapsychological evidence? Is it really just the brain playing tricks? How many Muslims see Jesus on their death beds? How many Buddhists see Mohammad?”



—“Some scientists have duplicated these out of the body experiences in people using electrical stimulation of certain brain areas.

“Another area of the para-normal is telepathy. There is a great deal of evidence that some people can read some people’s minds. Many years ago the studies of Dr. Rhyne at Duke University seemed to have proved this. The Soviets did a great deal of work in this area. But the means by which telepathy is done are unknown. It is probably not like radio waves because experiments have been done that seem to discount that possibility.



---“I remember a number of years ago when I was president of the Malibou Lakeside Club some people wanted to rent the club house for an event. The group were into spiritual sorts of things and felt they could astral travel. They came to a board meeting and wanted to show their special powers. They asked us each to tell them somebody they should visit. Dr. John Messina our vice president volunteered. John was the head physician at the Motion Picture Hospital in Woodland Hills. He was treating film personality Godfrey McCambridge at the time. So he concentrated on Godfrey and the people flew their minds to the hospital and correctly described Godfrey in the hospital. So then I volunteered. But I cheated. I gave them the name of one of my friends and told where he lived. But I concentrated on another friend who looked nothing like the first. The magic people described the one I was thinking about, not the one they were supposed to fly to. Their skill was obviously telepathy, not astral traveling. Telepathy is a skill that I would never have, so I was impressed. But when I told them what I had done they were really upset. But they still rented the lodge.

“I recently saw a TV program with a spiritualist who said he could communicate with the dead. People in the audience would stand up and he would tell them things about themselves that their dead relative was telling him. They verified what he said. I thought that his skill was more likely to be telepathy—reading the minds of the people standing. Of course they verified what he said. Whether he was reading minds or communicating with dead husbands we’ll probably never know. But it made for interesting TV.

“If telepathy exists, the evidence for reincarnation, that a person has been born before, may be explained by the possibility that a newborn baby’s mind has read the mind of one who is dying or one who has lived at the same time as the newborn? If this is so, the newborn would remember some or all of the memories of the transmitting mind. When a person in India believes she has been reincarnated, neighbors accept it because it is a major belief in the Hindu religion. When it happens in a Judeo-Christian society it is usually passed off as an hallucination because the Judeo-Christian religion holds that we have only one life, then we head up or down at the end of it.”



----“I remember a famous case where an American woman thought she had been an Egyptian princess in a former life. She could even speak some Egyptian. But a researcher working to verify the story found that she spoke modern, not ancient, Egyptian. He also found that an Egyptian family had lived in the same building when she was a child. Was this reincarnation or merely the work of the sub-conscious mind and some imagination?

“Does the historical evidence of reincarnation give us hope? Is this because we can’t think of our own nonexistence? Or is it that we don’t want our existence to end?”



—“Based on our limited view of the whole world, we once thought that the world was flat. Our idea of time was similarly limited. St. Augustine and Isaac Newton saw it as we see it, we just look at the clock. But Einstein saw the speed of light as the ultimate measure of time. Many of our new technologies are based on Einstein’s theory of relativity rather than Newtonian, Augustinian or Aristotelian concepts of time—or science. Aristotle wrote that women had fewer teeth than men. He never bothered to count them. He said that heavy objects fall faster than light

objects, but never tested his statement for truth. The reason that empirical science is the best way of knowing is that we keep developing better tools of knowledge and when we investigate an idea we keep testing and retesting it.”

“The tools of science become rapidly better allowing scientists to observe more effectively. For example, the telescope of Galileo, which was only 20 power, was continually improved and eventually replaced by the Hubble space telescope which is 4500 to 8000 power. The two power microscope of the past gave way to the 1500 power optical scope then to the 500,000 power electron microscope of today. The measurements for dating changed from memory and stories about the past to counting tree rings, to carbon 14 dating for up to 50,000 years, then to radioactivity dating for older remnants of our past.

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE



--“Empirical science may start with hypotheses, which the non-scientists might call theories. Then experiments are designed to prove or disprove the hypothesis. When many experiments yield the same results then it is called a theory. But new evidence later discovered may change the theory. The idea that the earth was flat was supplanted with the theory that the earth was round, then that it was not quite round but rather an oblate spheroid, flatter at the top and bottom.

“Physical science is more verifiable than the social and psychological sciences. Physical anthropology gives evidence but without a complete picture. The Leakey’s work in the Olduvai Gorge has given us a great deal of evidence about the pre-human Australopithicus, but we don’t have evidence of every evolutionary change from some sort of ape to homo sapiens. But as newer scientific tools develop we have been able to fill huge gaps in the findings of the anthropologists.

“Of course physics and chemistry are much more verifiable. Astronomy has many aspects that are exactly measurable. Geology has a large number of measurable areas. But when we come to physiology, psychology or sociology we have more and more variables. It is much more objectively verifiable to measure the speed of a falling object in physics or test a chemical reaction in chemistry than it is to determine the causes of violence in a sociological setting. Still in each of these sciences we can understand the variables. The more the number of variables, the more difficult it is to approach certainty.



--“True, but people usually believe what fits their fancies rather than what is verifiable. Many of you Americans don’t believe in evolution but you believe in a Bible that has hundreds of inconsistencies and is based on some oral tradition of things that might have happened thousands of years before they were written down. Admittedly there are some gaps in the millions of changes in life forms during the last four million years. But the sciences of geology, biology and chemistry all point strongly in the direction of evolution. But the possible historical recantings in the Bible are not verifiable in any way. A virgin birth, a worldwide flood, a resurrection, a creation of the world only 6000 years ago. They learned these unverifiable ideas at their mothers knee. Most of their friends believe them. Television evangelists tell you they are true. I just can’t believe the naivety of your people!



—“Right. Did you know that 51% of Americans believe that God created humans in their present form. Another 30% say that humans evolved but God guided the process. Only 15% believe in a non-God evolutionary process. (40) But Americans are not alone in their anti-

scientific thinking. The Nazis wouldn't accept Einstein's theories. After all, what could a Jewish pacifist know about the universe? The Soviets wouldn't accept the genetic theories of Mendel or the evolutionary theories of Darwin because they didn't fit the political thinking of the government. So when the Soviet Union wanted to scientifically back up the idea that socially learned abilities could be passed on thru the genes they published biologist Lysenko's work as the only science of biology. It was wrong but it was the only politically acceptable 'science' so everybody had to use it. It put Soviet biologists many years behind because what was called empirical science by the politicians was not true science, and was certainly not verifiable.

"We have found the same thing happening recently. With the substantial evidence for global warming known by the scientific community and the general public, the American president, an oil man, first disagreed with its existence, then assigning lawyers to rewrite the scientific reports to obscure the findings of the reputable scientists. The interests of politicians must not be allowed to hold back the advance of science. We might have expected it a hundred years ago in the totalitarian Leninist time, but it should not be possible in a modern educated society. Maybe this is a reason to demand scientifically educated people as our leaders.

"But we keep electing us lawyers and some businessmen to the high offices. We haven't been educated in the hard sciences. We have usually studied political science, and maybe some history or philosophy, and of course law. Maybe you are expecting too much of us. How can we be expected to know about climatology, biochemistry, astrophysics, psychology and sociology? How can we lawyers know with the certainty of the empirical sciences?"



—"We all want certainty, but science gives us only probability and the tools to evaluate the probable—looking for the better, not the certain, explanations. I guess we just have to follow Einstein's advice—to keep questioning.

"But you give me an idea. Maybe lawyers should take a class or two in the sciences before running for office, and the non-lawyers need a course or two in law. Legislators, executives and judges should demonstrate some competencies other than just being members of a political party.

"Science deals with facts, we humans generally deal in emotions, so the facts of science that confront our emotional needs are seldom believed, or are only believed by those with clear unprejudiced minds. Given the tendencies of humans for fantasy, it is amazing that science has been allowed to exist. Many fear the unknown, but documented evidence and truth is much scarier!"



—"But then politicians have another psychological force to contend with. If they want to be re-elected, they have to represent their constituencies even if those constituencies are anti-scientific, like the evangelicals or fundamentalist Muslims.



--"World-renowned astrophysicist Stephen Hawking said that the late Pope John Paul II once told him that as scientists they should not study the beginning of the universe because it was the work of God. 'It's OK to study the universe and where it began. But we should not inquire into the beginning itself because that was the moment of creation and the work of God.' But science is never content to let major questions go unanswered. It must seek answers, verifiable answers. It needs to theorize, then test, then re-test.

"Empirical science is based on the ideas that when you have a question or problem: First you must define what you mean, determine how to measure it and find out all you can, such as written information. Second, you develop experiments, observations or tests to determine whether a

concept or hypothesis is true. Third, you check alternate theories that might explain your findings. You may then retest to check your results.

“You may be trying to prove that the Earth is flat, that there is an unconscious mind, that God exists, that intelligence can be measured, that there was a Trojan War, that Moses existed, that there is a most effective way to make a free throw in basketball, that the government is corrupt. There are millions of questions. There are questions about nature, the supernatural, the planets, viruses, evolution, family life, education—and about every large and small aspect of every one of those questions.

“Many questions cannot be answered with today’s technology. Is there a purple cow on a planet near Alpha Centauri? Is there intelligent life elsewhere in our universe and if so has it contacted us? Some questions cannot be answered because we don’t have all the evidence. Was there a Trojan horse? How was Tutankhamen injured? What were the actual missing links between earlier apes and humans? What is the ultimately smallest particle in the universe? How can we find everyone perfect mates—or how do we find anyone a perfect mate?

“But as we educate more scientists in more areas and as we increase our technology, better evidence is found and the probability of the truth of our knowledge increases. We find greater probability in certain concepts, such as: the speed of light, the existence of ancient civilizations, the existence of neurotransmitters, how psychoactive drugs work, the theory of evolution.

“Hopefully our logical abilities will lead us to a more probable conclusion. But the same evidence does not always lead us to the same conclusion. For example, if we take the three numbers 2, 4 and 8 in a series and ask you to name the next number. You might say 16 or 10, Both would be right, but there are even more possibilities. So the same evidence doesn’t necessarily lead to a single conclusion. If you have atoms of hydrogen and atoms of oxygen how might you combine them? Your first thought would be H₂O, water. But they could also form hydrogen peroxide H₂O₂.

“Qumran, the site near the where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found was first seen as a monastery of the Jewish sect, the Essenes. Some even thought that Jesus was a member. Many years later a new and more probable theory emerged—that the site was used for pottery making. So as we get more evidence, even in history, our conclusions may change.

“Many scientists denied the extensive evidence for global warming. It wasn’t until the same evidence was found to be increasing that it became universally accepted by the scientists. Of course it wasn’t enough to convince all of the politicians who were protecting their financial links to the businesses that were doing the polluting.

“The more intelligent people have no problem admitting that they are wrong. The stupid can never do it. What they think of as their minds—are made up. But a mind made up ceases to exist. A mind must continually question or it isn’t working. Evidence and logic have no power to change many people’s traditions and customs. But if we do change our beliefs because of the preponderance of the evidence, if we have had the intelligence and conviction to accept beliefs with a higher probability than what we had believed, we risk being called heretics. And only the brave can accept the social disapproval that often comes with using our minds.

THEORY AS A START TO SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY

“In 1905 Albert Einstein published five papers that still excite us with questions about the universe. And as we discover as we think and research, the more we know, the more we know that we don’t know. Some optimists say that we know about 5% of the facts of the universe. That’s not bad figuring that empirical science is only a couple of hundred years old. We know little of what we call dark matter which is most of the universe. A hundred years ago we could only hypothesize about atoms, but today we have knowledge of sub-atomic particles, such as photons.



----“But what good is such research about the universe?”



---“Things like the atomic bomb and the microwave oven have developed because of Einstein’s ideas. And now we know that the age of the universe 13 to 14 billion years, that our galaxy has been around for 11 to 12 billion years, and that our solar system is about 4.5 billion years old. There is no question that such numbers boggle our primitive minds and make us question the myths that were created to explain the unexplainable to our primitive forebears.

HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

“Some historical facts are in the realm of science. They are highly verifiable. For some recent happenings, like World War II, we have films and eye witness accounts. But historical evidence is often politicized. Historians can pick and choose what they will examine and report on. Were all German soldiers anti-Semitic? Was Churchill the genius that the British say he was? Did Roosevelt really know that the Japanese were going to attack, but not tell his countrymen? Is history no more than ‘a tableau of crimes and misfortunes’ as Voltaire maintained? Is it the study of the past confirming that events never repeat themselves?

“Real historians want the truth, although some rewrite history to back up a political or religious system—which often requires ignoring or destroying important documents. We always need to know more about what really happened because so often history is an endless blending of fact and imagination.

“Some people deny the evidence because they haven’t heard of it. A lack of education, or a lack of objective curricula in one’s studies, can leave many people ignorant of many important things that have happened. For example, when the Iranian president Ahmadinejad convened a conference on whether or not the Nazi holocaust of the 1930s and 1940s existed, huge numbers of Muslims had never heard of it. It may not have been because the Muslim world was consciously trying to hide it, although that may have been true. The facts were that millions of Muslims were young and uneducated and what they had heard of genocide in their news reports was about Rwanda and the Balkans in the latter part of the 20th century—particularly about atrocities against Muslims. Additionally, the education of Muslims often includes the idea that Jews are trying to destroy Islam and that they are responsible for AIDS and for many wars.

“Look at the history of Christendom. There are more than thirty known gospels or ‘glad tidings’. Why did the early church fathers in the third century choose only those with the names Matthew, Mark, Luke and John? We know that they were not written by the apostles of the same names. The apostles were probably dead when these gospels were written. The gospel of John was probably written a hundred years after Jesus lived. Why did the early church leaders ignore the gospels of Thomas or Mary or Judas? Were all, some, or none of them actually inspired by God?

“There were many sects in area around Palestine at the time of Jesus, such as the Essenes, Nazarenes, Phibionites, Simonites, and others. Why were Jesus’s followers so successful. All the sects spoke of the soul going to Heaven, but only Jesus’s group talked about the resurrection of the body. This was an idea first proposed by the Zoroastrians. Did the Christians borrow the idea or did it develop independently? There were also other Messiahs at the time of Jesus, but their influence died while that of Jesus grew.

“Religious believers assume the truth of their myths then cite a few historical facts to prove their belief. Yes a town called Jericho exists. Yes there is a Temple of Solomon. But what is the proof that the Bible is the inspired word of God? There is no historical proof that Jesus was crucified on Golgotha, that he was resurrected, that he went to heaven. There is only the word of several people writing about it 20 to 100 years after it supposedly happened.



---“But isn’t that how most history has been written? Look at Homer’s history of the Trojan wars. Did Agamemnon, Achilles or Hector actually live? Was there ever a Trojan horse? Was Achilles impervious to injuries except for his heel? God can’t change the past, but many historians do, especially if they are justifying for a cause that is sacred or that backs up their basic assumptions..



“From the point of view of the empirical scientist or the serious historian, more proof is needed other than the personal experiences of a few people who say they have seen angels, saints or Jesus.

“Religionists say that the chances for a cell developing are more than a billion to one. That may be true. But the chance of a creator of the universe existing is far greater than that. If probability theory is to be used on one side of an argument it must be used on the other side as well.

“In the area of history sometimes we have only the words of a single person to indicate an historical event. Sometimes it is an eye witness, such as James Madison telling us about the development of the ideas of the Constitution in the Federalist papers. The ‘father of history’ Herodotus was not an eye witness to the Peloponnesian Wars. Did he see everything he wrote about? No.

“Stonehenge’s legends have been many. Some have said the devil bought the stones from a woman in Ireland; another story suggests they were placed on the plain by the fabled wizard Merlin; others have claimed that aliens built the monument and left it as a place for worship, or that Druids built it as a temple for sacrificial ceremonies. Others think that it was first a place for healing.

“The Old Testament, while supposedly happening from the dawn of creation, was not written until a few hundred years BCE. Of course if it is the inspired word of God, it is certainly correct. Adam and Eve were created about 4000 BCE. Abraham lived about 1800 BCE. Jonah was in the belly of a whale. There was a great flood that covered the earth and wiped out all people and animals in about 2350 BCE. The Red Sea parted for Moses and the fleeing Israelites, then closed in to drown the pursuing Egyptian army in about 1250 BCE. How verifiable is all this?

“The New Testament was written closer to the time of Jesus, but probably by people who never knew him. Matthew was probably written by 50 AD, but John probably not until after 100 AD. It is noted that Jesus tends to become more Godlike from Matthew to John. Then Paul, who never met Jesus, becomes his major evangelist. Of course if it is all the inspired word of God we can believe it all without analyzing it from the point of view of a critical historian.”



-- “Since history is written by the winners we might wonder about the factual situations of the American Revolution. The facts written by the American historians seem to be different from those reported by the English historians of the day.

“Getting a bit closer to home, just look at today’s textbooks in China and Kino. Wars, revolutions, socialism, Marxism and dynasties have been minimized while globalization, economics and technology are emphasized. Bill Gates, not Chairman Mao, is a hero. Chinese history is portrayed as much less violent than many of the events of the past might warrant. Modern history points to a more glorious future than to an exalted past.

“As so often happens, history in schools and churches leads the students toward the goals their society desires—toward democracy, socialism, preparation for war, toward economic success

or towards the favored religion. So history books often use the past to direct students toward a future societal goal, rather than accurately reporting and analyzing events of the past.”



---“And I thought that history was only about wars and religion. It seems that people are actually using the supposed study of history for propaganda for a future society.”



---“Isn’t that what history has always been used for? Its task has nearly always been to glorify your society’s past and aim it at an even more glorious future? But let’s get back to history, real history, as evidence. How about eye witnesses to a situation? Judges are quite familiar with eye witnesses to a traffic accident having quite different memories of the same recent event. And it is obviously impossible for a reporter or a group of reporters to remember a whole war, a whole presidential term or the complete happenings of any historical event. And the farther it is beyond the veils of history, or pre-history, the more mythical it is likely to be.

“So history is a combination of eye witness accounts, that may not be accurate or complete, tales from people who have heard about it, what the powers of religious and secular rulers want us to know, and some people’s imaginations. So unless it is the inspired word of God, as is said to be true of the Bible, the Qur’an or the Zoroastrian scriptures, we have to place historical evidence at a much lower level of probability than the empirical evidence of physics or chemistry.



---“But history is not all about oral or written words and traditions. History is often learned or amplified by physical evidence. The Sphinx and the tombs of the pharaohs give us evidence of the Egyptian civilization. The 8,000 terracotta warriors buried in front of the grave of the emperor Qinshihuang’s tomb 2200 years ago give us a glimpse of ancient Chinese culture—as do the earlier, but less impressive, graves and tombs in China. The bones and tools of australopithecus in Tanzania, the 200 cave paintings in France and Spain, and the foundations of Solomon’s Temple, all give us some physical evidence of history.

“Is the historical evidence of World War II as verifiable as the evidence of the Peloponnesian Wars. Is the evidence that there were once woolly mammoths on the earth as verifiable as the idea that there are elephants on the earth today? Is the evidence that water exists as verifiable as that an oxygen atom has 6 electrons? Is the evidence that most people have a sex drive as verifiable as that most males have penises? The physical world offers far more certainty in examining the evidence of chemistry or physics than do the social sciences of sociology or psychology. And how verifiable is the philosophical proposition that the world is matter and ideas come from matter, or that the Bible, whose earliest written historical evidence comes from the 2nd Century BC, is accurate in recounting things that happened thousands of years before the physical documents were written?



---“Certainly studying our human history is interesting and informative. It may even be able to help us to avoid the mistakes that were made in the past. But it seems that most political and religious leaders ignore the past and attempt to reinvent human progress. But the karma of the deeds of past leaders sweeps leaders of the present into the labyrinth of past errors, and the unlearned lessons of our past imprison the modern heretics who expect human nature to change. Again, the performance of power re-emerges as the tether of past events. So while the message of history remains, the players change. The situations change. The rationalizations for the actions of the actors change. It is in the reporting of the actions, actors and oratory that the evidence of history is questioned. Because nearly every story of our past is obviously charged with the drive for power. And in verifying the psychological drive for power we can look for the evidence in the

science of psychology. So science is often called upon to verify and illuminate the actions of the people who do the things that historians record and analyze.



--“It seems that you are saying that history is the record of things that never happened written by people who weren’t there.”



---“There’s more truth than sarcasm in what you say, Ray. What we call history is too often propaganda justifying the recent past or the sanctification of ideas our leaders foster and want us to follow—without knowing the real truth. So ideas or events of history often imprison our minds, rather than set them free.

“Here is an example. Muslims are not alone in often being controlled by events of the past. Jihadists have killed Moslems and others in Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Egypt as well as in Southeast Asia. The battle between the reactionary traditionalists and the more rational liberals dates from the 800s in Iraq. But inter-Islamic battles about who should lead the various sects also goes back to the beginnings. Then the Moslem conquests of North Africa, Spain and around the eastern Mediterranean and into southern Asia created more power conflicts about who should lead. The Crusades justifiably fostered an anti-Christian mind set. Then more recently the division of Palestine, giving part of it to the Jews, and the American intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan created more hostility.

“George W. Bush thought that by conquering Iraq he could instill his ideas of democracy and that freedom and respect for the various religions would take hold. The violent leaders might then be controlled or re-educated. The lessons of history show that it will probably take centuries to educate the people to the ideas of democracy and to shed their millennium old beliefs. Both history and psychology tell us that people generally don’t like to be conquered, especially those in the ruling classes. The result of his invasion was a huge negative reaction not only in Iraq and the Moslem world, but in the non-Muslim world as well. Recruits to the terrorists increased, jihadists attacked more countries, anti-Western feelings increased and the U.S was weakened both financially and in its ability to use any power that it might have had previously. Truly, those who do not understand history are condemned to repeat the errors in the use of power that history repeats endlessly. The conqueror so often ends as the conquered, either in the loss of power or prestige.”



—“And I thought the worst things Bush did were to dishonor God and the cowboys!”



—“There is more than the historical event that is important. Even more important is how it impacted the future. For example is France, or Europe, or the world, a better place because of Napoleon’s impact as a ruler? He killed off about 6 million people, 1-1/2 million from his own armies. Was that bad because of the total number of deaths or was it good for population control? His structure of laws was certainly a positive. The Napoleonic Code is the legal model for many countries. It codified laws so that the people now knew their bounds and they had equality before the law. His negative impact on monarchies may have aided the spread of democracy. The United States probably gained more than any country because of the Louisiana Purchase which allowed the United States to expand westward.

“He sponsored art, and stole art. He sponsored scientific inquiry. He instituted the metric system. He increased the separation of church and state.

“Again, on the negative side, his was a rather totalitarian government. There was also the scope of his wars that went far beyond the more typical two country wars. He also widened the scope of battle from merely the armies to the civilian population which might help support their army.

“So the ‘truth’ of your decision about Napoleon depends upon which factors weigh heavier on the balance scale of ethical and political achievements.”



—“When we want to change things for the better, we must be well versed in what has happened in the past and what stumbling blocks may fall in our path. No need to reinvent the wheel. It is seldom that a new idea arrives from a virgin birth. It usually has ancestors and relatives that will give us a clue. On the other hand the greatest atrocities are fueled by non-provable assumptions or the drive for power by tyrants.”

SCIENCE AND DEMOCRACY ARE SIAMESE TWINS



—“Science can’t tell us if there is life after death, but it can criticize some of the evidence for it. For example the out of body experiences or the tunnel of light with a relative or holy person waiting for us can be duplicated by stimulating certain areas of the brain. The theory of an instantaneous creation in 4004 BCE is questioned by the huge amount of evidence for evolution and for life of some sort having flowed for eons. Accepted stories of world wide flooding a few thousand years ago is countered by geologic and paleontological evidence showing that it never happened, and by historical evidence indicating that the Biblical story was probably adapted from other flood stories, like the Epic of Gilgamesh. And the Koranic story was taken from the Bible.

“So while one value of science is to be critical of all theories, both past and present, and both scientific and ephemeral, it does imbue us with values that help us to search for certainty—or at least probabilities. Its values include seeking demonstrable truth, criticism of scientific and non-scientific ideas, doubting the certainty of beliefs, open dialogue between antagonistic advocate for a theory, an honesty that follows the facts wherever they may lead, and a tolerance for views with conflicting but verifiable evidence. These values give us a new concept of probability, of pragmatism.

“We can see similarities between the pragmatism of democracy and the pragmatism of science. Both require educated practitioners. Both are looking for the best solution. Both have huge numbers of variables that need to be sorted out, eliminated or emphasized. Both should include a spirit of tolerance for other verifiable ideas. Both require freedom of speech. Both should be unimpeded by prejudicial ideas from philosophies and religions that preclude their verification.



—“Are you saying that democracies should leave religion out of their matrix. And philosophies too?



—“I know that not everyone would agree to this. And what we call democracies may choose to be totally religious. Look at Iran and Iraq. And certainly the philosophies of the Enlightenment were instrumental in the forging of the American and French democracies. What I

am trying to illustrate is that if an idea isn't verifiable it isn't of much use in science or in a pragmatic democracy. Has Islam made Iraq or Iran's people better off in terms of economic efficiency and happiness. Have they given the people freedom or have they suppressed it?



—“Of course you have to question how much freedom is actually good. The Dutch allowed prostitution and many drugs, but that freedom, or license we should probably say, brought some problems. Other criminal behavior, such as robbery, came along with it. So the government reined in some of the freedoms for the good of the society. Sociologically those freedoms were negative for the greater society. Another illustration in the prostitution allowed in Norway. It brought in prostitutes from Russia, Nigeria and East Europe. AIDS increased, so did drug usage. So it clamped down on the sex shoppers, the Johns. Many prostitutes left and brought with them the problems they had brought.

“The government of Iraq was undeniably Muslim. The problems of sitting enough Sunnis and Shias was a major task of government. The religion was primary. There are some similarities in Israel, where the Orthodox often hold the more religious Jews hostage. And look at America where George W.'s religious views and those of his Evangelical supporters pushed abstinence as the way to curb AIDS in Africa and the way to reduce pregnancies at home. Research showed that it didn't work—and it had far more negative effects than would have condoms.

“Philosophical ideas can also get in the way of democracy and science. Look at Marx's Communism in the Soviet Union and in China. Any idea of democratic elections was overruled by the essential and ultimate goal of Communism. Single party rule is not democratic. Democratic voting has never chosen a total Communist government. On the other hand, Socialism, or I should say the welfare state, has been chosen by some countries in democratic elections.



—“I think you see what I mean. Ideas gleaned from Rousseau, on the natural goodness of children and a basic feeling of equality, of the idea science is necessary for a utopian society, as Bacon thought, may find their way into guiding principles of a nation's political or economic thinking.

“Communism hasn't worked as an economic system based on totalitarian central planning. It held the Soviet Union back. But China's totalitarian regime allowed for some free enterprise and its economy rolled upward—aided by the totalitarian agenda to reduce its population. As we look at freedoms, time will tell if they work. Deregulating airlines worked for the consumers, but many airlines went bankrupt. A lack of regulating of home financing, business loans and investing, along with an excess of people who were not trained for the available jobs or who didn't want to work, led to the world-wide recession of 2008. Countries may learn from their mistakes. That is where democracy relies on science and intelligent observation. Economics looks at itself as a science, but how verifiable and predictive is it today? How much regulation of investment firms is optimal? How much money should investors be allowed to borrow? What level of borrowing by a government is optimal? Maximal? What is the optimal level of taxation on income? On sales? On food? How much annual income should be spent on education? On infrastructure repair? These are not nearly as verifiable as how much fluorine should be in the tap water or how many trans-fats should be allowed in the nation's cookies. In every level of a democratic society there must be the unfettered ability to question everything. . When your society prevents you from reasoning it is the Grim Reaper burying progress. When you stop questioning you are intellectually dead and are merely waiting for the Reaper's scythe. Whenever citizens are prevented from questioning their government, discussing global warming, bantering about the Big Bang, arguing about abortion, or evaluating the pros and cons of evolution—the society, as well as its empirical and historical underpinnings, are compromised. And this is not an area where compromise is acceptable.

EVOLUTION



--“What about Charles Darwin’s and Alfred Wallace’s theory of evolution as history? Is it history or science or both—“As you know, Lee, for nearly two hundred years scientists and religionists have grappled with the theory of evolution. Evolution is history but it is also science because we have the items we talk about—trilobites, dinosaurs, skeletons of pre-homo sapiens, and other fossils. It’s difficult for many to understand that all plants and animals have a common ancestor. But since scientific truth is actually more difficult to believe than a religious myth we often choose the myth. Can you imagine ten trillion galaxies each with millions or billions of suns and probably hundreds of billions of planets? It is beyond our comprehension! It’s simpler to believe that only our flat world exists and that it was created in six days. Six we can understand, infinity we can’t.

“The scientific theory of evolution is often misunderstood by non-scientists. While outside of science the word ‘theory’ generally means ‘speculation’ or ‘conjecture’, such as that ‘I have a theory about how to win at blackjack.’ So in the general sense it is a hypothesis, not yet proven. However the meaning in science of the word ‘theory’ means ‘a conclusion based on empirical facts that has been tested or is generally accepted and which can be used to make predictions in the areas studied by the various sciences.’ So Einstein’s theory of relativity is the best conclusion known for explaining a number of occurrences in the field of physics. And, the theory of evolution is the best conclusion for explaining the development of flora and fauna over the history of life on this planet. So in the scientific fields ‘theory’ does not mean an unproven hypothesis, but is rather a proven hypothesis. Consequently in scientific terms, evolution has moved from a ‘what if’ hypothesis to an ‘it is’ theory.

“The theory of evolution started with looking at the variation of animals and how the more primitive animals were found in the earlier geological strata. It moved on to classifying the various types of animals from the single celled amoebas to mammals, and since humans were doing the classifying we decided that we were the most intelligent. Along the way it was obvious that millions of species had died out. Saber tooth cats and tyrannosaurus now only inhabit museums. We thought we had pretty well stopped evolving, although some have postulated that our human successors will be large brained, large headed, small bodied humans. So we are probably just another link, not the end of the chain.

“Of course we can’t predict which way we will actually evolve, or whether global warming or nuclear warfare will bring our evolution to an abrupt end. But we can look backward and see that evolution is not really by chance. The accidents that happen through mutations and other means will tend to remain if they help the species, or they will die out if they don’t.

“The study of evolution may have developed with Darwin’s and Wallace’s theories but it has been verified by studies in a number of sciences. We first saw increasing complexity of organisms in succeeding strata of geological deposits. Wherever we looked we saw more complex development as the millions of years rolled on. As the sciences of paleontology and anthropology developed we looked at the human forerunners, their use of tools, their increasing brain sizes and complexity. We can see how common ancient ancestors sired species that evolved in different directions than we did. Paranthropus, was once thought to be somewhere in our evolutionary trail, now we find he was not. He died out while our ancestors continued to evolve along the path that led to us, and we too are evolving as long as we can keep our planet species friendly—controlling our ecology.

“New sciences have joined the hunt to clarify and deepen our understanding of the fact of evolution. We no longer need to look only at skulls and skeletons with the physical

anthropologists, we can trace the genetic trail from the earliest times by having the neuro-geneticists analyzing DNA and genes. We can analyze the skulls for brain form and complexity with the paleo-neurologists. Science after science confirms the empirical findings of our multi-million year descent to who we are today.

“As the human genome was studied it became clear that we are still evolving. During the last 15,000 years there have been many changes. The genes that show this evolutionary change include those responsible for the senses of taste and smell, digestion, bone structure, skin color and brain function. Darwin’s idea of natural selection is still at work. In making the transition from hunter-gatherers to farmers about 5000 to 7000 years ago it seems that some traits were more desirable than others. For example, Europeans developed the ability to digest milk in adulthood—because animal milk was a diet staple. Many humans still don’t have this genetic ability.”



--“While some think that evolution and religion are mutually exclusive, many religious believers reason that evolution is true. It is the divine plan of God. This divine plan obviously assumes that at some point in the evolutionary process, God put a soul into his advanced creations and we had humanity—we were thus made in the Image of God. Some religious scientists believe that understanding the idea of evolution is the key to affirming our faith in God. And St. Paul wrote in Romans 8:22 that ‘We know that the whole creation has been groaning, as in the pains of childbirth, right up to the present time.’

“From Pope Pius XII in 1950 to Pope John Paul in 1996, the popes have held that even though evolution is no longer merely a hypothesis, but Catholic tradition holds that at some point God creates the soul.

“In a different vein, in 2007 Pope Benedict wrote that ‘Science has increased our knowledge of life’s origins, but the theory of evolution is not completely provable because mutations over the millennia cannot be reproduced in the laboratory.’ (41) He concluded that the immense time span that evolution covers made it impossible to conduct experiments in a controlled environment to finally verify or disprove the theory. ‘We cannot haul 10,000 generations into the laboratory’, he said.”



—“But Ray, by his reasoning we would also have to bring his religious scriptures into the laboratory and re-enact the whole Biblical story, both the old and the new testaments. Then when he talks about the huge time-span covered by evolution theory, he doesn’t criticize his own beliefs which cover only a few thousand years of history. How might he criticize his own beliefs in a ‘controlled environment’?”



—“The Pope’s remarks were consistent with one of his most important themes, that faith and reason are interdependent. He said that ‘science has opened up large dimensions of reason and thus brought us new insights, but in the joy at the extent of its discoveries, it tends to take away from us dimensions of reason that we still need.’ You have to admit that the human power of being able to reason is critical to our humanness. And just because we don’t understand it doesn’t mean that it isn’t true.”



—“Agreed. But that goes for both uneducated people not believing in science just as much as it does for us atheists not believing in a creating god. That opens up the question as to whether we can actually reason. Are we merely reacting to psychological stimuli? Are we merely

trying to rationalize our beliefs in our myths by finding any possible reasons to make them sound plausible to our doubting minds?

“Certainly evolution is far more proven than are the beliefs in the Judeo-Christian scriptures. Can the Pope reproduce the foundations of his religion in a laboratory? But at least he didn’t back the creationist or the design theories as the start of things.”



--“The Pope said that science has opened up large dimensions of reason ... and thus brought us new insights. Remember that Pope Benedict had been a theology professor. He reminded us that pure reason allows us to go beyond the findings of science. Science cannot answer the great questions of where we and the world came from and where we are going. He is in the mainstream of Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants in his belief that God’s process of creation is done through evolution.”



—But Ray you know that the findings of evolution show that evolutionary changes don’t always go in a positive direction, sometimes it goes backwards. These mutations may occur very slowly in terms of taking millions of years. And the Pope doesn’t seem to understand that evolution doesn’t always occur through purely random selection. He assumes it is a conflict between theology and science and that theology wins. But he doesn’t really understand what evolutionary biology has discovered. His knowledge is a half century or more behind what science has found out. So while he acknowledges the findings of science, including those related to the science of evolution, he sets up a straw man from the early 1900s, then knocks it down with reasoning from the 14th century. I wonder if Aquinas would agree with Benedict today if he had access to today’s scientific findings. The point is that making up a myth, like religions continually do, does not explain the formation of the universe, the world, evolution, or us. We are better off intellectually if we just say ‘we don’t know’ or if we wait for a more probable theory. The myth of the Mid-East god is no explanation at all for an educated person.”



—“Lee, you’re using your reasoning power to criticize the Pope’s reasoning power. Our reasoning power is what makes us homo sapiens! Where did this reasoning power come from?”



—“I understand your argument, Ray. But why is the reasoning power of Catholic popes and theologians held so much higher than the reasoning power of non-theistic philosophers or of thinkers in other religions? Was Maimonides the rational inferior to

Augustine or Avicenna or Bertrand Russell? And you realize that we are not the end point of evolution. Assuming that we can avoid annihilating our race, which is a huge assumption, somewhere in the future there may be a race of people that can reason effectively and will have the evidence of far more advanced science than we do to help them with their reasoning. It’s hard for many to understand that we are not the ultimate end point for evolution.”



—“In fact, if we can avoid the human-caused Armageddon, there will be no end to evolution until the planet is destroyed by a giant asteroid or is sucked into the sun by a slowing of the Earth’s speed.”



—“Or the gasses of the sun are exhausted and we freeze!”



—“It is very scary to think of that ultimate end. Whether we question the Armageddon of Revelation or the Armageddon of nature we must be afraid for our species and our world. It is no wonder that Darwin put off publishing ‘The Origin of the Species’ for twenty years. He knew it would look like he was murdering God—and theocide has never been popular with the masses. But then since the dawn of science and critical thinking the death of the God concept has been gaining momentum with the educated elite.

ACCEPTING OUR KNOWLEDGE FROM AUTHORITY

“The simplest evidence comes from authority. Our parents and teachers were our earliest sources of ‘absolute truth.’ This is where we learn to believe in Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny. Mothers tell daughters that the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach. If they asked their fathers the organ with the direct connection to the heart is several inches below the stomach, and is outside of the abdominal cavity.

“Our parents convince us of the existence of Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny and the tooth fairy. By the time we are 10 we have lost our belief in the Easter bunny and the tooth fairy, by 20 we probably have changed our belief about Santa, but we don’t want to give up our adult myth of a god who will greet us after our death.

“When President Bush told his Secretary of State and the American people that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq—we believed our president because he was in the major position of authority. But he was wrong, as authoritarian sources often are.

“When suicide bombers believe that they will be greeted in heaven by 70 virgins—who told them and on what authority? The word used for ‘virgins’ has also been translated as ‘maidens’ and ‘raisins.’ Apparently raisins were a great delicacy for Arabs when the text was written. Would these young people still die for a bunch of dried grapes.



—“If there is a god, the ultimate authority would be that Supreme Being’s revelations in the Avestas of the Zoroastrians, the Old Testament of the Christians, the Tanakh of the Jews, the New Testament of the Christians, the Qur’an of the Muslims, the Book of Mormon of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the sacred scriptures of Baha’u’llah of the Bahai faith, and perhaps the ‘ruti’ texts of Hinduism which were whispered by the wind to Brahmin priests and might be considered to be from the Infinite. Are these all revelations from the same god? Or is only one of these revelations true?

“These all started as oral traditions handed down from the person God chose to be the recipient of His holy word such as Moses, Paul or Muhammad. Eventually they were written. Some people question whether God chose the best writers for his revelations. Perhaps Sophocles, or if we wanted more humor, Aristophanes would have been better choices. Or if he wanted it easy to read for the popes—Dante could have been chosen.

“But most of these authoritative writings were passed by word of mouth for hundreds of years before they were written. The Dead Sea scrolls of the Essenes about 200 BCE and the Mishnah of Rabbi Judah in about 200 AD give us the Jewish tradition. The gospels and the letters of Paul give us the start of Christian tradition sometime after 50 AD. The Qur’an was written during the early years of the religion but our earliest records of incomplete parts are from 400 years after the Prophet lived and the earliest complete text surviving comes to us from Venice 900 years after the Prophet lived.

“But there are many other texts that are sometimes even more important than the holy scriptures for some people. When the Pope speaks ex cathedra his pronouncements become law for Catholics. Teachers in all religions have interpreted, embellished and changed the direction of the original revelations. The more years that have elapsed, the more changes develop. Often a majority of the rulers of a religion make a decision that redirects the religion. The church councils of the Catholic Church are examples. The writings of Maimonides gave Jews an enhanced view of their religion. In Islam, the Sunnis have followed the teachings of the caliphate while the Shia say they hold true to Muhammad’s teachings. But the Sunnis don’t see the Shia as true Muslims. New teachings or emphases are found in every religion.

“Of course these new directions are not accepted by all. The epistles of Paul, although accepted as dogma by most Christians, are not accepted by all of them. Thomas Jefferson, as an example, deleted them from his views of New Testament ethics. Since Paul’s approach to religion is Greek, and he never met Jesus, some think that his teachings don’t reflect the Master. In fact there are those who argue that without Paul, the sect of Jesus would have remained in the Jewish religion. So perhaps the religion should be called Paulianity rather than Christianity.

“From an historical point of view, an oral or written text becomes scripture when a group of people begin to treat it as such, when they accept it as either being from the supernatural, as with Christians, Muslims and Zoroastrians, or as being ultimately true, as in the philosophies of Siddhartha Gautama, Lao Tzu or Confucius. In any case, to be true scriptures they must be venerated and viewed as absolute truth.”



--“Some ask why did God give people intelligence—if not to use it? If God only wanted non-thinking obedience He would have made us all Pavlovian dogs!



—“We need to go farther than that kind of observation, Wreck. We need to examine the credentials of the authority and look for any inconsistencies in its actions and the intentions of that authority. If your mother told you there was a special bunny hiding eggs early on Easter morning or a tooth fairy leaving money under your pillow for every baby tooth you lost, we can certainly understand that in her misrepresentation of reality she had good intentions. But when we have a national leader who lies to us about why we are going to war, that’s a bit more serious and more costly. What if we have a well intentioned person who is either misinformed or is hearing a voice from a psychotic source, or we have a power hungry person who seeks the esteem of those who see him as holy? Or maybe that authority comes from people like Mark Twain who said ‘When I was younger, I could remember anything, whether it happened or not.’”



--“We can also see the leaders of many sects who take a small bit of a scripture, then use it to rile the unthinking rabble to kill those of different beliefs. Or there are those who call on the faithful for money to line their own pockets with diamonds as a way for the donors to enter the Pearly Gates.”



—“Ya, we really should examine our beliefs. We Westerners used to believe in witches and astrology. Certainly fewer people believe these now. We need schools that will teach our future citizens to be able to think effectively using the tools of logic and science. I really believe that every source of authority must be questioned. Whether it is the Bible or Koran toting, fire-breathing holier-than-thou ministers or the omniscient and charitable political leaders

promising us tax cuts, we must analyze and evaluate the historical and economic beliefs and promises. If we don't do it effectively, we become the losers. But I don't think the people of most countries are ready for it. I have to agree with Einstein when he said 'Only two things are infinite, the universe and human stupidity, and I'm not sure about the former.'"



—"There's the other factor when you know everything, you lose your ability to be tolerant."



—"But Con, tolerance may be overemphasized. We shouldn't be tolerant of suicide bombers or rapists or unethical politicians or religious leaders who foster violence rather than mercy. There is no question that people who cloak themselves in the robe of religion are too often shielded from criticism. Scriptures often give many people a mantle of invulnerability and a reason for governments to allow their wishes. Why should churches get preferential tax treatment that other groups doing good works are denied. Why should anyone who calls himself a minister or priest get all of the advantages of the major religions. When there is a separation of church and state, why are religions allowed to put their beliefs into the classrooms and on to their coins? Why don't we just emphasize the Golden Rule?"

"Then you allow churches to be sanctuaries for those who have broken the law, particularly illegal aliens. Why is a church allowed to supersede society's laws? Even when you supposedly have a separation of church and state, the church calls the shots! Why is a politically responsible society held captive by a group whose claim to legitimacy is based on non-provable assumptions without verifiable historical evidence?"

"And as we have already mentioned, when a religion says that its beliefs require that it use a drug that society has outlawed, it can do it—because it is a religion. (42)



—"I don't think there is anything more counterproductive to an effective society than the certainty of religions. Knowing for certain what happens after death and how the world was developed is an appealing desire, but why believe it just because some shepherd said so a thousand or more years ago? And yet religions strongly shape political decisions in the US, both national and international decisions. It bothers me that people continue to believe in the conflicting claims of unproven authorities when they have a better way towards truth.

"Strongly religious countries often put religion into the classrooms. They keep trying to do it in the 'States' but the courts often block it. But in Norway, with its state religion, they put a required class on religion in the schools, but some humanist parents fought the requirement in the courts. They lost at every court level in Norway so they took it to the UN Human Rights Committee in Strasbourg and finally won in 2007. It took ten years of court fights, but they defeated the authority of the state in this instance.

"It's lucky for us that some people have a direct line to the Almighty—Pat Robertson, Osama bin Ladin, George Bush, Pope Benedict, the Ayatollah Khomeini. By following any of them we know what God wants us to do and what political approach to follow.

"Wanda, since so many people have the direct line to God and they are all saying He wants different things, is this proof for polytheism? Are there many gods talking to many people giving them different information? Maybe the ancient Greeks were right!"



---"Hadn't thought of that Lee. I guess it's possible. But as long as we are assuming, let's just assume a monotheistic god. Then we might ask if it is God's will that hurricanes and

earthquakes happen, but not that some wars are started. It may be God's will to start a war, or to fight against that war. It is God's will that we die of diabetes but against God's will to develop stem cell research that might cure the disease. It is against God's will to commit suicide, but it is OK to be a suicide bomber or to give one's life for a cause. Is it God's will that millions of children starve to death every year, but against God's will to use contraception to stop their birth so that they won't suffer. How do we, with our finite minds, sort out the reasoning of the Infinite? How can we know who has the direct pipeline to God? Within the same religion we have opposing 'truths' as to what God wants us to do.

"After Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans the Columbia Christians for Life announced that it was God's punishment because there were five abortion clinics in the area. God had even provided a proof. Radar photos from above the hurricane looked like a fetus. As I said, the Reverend Franklin Graham, saw it in more general terms as a punishment for the non-Christian sinning, sexual perversion and the use of voodooism, saying that 'There's been Satanic worship in New Orleans. There's been sexual perversion. God is going to use that storm to bring a revival. God has a plan. God has a purpose.' Con, this line of thinking seems to bother you."



---"Right. I think it is more likely that God was upset with the city because its professional football team was called the Saints. And the Pope hadn't canonized them. But seriously some say that America has replaced the Jews as the chosen people of God? Many think so. Who else is fighting to preserve those Christian values that are not found in the Bible—like democracy, the prohibition of contraception, abortion, nudity and stem cell research. If God didn't want these possibilities to limit population and heal the sick, why did He allow them to be discovered?"



--"Con, I'm sure we've all heard that before, in some form or another. I'm also sure that quite a number of us have heard it as an excuse for not believing in God or as a snide comment suggesting that Christians are weak and have invented a 'crutch' named Jesus to lean on. And maybe it would have been necessary to invent God, wouldn't it?"

"Because, you see, I absolutely agree that man needs God. But just because God is a necessity, doesn't mean that man invented Him. It simply means that God created that need in us. Man having a need for God isn't proof that God doesn't exist—but I'd argue that the very need for Him does prove the opposite. Sure, Jesus is a 'crutch' for many, but isn't that why God sent Him? What kind of father wouldn't help his children if he saw them struggling?"

"Let's look at this 'need thing' another way. I need food and, if food didn't exist, I'd need to either invent it or find an alternative pretty soon. But, just because we need food doesn't mean we invented it, does it? The food was there before we were and we simply used it to our best advantage. The same is true of all the Earth's resources although we constantly bicker about their best use. God is there for us to use to our best advantage. He even gives us guidance on how to 'use' Him correctly and efficiently.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

"What should I believe? If I say that I have seen a flying saucer, I believe it. If I have had a mystical experience with God, I believe it. If I feel that I have left my body and done astral traveling, I believe it. If I have seen a ghost I believe it. If I put a straight stick in the water and the stick now appears bent from the waterline, do I believe that it has actually bent or do I look for another explanation, such as the refraction of light through the water. What I experience is that the sun goes around the earth from east to west. What I observe from the ground is that the earth is flat. What I observe from space is that the earth is more like a round ball.

“Yet many such experiences find their way into religion. Did Saul of Tarsus actually have the experience he said he had on the road to Damascus? When we see the magic or illusions of David Copperfield millions of us see it at the same time. His most famous feats include making the Statue of Liberty disappear, flying over the Grand Canyon, and walking through the Great Wall of China. We assume that it is illusion, because he says it is. But what of others who claim to have experienced or done things that we haven’t seen?”

“As you said Wanda, we often mistake our feelings for thinking. And I think we often experience our sensations as being true representations of objective reality.”



-- “Many people have had experiences in which they believe they have experienced ultimate reality. This is called a mystical experience. Usually that ultimate reality is the supernatural. Sometimes it is a reaching out to a theistic God. Sometimes it is an experience of going deeper into one’s self and feeling a pantheistic experience—where god is the totality of the universe, as in the tradition of the Hindu religion. Sometimes it is an experience of the oneness of nature and is not thought of as a religious experience. Nothing is more real to these people than their experience. But is it an experience with God or a blip in one’s brain?”

“LSD and mescaline were once thought by some to be able to give some people this mystical experience. However, people who say they have had the mystical experience and have had an experience under the influence of a psychedelic drug, say that they aren’t the same. So truth does not depend on your opinion. (43)

FAITH

“Science deals with things that can be seen and measured—but faith, as St. Paul wrote in Hebrews 11:1, ‘is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.’ But few ask for evidence. Why leave our feather bed of emotional contentment for a world of prickly facts that just torment our minds. Certainly the truth hurts!

“Much of what we do relies on faith. You have faith that when you get in your car you will not have an accident. Usually your faith is affirmed. But what if yesterday your car didn’t start and your mechanic told you that fuel line was clogged but he couldn’t fix it until tomorrow. If you have faith that your car will still start today, your faith has been placed in an impossibility.

“You have faith when you go to work that you will get your paycheck, that you will not be terminated and that there will be money for your pension when you retire. Generally these happen, but not always. In these instances you have some historical evidence to back up your faith. For example the company has been in business for a hundred years and has always fulfilled its contract with its employees. But when you see giant corporations like Enron or WorldCom and many of the major airlines in bankruptcy and many major companies downsizing, often without adequate pension reserves, your faith may be misplaced. If you had lived in New Orleans a year before Katrina struck would you have made certain that you had ample flood insurance that was guaranteed to pay off in case of a hurricane? Most people didn’t. Did the people working in the Twin Towers on the morning of 9/11 have faith that they would return home safely that night?”

“Some of the things in which we put our faith are highly probable. The Twin Towers employees were almost certainly going home that evening. New Orleans residents did not have nearly the same chance of escaping a hurricane, since hurricanes are a fact of life in the Gulf of Mexico and global warming was making them more potent.

“Traveling a mile on a commercial jet liner is much safer than traveling a mile in a car. But is it possible that traveling a mile on Singapore Airlines is safer than on a transatlantic flight of an American or British airliner because of the terrorist threats?”

“If the president of a major country says that flying is safe, is that a more likely possibility than when a minister says that the Bible is literally true? When a university biologist says I believe

in a creating God, is that more likely to be true than when another university biologist says that I don't believe in a creating God?

"In 2005 the Thai Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra refused to answer questions from the press because Mercury was in a line with his star—and Mercury is not good. So a belief in astrology was more important than freedom of the press.

"When you have faith that God is on your side you can do anything—judge and punish in an inquisition, kill harmless civilians in a marketplace, invade sovereign lands, kill doctors who perform abortions, use capital punishment, or use torture as a means of religious conversion.

"The danger, as I see it, is when people place their faith in possibilities that have no other grounds than that they want it to be true. Hope and faith often give us a path to follow and a certainty of complacency. But shall we base the only life we will ever have on our accepted beliefs, or shall we seek more probable paths to truth. Shall we question our world, our thoughts, our behavior? Shall we actively seek truth in our questioning and experiencing of our world. Shall we converse with intelligent people and study the great literature of our sages? Or shall we wrap ourselves in the cloak of complacency, snuggle into our easy chair, and let an idiot box entertain us?

"The ideas I have just enumerated are not mine alone. Roger Bacon, the 13th. Century British philosopher said 'There are four chief obstacles in grasping truth ... namely, submission to faulty and unworthy authority, influence of custom, popular prejudice, and the concealment of our own ignorance accompanied by an ostentatious display of our knowledge

REASON

"Some people can think their way into a code of values, but generally our values are ingrained in us from our childhood by our families, churches and societies. Europeans generally abhor capital punishment, Americans believe it is a necessity. Americans hold it sacred to carry a firearm and a duty to use it, but the baring of a breast is a national disgrace. Unthinking and misguided Europeans think the body is to be enjoyed and shudder at the possibility of being a gun toting Wyatt Earp. The sins of one nation are the pride of another.

"Is the major ingredient of faith the ability to reason? Does Allah give us only the ability to believe but not to understand more deeply—or even the ability to question, to make our faith deeper. Or has He made us in his merciful image, able to think freely and to reason effectively?"



-- "Thomas Aquinas wrote that faith cannot be irrational. God does not contradict Himself—what He teaches through revelation does not conflict with the truths that humans can reason for themselves. Aquinas admired and echoed the ancient Greeks and the Moslem scholars of his day."



-- "Not all great thinkers believe that the reasoning mind is the best source of knowledge and solace. Blaise Pascal preferred the reasons of the heart to the reasons of the mind, so for him it was feelings over philosophy. But John Locke, Thomas Hobbes and David Hume found the mind primary. And if, as the Christians say, the mind is what the Bible calls the Image of God, then can these skeptics be right. Would the mind of God tell us that there is no God?"

"What kinds of cognition and modes of thinking may affect our mental or physical health? The founder of rational-emotive-behavior therapy, Albert Ellis, pointed out that non-rational thought was the factor leading to negative mood reactions and various biological or psychological symptoms. So the job of a therapist is to make the client confront his non-rational thoughts then replace them with rational thinking.

"If we believe that non-rational thoughts are among the reasons that lead to negative moods and to various biological or psychological symptoms we must change them with our reasoning

processes. When we rationally develop our thoughts we will come up with satisfying life philosophies and will choose more satisfying work and better social relationships. We will then be happier and physically and mentally happier. This is a large part of what our discussion today is about—understanding our values better and making us think through our life choices.”

BUT WE ARE PSYCHOLOGICAL BEINGS

“As I will continue to repeat, we are psychological not logical. What we feel is more important in our beliefs than what we reason. The mystical experience of union with the Infinite, as Theresa of Avila and so many others have experienced is felt to be real. From Sufis dancing their way to a transcendent state to an evangelical getting the Holy Spirit, then speaking in tongues, there is nothing more real than the mystical experience—the union with the eternal, the Supernatural, God. Yet most people have not had this all encompassing experience so they yearn for the hereafter—the heaven of the Christians, the paradise of the Moslems, Gan Eden of the Jews, the pure land of some theistic Buddhists, the House of Song of the Zoroastrians, the land on the other side of the River Styx for the ancient Egyptians,

“I know that you are going to delve into psychology when you talk to Dr. Chan in Singaling, but I thought we should mention it now. You probably know that it is a common question for a therapist to ask ‘how do you feel about that,’ when discussing a problem. Psychologists generally believe that most of us are ‘feelers’ rather than ‘philosophizers’.

“That is why I so often say that ‘we mistake our feelings for thinking.’ I’m sure I’ll say it again today. It’s just that over and over again in discussing how we come up with our values I encounter people not only clinging to their pasts, but afraid to critically evaluate them. I want them all to become philosophers so they will be critical. I don’t care about what their eventual beliefs are. I just want them to arrive there by critical thinking. I want them to think their lives through.

THE PROCESS OF REASONING

“If you plan on using your ability to reason you have to understand that you can’t argue about basic assumptions, because they are only assumed. Then you must use the best evidence available. The hard sciences like chemistry and physics are more verifiable than the softer sciences of psychology, sociology and economics. But these are generally more verifiable than historical evidence. And history, at least more recent history, is more likely to have been more complete and documented than ancient history. And traditional beliefs, rules from authority or our personal experience are all less likely to be adequately verifiable.

“Once we have the evidence we have to follow the rules of logic. We need both. If we start with evidence that is less likely to be true, we don’t have a chance of logically coming to a true conclusion.

“If I say that ‘Joe is a giraffe’ and ‘all giraffes are honest’ therefore ‘Joe is honest.’ The conclusion may be logically valid, but the premises are meaningless so the conclusion doesn’t conclude anything real. But if I say ‘Reverend Smith is a religious leader’ then I say ‘all religious leaders are honest’ I must conclude that ‘Reverend Smith is honest.’ But are all religious leaders honest? No. Is Reverend Smith actually a religious leader? How do we define ‘religious leader’? Must he have a following of a thousand people to be considered to be a leader? Must he be in one of the five major religions? What if he is an Inca sun worshipper with only two followers? Is he religious? Is he a leader?

“When the tsunami hit Thailand one person said it was the will of God. Another said it was the result of an undersea volcano erupting that caused a tidal wave. Some may combine the two saying that God made the volcano erupt. What evidence do we have for either statement?

“If we are going to think logically, philosophy has shown us how. We first start with probabilities, and if necessary, definitions. That is inductive logic. Then we argue according to deductive logic. There are a number of rules for this.

What if we want to prove that humans are generally directed by a drive for power. How would we define humans? Well, they have 46 chromosomes.

“But some have 45 and some have 47. On the other hand, hares have 46 chromosomes. So should we accept these rabbits as part of the human race? Are chimps close enough, with 48 chromosomes, that we should include them? Should we define humans by their IQ? But some animals will score higher than some people. So shall we bring the animals into the human group or drop some people out of it? Or is humanness all about whether we have souls? If so we are not using empirical or historical evidence or even personal experience. It has to be based on some monotheistic God related basic assumptions.

“Next we would have to define power. We might define it as power over others or power to accomplish something. Then we would have to do a psycho-social study to determine if all, none or some humans demonstrated one or the other types of power, and if so, how much.

“So saying that people are driven by power is not a simple proposition, nor is it easy to determine the probability of it being true.

“So when making a logical statement we have to define our terms. Does God exist? Exactly what do I mean by God? Do I mean a merciful or vengeful monotheistic God, a deistic being who is unconcerned with the world, a pantheistic idea that God is everywhere and is not judgmental. Or do I have some other idea. So if you and I are discussing God, we had better be on the same page—Almightingly speaking.



-- “Yet people can take a much more difficult concept, that there is a God, and accept it without question. Why?”



—“Because we are psychological, not logical. We want simple explanations for complicated questions and problems. If we accept that there is a creating God, we can jump to the idea that morals come from that God and that eternal life comes from that same God. As long as we are assuming we have gone all the way. Now we don’t have to think of us ceasing to exist. We don’t have to think of where we came from, we don’t have to think about what is good or bad. All we have to do is pray or meditate and go to the mosque on Friday, the synagogue on Saturday or to church on Sunday and our eternity is assured.

“India for millennia had a caste system in which the level of society in which one was born defined his or her social status for a lifetime. It was an assumption based on the natural inequality of humans, sanctified by the idea of reincarnation which was part of their religion. Only after Gandhi’s insistence that those born so low that they were below a caste and were “untouchable” did these ‘children of God’ find new hope. Gandhi formulated a new assumption based more on the democratic ideal of equality and did what he could to force an assumption of equality into a society that had assumed a basic inequality of humans. The birth of modern India and its constitution outlawed the caste system and the more mobile ‘class system’ of the West became a possibility. The cream was allowed, with great difficulty, to rise to the top. Fifty years after the birth of the nation a former “untouchable” became the president of the country. Changing basic assumptions is a difficult if not impossible task for us as individuals and it is even more difficult for societies.

“Basic assumptions and values can vary within a family. While Osama bin Laden was responsible for the terror attacks of September 11, 2001 in New York, his half-brother Yeslam bin Laden condemned the attacks and said he issued a statement following the attacks, condemning ‘all kinds of violence.’ Yeslam said that Osama, who had not left Saudi Arabia to study abroad like most of his brothers ‘was more religious than the rest.’ His values were different. ‘Osama didn’t

like music or TV and banned his kids from being entertained by them,' Yeslam said. 'I grew up thinking this is weird, but he's free in his household and I'm free in mine.'"



-- "We have had many problems in our church because of different assumptions and points of view. U.S. Catholics have often had a conflict of values. They support our church but disapprove of the sex scandals that have afflicted many of our clergy. They often disapprove of the Pope's rules that forbid female or married clergy and many disagree with the Church's stands against homosexuality, contraception and abortion. When they withhold their contributions the church suffers. While the 80 million U.S. Catholics make up only about 6% of the world's Catholics, they contribute about a third of the total of the Church's worldwide charities. Additionally fewer women and men have the vocation to serve in religious orders. The number of nuns in 1965 was 180,000, today it is less than 80,000 and their average age is over 70. Parishes that once had two or three priests now may have none. The Irish connection has all but dried up. When I grew up two of our three priests were from the 'old sod'. Priests and nuns who worked for only their room and board must now be replaced by lay workers who must have living wages. That puts the squeeze on our church finances. The costs of the sex scandals has averaged \$700 million for each of the 3000 Catholic dioceses. Several dioceses have filed for bankruptcy. Luckily we still have a large number of faithful."



—"I've seen the problems Ray. I've known people who have left your church for the reasons you mentioned. But I've also seen people becoming members because of your belief system. And from what they tell me it isn't easy. Lots to learn before you let them in.

"But Ray, I have some questions, if humans are created in the image of the Creator and are capable of both good and evil—is the creator also capable of good and evil. Or are people not made in the image of their creator. In fact, were they created or did they merely evolve into thinking beings who, from time to time, can reason? Are they significantly separated from their Creator. If God knows what will happen in every situation, does man have the free will to do differently from what God knows will happen? Or does God merely see how man will freely choose?"



--"Con, you are asking the unanswerable questions. How can we mortals understand the thinking of the Immortal? There have been attempts to answer. One is that we have free will and God sees how we will freely choose. Then there have been religions, like John Calvin's that accept the idea of predestination, that God knows when we are born what we will do every minute and whether we will go to heaven or hell."



—"Men you are illustrating the point exactly. Our different assumptions push us in different directions. But perhaps with a more critical view of the evidence and the proper use of inductive and deductive logic we might come a bit closer together. And probably the basic question is whether there is a concerned Supernatural Creator involved in our lives. And, as we've said, we can only assume the correctness of our answer whether we affirm such a being or deny it. But it makes no sense for believers or non-believers to use unverifiable evidence or faulty logic. We are unquestionably dealing with opinions.

OPINIONS AND SEEKING EXPERTISE

"We all have opinions. Are our opinions based in empirical experiments? Our view of history? Our belief that we have experienced God?"

“We may be quite willing to fight to the death for our opinions. And, of course, we think that our opinions are absolute truth. I want Joe for President. But what do I really know about Joe. I know what he looks like. I know what he tells us he wants for the country. But I don’t know his hidden agenda. I don’t know what he has promised his big financial backers. I don’t know when he is being truthful and when he is lying. But I think I know.



—“As a former football coach I found more and more problems with players and parents as they watched more televised football. They learned all their football with a remote channel changer in one hand and a beer in the other. They didn’t have a clue about how to develop team cohesion, they didn’t have a clue about fundamentals or what fundamentals were essential to each style of offense or defense. They had no concept about the percentages relative to the chances for success of different offensive plays or defensive stunts, they didn’t understand the kicking game, they didn’t know the tendencies of the opponents in every situation—but they thought they knew everything. They hadn’t spent days going over the films of every game that our team and our opponents played. They hadn’t seen the computer generated scouting reports based on our hundreds of hours of film analysis. But they knew every play we should call and every defense we should execute in every situation. They thought that high school and college rules were the same as the professional rules, but there are 200 difference between college and pro rules and another 200 differences between high school and college rules.



---“It’s like a guy I sat next to at a football game. His friend said, what play would you call. He said ‘I’d pass to the right end.’ The coach called a run left that gained 12 yards. What would you do now, he asked? ‘I’d run up the middle.’ The coach called a long pass that gained 30 yards. What now? ‘I’d run left again.’ The coach called a run up the middle that got them to the three yard line. What would you call now, said his friend. He replied, ‘I got them this far let’s see if the coach can call a play that will score.’



-- “When generals told Donald Rumsfeld that if wanted to go war in Iraq he needed 380,000 troops. He refused and wanted to do it with 125,000. His opinion was wrong. It probably cost thousands of lives and increased the ability of jihadists to expand the conflict and increase worldwide terror.

“Look at all the opinions that we hold that are not backed up by evidence. We know when a soul is put into an embryo or a baby. We know when life begins. We know when people are guilty of crimes even though there is no evidence against them. We know the best way to raise our kids. We know that we and our children will never be alcoholics or drug dependant. We know that when we drive fast we won’t have an accident. We know we can be obese and eat lots of saturated fats, but we won’t die. My goodness we’re smart.

“We all think we are experts on just about everything. We may admit that we don’t know how to clone a cow or how to operate on a brain tumor, but we know all about sports and national and international politics.



--“What we need to know is how did you come to your belief in your basic assumptions? Through science? Through historical evidence? By way of some authority—parents, community, a respected person or respected people. Have you thought through them? Are you certain of what you mean when you make a statement or hold a belief?

“For example, when you say abortion, do you mean any time after the sperm penetrates the ovum? Do you mean after it has attached to the uterine wall? Do you mean a cessation of pregnancy whether it was induced or natural? Do you mean only an induced cessation after the third month? Do you see any of these as acceptable, required or sinful?”

“When you say ‘sexual relations’ do you mean only sexual intercourse with the penis penetrating the vagina? Do you mean oral or anal sex? Do you mean kissing or fondling?”

“When you say democracy, do you mean a government like the republican form of government in most Western nations? Do you mean free trade or free speech? Do you mean a government where every citizen votes on every proposition? Would you call the government of ancient Athens a democracy when only the adult male citizens could vote?”

“While you can’t debate basic assumptions, when you have evidence for a position it should be debated logically. There are aspects of evidence that hang from basic assumptions that can be debated. For example, while the idea of the existence of God or the supernatural origin of the scriptures can’t be debated, it can be debated whether there is evidence for a world-wide flood when Noah lived. The often accepted date of creation as 4004 BCE can certainly be debated. These are historical beliefs that can be questioned because of empirically verifiable geological evidence. Then there are philosophical or theological ideas that can be debated, such as: whether the western God is merciful or vengeful; whether the message of Christianity is that love is primary; whether one should turn the other cheek. We might also debate the Biblically based versus the non-Biblical idea that a conceived embryo has a soul and whether abortion is murder. And we might debate whether mothers seeking abortions and doctors performing them may be hassled or murdered.”

SEMANTICS

“The same word or paragraph doesn’t always have the same meaning for the listener that was intended by the speaker. As Humpty Dumpty said to Alice ‘A word means what I choose it to mean, neither more nor less.’ Someone might say ‘I’d like to kill you.’ If it is a Mossad agent he probably means to kill your physical body. But it might have been your best friend talking after you have surprised her with a practical joke. She might mean, ‘I’m upset’ or ‘I’m really surprised.’ So semantics studies the meaning of a word or term being used by a person or people. If we don’t understand what another person means when they use a word we can’t discuss an issue properly. And if we don’t understand what we mean by a word or an idea, we can’t think clearly.”

“Look at the word ‘anti-semitic’ which many Jews use to disparage anti-Jewish beliefs or behavior. But what does ‘semitic’ actually mean? The word’s roots trace to Shem, Noah’s middle son. It includes Jews, Christians and Muslims from the Middle East. Jesus was a Semite, so was Muhammad, but not Paul who was a Greek, but was Jewish. But the word has been adopted to mean only Jews”

“What about being ‘black?’ Barak Obama is a black man. His father was 100% black and his mother was 100% white. Is he black because it was his father’s race? If his father was white and his mother black, would he be called white? Or is it that the genes for blackness are dominant? If so, if a person is 1% black and 99% white, is he black? If not, what percent of black genes makes a person black? Or is it merely skin color? If so is an albino person whose parents were both 100% Negroid a white person? Is a Caucasian lifeguard with a dark tan black? Or is it the heaviness of the supra-orbital ridge, the size of the nose or jaw, or the basketball playing ability?”

“But it’s more than just the words we use. A great part of our communication is non-verbal. For example, Iranian speech is not like American speech, Iranians are more likely to tell you what you want to hear rather than what they actually mean. Symbolism and vagueness are the rule rather than the exception. So the meaning of a word or a phrase spoken by an Iranian, while it might be understood by another Iranian, will probably be misinterpreted by an American or an Englishman. The real meaning can be hidden.”

“So when we try to understand someone there are not only the various meanings of a word there is also the meaning given to it by the speaker or the writer. So how do we label our meanings”

so that others can clearly understand what we intend to be understood. Should a fly without wings be called a 'walk'? Is there another word for synonym? What about the meaning of democracy, justice, socialism, God?

"A political liberal is probably for equality, socialism, and maybe communism. But a liberal education is supposed to make one freer in thinking and may develop conservative tendencies—because here 'liberal' means liberty or freedom.

"Americans in Iraq called the people who were fighting them 'terrorists'. People in Iraq who were against the American invaders called them resistance fighters. What is the difference between freedom fighting and terrorism? Is there an overlap? What is a terrorist?

"On the Ides of March were Brutus and his crew terrorists, freedom fighters or jealous politicians. When people accused Socrates of corrupting the minds of the young which eventually caused his death, was the accusation terroristic? The inquisitors were certainly terrorists, did their supposedly good intentions excuse them? If so are Palestinian terrorists excused? Were Jewish terrorists in the 1940s, both before and after being given part of Palestine, justified in their guerrilla warfare?

"Weren't the Crusaders terrorists? Darius, Cyrus, Alexander, Genghis, and Attila? The Nazis? And of course today the main threat comes from a group of violent Moslems. Should they be called fundamentalists? Would Mohammed have sanctioned such killing of innocents? Not according to the Qur'an. They may want to call themselves fundamentalists, but if you call yourself an elephant you'd better have big floppy ears and an extra long nose.

"Wasn't it terrorism to feed the Christians, or even Daniel, to the lions. Was it terror to have gladiators fight to the death? Was it terror when the Vikings attacked England and Ireland? Was it terror when the Spaniards decimated the Aztecs or when the American army wiped out the native Americans. And what about the Japanese in China, the Chinese under Mao, the Communists under Stalin?

"What about the word 'freedom'? Freedom can be viewed as independence or as being exempted from certain proscriptions. But philosophers and lawgivers have never intended it to be a license to behave in anti-social ways. Were you to ask Rousseau or Jefferson whether pornography should be allowed to children, whether adults should be able to have sex with children, whether automatic weapons should be allowed to every citizen, or whether gratuitous violence should be allowed in the media we can assume that these lovers of freedom would draw a strong line exempting such behaviors from the practice of freedom.

"Democracy means that all citizens of a certain age can vote. The democracy of classical Athens didn't allow most of its inhabitants to vote because most were women or slaves.

"Modern leaders have quite different concepts of this much revered word. For some it is only the right to vote. For others it includes many rights and ideas that go far beyond the generic roots of the word. Does democracy mean: everyone votes, men only vote, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom to do business, or a myriad of other ideas far from its original meaning.

"When the Afghan man who had converted from Islam to Christianity was brought to trial, facing the death penalty for giving up Islam, many thought his predicament was undemocratic in a democracy. Afghanistan had become a democracy, elected its representatives and decided that the Koran was the supreme law of the land. There should have been no problem with the Afghanis approach to law. Democracy only means that the people decide. There have been very few real democracies in the world. They only work in small populations, like Swiss cantons and New England town meetings.

"The big democracies are really republics. Most have democratically elected republics, although in the U.S.A. that is questionable. The Americans have a sort of double republic when it comes to electing their president. The people of each state vote for people to vote for them. The majority in the state gets all the electors. Then they go to the electoral college and all the electors from the state vote for, or should vote for, the candidate of their party. If the Americans didn't have this 'electoral college' idea, Al Gore would have been president he had more than a half

million more popular votes than George Bush. The world might well have been a different place if the Americans had used the popular vote as every other democracy does, if the Supreme Court had had more Democrats than Republicans, or if Al Gore's brother had been the governor of Florida instead of George Bush's brother.

“Other American elections are more straight forward. The whole state votes for its senators, but for the House of Representatives the districts can be skewed or gerrymandered so that some districts become ‘safe’ for one party.

“So democracy only means that the people vote. Republic means that the representatives make the decisions. The meaning of democracy does not include tolerance, such as tolerance for religion or race. It does not mean a welfare state and social responsibility. It does not mean capitalism. It does not mean free trade. It does not mean equality before the law. It does not mean freedom of speech or of the press. It does not mean equality of educational opportunity. These are often understood in the West to be part of the democratic way—but they need not be a part of a democratically elected government.

“When the West pushed for democracy in the Mid-East they expected that those democracies would follow the mold of the West. They were chagrined and disappointed. Their efforts were rewarded with a democratically sanctioned theocracy—a government by God. They were now dealing with a democratically empowered government of fundamentalist mullahs. It was actually easier to deal with the pragmatic strong men who often ruled the countries than it was to deal with imams, democratically empowered warlords, and newcomers unaware of the benefits and problems that had become the handmaidens of Western democracies.

“Justice means fairness. But what is fair? Should 4 year olds be allowed to have freedom of speech? Should jailed criminals be allowed to vote? Should the death penalty be allowed? Should adult minorities be subject to the prejudices of the majority? And how many people think that justice often requires revenge.

“Materialism means that there is no God and everything in the universe is physical. But it has taken on another meaning in that it often means the pursuit of material wealth—of money and goods. When an individual is only directed by the pursuit of money the values of loving and unselfishness are left behind. Yet how often are these considered to be the highest values for an ‘enlightened’ society.

“Private enterprise means that people should be able to develop their own means of economic production for their own survival. Total state control as in communism, where the state owns all of the means of production, or socialism, where the state owns the major means of production are contradictory ideas to free enterprise. However under the socialism espoused by Karl Marx the state could own all of the means of production but would pay people based on their individual levels of production. But under Marx in a communist society all people would be given what they needed independently of what they produced. This lack of a selfish motivation was a major factor in the downfall of those countries that tried the communist experiment.

“Capitalism actually means the system in which people make money from their own money, their capital, from investments, rather than from their physical work. While this may happen with full time stock traders it does not happen with business owners who are actively running their companies as managers.

“Many people lump together the ideas of democracy, and various freedoms, such as freedom of speech), capitalism, justice, private enterprise. We then have a confused set of meanings, so often discussions relative to any of these ideas are a hodgepodge of speakers howling from different Platonic caves misunderstanding the shadows cast by the semantic illusions they assume to be reality..



—“It amuses and chagrins me to see how the anti-abortion spokesmen shift biological definitions in their attempt to emotionally charge their audiences. At the South Dakota abortion law signing the Governor referred to fertilized ova and embryos, and of course fetuses, as children. Often abortion foes call fertilized ova ‘babies.’ Nobody wants to kill babies or children!

“Is it also correct to call 10 year old children embryos or fetuses? If so was it immoral to cut the umbilical cord? Shouldn’t we all keep our umbilical cords tied into mother’s uterus? Webster defines embryo as an organism from conception to about two months of development and ‘fetus’ as from two months until birth. One does not become a ‘baby’ or a ‘child’ until it is born. .

“Pro life anti-abortion groups chose a great slogan. Who would not be ‘pro life’? The questions that they haven’t answered are: What is ‘a life’ or ‘a human life’? Is it just a fertilized ovum? Is it a person who can take care of himself or herself—such as being able to find food, cook it, breathe, stay warm? Is it being able to contribute more to one’s society than it takes from it? Is all life valuable, both human and non-human, as the Jain religion would hold. Is an amoeba as valuable as a fertilized ovum? Is a monkey more valuable than a brain dead person? Is it as moral to keep a pet, perhaps spending hundreds of dollars per month on it, as it would be to use that same amount of money on starving or diseased humans?



—“I want to go more deeply into the issues relative to the morality of abortion later. Is that OK Len?”



—“Sure, but I want to mention a related issue in the South Dakota situation. We might go a step farther in looking at the scope of South Dakota’s laws. The state’s rape rate is 30% higher than the U.S. average and more than double that of New York. Should the life of girls and women also be protected? Where does rape prevention fit into South Dakota’s legislative priorities? Or is being pro-life only concerned with conception and not with sexual violence?”



--“Is all life equally valuable? The ancient Spartans placed their babies on a hill to see which would survive. The survivors then became valuable. Are the lives of draftees into the army valuable? What if the soldier is forced to serve? What about people condemned to death? Was the life of Einstein equal to that of Hitler? Is a person who is brain dead but whose body is being kept functioning through nutrients in tubes and other functions provided by machines equal to a ghetto child in an underfunded school? Where should the government’s funding go? Governmental funds are not unlimited.



—“Here’s another semantic shuffle. The term undocumented workers means illegal aliens. Does that mean that we should use the term ‘undocumented pharmacists’ for illicit drug makers and sellers? And I guess it would certainly include the Columbian and Mexican drug cartels. To be politically correct should we call white slave traders ‘undocumented travel agents?’ And ‘undocumented economists’ or ‘undocumented bankers’ could include money launderers, people involved in protection rackets or ‘cosa nostra’ members. Certainly law breakers deserve a semantic serape to give them respectability.

“Genocide is another emotionally charged word usually used when an ethnic, racial or religious group thinks its numbers will be or are being reduced. So all wars are genocidal.

“The word “God” has many meanings. We all think we know what the speaker means when we hear it. But do we mean the personal God of many in the West, the pantheistic god of the Hindu, a vengeful god or a merciful god, the deistic god of Jefferson or the meaning that some scientists, like Einstein, use meaning ‘the wonder of the universe and the laws of physics.’ This use of the term ‘god’ by many scientists does not mean a creating law-giving being.

“For many Americans the sins of the body, that St. Paul warned us about, and the practices of the Puritans and Quakers in early America have made it almost impossible to call urination, defecation or toilets by their correct names. And the joy of orgasm is trashed by the use of so many negative epithets to substitute for the action of a loving sexual intercourse.



-- “So the question is do we make sense when we talk? Do we mean what we say? I remember a girl at the beach who got angry with her dog. She yelled ‘God damn you.’ Did she mean it? She obviously believed in a Supreme Being and a Hell. That puts her well within the Judeo-Christian tradition. She must also have believed that her dog had an immortal soul. That puts her well outside of the Judeo-Christian tradition. So what she said was not rational for most Americans. Of course it was merely an unthinking psychological reaction to her frustration.

“When the car won’t start do you say ‘God damn it’ hoping that God will put your car in hell forever, melting it into a puddle of iron? And if you call someone a bastard, are you certain that his parents were not married? What if you call someone a ‘son of a bitch’ it might be more correct to say ‘you are a human with dog-like qualities’ or perhaps ‘your mother must have had bitch-like qualities and you have inherited them.’

“Look at the all purpose use of the ‘F’ word—as a noun, verb, adjective, or interjection. It almost never means what it originally meant in the Germanic or Anglo-Saxon languages.. But it takes no imagination to use it and it makes us feel profane and powerful. Listen to the literal meaning next time you hear it. “Fuck you” means that the utterer wants you to have an orgasm. “My fuckin’ car stalled” indicates that your automobile has a lover that is taking its energy away from its primary job of transporting you. Every time you hear the ‘F’ word uttered or screamed just substitute ‘sexual intercourse’ for the term and you will understand the real meaning of the speaker.”



—“So relative to our correct use of words, we either don’t know the correct word to portray our meaning, we don’t define our words, or we react psychologically and use terms meaninglessly—making ourselves look uneducated to those who are educated. If we are going to think comprehensively or communicate clearly we must have a clear understanding of the terms we use and if we are communicating our ideas we must define our terms so that our audience understands what we mean.

“What people mean by God or gods varies depending on their definition of a natural or supernatural power. It seems that historically religious thinking has moved from animism, ancestor or nature worship to pantheistic or monotheistic ideas, then as people become more educated about history and empirical science, belief shifts to deism or to agnosticism or atheism—which rely more on the hope of humankind’s potential than in the whims of a non-proved supernatural.

“Strange but some Christians think that when Muslims worship Allah they are worshipping a different God. But Allah is just the Arabic word for the same monotheistic God that the Jews and Christians worship. In fact Arabic speaking Jews and Christians use the word Allah, just as English speakers use the word God, French speakers use Dieu and Germans use Gott. The point is that we are not clear in our meaning of a term we will be as confused as the people listening to us. And of course we have to understand the exact meaning of the term being discussed and not be fooled by some inexact or emotional use of the term.

“We have to be aware that some people employ words for the purpose of disguising their thoughts. Others use absurdities to try to make their points. Nigerian Anglican Bishop Akinola has said that a homosexual relationship is a partnering of baboons. People often talk about addictions, addiction to work, addiction to food and so forth, But the medical meaning of addiction is physical dependence. If you don’t get what you are addicted to your body rebels. We all know about heroin or alcohol addiction. And some people’s bodies seem to be addicted to exercise. But people are not addicted to gambling or to chocolate. The desire to partake of these things is called habituation or mental dependence.



---“Sadly, far too few people have thought through their beliefs and clarified their language so that they+ can think and communicate effectively. A lack of vocabulary seems to be so common today when so few people read good books and they watch television programs geared to the fourth grade level. I remember that a TV personality referred to somebody as niggardly. Some illiterate African Americans reacted, thinking that it was a racial slur. Niggardly, as any fifth grade student should know, means selfishly or miserly. I wonder if Native Americans reacted negatively when communists were called ‘reds.’



---“Trying to understand or discuss ideas is fraught with so many obstacles! A lack of an effective vocabulary. A lack of a common understanding of the terms we are using. An attempt to influence us by using inexact words or meaningless idioms. Whether it is the work of politicians or other charlatans, or merely the rationalizations of the unthinking—we must be vigilant that the truth is not twisted and stretched so that our minds are manipulated by semantic Svengalis. If we can actually think our way along the path of truth, we must not be sidetracked by amorphous meanings or erroneous evidence. The silver tongued possessors of ultimate knowledge, and the unbounded confidence of those who seek to influence us, are the everpresent nemeses of cool logical thinking. We can’t intelligently discuss values without a clear idea of the concepts we are discussing.”

CONFLICTS IN VALUES



---“In Sir Walter Scott’s ‘Ivanhoe’, the fool Wamba ridiculed religious prejudice by arguing, ‘For every Jew you show me who’s not a Christian, Sir Knight, I’ll show you a Christian who’s not a Christian.’ People often spout their versions of religious scripture to validate their behavior. But their behavior might be quite different from the message they should derive from their scriptures. In fact what we deem as ‘moral’ behavior is not as clear cut as we would like to assume. Our own value decisions quite often jump around from being God based to self centered, to society based. Few people are consistent, using one basic assumption for all of their value decisions.

“Let’s look at several ethical problems and see how you might be for or against each problem whether you take a self-centered, a God based or a society based assumption. In other words, finding the answers to moral questions is not as simple as many think. While we may start with a self-, God, or society based assumption we will then add evidence to make our opinion clearer and stronger. And as we mentioned earlier, that evidence can be empirically verifiable or historical, it may have been given us by some authority or it may just be our opinion.

“As an example, let’s assume that my opinion relating to mercy killing is based on my belief in God and the truth of the Bible. Perhaps I’m not as familiar with the Bible as I might be, but my

minister has preached that mercy killing is wrong. But now my evidence changes because my mother is incurably ill and in terrible pain, she has asked me to help her die. I love my mother. It seems that the merciful thing to do is to help her to die. Do I abandon my God based assumption and become self-centered because I want my mother to rest in peace? Do I search the Bible for new evidence that would show me that mercy killing is not against the Scriptures that have been basic to my life? Maybe there is other self centered evidence. My mother has now used up the five million dollar maximum on her health insurance. If I mortgage my house I can buy another month of hospital care, but I had planned to re-finance my house to pay for my children's college educations. And remember, my mother wants me to help her die. She would definitely disapprove of my taking her grandchildren's legacy to pay for more life that she doesn't want. Do you 'accidentally' remove her breathing tube? Do you allow an air bubble to enter her bloodstream through one of her intravenous tubes? Do you simply give a 'do not resuscitate' order? Do you ask a doctor to give her more than the normal dose of morphine? Do you leave her to the hospital's care, letting it absorb the costs? But what if the hospital sues you for the money?

"Here we have your self-centered feelings versus what you believe to be a God based conflict. But often societal values are also important. Most of the greatest conflicts are between the self-centered values that I want right now and the other values, such as self-centered future values or God or society values.

"A survey of American physicians indicated that the majority felt that it is ethically permissible to explain their moral objections to patients regarding contraception, abortion and euthanasia. Over 80% said that they felt they should explain all of the options to the patient, but 30% would not refer a patient to another physician who did not share his or her moral beliefs. Being male or religious was more likely to reduce the chances of the patient being told all the options or of being referred to a doctor who shared the patient's point of view. (44)

People who use God based assumptions believe that they are infinitely superior to self-centered and society-based values. The problem is that religious values are not universally held. Buddhist values differ from Jewish values, Christian values of one Christian vary from that of another equally devout Christian, Muslims differ among themselves. And of course the values of some atheists will be identical to values held by some religious believers. If all Christians believed the same, or if all Muslims believed the same, we might be able to formulate a code of ethics for that group of believers. But while most will agree on not murdering, just look at Muslims in Iraq killing other Muslims with bombs; look at Israeli Jews killing Palestinian non-combatives or Lebanese non-combatative women and children. Or look at the good Christians who shoot Christian doctors who provide legal abortions or good Christian Ku Klux Klansmen who burn down Christian churches and kill Christians of a different color.

"A few years ago a fatwa was issued against a female tennis player who was a Muslim because she wore short skirts, but no fatwa was issued against al Zarwari's killing of Shi'ite children or adults in the suicide bombing missions he ordered in Iraq. Should someone of authority prioritize religious values for every sect?

"People who believe strongly in their ideas of God based values will not accept the societal assumptions that the society must be based on a constitution and on a government of laws, because their concepts are superior to society's ideas of laws."

"In 2011 Norway had a huge eruption of sentiment for a young woman, Maria Amelie, who had come to Norway with her parents illegally from Russia when she was 12. Without a state issued national identity number she went through Norwegian schools, graduated from college then got her Master's degree. She then wrote a book about her experiences and won a Norwegian literary prize. When she was then discovered she was forced to leave the country under Norwegian law. The publicity engendered prompted a Norwegian company to offer her a job. But she had to leave the country first. Under the Napoleonic laws of Norway there was no other way. If she had been in a common law country like the US or the UK the judges could have found a loophole to keep her as being valuable to the society--but not under Napoleonic law that seldom allows

loopholes. For the good of society valuable people should be kept but also for the good of society the laws must be upheld. So we had a conflict between her self centered interests and society interests, but we also had conflicts in the various interests of the Norwegian society."

MORALS OR ETHICS ARE NOT SET IN STONE

MORAL RELATIVISM



--"It seems that you are arguing for moral relativism. The Pope has certainly been strongly against this.



—"Well Ray, morals are relative. Probably none of us like it that way. The Pope wants everyone to hold the same values that he does, what he sees as God based values. The lawmaker who is for a woman's free choice wants everyone to agree with her. She doesn't want people like the Pope disagreeing with her with their different values. Marijuana smokers want their self-centered values to be freed from society's marijuana criminalization laws. Values are relative to the point of view of the person holding the value, whether he or she believes it comes from God, from what is best for the society, or what is best for one's self. Values are relative even within a religion. A Catholic priest, working with AIDS victims or among the poor who are pushed deeper into poverty with each child, may believe in contraception in opposition to his bishop or pope who is against it. In Christianity a sect that ordains female ministers and bishops is not in step with the Catholic laws of ordination. If you don't agree with my ideas on war, gay marriage, cohabitation or any number of things, our values are relative—relative to our points of view. If we all used the same basic assumptions and had access to the same evidence, our values might not be relative.

"The conflicts in values within one's own society are complicated when the values of another society conflict with yours. Such questions as the importance of money, the necessity of working, the need for a loving relationship, or the sanctity of life are just a few of the areas where national differences are significant.

"There is probably no way our values will ever be identical for every member of our species. So we just have to adjust. Adjust or bust! The best we can hope for is some consensus. I think that the great majority are against robbery, rape and murder. So it is easy to make laws against them. But we might not have as much consensus on the punishments for breaking those laws. Long prison terms or capital punishment are options, but are not as universally agreed on.

"So the realities are that we have a large number of ethical practices within each group of basic assumptions and also a great deal of crossover of ethical beliefs and practices between the people who advocate the different basic assumptions. So while each of us will be quite certain of the essential nature of our own ethical beliefs, as circumstances change we quite often shift our beliefs, and often then shift our basic assumptions to sanctify our new opinion. Just look at the United States Catholics, the Pope says no abortions, but the rate of Catholics undergoing abortions is similar to that of non-Catholics.



—"People like to sound very moral, often God based, but what they actually do shows their true ethical beliefs. It is so common that it is almost a rule that a person judges himself by what he says—not by what he does. We behave in selfish ways then rationalize our behaviors to cover up our weaknesses. We discuss with great concern the illegal drug problem while we drink our cocktails. We condemn the poor quality of our schools while we vote down new school taxes.

We criticize our politicians but we don't vote because it would take fifteen more minutes from our busy day once or twice a year.

"The reverend, and I use the word in a detrimental sense, Ted Haggard, a strong opponent of gay marriage and pastor of a 14,000 mega-church and president of the 30 million member National Association of Evangelicals, resigned after being accused of a three year sexual affair with a male prostitute and buying methamphetamines from him. Representative Mark Foley was co-chairman of the House Caucus on Missing and Exploited Children, he resigned after admitting to soliciting his young male assistants. Strongly religious Tom DeLay resigned his congressional seat amid charges of corruption. But these are just the tip of the iceberg. DeLay and Foley should have been acting from society based values in their congressional jobs, but they acted self-centered, while saying they were God based. Very confusing!

"Not many months later a 52 year old minister, one of 42 ministers in a Texas megachurch with 26,000 members, was arrested for sexual improprieties with one he thought to be 13 year old girl. It was part of a police sting. His arrest occurred after he had driven 200 miles to meet her.

"Of course wide discrepancies between what one practices and what one preaches is not limited to Christians. A number of the Muslim 9-11 hijackers drank hard alcohol—forbidden in the Koran (45), watched pornographic films and went to nude bars where they danced with the nudes—both forbidden in the Koran (46), or desired or used prostitutes—also forbidden (47). One even left a copy of his Koran at a bar. If they believed they were promised paradise in a few days, why did the self-centered desires win out over their supposedly professed beliefs in the Koran?

"In older days the God of the Mid-East was responsible for everything—death, disease, war. But for many modern people, with the often supposed death of God and the rise in democracy the individual has become responsible. His smoking or lack of exercise causes disease, as does his high fat intake. His ideas and work ethic are responsible for his success or failure in his economic life. People, not God, are responsible for famine and AIDS, for war and yes, even for peace.

"Another case of society vs. self centered values is found in the numerous cases of individuals or states suing tobacco companies. I don't remember doctors ever advocating smoking—even though many used to smoke. Athletic coaches have always warned their charges against smoking. Schools have advised against it, as have public health agencies. I doubt that any smoker in the U.S. has ever believed that smoking was healthful. And if that smoker can read the warning on the cigarette package he well knows that it can be 'hazardous to his health.' But for his self-centered desires to have 'pleasure now' through a nicotine jolt, he smokes. Then when he develops emphysema, lung cancer or heart disease he sues the cigarette company. Or if he dies, his heirs sue the company. Courts, representing society, often give huge financial awards to people for their stupidity of having smoked.

"While society should certainly continue to warn its citizens of the possible problems due to developing a nicotine habit, perhaps it should recognize that smoking can be good for society as a whole. If the cigarette taxes are high enough to more than pay for the hospital expenses due to the habit, the earlier deaths of the smokers will reduce the amount of retirement benefits that the society will have to pay. In fact this was one of the reasons that a tobacco company gave an eastern European country for allowing smoking in that country.



— "There is a major question as to how much individual freedom a society can allow its citizens and still keep a semblance of order. It seems to be a universal rule that societies do not allow their citizens to murder or rape those in their own societies. But once we leave the bounds of our countries, particularly during wartime, even those rules are often broken. And, in fact, many of our greatest heroes are those who have killed the most humans who wore their enemy's colors. And how does the society enforce its laws? One culture cuts off the hand of a thief at the wrist. Another merely slaps that wrist.

SELF VERSUS SOCIETY

“There seems to be no universally acceptable solution. I can’t have everything I want. I must give up some of my self-centered values to gain other self-centered values. If I want a friendlier ecological home, some of my fellow citizens must reduce their expectations for parenthood. Yet none of us want to be told how to run our lives. There is the continual battle between individual and collective rights—the values of the self pitted against the values of the general social good.



--“Even if we could somehow meet a happy medium between the desires of the individual and the general good of the group, we will undoubtedly still have conflicts between our self-centered and social values and the desires we might have to practice our religion the way we wish. It is so common as to be a rule that the self-centered, the society-centered, and the God-centered values will continue to conflict and to not allow for a mutually arrived at consensus—or more important, an intelligent approach to our problems.

“There are a few countries in which the religion is so strong that its religious values are also the values of the society. The holy scriptures dictate the laws of those societies. This certainly makes the value system clear to the inhabitants of that country. In a Moslem country which uses the Koran as its law, the thief can certainly lose his wayward hand. Both Allah and the king have joined their hands on that issue. Shari’a, using the law of God as the law of the land makes perfect sense if: there is a God, and that God did in fact hand down His law to humankind, then that it was passed down without error from God’s human spokesperson without changes in interpretation, and that God intended that the law was to be immutable and eternal and not meant to apply only to those people to whom He gave the law at the time and place that the law was given. One problem is that so many mullahs and caliphs have interpreted the law differently.



--“But what about a country like my own which values freedom of religion? If the religion dictates that we should produce as many babies as possible but the society holds that more babies are not good for the society what happens? Well, our courts have often determined that the practicing of a religion may be harmful for the society and therefore illegal. This has happened when the rights of society, as viewed by the courts, have more validity than the rights of the person to refuse medical care for himself or his child because of a religious belief.

“There was also a major case which held that people in a religious sect which handled poisonous snakes and drank poison to prove their holiness were behaving against the best interests of the society. The members of the Holiness Sect were doing just what the Bible had indicated as a test of holiness. After his resurrection Jesus appeared to his apostles and told them that the believers ‘shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall in no wise hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.’ (48) However the Court held that the society must protect its own citizens from themselves—no matter what the source of their beliefs. The state Supreme Court ruled that the citizens have the right to believe anything they want in the religious area but that their rights to practice that belief are limited to society’s rules.

“This is probably why we don’t allow any religions to sacrifice beautiful maidens to the god of the volcano. This I believe is a wise decision. There were just not enough beautiful maidens in the country—and sacrificing them was such a waste! Maybe instead we older citizens should be tossed into the boiling cauldron!!

“So which values should we hold most dear? Most of us would like to have our own freedom unrestricted, but we can all see ways to limit the liberties of others. It’s OK if I drink and drive—but not if you do it. It is fine for me to take a sick day off from work to play golf but if you do it you’re cheating. I can drive my car beyond the speed limit but you should not. But what if each of my selfish whims were punished by death if I were caught? Might society not benefit from having

fewer drunk drivers, cheaters, and speeders? And is the death penalty so bad? None of us will live forever! On this planet not many of us will make much of a positive difference in the future of the world. If we plan to have a strong societal ethic, such as that of Kino, we will need either a highly effective system of education and strong social pressure or a penal system which insures societally correct behavior."



—“Is it possible to develop a consensus among the populace. I think not. We will, for the extended foreseeable future, continue to have conflicts based on our immediate desires. Our inferiority complexes, and our lack of ethical and ecological understanding will continue to stop the progress which must be made. The uninformed individuals will continue to fall in line with the commanders of their kingdoms and the regents of their religions. In short, as the philosopher Spinoza said, “The masses of people will always be ruled by imagination and emotion, not by reason.” Will the masses of people opt for a smaller population and the potential for happier lives for their grandchildren—I think not, but I hope so!

“If our minds are allowed to be free we will always have conflicts in values. Orwell’s Big Brother could not control all of the people. The Soviet KGB could not control all of the people. The powerful Pope of Rome has not been able to convince all of his faithful to follow of all of his pronouncements. There will always be thinking people. And those thinking people will hold different basic assumptions. Those varying assumptions and the types of evidence we choose to use with them will generate quite different ethical and political systems. If only God would descend to us and set us straight—but we wouldn’t believe Her.”



"That's blasphemous Wreck! But maybe with all your years in space you have been closer to the Supreme than I will ever get.

"But back to the subject. Do you remember when that double agent was poisoned in England in 2006? Then in 2016 a British investigation opined that it must have been ordered by Vladimir Putin. Putin said that 'your rules don't apply to me or my country.' So his self-centered values or those of his society ran counter to the values of other Western countries with whom he wanted to do business.

VALUE QUESTIONS



-- “Let’s discuss a number of value questions. I think we can see how most value questions can be seen as moral or immoral depending on which basic assumptions we use and what evidence we use with that assumption.

“Let us look at some social considerations and how we might take self centered, God based or society based assumptions as the starting points for seeing how our moral ideas may develop. We will look at an existing problem, like abortion or animal rights or capital punishment. Then we will add evidence, such as historical or empirical, to the mix and we will see that just about any problem can be seen as ethical from a self, God or society point of view—depending on the evidence we choose to believe.

“All of these problems are problems societies must wrestle with. I want to start with some general social problems, then explore some ethical problems about life and death, then some issues about reproduction. Then I want to look at some problems that center on sex or marriage. As I have said, the positions people may take on one of these issues depends not only on their basic assumptions but also on the evidence they choose.

“But more. Some aspects of our assumptions may move out of the nebulous area of assumption and move more toward probability. While we can not prove or disprove a supreme being, we may be able to provide more proof for individual or societal behaviors. If a hundred years ago a person assumed that opium would not hurt him, he had no proof. Today we do. The assumption of the Divine right of kings and their right to absolute rule, has been sociologically disproved as an effective method of government. So our previous beliefs and assumptions are sometimes proven to be in error as our knowledge increases.

“The various sciences of psychology, economics, sociology and such can measure more effectively the realities and the effects of some programs. Does capital punishment reduce crime? Does contraception or abortion make most people’s lives happier? Is torture an effective way of gaining information from terrorists? Will euthanasia save a society money?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of the welfare state? These can be measured!

“About an hour ago we looked at some issues concerning the welfare state as a possible ideal. Let us now look at it as being an ethical approach or a non-ethical way of handling a society. While we looked at the ideal of ‘cradle to grave’ state responsibility, because it exists today, we can measure it. When Karl Marx proposed his idea of communism it could not be tested. It was purely in the camp of societal basic assumptions with Plato’s Republic and Augustine’s City of God. But as the Soviet Union struggled through its brand of socialism it was clear that human selfishness would not accept Marx’s ideas of socialism or communism today. Maybe in the future, but not today.

“The welfare state continues to be an ideal. But the economic realities of globalization and the demands of the people are stretching it and causing many to question it. Can states provide more and more in today’s world? Must the benefits be pruned back? How high can people be taxed without rebelling. Will the high level producers leave the country because they rebel at paying for other people’s benefits?

THE WELFARE STATE

“In a welfare state we assume an actual equality of the citizens. We are going more into exploring equality when we get to the United Colonies and speak with Dr. Konnor. It is generally popular with those on the bottom economic rungs, but less popular with those on the top. If we are actually equal then the welfare state is a must. If we are not equal then it doesn’t make much sense unless it avoids riots. “The most complete national welfare programs are found in the Scandinavian countries. This so-called ‘Nordic model’ gives benefits to all citizens and immigrants, and in the case of health care, to many visitors. The benefits of health care and education through the secondary level are free as in most advanced countries. Students may have to buy their books, which is not usually the case in the US. At the collegiate level if a student qualifies for a certain course of studies he gets a scholarship. In the U.S. a few will be on scholarship, but many will have to work their way through college while paying their tuition. “Financial advantages for parents are a major difference between the welfare states and the U.S. In Norway, for example, after a birth, one parent gets 11 months off work fully paid by the state and the other parent gets one month off fully paid. Then there is the monthly stipend for each child.

“Unemployment benefits are generous. Of course you must have been employed. You don’t get paid for just existing. Employment in these countries involves most adults. The heavy tax rates require two breadwinners in every family unless one is in a very well paid private business.

“In the public sector you may find that no one can make a higher salary than the prime minister, who may make \$100,000 to \$150,000. However in the private sector there is no limit, but highly paid executives may be chastised in the press for their excessive salaries. On the other hand highly paid athletes are admired—even when they put their earnings in tax free countries like Monaco. But certainly a soccer player is of more value to the world than the prime minister of Denmark or the CEO of Eriksson

“There’s no question that to get more welfare benefits you have to tax your citizens more for the benefits or borrow from China then tax the citizens for the interest payments to China, and eventually tax them enough to pay back the principal that you borrowed.

“Denmark borrowed a lot to pay for its benefits, then since 1995 it has reduced its debt ratio by half, through high taxes for ten years. The per-person share of the debt dropped to about \$10,000. It can now either reduce the benefits and reduce the taxes or it can keep the taxes high and keep the welfare state flying. Denmark’s per person share of the national debt is about the same as the UK, which is a less generous welfare state. But it’s only about a third of the average American’s share—and you don’t even have a welfare state—at least not in the same league with Denmark. But then Denmark didn’t go to war against some Muslims, they only printed a few offensive cartoons. And the Danes didn’t give tax breaks to their richest citizens like your country did. In three years Denmark dropped the interest costs to taxpayers by 25%. Foreign debt dropped over 50% in 3 years.



--So the Danes are getting more and the Americans are getting less for their taxes?



—“In spite of its welfare state, and its high taxes, the Danes are getting more for their tax dollars, but the Chinese aren’t getting their cut because the Danes aren’t borrowing from them to keep their welfare state operating. Thank God for American borrowing and toy purchases or China would still be a third world country!



—“We talked about the welfare model earlier. Let’s look at the plusses and minuses relative the our basic assumptions.

The Welfare State is Moral from a self-centered point of view

“From a self-centered point of view obviously if you get more from the system than you put into it you will be for it in most cases. Poor immigrants are given free health care and education, along with a monthly stipend for each child. And any families that work can have one parent take off about a year with full pay.”



—“That’s great if the country needs more people, but if the world is overcrowded, no country needs more people. They just need to share people.”



—“But we’re talking about self-centered interests here, not the social interests that I believe should be primary. I’m just the devil’s advocate here. So let’s go on. With fully paid sick leave from day one of an illness, it pays to take off work if you don’t feel like working. Maybe a couple of days of beach time or skiing is all you really want.



—“I assume you’re being a bit facetious here. Let’s add in education as a positive. Of course education to about age 18 is free, although you may have to buy your books, but at the collegiate level all or most students are on scholarship. So if you get into a university you don’t have to work your way through school like most people do in the U.S. That certainly appeals to students’ self-centered interests!”



—“And those of their parents! OK Con what would you see as self-centered negatives?”

From a self centered point of view it is immoral.



—“A Dutch friend of mine was complaining that while he was working and paying his taxes, the unemployed were playing on the beaches of Tenerife and the government was sending their welfare checks to them in the Canary islands. The Dutch welfare system was not fair from his point of view.”



“The same thing happens with Norwegians. A person gets his welfare payment sent to the Canary islands but he works there driving a taxi or opening a bar. A friend of mine lived in Norway for a while and complained that on the average things cost three times what they did in the states. There were value added taxes of 24%, on goods and services and because of the taxes businessmen had to charge higher rents and include higher profit margins than was needed in the U.S.”



—“But remember that Norway pays its own way, it doesn't borrow from China and Japan and it has no national debt. They realize that you have to pay for what you get. They are financially realistic, not living in a dream world like the U.S. On the other hand, people contributing more than they receive may not like the system. I know several who have left for lower taxed countries. They vote with their feet. The people who stay realize that the government has to take away their money before it can give it back.

Moral from God based assumptions



—“From a God based point of view, all humans have equal worth, we're all made in the Image of God, so we should have our needs met equally. Some have greater needs and lesser income.



—“I know that the welfare states have been developed in northern Europe by Protestants. Why haven't the Catholics done it in the south of Europe?”



—“I think there were a couple of reasons. One is that we have always held that the family, not the state, is the best caregiver. Then Germany and the north were more industrialized, the south was more rural in many cases. Then our Catholic money went to the poorest areas of the world rather than being kept at home. But you can see now that southern Europe is becoming more industrialized and there is more socialistic thinking.”



—“And wouldn’t you say that the Catholic hold on the southern Europeans has weakened considerably?”



—“Unhappily for Euro—“What about other religions?”



—“I would guess that the Muslim approach to almsgiving might be used if a Muslim state were to decide to be a welfare state.”



—“I think Saudi Arabia is a good example. They have free education and some effective health care and social services to bring the poorer people up economically. And the best thing is that it isn’t paid for by taxes, but by oil.”

Immoral from God based assumptions



—“On the other hand, if God puts us in this world in a particular economic class, we might assume that that is where we were intended to be. Something like the Hindu idea of karma. Or we might say that any excess money should be used to convert non-believers rather than to economically equalize those who already believe. After all, suffering economically is as good a way to don the crown of thorns as would be other physical suffering.

Moral for society based assumptions



—“It is only Christian to give every soul the benefits of health services and education. It isn’t fair that people get material and educational advantages just because of their parents’ wealth. If it is more difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, let’s make fewer people rich and give more people a chance at a happy hereafter.



—“That sounds God-based, Ray.”



—“Well I think it is clear that the idea of a social welfare state has its roots in Christianity. Although I have to admit that it has come to fruition under Protestant governments. Norway and Denmark have Lutheranism as their state religions, and Sweden had Lutheranism as a state religion when it developed its welfare state.



—“It would seem that the welfare state is a positive for the people, or they would leave their countries or vote out the politicians that oversee it. The question for these democratic-

republics is whether the people are better off because of the universal education and health care and the emphasis on the contentment of the individual worker in terms of hours worked, vacation time, and retirement benefits. Sweden, Denmark and Finland have recently passed the U.S. as better climates for business. So all of the negatives mentioned earlier may not apply to all welfare states. It seems that if welfare states spend their money on domestic tranquility rather than on pre-emptive wars, they come out ahead.

Immoral from a societal point of view.

“But in the U.S., Social Security and Medicare have promised \$37 trillion more in benefits to senior and disabled workers than the programs will be able to pay. The annual report of the trustees of the Social Security and Medicare trust funds concluded that both programs will require progressively larger transfers from general revenues to maintain the projected levels of spending.



--“Medicare and Social Security will require growing amounts of federal income tax revenue. Early in the century about 7 percent of federal income taxes went towards the two programs. Five years ago, in 2020, 26.6 percent of all federal income taxes went to paying for Medicare and Social Security. Medicare’s cost alone are 23% of federal taxes. Then by 2030, the cost of both will increase to 49.7 percent, with Medicare taking over 37% of federal taxes. Medicare’s long term debt will be over \$32 trillion, \$8 trillion of which will be for the prescription drug program.

“If Congress wants to solve the problem it only has to find six and a half trillion dollars today and the Social Security fund will be solvent for another sixty years. Not to worry, China can lend it to us. Maybe they’ll take Hawaii and Alaska in trade. Maybe Congress will have to stop spending the money in the trust fund. If they’re going to bring home the bacon, maybe they won’t find it in the pork barrels!

“With Social Security outgo just about equaling its income, the Federal government is running out of rabbits to pull out of its magic hat. Can the electorate realize that the free magic show is over? But our children will be paying dearly for our pragmatic politicians’ sleight of hand. Just how are we going to handle health care?

In Europe every nation spends more than it taxes. Unless there is an additional source of income, like Norway’s oil, the country has to borrow. That problem is exacerbated in the ‘States’ because we refuse to tax ourselves for our desires. The ‘entitlements’ that we expect are not delivered by Santa Claus, they are financed by Scrooge. If we learned nothing from the financial collapse of 2008, we should have learned that it takes more than hope to assure that our home values will rise and our stocks will forever rise in value. We should have learned as individuals and as legislators that our credit card debt and our deficit spending must someday be repaid. The pot of gold at the end of the rainbow only exists for leprechauns.

HUMAN RIGHTS



--“Let’s look at human rights for a minute. While there are lofty pronouncements regarding human rights, they mean nothing if the government of a country doesn’t grant them—or if the Earth can’t provide for them, like when a ‘right’ states that people should have clean water—but there is no unpolluted water in a country. When refugees are not allowed into a country or are taken in for a time then later shipped home—what rights did they have? They have none, only their desires which they like to call ‘rights.’



---“If a Tibetan wants to immigrate to France—should France be able to stop it? What if five billion people wanted to move to San Diego or to London and become citizens? The cry of the asylum-seekers is ‘let me in’ but generally the societally based interests of the desired city trump the self centered interests of the individual petitioner.

“When a citizen of the US wants to move from Chicago to Los Angeles—it is allowed. Should that person be immediately eligible for schooling, medical care, welfare benefits? The U.S. Supreme Court said ‘yes.’ (49) Citizens of the United States, whether rich or poor, have the right to choose to be citizens “of the State wherein they reside.” (50.) The States, however, do not have any right to select their citizens. The Fourteenth Amendment, like the Constitution itself, was, as Justice Cardozo put it, ‘framed upon the theory that the peoples of the several states must sink or swim together, and that in the long run prosperity and salvation are in union and not division.’

“I would like the human ‘right’ to drive on the right side of the road while in England. I have that right in most countries. But what we individuals would like to call human rights come from God or society, not from ourselves. We may think there is a basic human right to life and liberty, but, the society may authorize capital punishment or a war in which we are required to serve. We often tout the right to privacy, but the government may spy on us. The United Nations declared the rights of a child, but countries often do not protect their children from disease, slavery, physical or mental abuse. If people have a right to health insurance that must be paid by taxing others—do those ‘others’ have the human right to keep the money they have accumulated?”



--“The best interests of the child—of every child born into the world—must be primary. Why should biological parents be favored—it is only tradition, an uncaring tradition. Mass murderers have more rights to legal recourse than do honest poor citizens. And children usually have none.

“Are human rights violated when people who do not want to have the possibility to die are sent into a war they don’t support. If they support the cause wholeheartedly and are willing to die for it that is one thing. But the opinions and desires of a society’s leaders usually translate into the needs of the society.

“Just look at some of the human rights enumerated by the United Nations in 1948, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They certainly sound good, but admittedly they would have to be codified in the laws of the various countries if they are to be meaningful. In Article 1 it says that we are all born free and equal in dignity and rights. That is certainly a nice democratic assumption. But then it goes on to state that we are all endowed with ‘reason and conscience.’ Physiologists know that some babies born to human parents have so little brain capacity that they can’t reason. And history clearly shows several people whose actions seem to have been performed without any semblance of a conscience.

“The Declaration then goes on to allow everyone certain rights, such as: the right to marry freely, the right to not be tortured or enslaved, and equal rights before the laws. Does this mean that since 1948 no one has been tortured, enslaved or been married against their will. And even though everyone can seek asylum from another country, there is no guarantee that it will be granted.

“Then it goes on to call for the right to work, a free choice of employment, fair wages and to social security. And Article 25 goes way beyond these saying that ‘Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.’

“Even a utopian like me realizes that many of these rights are impossible to realize. But then in Article 29 the Declaration mentions that citizens have duties. Perhaps half of the Declaration should have been related to a citizen’s duties and the other half to rights in a utopian modern democracy. And of course the Preamble recognizes that these ideal rights must be imbedded and protected by the laws of each country.

“Changing the geography of our conversation a bit. It gave me pause when protesters against China’s violation of human rights at home and in Tibet were violently denying the human rights of Olympic torch bearers running the Olympic flame from Greece to China. The runners were not even Chinese—but British, Greek, French, and other nationalities. They were not supporting China’s positions, but rather supporting the Olympic ideals. I guess we see the same question of conflicting assumptions here. Both sides were certain of their rights. But did those protesting against violent civil rights violations by China have the right to violence against third parties who were not involved with China?

“It’s true that China invaded Tibet in 1950 to regain the sovereignty it had acquired in the 1700s but lost to the British in the early 1900s. The British also conquered Palestine in World War I. The United Nations gave part of Palestine to a new nation called Israel. On the other side of the Atlantic Europeans took North America from its natives starting in the 16th Century and Africa from its natives a century earlier. Then they gave Africa back in the 20th Century. The violent and acquisitive history of our species, as seen in the innumerable invasions, insurgencies shift and re-shift national boundaries. So is possession 9/10s of the law, except sometimes? Should Tibet again be free, as many Christians and Buddhists want? Should Palestine revert to the Arabs as most Muslims want? Should the Southern states have been free to go their own way in the 1860s? Was Lincoln wrong in stopping them?

“How many years back do we go to determine the ownership of land? If we go back 3,000 years, before David conquered the lands that now comprise Israel, Israel has no call on the land. Do we go back to the 6th Century BC, if so it belongs to Iraq or Iran. If we decide to go back only 2,200 years, it belongs to Greece. Then it belonged again to the Jews 2100 years ago, for 100 years. If we decide that 2,000 years is the farthest back we can go to determine land ownership and any civil rights that entails then it belongs to Italy. If we set 1,500 years back as the time of legitimate ownership Turkey has the best claim. But since Turkey is a Muslim country and the area was Christian, we have a conundrum. If we decide that legitimate ownership should be determined by ownership a thousand years ago it should go to the Muslims. But if we decide legal ownership began 800 years ago it would go to the Christians, maybe England or France. But a few years later it would go to Egypt and the Muslims, who would keep it until World War I. So if we go back 75 years the British get it, but they gave it to Israel. For almost 3000 years some Jews have lived there but so have Arabs.

“Few areas have had so many changes of ownership as has Palestine. But changes in ownership of every land is a reality of history. Whether it is the clumping together of city-states to form Italy, or the joining of kingdoms as in France and England, or the dividing of land as in the former Yugoslavia. It’s all about power and influence. Should we use the same rules for the Palestinians and the Tibetans? Should Israel and China have taken their lands? Certainly it would be nice for the Jews, the Palestinian Arabs and the Tibetans to have their own lands. Is it some concept of human rights or the reality of national power that determines the way the people will live?



—“You’re right Wreck. Where do we draw the line? How do we define human rights? How do we limit them? How do we expand them? Are our human rights violated when a criminal beats the rap when he was guilty? Are Norwegian taxpayers’ human rights violated when their tax money goes to paying criminals \$25 a day when they are in jail? Are taxpayers’ human rights violated when their money is sent to developing countries for aid but is pocketed by the corrupt

dictators? Is a Scandinavian's rights violated when he pays 10 or 20 times more for a traffic fine than does an American for the same offense? Are the rights of high salaried high tax bracket people violated when they pay ten times more in taxes than they receive in benefits? Which types of unfairnesses against humans violate their human rights. And who gives these rights?

“And if a drunk teenager and his passengers are severely injured when he is racing another car on a narrow mountain road, does he have the human right to \$300,000 of medical treatment, when that money could have gone for early childhood education or building new classrooms? What about his passengers? If they had the opportunity to not ride with the drunk, are they somewhat to blame for their predicament? What about an impoverished father of twelve? Does he have the right to unlimited medical care? His children, who didn't choose to be born may have such a right. The question is, if rights require corresponding duties, do we require that the duties be performed before granting the rights?”



—“Interesting observations. Well, let's look at our basic assumptions and see how they might impact our ideas of human rights.

Moral from a self-centered point of view.

“I could say that I want to do anything I want. I believe that whatever I want is my right. I want all my medical bills paid by someone else. I want a good job even if I'm not qualified for it.

Immoral from a self-centered point of view.

“But if what you think are your rights interfere with what I think are my rights, I'm not ready to give up what I have for you.”

Moral from a God based point of view.



--“Jesus said that the meek shall inherit the earth. (51) And throughout His Sermon on the Mount He clearly shows that we are all brothers and that we should treat each other with charity. (52) That certainly shows a concern for human rights.”

Immoral from a God based point of view.



--“But Ray, in that same sermon Jesus didn't seem to give us sinners any rights. If my eye or my hand is responsible for a sin the eye must be gauged out and the hand cut off. (53) And if I divorce my wife for any reason other than 'marital unfaithfulness' I have sinned. (54) And if I marry a divorced woman I have committed adultery. (55) The legal rights to divorce or to marry a divorced person that most of us consider to be human rights are against the law of God as Jesus saw it. In the U.S. about 50% of Christians have broken this law of God thinking they had a human and legal right to do it.”

Moral from a society based point of view.



--“From a societal viewpoint human rights are essential. But the question is which rights are essential to a smoothly running society. The right to vote? Freedom of religion or

speech? Freedom from want? Freedom from fear? The right to an education that is unbiased by religious or societal assumptions? As in so many areas of life the ideals of some are not the realities for most.”

Immoral from a society based point of view.



--“Wreck, your implication is that we don’t know which rights a society should give and whether they should be absolute. Certainly in many countries and states a person doesn’t have the right to live. Some murderers in America get the death sentence. Homosexuals in Iran, dissidents in China and many other sins against the Supernatural or the society incur the death penalty. So people can lose their most basic assumed right—the right to life. No country allows its citizens or its visitors unlimited desires as rights. Deal drugs in Turkey and see the severity of your sentence compared with the punishment for the same crime in Oregon. Human rights sound good to UN politicians and to the person on the street, but certainly we don’t want everyone to have every desire for which they wish.

“And what about the right for food by a starving person in Darfur compared to the right for an American to give his pet dog a manicure? Should the manicure money buy bread for those dying of starvation? Societies overwhelmingly cater to the wishes of their influential citizens not to the physical needs of outsiders.”

LEGAL AND CIVIL RIGHTS

“When Los Angeles considered closing bath houses used by homosexual men because they had been found to increase the incidence of HIV, activists fought it because it interfered with their civil rights. The American Civil Liberties Union and such groups have fought continuously for civil rights, such as: the rights of Nazis to demonstrate and the right to pornography, the right to send spam to all computers, and the legalization of heroin and cocaine. So many think that whatever we desire becomes a civil right. It doesn’t matter if it might interfere with the optimal functioning of the society or that it might interfere with any rights that others may desire.

“So we have the rights of freedom of speech in the First Amendment and the right to conduct commerce from the First Amendment, both Constitutional guarantees quite possibly in opposition to the necessity to insure domestic tranquility and the promotion of the general welfare of the nation as found in that document’s Preamble.(56)

“Additionally since the Constitution is silent on the issue of pornography it may be considered to be a right of the states to regulate it, as allowed by the Tenth Amendment.(57) Or, since it is not enumerated in the Constitution it may be a right retained by the people under the Ninth Amendment.(58) It is difficult to believe that the Founding Fathers would have approved of child pornography or its availability to minors. Would the right to produce or view pornography be valuable to a society if it were shown that it increased rape or unprotected sex in the young, or that it increased sexually transmitted diseases or unwanted pregnancies?

“Is it a right to be able to fly safely on any airline? What freedoms may have to be reduced to inhibit terrorists from hijacking or bombing the plane? What rights should a mass murderer have if they cost a society money—such as in the expenses of prolonged appeals? What rights should Nazis or the Ku Klux Klan have if they advocate the killing of law abiding citizens of a society? What freedoms are you willing to give up to be safer? Do you mind having your luggage searched in an airport?”



—“Often human rights or civil rights are seen as the protection of self-centered desires in opposition to what the society’s legislatures find is best for society. Are potential terrorists

detained indefinitely being deprived of civil rights or are the rights of the society to avoid destruction being protected? Which is more valuable?”



—“I’ve heard people say that they have the right to have their dog defecate in the park and they don’t need to clean it up, because they are taxpayers. As a legal or illegal immigrant I have the right to bring my mother or brother or children into the country where I live and work—because I want to. The fact that others will pay for their education or medical costs does not matter. I want it.

“As a murderer who tortured my victims unmercifully, I have the right to life, or the right to a painless death. As a drug addict who dropped out of society and robbed and stole to support my habit, I have the right to food, shelter and medical care. As an able bodied person I have the right to refuse jobs that are ‘beneath my dignity’ because an immigrant will gladly do them. Meanwhile I am entitled to unemployment benefits.

“Then there are often those who call for rights but don’t want to grant them themselves. For example. The reverend James Bevel, a top lieutenant to Martin Luther King, was charged with having sex with his daughter from the time she was sex, saying it was part of her religious training. She was one of his 14 children. Is this the type of freedom that Dr. King advocate?”



—“ Lets get into some more general social areas where we can see how basic assumptions and evidence can take us in many ethical directions, depending on which of these variables we choose.

SOCIAL QUESTIONS

OFFICIAL STATE RELIGION

“You can see some of the problems when you have a state religion, often being supported by state revenues. Minorities may be frozen out of their religious beliefs.

“From a self centered point of view it is convenient if you are a member of the state church and everybody in the country helps to support your church. You don’t have to come up with as much money to support it. Also, if most other people believe as I do, I have more people who have things in common with me.”



---“Let me take the negative side. If I am a minority person, such as an agnostic or a Muslim or even a Catholic, in a country with a Lutheran state religion, I am going to feel different and unaccepted by my society.”



—“I think that from a God-based point of view having a state religion makes sense, especially if it is my religion! But I admit that there must be a Christian tolerance for all charitable religions who advocate peace for the world.”



—“Ya, Ray, the problem, I think, is intolerance. But I can understand that if you have a state religion you will have less dissention in the country. Like in Saudi Arabia where Islam is the state religion and the majority are Sunni, but all Muslims are welcomed for the annual hajj to

Mecca. On the other hand there might be people who would be more content being Buddhists, Hindus or Christians, but they don't have those options."



"From a societal point of view the idea that Wanda mentioned, that there should be more national cohesion if all or most of the citizens are in the same religion."



"But Wreck, there are a ton of negatives. This is probably why so many countries have given up their state religions. Turkey, which is over 99% Muslim, separated the church from the state a hundred years ago, about the same time that Austria and France gave up their Catholicism and Wales gave up the Anglican religion. More recently Spain and Italy have given up Catholicism as the state religion and Sweden has given up its Lutheran state church. But its Scandinavian neighbors Denmark, Iceland and Norway still claim Lutheranism as their state religion. There have been some rumblings in Norway to separate their church and their state.

"One problem is that when you have a state religion, tax money is generally used to support it. And with national budgets being pinched, tax supported religions may have to give way to increased expenses for tax supported health care and pensions. But even in countries that do not have a state religion, there may be government support. In the U.S.A. for example, there are tax deductions for contributions to religions and many churches and church businesses aren't taxed. So the general tax rates must be raised or more foreign borrowing must be done to continue the government support for religion."

CHEATING OR LYING



"Cheating, lying, stealing and corruption are all branches of the same tree. But lets take a look at some of these branches.

"If Franklin Roosevelt knew about the possible Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor, as many say was true, but the war helped to end the depression and helped to make joining the Allies possible so that Hitler could be stopped—did the greater good cancel out the evils, which included the deaths of over 400,000 Americans and the injuries of many others. Was his decision moral?

Moral from a Self-centered point of view.



--"Let me look at cheating and lying since we lawyers are always being accused of it. From a self centered point of view I want to pass an examination or I want to win a case or I want to get a business contract, cheating or lying would be fine from my point of view. I wonder how many people in the world cheat on their taxes.

Immoral from a self-centered point of view

"But what if I get caught? I fail the class, or worse, am dismissed from college. Or as a lawyer I tell my client to lie and he is caught and blames me. Maybe I am sent to jail for obstructing justice, or I'm disbarred. Or as a business man, I cover up some negative facts or publicize things that aren't true to raise my stock's price and then am found guilty of stock fraud or conspiracy and am fined and imprisoned.

Moral from a God perspective

“Was it cheating during the early Christian church history when the founders of the religion did not accept as scriptures early gospels that did not back up their desired ideas?

“Is it cheating when I copy your exam paper, or is it sharing? If so, isn't this the Christian way?

Immoral from a God perspective



-- “If cheating is stealing, it is against all scriptures. But was it cheating when the harlot hid two of Joshua's spies? Is it lying when an imam recruits some people to be suicide bombers and destroy the great Satan, while promising them salvation? Is it cheating when Israel or the Palestinians break their cease fire agreements?

“Certainly ‘bearing false witness’ is against the Commandments.

Moral from a societal point of view

“Since lying is a type of cheating, we see it continually in democratic elections. They lie about funding schools. They lie about their opponents.

“The leaders of societies lie about why we should go to war. They lie about the progress of the war. They cheat the citizens by giving tax breaks that eventually cost the taxpayers far more than they got in the tax windfall. The people of the society are continually lied to and cheated. But the society still does pretty well.”

Immoral from a societal perspective.



--- “It seems now that white collar criminals, who have bilked people out of billions of dollars, are getting prison sentences that match those of burglars or marijuana smokers there is some reason to practice honesty. Transparency International has ranked countries by their absence of corruption. Finland is number one, Denmark and New Zealand are tied for second with the UK at number 10 and the U.S. at 16. Looking for corruption? Try Nigeria or Bangladesh, ranked 102 and 103. Better bring lots of baksheesh if you want to do business there.”



—“I would guess that cheating in school has been around since Aristotle was a student of Plato. But with cell phones, computers and the internet, students must use all their time in chicanery rather than studying. When I last taught in the university I had to check in cell phones on exam days because cell phone messaging has been a major method of getting answers from outside accomplices. I took phrases from every term paper and checked them against Google. I found whole papers copied. I found quotes not cited. I failed a fair number of search engines schemers, and none of them complained.”

STEALING

Stealing can be moral from a self-centered point of view



—“I’ve defended a number of burglars and they rationalize that ‘it’s an easy way to make money. I have no other skills.’ Just look at most countries and you will see a number of people who make their livelihood in stealing. Look at the organized crime, from China to South Africa to Europe to the U.S. many thousands of criminals are engaged in stealing from the law abiding. They must think it has value for them. Then there are the drug users who generally rely on stealing to support their habits.

Stealing is immoral from a self centered point of view



—“The negatives for the thief are certainly that if they get caught they are thrown in jail. The negatives for me are that I want to keep what’s mine. Of course when they steal from me I think it’s highly unethical. And certainly I would feel safer if there were no people in the world trying to steal from my house, my bank, my business or my wallet.

Moral from a God based point of view

“We do see stealing occur in religious contexts, particularly where there is land or ideas involved. Israel occupied Palestine 2000 years ago, so it was always theirs. But the Muslims conquered it over 1000 years ago. They believe that once they have owned a piece of land it’s always theirs. Who stole whose land. Did the Jews steal it from the Canaanites or the Phoenicians? And who had it before them? Neanderthals lived there 200,000 years ago, then the Kebarans 20,000 years ago. Egyptians, Syrians, and others from the area settled, warred and conquered. The Canaanites were settled there when Abraham lived about 1800 BCE. The Hebrews migrated to the area about the time of Moses in 1200 BCE. But the Philistines seemed to have most of the control over the area.

“The Israelites conquered the Canaanites, then were conquered by the Assyrians in the 8th century BCE. A few hundred years later the Persians ruled the area. Then we have the Roman conquest, then the Jews again, then the Muslims. So who has the most legitimate claim to Palestine—the Neanderthals, the Egyptians, the Iraqis, the Lebanese, the Syrians, the Iranians, the Italians, the Muslims, the Jews?

“Is possession nine points of the law? Or how far back do we go to find the true owner? Should the United States, Mexico and Canada give back North America to the Native Americans? Should Taiwan be again a part of China? Should Tibet be freed?”



---“There is another question. Is destroying another’s property the same as stealing? During the Counter Reformation, the Catholics took the Protestants’ books but didn’t keep them, they burned them. I suppose that is the same as stealing, but they didn’t keep them, they just destroyed them. Henry the Eighth did the same with Catholic books. And what about the Taliban in Afghanistan blowing up the Buddha statues in the Bamiyan Valley?”



--“Then you have the Muslims conquering Spain and turning many churches into mosques, and building more mosques, like at Cordoba, then the Catholics re-conquering the area and making the mosques into churches. The spoils of war follow both secular and religious conquests!”

Immoral from a God basis.



—”There is clearly a commandment to not steal. But if your family is starving in a village in Mali, would you steal to feed them if that were your only option? Which is the greater sin—to steal or to die? To steal is against the 7th Commandment, and Surah 5:38 of the Qur’an. As to the thief, male or female, cut off his or her hands: a punishment by way of example, from God, for their crime: and God is Exalted in power.’ But it is also wrong to die when it need not have happened. The Psalms say ‘He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death.’ (59) And the Koran says ‘(They are) the ones that say, (of their brethren slain), while they themselves sit (at ease): ‘If only they had listened to us they would not have been slain.’ Say: ‘Avert death from your own selves, if ye speak the truth.’ (60)

Moral from a societal basis.

“Nations routinely try to steal the military and diplomatic secrets of other countries. Computer hacking, planting moles or bribing employees, using threats or sex are all means of espionage. Businesses often follow the lead of the nations and try to steal secrets.

Immoral from a society’s viewpoint.

“Obviously stealing from people in your own society is unethical, except on Wall Street or in Vegas.

LIMITING POPULATION

“The UN’s world population projection gave several scenarios of how growth might increase or decrease. From the 1991 world fertility rate of 3.4 children per woman, if it reduces to 2.06 children per woman the population will level off at 11.5 billion by 2050. if it reduces to 2.17 children per woman the population in 2050 will be over 20 billion and increasing. However if it drops to 1.96 children per woman the population will drop back to a bit over the 6 billion it was in 2000.

“With fertility rates of about 7.4 children per woman, as it is in Niger and Mali, the doubling time of their populations is a bit over 25 years. On the plus side over 70 countries have fertility rates of 2.0 or less. And the U.S. rate is about 2.1 with Asians are under 2, African Americans a little over 2, and Hispanics at 3.

“Why should Europe and America take in excess populations from countries that did not control their own populations, when those countries can’t provide the jobs for the people they produce.



—“It should be the major concern of the world’s people and leaders—reducing the world’s population. It amazes me that such an essential need still has opponents. How can anyone be against saving the planet from ourselves. The optimal population of the world is not the maximum number of bodies it can hold!

“Don’t any of the do-gooders see that to save southern Africa from poverty, sickness and starvation—the key is in limiting their population. Fewer babies born will mean fewer dying of starvation, fewer dying of AIDS, fewer dying from water borne diseases and less poverty. A limited amount of dollars spread among fewer people will bring more of them out of poverty. Certainly creating wealth is a lot harder than creating babies.”

“We talk about China’s one child policy, but China is still reproducing at a higher rate than other Asian countries. Japan’s fertility rate is 1.38, Singapore’s 1.04 and in a part of Hong Kong it

is 0.91. So it seems that it is either social policies, or individual selfishness, that deters people from wanting the negatives of children.”



—“Creating basic wealth is hard work. Creating babies is more fun than winning in Monte Carlo. People can’t see beyond the ends of their noses, or should I say, their penises. Looking back at the history of societies we see that having children was essential in a subsistence farming economy. But more children are no longer necessary for an economy, except to increase the number of consumers. We have more than enough producers now. Although some societies think they need more workers just so they can pay the pensions of those who have worked in earlier years. But those older workers had either not contributed enough to pay for what the government, or their employers, promised or their government or employer had used their contributions to pay other expenses. So we need more babies to make up for the lack of foresight of the politicians and business owners.

“We have 7 billion people now. Do we need 10 billion to pay for their retirements? Then 15 billion to pay the pensions of the 10 billion, then 30 billion to pay for the 15 billion? Very few people can think of the tomorrow after tomorrow. Thomas Malthus saw the coming problem over 200 years ago. People laughed at him. God will provide, they thought. And Malthus didn’t even foresee automobiles, electrified homes, global warming. How could this great big world run out of air or water? How could the limitless skies and vast oceans not absorb every bit of refuse that the less than a billion souls could produce in 1800.

“Every thinking person recognizes that people in technological societies increase the causes of global warming. They recognize that the world faces the exhaustion of many of its raw materials. They know that farmland is reduced as suburbs are planted where wheat once grew. They know that the planet is choking on its excess population. But every country is primarily concerned with its own economy and the need for its own ethnic citizens to till the soil and man the machines. They disregard the fact that there are waiting workers in other countries praying for a chance to help. But those outsiders are of a different ethnicity, have different customs, or different religious beliefs, or speak a different language.

“The choice is between saving the world for tomorrow or saving the economy today. Anyone who sees the world’s realities today knows we are already grossly overpopulated and it will get worse no matter what we do unless someone provides a genocidal holocaust exterminating two thirds of the population of the world by nuclear, biological or chemical warfare. I hate to see it, but it is more likely than expecting politicians to intelligently work on huge population reductions.”



—“But pragmatic business and ethnocentric nations will not allow it to happen.”

It is moral from a self-centered point of view.

“We must control our population and the rape of our environment for me, for my children and for theirs. I don’t like the idea of being told I can’t do everything I want, but I can get a glimpse of our future and it is fogged with the smog of our ignorance. We saw, but we were conquered by our selfish desires to have it all during our short lifetimes. Our self centered needs of today are nearly always more important than what we might need for the morrow. So we must control our population for self-centered reasons. We are looking at a future that will not be people-friendly. In fact our present is not very people-friendly for more than half of our global brothers and sisters.

“The older idea that children are essential for a woman’s happiness is now disbelieved by most. And potential fathers, rather than waiting for the son who will carry on the family name, now are even more skeptical than the women of the blessings of having another mouth to feed.”



--“Feminism, with its emphasis on women’s economic and political independence, is a major factor in the advanced countries’ population reductions. Climbing the educational and economic ladders is more fulfilling and more exciting for many women. Changing diapers and tending to runny noses is not always the most rewarding of occupations. And childlessness reduces the odds for divorce by half. As much as children may add joy to some marriages, they create economic and tranquility problems in many others. So dipping into the sink of self centeredness has cooled the cauldron of excess fecundity in Europe. I certainly never wanted children. Working with ideas and making them become public policies was always more important to me.”

Immoral from a self centered viewpoint.



—“As a businessman I can certainly see the need for more consumers. So from my self-centered point of view I don’t like any restriction on population. Fewer consumers means less profit. Also, if we continually allow people to retire early, we either need more people paying payroll taxes, more contributions toward their retirements from me, or higher taxes from me. I don’t like it when my outgo increases. I’m not in business to pay out! I’m in business to take in.



—“Wreck, let me play the devil’s advocate again.”

“It seems that all your life you’ve been the devil’s advocate. I guess that’s why you became an attorney, so that you could help to spin the laws so that they mean the opposite of what the legislators meant when they wrote them.

”Let’s not be cynical my man, remember we have a government of law. But on with the discussion! If I want to have children and can afford them, it is a basic freedom to have them. Whether it is in the Constitution’s allowing me to pursue happiness or my desire to have a kid I can coach in youth sports—I have that right and people have always had the right.”



—“You’ve had the right because society gave you the right and religion gave you the duty. But those can change.

Moral from a God point of view.

“Let’s look at the God bases for limiting population. If the Bible says “Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth” does it mean to multiply forever or until the world is adequately replenished? A number of Protestant denominations have recognized the need for a reduction in population. How can people honestly and fervently think about salvation when they can’t salivate because there is no food. It is obvious that God will not provide everything, He already provided us with a reasoning mind. If we refuse to use it we are going against the Divine plan.

“Society continually changes what the scriptures of a religion proscribe. “An eye for an eye” is not observed in most nations. Causing the loss of an eye might mean a civil fine, a penal sentence, or a monetary payment to the offended. Does society “turn the other cheek” when one of its members robs or rapes? No!

“If God is reasonable He must say ‘stop’. More people in the world means more misery and more poverty.

“God told Adam to multiply, and he did. But the people did not live as God wanted so He wiped them out in the flood. He then told Noah to multiply. So it may not be that multiplying alone

is the major concern of God, but rather multiplying people who will live morally according to God's laws.

Immoral from God's point of view.

"But limiting population is immoral from a God based point of view. The right to have a child or to have as many as you want is a God based right and duty. It is not enough that we have the conflicts between the religions that see more children as essential, such as the Catholics, Mormons and Muslims but we have conflicts between those religions and those that think we have multiplied to absurdity, or should I say to oblivion?

"Will God provide? When? If He or She is merciful, intervention probably should have come some time earlier, perhaps before the African famines due to global warming and the lack of water. Maybe AIDS, revolutions and suicide bombings are God's solution to the human population predicament. But are these the doings of the All-merciful God or the vengeful God? And is this supreme being good? If so why do we have war, torture, AIDS, starvation? Why are we running out of fresh water?"

"When irresponsible parents have children they can't take care of, why is everybody else responsible for their children. The Christian and Muslim moralities ask us to be charitable. But in many cases, the Christian and Muslim morality is responsible for the plight of the world's overpopulation and its most recent earthly and human calamities. The Catholics and Mormons want more children. The Muslims want more babies. Canada wants more, so do Sweden and Norway. The problem is that the world is literally dying because there are too many children."



—"Pope John Paul II assured us that our population growth is part of God's Divine plan. We should welcome it, not resist it. People err when they see Africa's starving and sick peoples as deprived. They are deprived only in an economic sense. Morally speaking, poverty means wealth. Remember Jesus said that it's harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle?"



—"Then why doesn't the pope auction off his church's treasures at Sotheby's and join the poor and the hungry on their hajj to heaven? His belly doesn't show any lack of spaghetti or strudel."



—"You agnostics don't seem to see the big picture. There is a whole world of people needing spiritual guidance. That's his job. While some ascend to heaven alone through the path of asceticism others must be involved with helping the whole world to see the vision and hear the message. Someone must sting the rumps of those who tarry, and lead those who would otherwise wander aimlessly.

"For example, the Italians are not having many children. The Pope sees this as a crisis.

Most Italian families are limiting themselves to one child. And it is likely that that child will stay close to mamma for 30 or 40 years. Forty percent of men do this. Instead of marrying and parenting in the early 20s, more Italians are staying home and using their salaries and time on self fulfillment—on sexually active relationships and physically active vacations. And no one takes as good a care of you as mamma does. After all she has years of experience and a lifetime of commitment to you. But in spite of the Pope's obvious concern, marriages are continuing to drop.



--“Certainly the more souls born may mean more souls that can be saved and go to heaven. However this assumes that the same souls might not be born later. If the species becomes extinct, fewer total souls would then be born and fewer would enjoy eternity.

“Then I wonder if it is moral to have children in a theistic religion if the children have little chance to enter paradise. For example if you have Christian or Muslim children taken into the armies of warlords and they kill others, then are killed themselves before having had a chance to repent, The Koran would direct them to hell. And their behavior would be impossible to fit under the Bible’s Golden Rule.

Moral from a societal perspective.

“How important is it that all people should have the right to becoming the best they can be, contribute toward their societies and live happy and fulfilling lives. For the world’s society it’s a ‘no brainer’. We’ve discussed this ad nauseum. There’s global warming, pollution of the seas, scarcities water, the depletion of oil and forests, no place to put the garbage. We just have about three times the number of people that the earth can handle. I certainly looked for a place to put them, but there is no place in our solar system.

“The people who study human ecology say that the populations of Africa, Asia and Latin America must be reduced. Ninety percent of the increase in population is occurring in Africa where the population has tripled in the last half century and will triple again in the next 50 years, since nearly half of the population south of the Sahara is under 15.

“I think that everyone should have the opportunity to be the best they can be. But how can a young woman have an opportunity to be her best, to fulfill herself or to contribute to her society when she is exposed to dying from giving birth. In Africa a woman’s chance of dying because of a pregnancy is about one in 20. In Latin America it is one in 200 but it is only one in 3,000 in the developed countries. We can’t raise the level of income or education while the wave of population grows faster than we can build the dikes that will allow for human achievement.

“Another important consideration is that when countries allow more children to be born than can be supported, it is immoral from an international perspective. So to limit a population to the number of people that can be provided jobs, or in the welfare providing countries, limited to the number for which welfare can be provided—is the only moral approach to population control.

Immoral from a societal perspective,



—“But Wreck, Singapore began a population reduction program in the 1960s. It attempted to limit each family to two or fewer children. The program was so successful that in the 1980s they had to reverse course and seek more children per family. The government began subsidizing maternity leave for working mothers, bonuses for having two or more children and tax breaks for three or more children.

“Society needs people to produce and consume. Business people want to keep the market expanding so they have somebody to sell to. They need poor people to work cheaply and they need people with money to buy their products.

“If you don’t want to reduce pension and health benefits, reduce taxes, or use robots for the low level work, the simplest and most pragmatic approach is to try to increase the fertility rate of your citizens. Of course that adds to the world’s population problem and adds more warmers for our globe! And it just delays the inevitable. Or you can bring in immigrants as guest workers, then the quality of the immigrants is essential. A single computer scientist would be expected to contribute more to the society than she takes out. But a minimum wage worker with four children

will undoubtedly take out more than he puts into the society. But if his family contributes two or three soldiers to the volunteer military much more is contributed to the cause of the country. Then the next generation will need more immigrants to pay for the social services offered to the last generation.

“Countries that think they need more children from their citizens can either give one-time bonuses, monthly allowances for the child to age six or even through the teens, or they can make parenting easier by giving at least one parent pay to raise the child, by giving tax breaks, and by providing adequate and inexpensive day care facilities. Australia offers a \$2000 bonus, Singapore offers \$10,000 for third or fourth children. Estonia will pay a mother a full year’s wages to have a child.

“In Northern Europe several countries have increased child care leave. Germany pays 2/3rds of the pay, up to 2300 euros a month, for a parent to stay home for a year, with an additional two months for the other parent to stay home. The opponents of the law said it was not enough. Norway is more generous, allowing 100% pay for one of the parents to stay home for 44 weeks or 80% of pay if they stay home the whole year. One of the parents must spend at least one month of this time at home, the other would spend the remaining time at home. In Norway the parents of every child under 18 are given \$150 a month, and in the more sparsely populated areas an additional \$50. There are also substantial tax deductions for parents.

“Japan and Germany, needing young workers to pay the costs of their aging retirants, look to France for guidance. Yes that’s the same France that has lowered retirement ages, increased vacations, and endured near rebellions from its unemployed. It is the France that has increased its birthrate among all its social classes. Various governmental agencies have given tax deductions for more children, given cash to employ in-home child care, subsidized child care, including free government paid pre-schools and heavily subsidized summer camps. They have also given paid long maternity leaves and additional monthly grants for a third child. Then there is the guarantee for working mothers that her job will be waiting when she returns. In fact she has the option of staying home for three years and still have the guarantee of her job. The financial subsidies give greater benefits to the low income families.



--“French politicians have also pushed the ideal that the government favors families and that it is your patriotic duty to have more children because families are the future of France. This has resulted in a baby boom that has passed Ireland as Europe’s major detriment to the stability of the world’s ecology. Since the 1920s the French government has awarded the *Medaille de la Famille Francaise*, the medal of the French Family. Four children gets you the bronze medal, six the silver medal and eight the coveted gold medal. It’s a nice nationalistic notion, but I would prefer to title the medal ‘*Le sexe avant la civilité*’ or ‘Sex over Civility’ or maybe ‘*la croix d’Aujord’hui plus que demain*’ or ‘Now over Tomorrow.’

“In France the birth rate has increased across the board, but immigrant mothers have a higher rate of fecundity than do the native French. Will this increase the riots and ghetto grumbling? With a 25% projected increase in population by 2050, can the country handle 70 million when it has the highest unemployment rate in Europe?



—“ In the UK the growth of the varying ethnic groups showed no growth among the Caribbean blacks, 1% for whites, 49% for mixed blacks, 37% for black Africans, 30% for Bangladeshi. 13% for Pakistani, and 5% for Chinese and Indians. It seems that the longer the ethnic group had lived in the UK, the less the group grew. The ethnic groups grew 15 times faster than the whites. This may have political effects as the years roll by. There aren’t a lot of Bangladeshi in the House of Lords.



—“It would be more valuable to know the social class and the educational and employment levels of the parents and possibly their religions. For example is the white baby born to unemployed drug users, is the Pakistani child born to Christian parents, is the Bangladeshi child born to university professors?

“It makes me wonder if they are reproducing the lower end of their society, the people who will most likely produce the criminals, the troublemakers, the uneducated and the unemployed.”



--“Looking at France, would the French economy be better served if the unemployed were effectively trained for meaningful work? Their recent unemployment rate has been near 10%. Can the French economy produce enough jobs for their increasing population? And if the population is increasing in the lower social classes where they are probably going to produce fewer university graduates, can low level jobs be developed where they can compete economically with the Southeast Asia or South American workers? Or maybe they need to keep reproducing at the lower class end of society so that there will be more rioting to keep the police busy. Otherwise French police could strike for retirement at 35.

“I think we should reduce the population in every country but mine.

Population reduction is immoral from a society point of view.

“If society’s economy depends on more workers to produce more, you certainly don’t want to limit your population. And as we’ve said, we need more young workers to pay for the benefits of the retired workers.

“Singapore’s earlier population reduction programs, combined with more highly educated women not wanting families, reduced the projected population below where the national leaders felt it was ideal. It has about half the fertility rate needed to keep the population stable.”



—“I wonder about the commonly used number of 2.1 children per woman needed to keep the population stable. I don’t know when it was proposed. But if the lifespan at that time was about 60 and the death rate was fairly high, it might have been right at the time, but now it is too high, it seems to me. Let’s say we assumed that the 2.1 was correct in about 2000. And let’s assume that we had 6 billion people that year. We’ll assume that the .1 died, as was probably assumed in the original estimate. Now let’s start with four adults who reproduce themselves by the time they are 25, so that’s the year 2025. We now have 8 people and the world population has doubled to 12 billion. If the children reproduce themselves by the time the parents are 50 we now we have 8 adults and 4 new children. So the world population would be 18 billion by 2050 in our hypothetical illustration. Then by year 75 those children will reproduce so we now have 16 people. But the original 4 will die about this time unless medical science has found more life extending techniques. So the 4 original people will stabilize at about 12 people assuming that life spans don’t increase. And the world’s population would level off at 18 billion, about 9 times more that the maximum the earth can effectively support.

“Using the same scenario but with each pair of parents having only one child, in 2025 we would have 9 billion. In 2050 we would have 10.5 billion then it would start to drop off if life spans didn’t increase. In 75 years we would be back to about where we are now. Then we could drop to the one or two billion that would be acceptable for the planet. But it would take much longer to get rid of the CO2 and the other global warming problems. Natural resources would

probably be nearly exhausted. Waste disposal would have continuing negative effects. And the oceans would be thousands of years from recovery.”



—“I don’t know where that 2.1 figure originated, but it has been revised downward to 1.85. And if that were a correct number it would still keep the world’s population at far more than six billion. And I agree with you commander, that six billion must be reduced as rapidly as possible.”

LICENSING PARENTS



—“I have been clear that I think licensing parents to have children is the best solution for having healthier happier children while limiting the world’s population. So let’s discuss it for a while.

It is moral from a self-centered point of view.

“I would assume that if children had a say in their birth they would choose not to be born if their lives were to be an endless series of pain and sadness. How many potential children would choose to be brought into this world if they knew they would be hungry or sick every day and die within the first five years of their lives? How many physically, mentally or sexually abused children would choose birth?

“Are you concerned about the type of children who will populate your world? Do you think that we would have fewer mentally ill people and criminals if the children were loved? Would you want to make certain that you are qualified as a potential parent so that you would be able to give your child the best upbringing possible?

“Look at the developed countries and you see that when contraceptives and abortion are available, fewer children are desired. People often prefer their free time to spend on themselves—skiing, sunbathing, traveling, reading, joining special interest groups. And if we had adequate retirement and health care systems, so that parents didn’t have to rely on their children in their old age, we would have still fewer children.

It is immoral from a self-centered point of view.



—“But obviously you are going to have a lot of people who couldn’t pass your licensing tests who want to be parents, or at least don’t want to use the preventatives that are available. And if you are denied a license or don’t want to go through the testing or educational processes that might make you a better parent you would certainly be against it.

“If my major accomplishments in life are in the bedroom rather than the board room I would want to keep those babies coming. What better way to prove that I am a real man or a real woman?”



—“But Con, which parent is more likely to be more loving and effective, the one who wants to make certain that he or she is qualified or the one that isn’t concerned? That’s another no-brainer.”

Moral from a God based point of view.



—“I would think that many of the religious groups that support population control or contraceptives would be for it. All children should have the advantages of being raised in a loving environment. The messages of the Bible and the Qur’an are love and mercy.

Immoral from a God based point of view



—“We have been over this again and again—as many children as possible should be born. Sex is only for procreation. God did not tell Adam or Noah to get a license before they multiplied. It is a God given right and duty to procreate and Wreck, your idea will never fly in free countries. Most people definitely want children.”



—“But Ray, when you take your vow of celibacy, isn’t that like a license to not have children? Maybe license isn’t the right word, maybe contract would be better. Funny, but I would think that in an ideal society priests, who are usually highly intelligent, educated and ethical, would be ideal parents. In fact I think it’s a shame that your church has adopted the idea of celibacy for its religious ministers.”

Moral from a society-based point of view.

“The reason I advocate it is to have a smaller, healthier, more educated and happier society. We certainly see lots of unhappy and mentally or physically ill children and youth. My objective would be to greatly reduce such child unhappiness, which eventually often poisons the adults they become—adults who have been deprived of the best when they were young. Undoubtedly much mental illness, crime, drug abuse and marriage break ups are due to unhealthy or poor parental upbringing.

“Future citizens should have the firmest psychological and educational foundations possible. It starts with the family. It can’t all be done by the state in schools and prisons. When it comes to restricting births, which should we value more—the interest of the child or the interests of potential parents—some of whom may be child abusers?”

“Maybe the society should be part of the license. For example Palestinian children have commonly had a terrible existence, with Israeli bombs and internal Palestinian violence. If the society would guarantee that there would be no violence and that there would be plenty of food and adequate educational opportunities then a Palestinian parenting license could be issued.”



—“How about societies like Britain with its drunk and drugged poor kids roaming the streets and stealing.



—“That’s the point I’m making. In every society there are unloved and unwanted children roaming the streets and getting into trouble. It seems to be an age-old curse, because even Aristotle complained of it in ancient Athens. But it’s far worse today.

Immoral from a societal point of view.



—“It certainly has little value if a country wants more babies no matter what their intellectual, psychological or physical potentials are. If a country needed workers and chose not to bring in guest workers, this might be their only alternative. It might come down to this, our society needs more people. If they are not loved we can still find low level jobs for them. Another factor would be that if a government tried to license parents there would be large scale rioting in the streets or in the polls.

“Heck, that would probably be true if you merely taxed parents—and taxing wouldn’t have near the repercussions that denying them children would have. Remember that right now you can have as many children as you want and you get a tax deduction for every one of them.

UNLIMITED FREEDOM OF SPEECH

“I know we are going to address this question as we continue our travels, so let’s talk about one of my pet subjects, freedom of speech. It has long been one of our cherished rights, but it seems that the Constitutional right has been taken to absurd levels by some people and by some judges.

“Freedom of speech in the U.S. Constitution dealt with speaking, writing and publishing political ideas.(61) Some have taken it to mean that you can say and print anything, no matter how obscene or violence producing it is or it may be. This has led the Supreme Court to be overly cautious as to what it will disallow as free speech. It has allowed the Ku Klux Klan to put their name on a highway to sponsor highway clean up. The court is usually concerned with the words and visualizations, not with the actions that might result from them. Of course yelling ‘fire’ in a crowded theater just might result in a stampeding action that could result in a death or injury. But the Supreme Court case in which Justice Holmes indicated that yelling ‘fire’, where it presented a ‘clear and present danger’ possibility could abridge the ‘freedom of speech’ guarantee. (62) So it was overruled by another Ku Klux Klan case (63), in which the appellant was convicted under Ohio law of advocating violence and unlawful methods of terrorism. But the Supreme Court ruled that speech could only be banned when it was directed to and ‘likely to incite imminent lawless action.’

“So potential long term damage or violence is not a factor limiting free speech. It must be immediate. This certainly seems to clear child pornography, except for the actors in the films or other depictions. The court might rule differently if everyone who viewed child pornography immediately raped a four year old. Of course if ten or fifteen minutes elapsed between the viewing and the rape it would probably not be considered to have been ‘imminent’.

“The British courts have been more negative to pornography since such speech might have negative effects on susceptible people. It stated that ‘whether or not the tendency of the matter charged as obscenity is to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences, and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall.’ (64) The American court is more lenient, looking at how the community may view it and whose “dominant theme taken as a whole appeals to the prurient interest” (65)) But the U.S. Supreme Court decisions on obscenity are generally 5 to 4 or 6 to 3 decisions with some judges holding that all obscenity is protected by the First Amendment.

“But so far in the Court’s decisions it is clear that obscene material is not specifically protected by the First Amendment, although some of its judges have believed otherwise. Still ideas having even the slightest bit of redeeming social importance, such as controversial or unorthodox ideas, have constitutional protection as long as they don’t conflict with more important social interests.

“Sexual material is not necessarily obscene. To be obscene it must appeal to prurient interests. Then the Court (66) determined that computer generated images of child pornography sent over the internet were legal, even though they looked as if children were being violated, since no real children were harmed. The Free Speech Coalition is a trade organization for people producing adult pornography. It was the original plaintiff in the action. The law challenged was the Child Pornography Prevention Act which banned actual and virtual images of children who appear to be under 18.

“The Supreme Court said that the individual states can only criminalize child pornography when the laws “limit the offense to works that visually depict explicit sexual conduct by children below a specified age.”



--“To get around the Supreme Court’s objections that the laws are too vague, possibly the legislatures could develop a comprehensive list of situations that would ‘appear to be’ or would ‘convey the impression’ of an act with an underage real or virtual image. For example we could start with 4 week old female infants being penetrated anally by a male who might be 18, is 4 feet 8 inches tall, weighs 80 pounds has four hairs on his chest, is blond and has a moustache. The list might then expand on every one of these variables. With the same 4 week old female we would have to specify every possible combination of height, weight, chest hair, hair color, and every possible type of facial hair. Then we would have to do the same starting with a four week old male infant. Then every possible variation of age, sex, height, weight, ethnic appearance, sexual action, and body characteristics for every perpetrator and victim. That would be explicit—and as absurd as the court’s decision.”



---“Under British court decisions, and the laws that the Supreme Court found to be unconstitutional, such images could have been found to have a prurient interest by viewers and might actually increase eventual sexual violence against real children. But apparently the court found that viewing such pornography is either in accord with community standards or does not conflict with any compelling state interests. Certainly if adults, including pedophiles, want to see such pornography they have the right. There is no question that viewing virtual child pornography is an intellectually and emotionally uplifting experience and will make those viewing adults more humane and loving human beings, not prone to violate children themselves. And that is certainly the goal of our advanced democratic societies.”

Freedom of speech is moral from a self centered viewpoint



—“Well let’s look at how free speech plays out according to some people’s self centered morality. What if I want to communicate in any way possible whatever I want: political ideas, pornography, even information that may help to end my society, such as bomb making. In fact as a pornographer I demand the right to make money any way I can.”

Immoral from a self centered point of view.



—“But the other side of the coin is that I don’t want to watch pornography and I don’t want my kids to watch it. I don’t want people to teach others how to make bombs or how to destroy cities through biological or chemical means. I don’t want people of any race or religion

enflaming others to terrorist actions. I think we need to learn to live in peace. I want this for myself and my children.

Free speech is moral from a God based viewpoint.



—“When we work to convert others to our religious truths, we must have that freedom. Many Muslim countries do not allow such freedom. If I, or a Jehovah’s Witness or a Mormon, were to go door to door in Saudi Arabia with our message we would be stopped and probably arrested. But if a Muslim were to do the same thing in the U.S., Canada or France his speech would be protected.

“The Danish cartoons of Mohammad were done with the idea of free speech, with the idea that at the time the great majority of terrorist attacks, including suicide bombings, were done by radical Muslims. Freedom of speech is not a basic assumption. It is a philosophical idea relative to the freedom necessary for democracy to work. The original idea was not to allow anything to be said under the guise of free speech, but rather that one should be able to freely express political ideas. The Danish cartoons fell well within the confines of freedom of speech. Many European newspapers reprinted the cartoons in support of the Danish press. But there were violent outbursts in Denmark and around the world protesting that free expression.

Immoral from a God based point of view

“On the other hand, when a person or the media gores another man’s god, that is inexcusable. They do not have such a freedom. This is true even though it does not criticize basic assumptions. When the Danish press cartooned Mohammed it was criticizing secondary Muslim beliefs—such as that Muslim art should not portray humans or animals. But when one’s prophet is portrayed as a terrorist one can get more than a bit miffed.



-- “But it’s not all about Muslim thinking. The Catholic Church objected to Dan Brown’s fictional ‘da Vinci Code’ and advised its members not to read it.”

Moral from a societal point of view

“Judges at lower levels are handcuffed by the U.S, Supreme Court’s decisions. According to law they must rule according to the decisions of the higher courts. Rather than outlaw child pornography or the access of children to pornographic programming, they can only recommend that parents use filters that limit children’s access to undesirable television programming. They can see that the laws are ‘overly broad’, that if they did anything to restrict anybody’s speech, the children will have lost a Constitutional guarantee when they are older. Civil libertarians say that restricting internet pornography will ‘dumb down’ the internet. It would restrict the creativity of internet. It would bring down the internet to the level of a 6 year old.

“If a society is to advance through reasonable ideas, freedom of political speech is essential. The ideas of communism should be able to be discussed in a capitalistic society. The ideas of Islam should be able to be discussed in a Christian or Jewish community. Of course the reverse is also true. There may be a better political or economic system than the one being used. All religious and non-religious or anti-religious ideas should be open to discussion. We can’t advance unless we can see the alternatives and choose the best possible ones. If Hegel was right that we advance by understanding the dialectic of ideas, and if Marx was right that economic systems advance the same way, then we need those opposite ideas, the antitheses, to make us question our theses, the

way we are thinking now. Then maybe we will develop new syntheses which will lead us to a better way of doing things.

Immoral from a societal viewpoint.

“I happen to disagree with the courts on their allowing freedom for nearly any kind of speech. I’m a ba-a-a-d liberal! On the other hand I see so many countries, especially emerging countries, where the leaders disallow freedom of speech and severely punish those who speak out because it does upset the status quo and could start a rebellion.”



—“Certainly some forms of freedom of speech can threaten the social order. I think that your Supreme Court has become very lenient in allowing pornography. There is no proof that pornography is helpful in any way to society. If it did help it would only be because it somehow released power impulses and sexual desires that might otherwise be perpetrated on real adults or children. But we don’t know if there is any such positive outcome. But many say that watching pornography has stimulated them to act out what they saw. It is also hard to believe that seeing men controlling women violently, or adults taking advantage of children raises the voyeur’s view of the women or children they see in real life.

“The Congress is debating whether to disallow pharmaceutical companies from advertising to the general public because some drugs have had some unexpected side effects. Of course they had many positive effects. How positive are the effects of child pornography?”

“I see no problem in the freedom of speech regarding political, economic or religious ideas. But when anything can be said, drawn, or filmed that debases humans or is highly likely to cause harm to the viewers or their society, I think the laws or the courts should act intelligently. It seems that the Supreme Court acts so often as if people are totally rational, rather than psychologically motivated, as science keeps proving with the greater probability of empirical science. Certainly if we can be influenced positively by uplifting ideas, like our Constitution and the poetry of Burns, we can be influenced negatively by the Marquis de Sade and Jack the Ripper. A pronouncement from the bench that we are not influenced by things that we experience is assuming that we live in emotional vacuums.”

SLAVERY

“Let’s look at another social problem. Slavery. You would have thought that it would have disappeared at least a hundred years ago.”



—“It amazes me that we still have slavery today. I was reading about it yesterday in Time. Let’s talk about it for a while. We still have the slaves that are owned by others in some countries. We have extensive child labor for pennies an hour. We have huge numbers of sweatshops and we have the white slave trade in most countries. Then we have bondage because of debts, marriages to non-consenting females, and child slavery. In 1956 the United Nations added more provisions to the previously enacted international slavery convention of 1926. Like in other concerns that sound essential to intelligent and well meaning legislators, various kinds of slavery still exist, and in many cases it is getting worse.”



—“It sounds like you are defining slavery more broadly than I would have.”



---“Well, the 1926 Convention defined it as ‘the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised, and ‘slave’ means a person in such condition or status.’ So this definition certainly covers all of the illustrations I just mentioned.

“Since men have more physical power, and generally far more political power, women and children are commonly the victims of various forms of slavery. In Togo, children as young as 3 are forced to work in homes and fields and are commonly the victims of both physical and emotional abuse. Young Togolese boys work 13 hour days in the Nigerian fields, with no chance for an education. Young girls are often forced into prostitution in the capitol city of Lome. AIDS orphans are particularly at risk for such abuse and trafficking because there is no one to take care of them.”



—“Then there are sweat shops. By definition, a sweatshop is: any workplace where the wages are inadequate, the hours too long, and the working conditions endanger safety or health—whether or not any laws are violated. As bad as they seem to those of us in the West, they are often the only hope of the poor, both adults and children. Western do-gooders complain that the wages are too low and the working conditions very poor to dismal. But if the wages were raised, the work would go back to the West to the mechanized factories. Business is in the business of business. Only sometimes do social concerns enter the picture. And if the social concerns of one company reduce their profit margins because of another business underselling them, the stock goes down and the CEO will be looking for another job—maybe in a monastery.

“What is seen in the West as hell, is viewed as heaven for the dollar-a-day sweat shop workers. And as the sweat shop salaries pour in to Asian coffers, the countries rise in economic status. In the mid-20th century it was the Japanese, then came the South Koreans, then the Chinese, Thais and Vietnamese. Then as we see that as the sweat shops prosper, the countries mechanize and move upward economically. For poor people they offer paradise, but for those already in paradise we may see them as pits of impoverished slaves. But where there are people who are subservient to others, you can expect abuse of various sorts.

“Remember the UK started it all, then the continental Europeans and the Americans. It doesn't seem that you can shortcut the process. Hard work, then fairer wages, then education and mechanization, then white collar work. From brawn to brain! But for the successful, the hours of weekly work may not reduce, but the worker's emotions will have gone from dread to joy, from starvation to an exiting livable life.”



-- “So people who boycott items made in south Asian sweat shops are often hurting, not helping the Asians. But the best hope of prosperity is in reducing children. But in the meantime it is difficult to believe that the Asian industrial revolution is being led by old and young workers toiling 6 or 7 days a week for 12 hours a day. As bad as we think it is, it is putting food on the table and a roof over their heads.

“But things are improving. Wages have increased 4 and 10 fold. Still not to the minimum wage levels of the west, but good pay for unskilled Orientals. And as skill increases working conditions get better because the shop owners want to keep the best workers. These sweatshop countries of southern and eastern Asia now produce about 30% of the world's products. In five years, by 2025, it should be well over 50%.

“As long as the Blue Fairy is there with her magic wand to let every impoverished waif wish upon a star, it seems that the rocket ship to high level economies is docked at the lowly sweat shop. The Taiwanese and South Koreans, and now the Chinese have ridden the rocket to the top in

an historical instant. And Thailand and Vietnam are adjusting their afterburners for their continued ascent. And as the economies rise so do tourist hotels and four star restaurants, so there's more than just temples and picturesque villages for the affluent traveler. One thing fertilizes another and the economy blossoms and grows.

"It's a shame that workers in Haiti earn only about 30 cents an hour, but not long ago China had workers making only 80 cents a day. Because of this, labor costs for clothing are often less than 1% of the retail cost of a toy or a shirt. It's certainly not a rosy picture for those of us in the West. There are many dismal realities. A quarter of a billion children ages 5 to 14 work for very low pay, often in unhealthy or toxic workplaces. Pesticide poisoning of child farm workers is common in some countries. In some Indian villages people are paid less than 50 cents a day for the hard physical labor in rock quarries. These are the realities of the needs of the impoverished when given the opportunities by employers."



—“Then there's the white slave trade. White slavery used to refer to child prostitution, now it refers to forced female prostitution. I handled a case where four Guatemalan women were arrested by the federal government in 2006 for bringing their countrymen into the US on the false job hope of earning up to \$20 an hour. Once they arrived they were forced into prostitution. Their \$70 tricks were supposedly to pay off the \$10,000 debt incurred when they were brought from Guatemala.

“I learned that there are several kinds of sex slavery. One is where a woman is bought and kept by an individual. Another is where a woman is kidnapped and held. Then there is normal slavery where sex may be just a part of the duties. Generally today it means forced prostitution. This often includes kidnapping the victims and bringing them to other countries. The CIA has estimated that 50,000 women and children are brought to the U.S. every year for sex purposes—against their wills. Such sexual slavery is common in many African countries and in Israel and Turkey. It is less common in other Middle East countries.

“During World War II the Japanese army forced a number of Asian women into prostitution as ‘comfort women’. And while the Japanese government apologized, many of the women say that the shame has never left them.”



—“So then, let's look at the moralities of slavery.

Moral from a self-centered point of view

“If you are making money on any such slavery, it certainly has value for you. If you work in a sweat shop and have no chance for survival without the slave-like wages, your opportunity is valuable. If it is sex slavery and you are a customer, it also has value.

“Then you have national traditions, particularly in Africa, in which children are either stolen or sold into slavery as domestic workers. Some upper class African families, both northern and southern Africans, have brought their slaves to the U.S. One case involved a 10 year old Egyptian girl ‘leased’ to a well-to-do Egyptian family in Cairo for \$45 a month. She was then brought to the U.S. by the family, working up to 20 hours a day, denied schooling, and treated as an outcaste slave. For the owners it was obviously moral. Even for the girl, she was living in a garage that was a superior lodging to her dwelling in rural Egypt.

“Estimates are that around one-third of the probable 10,000 forced laborers in the United States are servants in suburban homes. How many of these are children is impossible to estimate. This is according to a study by the National Human Rights Center at the University of California at Berkeley.

Immoral from a self-centered point of view.

“But she was still a sub-citizen, a person separated from her biological family, an unhappy slave. And certainly those pressed into sex slavery would detest their lot.

Moral from a God based viewpoint

“Certainly slavery has been a part of Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions. The Jews held slaves and were themselves enslaved. The slave trade in the New World was a combination of Muslim and Christian slavers, catching the slaves then selling them to both Christians and Jews as household servants or field laborers. The New Testament has many references to slavery, and does not disparage it.(67) The Qur’an also does not necessarily find it a negative.(68) The practice was quite common in those earlier days.

Immoral from a God based point of view



—“But you forget that the message of the Bible is love—and slavery is antithetical to love.(69) And certainly in today’s world no Jew or Christian would advocate slavery.

Moral from a societal viewpoint



—“Some societies still sanction slavery or slave-like relationships. We find required arranged marriages, particularly among some Muslims and Hindus relatively common, even when the families have immigrated to countries where it is illegal.

“More than 100,000 Africans are still enslaved as laborers and millions are enslaved in other ways and in other places. UNICEF says that 200,000 children are enslaved in Africa. And we’re not talking about people in low wage jobs here. We’re talking about traditional slavery where people are shackled, held at gunpoint, or have their Achilles tendons cut so they can’t run away.

“We may find people enslaved as sugar cane harvesters in the Dominican Republic or Haiti, as servants or sex slaves in Sudan, or carpet makers in India. As many as 300,000 children are working as slaves making carpets.

“In Africa, Arab Muslims are often the perpetrators. Animist tribes in southern Sudan are frequently invaded by Arab militias from the north. They kill the men and enslave the women and children. The Arabs consider it a traditional right to enslave southerners, and to own slaves as personal property.

Immoral from a societal viewpoint



—“ Britain outlawed slavery in 1833, the U.S. did it in the 1860s and West Africa in the 1880s. The 1926 Convention on slavery enlarged the definition. It is now considered to be slavery when a woman can be sold into marriage by her family, where a woman can be transferred to another person, or where a woman can be transferred to another person after she is widowed. The Convention also disallowed the transference of a child under 18 by its parents to another person for labor. It defined several areas of other types of slavery then went on to state that any slave who takes refuge on board any vessel of a nation that signed the Convention would be immediately free. The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights added another plank in the

wall to stop slavery when it proclaimed in Article 4 that ‘No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.’”



—“In spite of the many laws against it, trafficking in children or women in Europe is the fastest branch of organized crime. East European and former USSR women and children are the most victimized. It makes me sick that people still allow it and do it. It is one of the grossest affronts to freedom. And if my parent licensing plans were carried out it could be greatly reduced or even eliminated.”

IMMIGRATION

“We have gross overpopulation and we have pitiful poverty among those who reproduce *ad absurdum* and among the unfortunate whose economic ecology gives them little or no hope. For some, economic survival is just across a border or a sea. Albanians crossing to Greece, Africans sailing to Spain or Italy, Mexicans scaling the fence, or tunneling under it, to California—all scrambling toward security. Can we deny fellow humans the opportunity to crawl from the pit of poverty and become 21st Century contributors to the globalized world?

“Countries often open their doors to immigrants when they need labor, especially cheap labor. The Germans did this in allowing many Turks to immigrate. England opened its doors to those in their Commonwealth, consequently many Indians and Africans came to the UK, but they often didn’t have jobs. Spain has been quite lenient in accepting illegal African immigrants. Dubai has 85% of its population from other countries, and these make up 99% of the workforce.

It is moral from a self-centered point of view



---“If I were poor in another country I would certainly want the chance to emigrate to a more economically friendly culture. I have heard the dreams of Mexicans in my travels. They say, ‘I want to immigrate. I want a job, or welfare benefits, or a better education for my children, or freedom from the brutality of where I live.’ Even their family in their home country benefits because they send money home. Mexican illegal immigrants send \$23 billion a year home from their \$9 an hour average jobs. Heck, no wonder 12000 people a month come over the Mexican-US border successfully. Wouldn’t you do the same thing?”

Immoral from a self centered point of view



--“I understand their self-centered desires, but when an immigrant comes to my country he may be taking my job or my tax money for welfare benefits, or he is increasing or decreasing property values depending on how close he lives to me.

“If you are attempting to come into a country illegally by boat or truck and die in the attempt it is certainly not good from a self centered point of view. Look at how many boat people from Africa have lost their lives--over a thousand in many recent years. Then when boats are intercepted they are turned back to their points of departure—and the \$3,000 to \$10,000 they paid to the boatman is lost.”

Moral from a God based viewpoint



—“Charity is a major element of most religions. The Golden Rule is universal in religious ethics. Good people of my religion should be allowed in to increase our national congregation. Hispanics, mainly Mexicans, in Los Angeles are filling some churches today, while in the 1980s churches in the Hispanic areas of Los Angeles were being closed. Already the Hispanics account for over 40% of America’s 70 million Catholics. Because about half were born outside of the U.S. they tend to be more primitive and orthodox in their religious beliefs. This gives us a ministerial challenge. We, therefore, need more priests to take care of the growing congregations. After all, the median aged priest in the U.S. is ready for retirement.”



—“In the 35 years before I left, attendance at Catholic high schools in the U.S. were reduced by 50%. Attendance at Sunday mass had dropped by two thirds. The number of men in seminaries dropped from 49000 to 4700. Something had to be done. More masses across the country are being celebrated in Spanish. Do you think you can recruit more Hispanic priests?”



—“You’re right, we really need them, maybe we’ll get more vocations from the immigrants when they see how much the Church has done, and is doing, for them. For example one of our churches in central LA is just finishing living quarters for a sanctuary for those people facing deportation.”



—“Ray how many Muslims has your church taken in? Or is it only Catholics?”



—“I don’t know Lee, but obviously it is primarily for Central and South Americans, who will be mostly Catholics.” But just as Methodist churches have taken in Catholics, I have no doubt that we would take in non-Catholics. We must do all that we can to preserve the family unity.”



—“I don’t get it. These people are leaving their families in Mexico all the time. They don’t seem to be concerned about the unity in their own families.

“But then while the U.S. society says it doesn’t want them, some of the churches fight society. What about that ‘render unto Caesar’ idea of Jesus? Isn’t it a civil problem? It’s just another illustration of religions thinking they are above the law. Why should you pity some people who have come here illegally and who will require the citizens who are taxed to pay significant amounts for them, but you don’t have to pay because the churches aren’t taxed.”



—“These are children of God, made in God’s Image. How could we not want what’s best for them? There are a number of Biblical passages that tell us to accept aliens as our own. For example Leviticus 19:34 says ‘The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.’ For that reason many churches are giving illegal aliens sanctuary. In Los Angeles Our Lady Queen of

Angels church joined a national effort to shield illegal immigrants and to press for changes in the law.”



—“Why don’t you also want the best for those other children of God who are being taxed to pay for them? I think you should take the Churches money and start businesses in Mexico!”



—“Men, you are arguing basic assumptions, a bunch of God based assumptions against a bunch of society based assumptions. So there’s no way to get an agreement. Let’s leave it.”

Immoral from a God based point of view.



—“But bringing in a competing religious group waters down our religious base. Allowing Muslims into Christian or atheistic Europe has obviously caused problems. Adding a different religious or political belief or an ethnic difference to any group, whether it be a family or a nation, will undoubtedly cause more problems than it solves. While cheap labor may be economically desirable, it may be more than counterbalanced by religious agitation and violence in the lower social classes that provide the sociological home for the unskilled, and often the skilled, immigrants. With more divergent souls roaming the streets and congregating in the churches and mosques that enliven their beliefs, it certainly upsets the status quo.”



—“The Bible again gives us the message that the aliens must obey the same rules as the natives. In Numbers 9:14 it says “An alien living among you who wants to celebrate the Lord’s Passover must do so in accordance with its rules and regulations. You must have the same regulations for the alien and the native-born.””



—“But when you allow lower class people into a society, no matter what their religion, you are more likely to have God’s commandments broken, especially violence and murder—and maybe even bearing false witness and dishonoring their parents.

Moral from a societal viewpoint

“For society I see both positive and negative immigrants. Immigrants that provide needed skills and services while paying more in taxes than they take out, like Indian engineers and doctors, or British or Chinese businessmen. The negative immigrants are those that cost more than they contribute, like many Latin Americans, those that cause social unrest or commit crimes, like some Muslim extremists or poor Latin American or African or Caribbean blacks.

“If we need more soldiers—we can give citizenship to foreigners who will serve for 10 years in the military. They can learn the language and the country’s history, then learn to shoot. If we need workers who will do the unskilled work that the richer nationals won’t do then immigration is needed. The stoop labor in the fields, cutting meat in a slaughter house, the heavy work of construction, and doing domestic work are some of the jobs that the economically elite, or those on welfare in prosperous societies, will not do.

“In many European countries there is an advantage to having some immigrants where so many taxi drivers are Muslims, there is no problem getting a taxi at Christmas or New Year’s, but rides might be slim around Ramadan!

”Asian-Americans are often called a model minority. The Chinese laborers who immigrated to California in the mid-nineteenth century were greatly prejudiced against. In fact in California no group has endured more negative and homicidal prejudices. But they worked hard, stuck together and surpassed their Anglo oppressors in education, in social and vocational achievement, and in their lack of criminal behavior. Chinese and Japanese generally immigrated as contract workers for farms, mines and construction. Japanese have achieved just a bit below the Chinese, but still well above the Anglo population.

“Indians often came to the U.S. as more prosperous traders or farmers. But although they were Aryan, as are most other Americans, not Mongols as are the other Asian immigrants, the Supreme Court denied them citizenship because of their darker skin and continent of origin. (70) Other Asian immigrants, like the Filipinos and those from Southeast Asia, have not been as successful as the Chinese, Japanese and Indians. So clearly we cannot lump all immigrants from the same continent together. Some come as higher class people, some work their way up the social classes—but others do not.

“In the US a quarter of new technology businesses have at least one foreign born founder. Sun Microsystems, which has created many thousands of jobs, was created by immigrants from India and Germany. One of Google’s two founders was born in Moscow.

“Another positive has occurred in Santa Cruz, Mexico. The women have taken the money sent home from the U.S. and begun making small loans—and jobs are created. Former illegals are now coming home. So there are sometimes positives back home from those who went north for a better life.

“Certainly immigration is positive when the countries left and entered both gain. This seldom happens. If it is a matter of laborers leaving a country that doesn’t need them for a country that does—it is win-win. But if is a doctor or an engineer, the country they leave is probably the loser.

Immigration from poorer EU countries to the richer countries like Britain, Ireland and Sweden has been generally positive. Being primarily Christians you don’t have the often anti-Christian Muslims. And the people come with needed skills. Not like the hard working but skill less Central Americans

Immoral from a societal viewpoint



--“With the exploding world population there is humanitarian pressure in the West to take in the excess population. Often it is political refugees, sometimes it is for workers. Europe has taken in a great many Muslims—Pakistanis and Somalians in Norway, North Africans in France, Turks in Germany, Indonesians in Holland, and people from throughout the old empire into the UK. Most refugees are going to put a strain on their new home. The strain will be financial and internally disruptive. While the government may work to provide housing, education and integrating tools, the average people in the country tend to like their own kind, those with a similar religion, similar education, similar interests and a similar way of looking at the world. Immigrants often refuse to learn the language and generally hold on to their lifelong habits. This brings additional suspicion and prejudice from the natives and makes it more difficult to obtain jobs and to become fully participating members of their adopted country.

“Immigrants, both legal and illegal, generally feel more comfortable with fellow countrymen. This is normal, but it impedes integration. Whether it is the Portuguese or Italian areas of Toronto, the Cuban areas of Miami, the Moroccan areas of Paris or Koreatown in Los Angeles. Likes tend to attract like.

“In Denmark and Norway, for instance, the countries are taking in far more non-Muslims as part of their quotas for asylum seekers. Buddhists from Burma or Christians from Congo are far more likely to integrate easily than are the Muslims. Denmark, for example, recently reduced their Muslim immigrants from 90% of their quota to 10%. And it is not just because of the terrorist danger. Most Muslims come with ‘the’ true religion and often dress quite differently. Then the religion’s ‘truths’ often conflict with democratic traditions like freedom of the press. The violent international Muslim outbursts against the published anti-terrorist Muslim cartoons was no small factor in the Danish immigration decisions. And the Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris didn’t endear Islam to the native Frenchman.”



--“If Muslims want their fellow believers to be able to escape inhumane treatment in some countries, they are shooting themselves in the foot. Then look at Spain where there is a movement to require immigrants to be able to speak Spanish.

“But looking at my country, those who want to have English as the universal language meet strong opposition from the Spanish speakers. On another front, the immigration needs of the U.S. have changed over the years. First we needed labor so we allowed about everybody in, even slaves. In the late 1800s Chinese were specifically excluded. The prejudice against Asians was evident when over 100,000 Japanese were interned in camps because the U.S. was at war with Japan. But it didn’t inter Germans or Italian Americans and we were at war with them too. And in the 1920s many foreign born people who might have communist leanings were expelled.”



—“The idea inscribed on the Statue of Liberty about taking in the tired and poor was neither law nor an American governmental ideal. In a republic, laws tend to reflect needs, particularly economic needs. Cheap labor, like slaves and Irishmen, are no longer needed because machines do the work. The needs now are for engineers, computer specialists, and venture capitalists.”



—“Another negative for a country is that so much of the money earned is sent out of the country so it does not buy goods or services where it was earned consequently it does not contribute to the economy of the immigrant’s new abode. Also much of the work is done without being taxed. Illegal immigrants, like the rest of us, are not too eager to pay taxes if they don’t need to. With food often untaxed in the U.S., it is possible to earn most money tax free.

“We must recognize that every household, legal or illegal, is a drain on tax dollars. Obviously our taxes support education, health care, roads, and government administrative expenses such as police and fire fighters. And every household pays some taxes, such as income and sales. The question is whether the household is paying its way. While many immigrants pay taxes through income tax withholding and sales taxes, they don’t pay enough to make up for what they cost the greater society. With required health care, and education expenses of \$8000 to \$15,000 per student, it takes a lot of purchasing to make it up.”



--“Where does that \$10,000 or more per student go? It’s certainly not in teachers’ salaries.”



—“Definitely not. It goes to bussing, school lunches and breakfasts for poor kids, upkeep of the school, and a huge amount for administration.

“Then there are the medical costs. In the U.S., immigrants, legal and illegal, are allowed emergency medical benefits. These can be extremely expensive because thousands of dollars of tests may be prescribed. In the past, legal immigrants were also entitled to Medicaid. There are few data about the number and costs of immigrants on Medicaid. But we know that of the 32 million monthly Medicaid doctor visits per month, 2.4 million, or 7.5%, are by legal and illegal immigrants

“Older adults are the more common recipients. This is because many children of aliens are born in the U.S. so are citizens. Their parents, or even grandparents, may then want to be residents.

“In the U.S. the cost of illegals is estimated to be \$30 billion a year. It is about \$20,000 per illegal who has less than a high school education. Seventy percent of this type of person is from Mexico.

“Non-citizens compose 12.5% of those in the US below the poverty level. For Medicaid the \$8 billion costs of the non-citizens is less than 7% of the total cost. But California has 25% of the non-citizens on its caseload. In fact more than half of the immigrants in the nation on Medicaid are in California. The medical and education costs are not spread evenly because 10% of the states have 90% of the immigrants.



—“Legal or illegal workers may work for less than normal wages in janitorial services, restaurants, hotels and motels, gardening, construction, agriculture, manufacturing and other areas. They tend to take less sick leave than the country’s natives. The owners of the businesses and farms reap great rewards for this. So the average citizen is subsidizing the wealthy farmers and businessmen. But some of their savings may be passed on to the consumers, the restaurant patrons, the hotel guests, the fruit buyers, the purchasers of clothing made locally, the homeowners. Other times the homeowner keeps all of the savings, for example, when an illegal worker cleans her house for less than a standard wage.

“The low wages of the Latin American illegal immigrants hurt uneducated legal African-American and Latin American citizens the most. The reason that American wages have not risen as much as they might have is because illegal immigrants will work for low wages. Then the unemployed Americans have to resort to welfare payments or unemployment benefits to live, this increases the costs to the government.

“But let’s get on with taxes. Latin American immigrants paid an average of only \$2000 in Federal taxes. This is probably because Latin American immigrants have five fewer years of education than American citizens or other immigrants. Now comparing the \$2,000 average income taxes paid by the Latin American immigrants, the Americans averaged paying \$7,900 and the average Asian immigrant paid \$12,500. Because state taxes are often sales taxes, the Latin American immigrants pay a greater percentage, about \$3000 a year while Americans pay \$4,500 and Asian immigrants pay \$6,800. This amounts to a drain of the real taxpayers. Last year the average cost of a Latin American illegal immigrant household in California was \$7,206, and in New Jersey it was \$5,625. Meanwhile all other illegal immigrants, taken as a group, provided a net positive income.

“In the UK more than 80% of Somalians aren’t working and half or more claim income support from the government. On the other hand, people from Zimbabwe are 20% more likely to be employed than the native Briton. So we have to take a case by case approach to the economic liabilities and assets of the modern invaders.

“When the liabilities of immigrants are noted, they often focus on crime, health service and low cost housing. (71)



—“That’s true. There was another study that tried to separate ethnic groups. It put the net cost to California residents at \$433 per European and Canadian immigrant household, \$1,240 per Asian immigrant household and \$8,182 per Latin American household.

“Education and other services provided to illegal immigrants run California taxpayers more than \$10.5 billion a year, a new analysis shows. With almost 15 percent of kindergarten through high school students in California students being the children of illegal immigrants, California spends about \$3.2 billion educating children who are illegal aliens themselves and another \$4.5 billion educating U.S.-born children of illegal aliens. Another \$1.4 billion is spent on health care and \$1.4 billion in prison costs for illegal immigrants. (72) The cost of illegals in California accounts for about 2/3s of its budget deficit. This of course has to be made up by taxing the legal citizens.

“Of course without the cheap labor of the migrants, who make up 2/3s of the farm workers, food costs would rise. The best solution might be to develop more mechanical pickers, more robots and other labor saving devices.

“Of the costs, some states pay a much higher percent of their tax money to support immigrants. So while a high immigration state like Texas or California may have a net loss. A low immigration state like North Dakota may see benefits from the immigration to California or Texas because of the lower food and clothing costs for North Dakotans.



—“Let’s talk about what they cost the U.S. citizens. In 2005 I saw that immigrants cost the U.S. \$68 billion when figured one way and up to double that when other factors were added. I don’t know if a similar study has been done recently. The study took into account several factors such as the change in consumer prices. It reported that educated high level producers pay more taxes than they use. People in low level paid jobs don’t pay their way. Then about \$30 billion is sent from the U.S. to the home countries of aliens. To the degree that it eventually buys U.S. goods it is no problem, but if it buys goods from other countries it is an additional negative.

“While we categorize immigrants from continents or major countries, like Asia, Latin America or Canada, there can be huge differences among the groups and among individuals in the groups. For example computer engineers from India are much more likely to contribute to the society than laborers from Vietnam or Cambodia. A Mexican or Argentinean businessman is quite different from a Cuban convict.”



—“So often what appear to be valid statistics are really the selected, and sometimes fictitious, figures cited by advocacy groups. You know about ‘lies, damn lies, and statistics’, well quoted statistics are not always true nor do they always point out the actual status of the situation. We need scientific studies, not advocacy statistics whether pro- or con in the illegal immigration debate. We need to be exact. When we say Asians, do we mean all Asians, Chinese who came before 1870, Chinese who have come in the last ten years, Cambodians, Indians—who exactly. Do we mean those who came over as laborers or those who came as medical doctors? When we say Latin Americans do we mean Mexicans, Chileans, those who came as businessmen, those whose ancestors had been in California since before the Anglos came? There are so many variables. Effective statistics would zero in on exact groups.

“The pro-immigration groups, let’s say those advocating Mexican laborers, will likely lump all immigrants together when saying that immigration helps America. While those advocating Indian or Chinese or Japanese immigration would leave the uneducated Mexican laborers out of their statistics and focus only on the advantages that their group has offered the country.

“When advocacy groups say that the immigrants are taxpayers, they don’t say whether the taxes pay for the costs of their group. If an illegal Mexican woman cleaning houses and not paying income taxes buys \$1000 worth of clothes for her school-age children she may pay \$80 in sales taxes. Since there are no taxes on food, her taxes are minimal. But her four children cost the state over \$40,000 a year for education, then if she uses Medicaid or emergency medical services her costs to the state increase significantly. On the other hand if you have a married doctor from India with no children he will probably pay over \$30,000 in income taxes and pay several thousand dollars in sales taxes, but will have no state-paid expenses. While these examples may be near the extreme ends of the immigrant spectrum, they illustrate a reality.



-- “Unquestionably the Mexican baby boom can’t be absorbed by the Mexican economy. Even though the fertility rate has dropped from 6 children per woman in 1970 to 3 per woman today, the Mexican economy cannot provide the jobs needed. And the government cannot provide the education needed to bring its young people up to the level needed in our technological age.

“But the births don’t stop when the illegals come to the States. The estimates are that between 400,000 and 3 million births a year in the U.S. are to illegal aliens, that’s one out of ten births if the lower estimate is true. The cost of educating them is 4 to 8 billion dollars a year. Those that don’t make it that far become additional drains on the economy. Those who graduate from college become advantages for the economy.

“The education expenses, when added to health care, reduced American wages, unemployment compensation, law enforcement costs, money sent home and other costs are significant. One study found that these costs gave a net loss of \$136 billion for American natives, or about 1.3 percent of U.S. GDP. These are big numbers.”



—“There are certainly other disadvantages of poor illegal and legal immigrants. Many live in overcrowded, often sub-standard housing in clear violation of local laws.

Property taxes paid are minimal because of the low value of the dwellings used and the fact that multiple families may use one dwelling. They bring diseases such as drug resistant tuberculosis, malaria, leprosy, plague, polio, dengue fever and AIDS which they pass on and which increase the expenditure of health care dollars, while decreasing the life-spans and healthy lifestyles of the citizens.

“You are more likely to get more criminal activity or violent behavior where that is common in the home country. This seems to be more common in central and South American countries and in sub-Saharan Africa. The classic situation was when Fidel Castro released a number of ‘political’ prisoners, which the U.S. eagerly accepted. The problem was that many were hardened criminals, often identified by their tattoos showing them to be murderers, rapists, robbers.

“Street gangs of Vietnamese, Armenians, Salvadorians, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans and many other groups develop when they are not accepted into mainstream middle class society immediately or when their similar ethnic backgrounds give them immediate acceptance and recognition.

“But it’s not just about gangs. To get work, illegal immigrants are brazen about acquiring forged documents, especially Social Security cards and driver’s licenses. Then with the forged driver’s licenses they drive but nearly half of immigrants are uninsured. This is more than three times higher than for citizens. Then you have drug smuggling, human trafficking, robbery and prostitution that are among the crimes we see in higher rates among illegals. The increase in crime adds to the cost of policing and the justice and penal systems. In Oslo, Norway 70% of those in jail are illegal immigrants. They are responsible for most of the house break-ins and drug sales.”(72a)



---“Eventually we will be one world so everyone can live in California or Florida, loll on the beaches of Thailand or Tahiti, or enjoy the mountains of British Columbia or Austria. Until then we have sovereign nations and those nations may not want any immigrants. Or they may only want some highly skilled people like doctors or computer engineers. They may want only people of a certain religion or race, or they may not want people of certain religions or races. That is their right. Holland is now talking about having immigrants put up large sums of money if they want to immigrate.

“You are all talking about immigration in your country. But there are 11 to 13 million illegal immigrants in the EU. And there are lots of legal and illegal immigrants that have been problems. European countries have been pretty open-armed for refugees. Bosnia, Ethiopia, Darfur, Ghana, Iraq and many other countries. Norway is unwittingly harboring a major terrorist and others who are suspected of terrorism. Britain has certainly had its problems and Arab terrorists have organizations in most Western countries. And the legal immigrants get all of the welfare state benefits for education, health care and childbearing.

“And remember it’s not just illegal immigrants. In the European Union people are generally free to move from their poor home country to a richer country where jobs are available, the pay is better and education and health care are far more available. The financial and social stresses are not equally shouldered.”



—“In the U.S. who is illegal and who is legal, I get confused? What have the courts said Lee?”



—“There’s one more category—citizens. They have more rights than legal aliens and legal aliens should have more rights than illegals. Obviously if your parents are citizens and you are born in the U.S. you are probably a citizen. You can also be naturalized by finishing the steps set out by the Federal government. After this it can get fuzzy. While the 14th Amendment granted citizenship rights to black slaves, it did not grant them to American Indians, even though they were born on U.S. soil and even if they left the tribe and swore allegiance to the U.S. government. They had to be naturalized. (73) Indians were not given citizenship until 1924. On the other hand a child born to legal immigrants on U.S. soil is a citizen. (74) But, based on these cases, a child born to an illegal immigrant may not be a citizen in spite of the common perception that he is. The Supreme Court has never ruled on it. The phrase ‘natural born citizen’ has never been defined. And the phrase in the Fourteenth Amendment ‘and subject to the jurisdiction thereof’ has not been ruled on. Although the Plyler case in Texas has indicated that illegals once in Texas are under the jurisdiction of Texas education law.

”We lawyers often wonder if the original meaning of a Constitutional phrase or paragraph is to be expanded or narrowed by five lawyers, appointed by a partisan president, and sitting on the high court.”



—“I can see how the meaning of the 14th Amendment was enlarged by the court. But where has the Supreme Court narrowed a meaning of the Constitution? Has it ever happened?”



—“Yes. When the meaning of ‘ex post facto’ was changed from a civil right to a criminal right only, by the Supreme Court in the case of *Calder v. Bull* in 1798. (75) After a probate court hearing the legislature of Connecticut passed a resolution, which probably couldn’t be called a law. It set aside the probate court’s ruling. So much for the separation of powers! Rather than look at what the writers of the Constitution said was intended by the term ‘ex post facto’, they looked at old English law and the constitutions of several states, and decided to protect the rights of the states to be able to do what they wanted civilly.

“The judges said that the term ‘ex post facto’ which clearly means ‘after the fact’ was ‘unintelligible’ and ‘means nothing.’ So the judges went on to find that ‘the plain and obvious meaning and intention of the prohibition is this; that the Legislatures of the several states, shall not pass laws, after a fact done by a subject, or citizen, which shall have relation to such fact, and shall punish him for having done it. The prohibition considered in this light, is an additional bulwark in favor of the personal security of the subject, to protect his person from punishment by legislative acts, having a retrospective operation. I do not think it was inserted to secure the citizen in his private rights, of either property, or contracts. . . the restriction not to pass any ex post facto law, was to secure the person of the subject from injury, or punishment, in consequence of such law.’ They found only one case in British law that applied ‘ex post facto’ to civil law. And further they decided that ‘if the term ‘ex post facto law’ is to be construed to include and to prohibit the enacting any law after a fact, it will greatly restrict the power of the federal and state legislatures; and the consequences of such a construction may not be foreseen.’ The ruling indicated that laws could be passed after the fact if they benefited the whole community. In fact ‘The words, ex post facto, when applied to a law, have a technical meaning, and, in legal phraseology, refer to crimes, pains, and penalties. Judge Blackstone’s description (76)

“The court then went on to decide that ‘from the above passages it appears, that ex post facto laws have an appropriate signification; they extend to penal statutes, and no further; they are restricted in legal estimation to the creation, and, perhaps, enhancement of crimes, pains and penalties. The enhancement of a crime, or penalty, seems to come within the same mischief as the creation of a crime or penalty; and therefore they may be classed together. Again, the words of the Constitution of the United States are, ‘That no State shall pass any bill of attainder, ex post facto law, or law impairing the obligation of contracts.’ (77) Where is the necessity or use of the latter words, if a law impairing the obligation of contracts, be comprehended within the terms ex post facto law? It is obvious from the specification of contracts in the last member of the clause, that the framers of the Constitution, did not understand or use the words in the sense contended for on the part.’

“But the judges were not at the Constitutional Convention, and James Madison who was, said that ex post facto applied to civil laws. (78)) Madison doesn’t mention criminal rights as being covered under the ex post facto section, he mentioned only ‘personal security and private rights.’ Criminal rights were covered under both ex post facto and bills of attainder. But just as in most areas of human thinking, intellectual prejudices prevail over facts—even for those who are supposedly educated!

About twenty years ago I took a case involving ex post facto to the Supreme Court. (78a)

A California teacher was forced to contribute to the pension fund, but when he tried to collect the pension on it the state attorneys made up three major objections that were not in the laws. He was defending himself at the time and individuals going against states have no chance to win. He appealed. By the time the case got to the appeals court the state had enacted into law their three points. So he lost again. I took the case to the U.S. Supreme. Court. I had heard that Justice Clarence Thomas was looking for a case to bring back the original meaning of ex post facto in the Constitution. I don’t know if Justice Thomas saw it, but the case was not heard.”



--“Very interesting Lee. We realize that judges often decide cases based on their own basic assumptions and the personal evidence they have accepted in their own lives. But let’s get back to the issue of illegal immigration and to the citizenship of the children of those illegal immigrants. Not all children born on United States soil are citizens. Children of foreign diplomats are excluded. They, of course, are not under the jurisdiction of the United States laws. They have diplomatic immunity. But children of illegal aliens are considered to be citizens. But are their parents subject to the laws of the U.S., especially when they knowingly broke them when they entered the country illegally. Should they be exempt from citizenship because of their parents’ allegiance to another country?

“The Supreme Court has not ruled on whether illegal immigrants are under the jurisdiction of the United States laws. Certainly they are breaking them and can be sent back if they are caught. Does that mean that they are not under the jurisdiction of federal law until they are caught? Certainly the young men cannot be drafted into the armed services. They can’t be called for jury duty. They can’t vote. They can’t be guilty of treason. Do they have an allegiance to the country they have invaded? Or do they only want the opportunities without the responsibilities.”

“What if the Court had ruled as the Dominican Republic’s Supreme Court did. Their Constitution gave Dominican citizenship to anyone born on their soil, except for diplomats and those in transit through the country, The Dominican Court ruled that the Haitian workers were ‘in transit’ so their children were not citizens—even if the workers had lived in the Dominican Republic for many years.

“It seems to me that judges make up their minds then look for whatever will back up their position. If the legislators who wrote the law back up the judge’s position the judge uses legislative intent as a basis for the decision, if the legislators had a different intent, then the judge may go to old European law or the law of some other state to back up his thinking. If their ideas are really ‘far out’ they can usually find a case in California law on which to base their case. Like we say, California is the land of the fruits and the nuts—and lawyers and judges may be among the nuttiest!



—“I don’t know if it’s about being nutty or prejudiced. In law books, as in the Bible, you can generally find some phrase to back up any position. For example, while the Wong Kim Ark case grants citizenship to the children of legal aliens, in a series of cases called the Slaughterhouse cases, the court noted that ‘the phrase, ‘subject to its jurisdiction’ was intended to exclude from its operation children of ministers, consuls, and citizens or subjects of foreign States born within the United States.’ It was agreed that children of foreign diplomats and embassies or consulates and people who owed allegiance to another country could not be citizens. I would think that illegal aliens would fall under the same category since they owe their allegiance to another country. This was the same line of thinking that disallowed citizenship to Native Americans in the Elk v. Wilkins case. And the Chief Justice in the Wong Kim Ark case said, ‘the words ‘subject to the jurisdiction thereof,’ in the 14th Amendment, were used as synonymous with the words ‘and not subject to any foreign power.’ So the courts have generally affirmed the citizenship of children born to legal immigrants but not to those born to illegal immigrants. But then the Plyler case gives children of illegals equal rights to education, but it didn’t give them citizenship. What a hodge-podge of thinking—if it can be called thinking, because it does not seem rational!



—“Of course the legislators, or a Constitutional Convention, can change the rules. It is obvious that in the past, countries wanted more workers so just about any birth on their territory

was welcomed. That may be changing now. Manual labor doesn't have near the attractiveness that it once did for modern economies. And why not take in people already educated and proven law-abiding, rather than babies that will take many thousands of dollars in education and health expenses before they are ready to produce economically.



—“Yes, we'd have to change the laws to reverse the thinking of earlier governments and Supreme Court decisions where the rulings are quite clear that if a person comes into the U.S. for business or pleasure that person is under the jurisdiction of the laws of the United States.(79)



—“What if you made it a felony to be in the country illegally. If you are subject to the jurisdiction of the laws of the country, you can certainly break them—and even break them big. Then there could be placed in the immigration laws the requirement of never having a criminal record to legally immigrate or to become a citizen. Lee, could it be considered to be treason for a foreign national to hurt a nation's economy by using its health care or educational opportunities. Or do you have to be at war to have a treasonous act? Or do you have to be a citizen to be guilty of treason?



—“Treason usually means supporting an enemy of your country. But some dictionaries define it as treachery or dishonesty. So if a judge used that definition it could be another means for handling illegals. But I doubt it would fly. It would probably make more sense to class illegals, whose allegiance is to another country, with diplomats, whose allegiance is also to another country and whose children are citizens of their home country, no matter where they are born. Children of legal immigrants would of course be citizens, unless the laws are changed. Just being in a country doesn't transfer allegiance to it. If it were that simple, naturalized citizens wouldn't have to go through the ceremony of swearing allegiance to their new country of citizenship. Every traveler and trader could be assumed to be showing their complete allegiance to a country by just being on its soil.

“It's strange that the child of an American citizen born abroad is not necessarily an American citizen, but the child of an illegal immigrant, a criminal, is automatically a citizen. But this idea goes way back in British law. In earlier days anyone born on British soil was a subject of the king. The previous British common law stemmed from feudalism where a child born on the land of a nobleman belonged to that land owner. But while the Americans cast off their allegiance to the king, they kept much of the common law of the British system. And since legal concepts don't change very fast, that idea has stuck.

“But in the rest of Europe it is quite different. Generally you become a citizen of a country if one of your parents was a citizen. In France, if you were born in the country to non-citizens you can request citizenship when you are an adult. It was only in the British Commonwealth and the U.S. that your accidental place of birth made you a citizen.

“But now the British have changed their rules. While the members of the British Commonwealth were subjects of the United Kingdom until 1981, they don't necessarily have the right to live or work in the UK. And citizenship is no longer acquired because you were born on British soil. You must be born of a British citizen on British soil. So the birth of a child in the United Kingdom by alien parents does not result in British citizenship any more. It is primarily the United States, which doesn't need more people, and Canada, which says it does need more people, that give citizenship to anyone born on their soil.

“Our American rules keep changing. First citizenship in the United States was only for whites. Blacks and Orientals were excluded. Then after the Civil War slavery was abolished by the

13th Amendment and citizenship was liberalized to include others, primarily the ex-slaves, but it excluded American Indians we excluded under other laws. Then in 1878 a law forbade the Chinese from becoming naturalized citizens. In 1906 Asian Indians, who were Caucasians, were denied U.S. citizenship. In 1889 the Supreme Court ruled that all Chinese could be barred from entry into the country. So, except for European whites and freed slaves, it was pretty tough for other races to enter the United States. The simplest road to citizenship was provided by the Supreme Court's interpretation of the 14th Amendment which gave citizenship to children born in the country to legal aliens in the Wong Kim Ark case.

"But if you read the 6 to 2 decision, there were a number of points made that were quite different from the decision that he was a citizen. One observation was that 'The true bond which connects the child with the body politic is not the matter of an inanimate piece of land, but the moral relations of his parentage. . . The place of birth produces no change in the rule that children follow the condition of their fathers, for it is not naturally the place of birth that gives rights, but extraction.' And another point was that 'To what nation a person belongs is by the laws of all nations closely dependent on descent. It is almost a universal rule that the citizenship of the parents determines it, --that of the father where children are lawful, and, where they are bastards, that of their mother, without regard to the place of their birth; and that must necessarily be recognized as the correct canon, since nationality is in its essence dependent on descent.' (80)

"And the ruling continued, 'As the society cannot exist and perpetuate itself otherwise than by the children of the citizens, those children naturally follow the condition of their fathers, and succeed to all their rights. The society is supposed to desire this, in consequence of what it owes to its own preservation; and it is presumed, as matter of course, that each citizen, on entering into society, reserves to his children the right of becoming members of it. The country of the fathers is therefore that of the children; and these become true citizens merely by their tacit consent. We shall soon see whether, on their coming to the years of discretion, they may renounce their right, and what they owe to the society in which they were born. I say that, in order to be of the country, it is necessary that a person be born of a father who is a citizen; for, if he is born there of a foreigner, it will be only the place of his birth, and not his country.' (81) And more still, 'Section 1993 of the Revised Statutes provides that children so born 'are declared to be citizens of the United States; but the rights of citizenship shall not descend to children whose fathers never resided in the United States.'

"Then Justice Miller, delivering the opinion of the court, analyzed the first clause of the 14th Amendment and observed that the phrase 'subject to the jurisdiction thereof' was intended to exclude from its operation children of ministers, consuls, and citizens or subjects of foreign states, born within the United States.' This meant that to be 'completely subject' to the political jurisdiction of the United States is to be in no respect or degree subject to the political jurisdiction of any other government. So if we follow this line of thinking, children of illegal immigrants and visitors to the country would not be U.S. citizens,

"Citizenship law has so many unanswered questions. Do you have to be domiciled in the U.S., that is live there, or is it enough for a pregnant woman in Tijuana to run across the border, have her child, then go back to her Tijuana domicile? Does the father have to be domiciled in the U.S.? That was true in earlier days. Must the parent, or the child when it grows, have allegiance to the U.S.? And if so, do they renounce it if they break the laws of the U.S.? Have they renounced the laws by entering the country illegally?

"There was then the Plyler case (82) which gave education rights to illegal aliens in a major decision of the U.S. Supreme Court regarding illegals. In a 5 to 4 decision, the Supreme Court held that Texas did not have the Constitutional right under the 'due process clause' of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution to deny free education to illegal aliens. Since the students were under the jurisdiction of Texas law they were entitled to the rights of Texas citizens. Further, since immigration is a federal, not a state, responsibility Texas cannot make laws to control illegal immigration. While saving the cost of educating the illegal aliens one might think would be a

‘compelling state interest’ and thus be given great weight by the Court, since it cost the state billions of dollars, the Court didn’t find it so. Naturally the Court didn’t attempt to make the federal government pay for the education of the people it was not able to keep out of the country nor did it suggest that the federal government send them back to their countries.

“Legal scholars question several fundamentals of the decision. First is the question of whether illegally entering a state places a person under the full jurisdiction of the state or the nation, since it doesn’t know the person is there and the state has no power to remove the illegal since that is a federal responsibility. Then there are those who say that the 14th Amendment wasn’t a legal amendment because many states were coerced into signing it, some rescinded their ratifications, and several other problems existed. It has been said that, in terms of previous Supreme Court decisions, the presence of illegals inside U.S. borders, and the activities while illegal are more like the Native Americans in *Elk v. Wilkins*, than the legal immigrants in the *Wong Kim Ark* case, so they should be considered as still being under the jurisdiction of their home country. But that’s not the way American law works, so the decision stands.

“Then, because there is the question as to exactly what is ‘a compelling state interest’, which would allow the state to make such a law. The Court found that it was not a ‘compelling state interest’ to save the money or to discourage illegal immigration. So a majority of one judge on a federal court, not the state’s legislature and administration, is better able to determine the state’s interests. Definitely a five to four majority in Washington is the better decision maker than are the local legislators who must pay the bills.”



—“Lee, I had a friend in the Texas government at the time. He told me that the \$4 billion annual cost of educating illegal alien in Texas is 5% of the total state budget and 17% of the education budget. The five judges voting against the law passed by the Texas legislature did not volunteer to make up the cost to Texans even though it would only cost each judge only \$800,000 a year. They did admit that illegal immigration is a crime—but the state can’t enforce the laws or punish the illegals.”



—“The Court wrote that the impact of the Texas law was borne by a ‘very small subclass of people’, illegal immigrants at the time were 1 to 2% of the 226 million U.S. population, or 3 to 6 million people according to the court record.”



—“But today the ‘very small subclass’ of illegals is 3 to 6% of the 300 million population or 10 to 20 million people. In 2005 1.5 million illegal aliens lived in Texas. This is 7% of the population. So if this is an insignificant number, where would it become significant? 10%, 50%, 90%? The Court in its decision was not precise. It was without any empirical guidelines. But then that’s what courts do. They use inexact language to back up their unprovable basic assumptions. This is the problem with using the common law of the U.S. and the U.K.

“Lee, when Supreme Court judges determine that 3 to 6 million people in the country are a ‘small subclass’ is there any judicial or empirical basis for it—or do they just SWAG it?”



—“ What do you mean SWAG it?”



—“ It means, take a ‘Sophisticate Wild-Assed Guess.’”



—“ Maybe! But back to the case. The court decided that illegals are within the jurisdiction of the state. I guess they figured that illegals could be arrested for drunk driving or robbing banks. But they couldn't be dealt with for being illegally in the country. This seems to imply that U.S. born children of illegals qualify for citizenship as a birthright for being born in the U.S. It stated that ‘no plausible distinction with respect to Fourteenth Amendment ‘jurisdiction’ can be drawn between resident aliens whose entry into the United States was lawful, and resident aliens whose entry was unlawful.’ It didn't specifically address the idea of ‘anchor babies’, those born in the U.S. to legal visitors or illegal immigrants?”



—“You mean that when a visitor, like a resident of Tijuana, comes to San Diego to have her baby, that many people consider it a citizen because it was born in the U.S.?”



—“Exactly. And worse, she probably had the baby in an emergency ward, so California tax payers paid for that too.”



--“I wonder too if, since illegals are entitled to education in a state must they also be entitled to driver's licenses, U.S. passports, rent subsidies, food stamps, Medicare and Medicaid, small business loans, welfare subsidies. In fact all the benefits of citizenship?”



—“Don't know Con. But remember that the 14th Amendment's purpose in the 1860s was to give ex-slaves the right to citizenship and to make certain that states couldn't make laws that would limit their rights as citizens. The Court quoted Senator Howard, a major mover in proposing the amendment, as saying that it would prohibit a state from denying any person the right to life, liberty or property without due process of law.”



—“But was protection of anybody a concern of the majority of the states that ratified it? Or of any state? Do you think that a majority of states would have ratified it if they knew that illegal entrants were to be given equal rights with tax paying citizens?”



—“That's impossible to know.”



—“Another thing, is it the way you lawyers do things to take a mere opinion from one side of an issue and make it the controlling factor in the passage of an amendment, even though it may have made no difference in the way the states voted. In fact my experience with the courts is that the judges make up their minds based on their prejudices then look for legal and other opinions to back them up. That statue of blindfolded justice is peeking under her blindfold to look for loop holes. The idea of blind justice sounds good, the problem is that you have prejudiced people in those black robes deciding the cases.”



—“That’s why in Kino we have the legislators write the laws and computers making the decisions. We don’t want democratically elected presidents behaving like absolute monarchs or a judiciary functioning as a legislature. Your American balance of powers idea sounds good, but your see-saw isn’t always balanced on the fulcrum.”



—“Amen, Wanda. Another question Lee. If education is a state function and not covered in the Constitution, how does the Federal court get involved? If the state government decided to eliminate all education, could the federal government force it to reinstitute it?”



—“The Plyler court said that education is not a fundamental right, so I guess the state doesn’t have to provide it for anyone. Anyway, you see that much of immigration, and all illegal immigration, is a negative for society.

“Then there is the problem of laws brought with the immigrants that they want to keep. In the UK a survey of Muslims showed that 40% wanted to be ruled by Sharia law rather than British law. And the Archbishop of Canterbury seemed to give some credence to their request. It is certainly not integrative to have members of the same society being judged by different laws.”



—“You men often sound as though the only problem with illegal aliens is in your country. Western Europe has huge problems. It seems to be two-fold. There are the unskilled looking for work and there are the terrorists looking for revenge or immortality. How many Africans selling fake leather purses on the sidewalks can a country support? Venice, Barcelona, Rome, Athens and every other Mediterranean land seems inundated with eager uneducated people looking for a better life. So it’s not just Mexico and Nicaragua that have too many people, it is every Latin American country. It is every African country. It is nearly every Asian country. And there are not enough Spains, Hollands, Italys, U.S.s, Australias and Hong Kongs to absorb the southern hemisphere’s fecundity.



—“Doesn’t licensing parents make sense yet?”

ANIMAL RIGHTS



—“We could discuss legal and illegal immigration forever, but let’s move on. There has been some recent resentment in Western countries against eating, confining and experimentation on animals. If the protestors were Hindus or Jains, their antagonism could be easily understood because of their belief in the sanctity of all life. But now we’re getting objections by people whose basic assumptions are not traditionally pro-animal. Apparently they are Jews or Christians, agnostics or possibly atheists.

“Animal rights, in its most extreme holding, is the concept that all or some animals should be free and in charge of their own lives, and these rights should be enacted into laws. Animals should not be seen as merely the property of humans who can treat them as they will. This is the position of PETA, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. Their approach is a more encompassing

idea than the more traditional idea of animal welfare—which is concerned with reducing the suffering of animals.”



-- “Lions have a right to kill zebras, zebras have the right to avoid being killed. Sharks eat big fish. Big fish eat little fish. But why don’t humans have the right to kill any of them?”



-- “The human protests for animals extend to freeing circus animals. Naturally they also include saving seals and whales and prohibiting hunting. They protest the euthanizing of unwanted pets. But some of them also argue that killing scientists who do medical experiments on animals is ‘morally justifiable.’ (83) A pro-animal medical doctor told the London Observer a few years ago that ‘I don’t think you’d have to kill too many animal researchers to save a lot of animal lives, I think for five lives, 10 lives, 15 human lives, we could save a million, 2 million, 10 million nonhuman lives.’

”But most of the political techniques of the movement involve harassment, such as threats against the families of scientists. And the use of force has stopped some scientists from doing medical research on animals.”



—“People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) is a large worldwide organization. It’s philosophy is that “animals are not ours to eat, wear, experiment on, or use for entertainment. It is against animal research, animals for work, fur farming, fishing, killing animals that are pests like wolves and rats, and abuse of animals from the family pet to those used for fighting—like bulls, cocks and dogs. It attempts to find homes for stray animals and euthanizes those for whom no homes can be found.”



, “Would the PETA people favor euthanizing the homeless?”



—“Don’t be ridiculous. There are some who advocate that all animals, human or others, should have the same rights, that animals should be able to lead their own lives as they see fit. Caged animals are being treated as slaves. Moreover, overcrowding animals and killing them for their fur is, some say, the moral equivalent of the Holocaust. In fact, if animals have rights to life we should all be vegetarians. So PETA advocates strict vegan diets. But in Romans 14:2, Paul tells us that ‘For one who believes, he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.’ So vegetarianism may not be a particularly Christian concept. It is, however, definitely a Hindu necessity.

“What about the plants. Some people think they can feel pain, but there is no way of telling it now. As far as I know. Without a nervous system, can an organism feel pain? Or is some sort of chemical transmission enough to label it pain? Is some sort of response enough? Plants often respond to the sun by turning towards it. Are the plants actually thinking, just like a sun bather on the beach turning toward the sun as it follows Apollo across the sky?”



—“We can leave plants for a while. There don’t seem to be any rutabaga rights groups forming. And most animal rights advocates do not advocate that animals be given all the rights of people, such as voting rights. So we’re really just looking at the idea that animals should have the

freedom to live their own lives without being used by us human animals for food, clothing or toys. When doing scientific testing to understand behavior or to find cures for illnesses, we should use our own species.

“There is some question about whether all animals should be included. Must they be thinking animals, like dolphins and chimps, or do we include fish and honey bees in the group?”



—“In animal rights discussions, as in our other discussions of ethics and their basics, should we look at facts or feelings—which should be primary in determining our moral approach to life? Is it a basic assumption that all life is equal? Or all animal life? Would amoebas be considered to be the ethical equals to people? If not, at which phylum do we draw the line? Worms, jellyfish, mammals, fish, flatworms, insects, birds, reptiles?”



—“You’re right. Animal rights advocates may have a valid point, but they seem to miss it with their faulty logic and lack of philosophical definitions. They tend to use emotional arguments, such as that animals suffer pain as do humans, or that animal rights are equivalent to women’s rights or homosexual rights. In terms of effective thinking most of their arguments are logical fallacies because they appeal to the emotions. We must first determine whether there is an equality of essence before we can compare animals and humans.

“If animals are to have rights, whether partially or fully vested, there must be a reason that is either factually provable or is enunciated as a basic assumption relative to the equality of humans with animals. Those I have talked to are unwilling to draw a line for those animals with rights equal to humans and those with no special rights. Are oysters and jellyfish among the animals with rights? What about rattlesnakes and great whites? For most of the animal rights people it definitely includes mammals like: monkeys, whales and seals, cats and dogs.”

From a self centered point of view animals have rights.



—“I can see pain as an equalizing concern. X amount of pain in a human would be the same if it occurred in animals.”



--“If we choose the ability to feel pain, how do we know that pain is felt equally? Is appendicitis in a human the equivalent in pain experienced to that of a fish just hooked and tossed into a bucket on the boat? Does a more advanced nervous system feel pain more intensely? Is the pain of a famished child equivalent to that of a chicken killed to feed the child?

“How do we know that all animals in research feel pain. And even if they do are there more important criteria? And, might we rank the pain of the experimental animals against all the pain they are saving humans from. If a group of a hundred animals suffers X amount of pain in the drug developing experiments but they save an amount of human pain that is ten times greater, then 1 certainly doesn’t equal 10!

“What if we just stop or minimize animal suffering? What if scientists designed experiments where the animals didn’t suffer and were still used to help in curing human diseases? And if pain is the criterion, do we exclude from those with rights any humans who have a condition that makes them totally or partially insensitive to pain—like brain dead people, but include animals who apparently do feel pain? Would more ability to feel pain make an organism higher in the ranks of those who get rights?



—“Should the animals be considered ‘selfs’ whose needs we must consider? Should the ability to feel pain be the sole concern? What about the ability to reason, or in the case of an infant or child, the possible eventual ability to reason, the essence that separates humans from animals? Or in the case of a brain injured person, should it count that the person in the past had the ability to reason?”

“Is it a level of reasoning ability that should be our criterion? When a chimpanzee arranges boxes to form stairs so he can reach a banana that is placed too high to grasp, this is certainly an example of reasoning. When dolphins get together they talk in whistles and clicks. In fact it has been found that dolphins in different areas communicate in dialects. I guess you wouldn’t expect all dolphins in the world to use the same language any more than you’d expect all people in the world to use the same language. Watching dolphins hunt fish, it is obvious that they reason. Should we give them rights but take away rights from humans who can’t reason or communicate?”

“Should we let some chimps and dolphins into our group of reasoning beings. And should we drop out those humans who can’t reason—like idiots and brain dead people? And how long should we give infants to demonstrate that they have the ability to reason? Some animals show more ability to learn than some people. They may even show some abstract thinking. We may even learn to communicate with them. But how many animals would have the ability to weigh political issues?”



—“How many people can weigh political issues. No matter what the question you will have people on both sides of every issue.”



—“Do we use some sort of intelligence test and eliminate those homo sapiens who fall below the line, but include those animals that are above it?”



--“What about cruelty or captivity. Is using animals for entertainment at Sea World cruel? What about trained dog acts? Should we let the animals choose what they want? Are the animals better cared for in this type of captivity than they would be in the wild? If we put our old people in rest homes to protect them while they await their deaths, is this akin to keeping animals protected and safe in a zoo? If given the choice, would a zebra prefer living safely in the L.A. Zoo or taking his chances with cheetahs or humans on an African plain? ”

“What about dog fights or cock fights? They certainly entertain some people. Do the animals enjoy it as the ultimate fighters or kick boxers do? Or was it that the animals didn’t have the choice?”

“Could we require sport fishermen to catch trout with nets instead of hooks? Or slaughterhouses to give cattle painless lethal injections? Does it make sense that we’re killing them painlessly so that we can eat them.”



—“But you are still killing them!”



—“Let’s take another direction in our discussion. What animals would you rank above which people?”



—“Well I would rank a drug sniffing police dog above a drug distributing cartel boss. And I would rank it above murderers, rapists and a bunch of other criminals. Then I think there are some very moral or useful animals. Milk giving cows and watch dogs serve a social purpose. I think they’re worth more than murderers. Dolphins have been known to guide ships through unknown and dangerous waters and sometimes they save human lives.

“If we base animal rights on some kind of equality, what is it? The inability to photosynthesize oxygen? The ability of locomotion? The need for oxygen? Two arms and two legs? Body hair? A nervous system sufficiently advanced to feel pain? A brain that can understand that there is a future?

“What about interests? Should all animal interests be given equal weight? Should a tiger’s interest in eating a person have the same ethical weight as a person wanting to eat the flank of a steer? I would guess that all animals have a certain self interest that propels their actions. I would assume that if we could talk to the steer it would prefer lying on the plain to lying on a plate.



--“From the animals’ points of view, for most animals, there is a preference for companionship with one’s own species. Animals are ‘species specific’ when it comes to sharing their lives—with the possible exceptions of some little old ladies with a houseful of cats, a man with a dog as his best friend, or a hippo with his trusty tickbird. And it’s more than just living together! Needs and familiarity play a part. A tiger may kill a man to feed her cubs. A man may kill a tiger for a pelt to decorate his house. If your dog attacks a neighbor’s child, which would you allow to be killed to save the other? Should we kill the child because it is a greater danger for global warming, or kill the dog because the food it eats could save starving children in an impoverished country?

“If we use economic contributions as the criterion for worth and equal rights, do we exclude humans who do not contribute, or who cost the society money, but include those animals that contribute economically, like police dogs and plow horses?

“Animal rights, even equality, are evident among many pet owners in the West. Their pets are pampered, medicated for their ills, clothed, beautified, and eventually expensively buried. They are family members. They are hospitalized when they develop cancers, arthritis, dementia, heart problems, allergies, obesity and a number of other ailments. Half of Americans think of their pets as family members, so money spent on their upkeep and pleasure is money well spent. Health insurance for pets is an increasing expenditure. It saves people from mortgaging their homes for their pets, as some have done. The late hotelier and real estate magnate Leona Helmsley, who died in 2007, left between \$5 billion and \$8 billion to be used for the care and welfare of dogs, she had already stipulated that \$12 million was for her dog. So we certainly have some lucky animals. But should they be freed to grovel in the garbage and live their own lives of freedom?”

Self centered—animals should not have rights



—“I can’t see giving animals equal rights with humans. If animal research develops cures, techniques or pharmaceuticals that will help me, my family or humankind, I am for it. While there may be a few animals I rank higher than some people, on the average I put humans higher.

“And who’s self are we talking about here. If I can be saved by a drug that cost the lives of a thousand rats or monkeys to develop, I’m for it. If my dog can be saved by killing the neighborhood pit bull that has been killing local dogs and cats, I’m for it.

“If we give rights to a species, must the individuals, or the adult individuals, behave in a certain way respecting the rights of others? If we give people freedom but they take away the freedom of others by kidnapping or murdering them, we can take away the freedom of the violator by putting him in prison. The human generally recognizes the duty to not kidnap or murder. If we give the same rights to animals, will the rats not bite humans, or the chimps not attack them? With all the cases of pit bull violence, should we let them on the street and only cage or kill them after they have attacked a person or another animal?”



--“But all humans cannot make moral judgments. Infants, brain damaged people, idiots don’t have this ability. So do we drop them from the human race?

“But do you support fox hunting, dog fights, restraining egg laying chickens or managing mink farms? Shouldn’t animals be allowed some level of comfort in their lives?”



—“Should we start with saving impoverished people before we start saving animals from discomfort?”



—“What criteria are we using? If it is a feeling of moral duty, do we exclude those humans who don’t exhibit it, but include animals who do? For example, rhesus monkeys avoided pressing a lever that would give them food if at the same time it gave an electric shock to another monkey.(84) ”

GOD YES animals have rights



--“From a God based point of view, it seems to hang mostly on whether or not animals have souls, and if so, just what kind of soul. For example Aristotle and Aquinas believed in levels of souls. And soul, to them, meant a life force. Plants have vegetative souls. These give a life force that allows feeding, breeding and growing.

“Animals have an additional type of soul, the sensitive. This makes them able to move and gives them some potential for taking care of their needs like hunger and breathing. They have vision, hearing and other senses.

“Humans have still another level of soul, the intellectual level. This gives them the capacity to think minimally to abstractly, to contemplate the future and to make choices. This unseen spiritual ‘thing’ is what many call the image of God. Then to take it a step farther, it is the spiritual thing that lives after death. So if those religious people who believe in an afterlife,

like the ancient Egyptians and the Mid-Eastern religions, are right, this could be the soul that enjoys it.”



---“Anyway the written ideas of Aristotle, that we have three types of souls or life forces, and the oldest versions of the Old Testament were both written in Greek. The words spirit, breath, wish, hope, life force and soul are used interchangeably, and in modern bibles they are often translated as ‘soul’. This makes it difficult to discern what the original writers or verbal translators actually meant. Did the idea of the soul being the “image of God” begin with the earliest writers? Did that idea of soul come much later?”



—“Good point Lee. Did you know that if you look for the word ‘soul’ in all the Bible translations, the various Bible translators vary considerably in their translation of it. One Bible uses the word ‘soul’ only 20 times, another uses it 500 times. Bible scholars are not as quick to say they know the exact meaning of a word as are the people preaching in the pulpits. While I would see the human soul as being that ‘image of God’ spoken of in Genesis, I have to recognize that there are many possible meanings. And while I certainly don’t believe that animals have a human-like soul, I do think that as God’s creatures they should be treated humanely. As it says in Proverbs 12:10 “The just man regardeth the life of his beast, but the bowels of the wicked are cruel.”



—“Ray, I know you believe that humans have souls, but do animals have souls? For the Hindu or the Jain animals and humans are equally aspects of the pantheistic god that is the universe. So if animals have no souls in the Judeo-Christian belief, do they have rights? Remember that in Genesis 1:26 God gave man dominion over the animals.



—“What if the Hindus are right and there is reincarnation, am I judged by how well I live in whatever form I live. If I am a pig, do I get reincarnation points for gluttony, but when gaining humanness am I judged negatively for that gluttony? As a great white shark, am I living the ideal life if I eat people, but then am I judged differently when I become a cow?

“Do we extend the thinking to all living things as did Mahavira, who gave the Jain religion its modern form? It is said that he would not pick a fruit from a tree because it was living. He would only eat fruit that had fallen to the ground. And he used a feather to sweep off a seat before he sat down so that he would not hurt any living thing by sitting on it.

“What does the Bible say about animal rights, Ray?”



—“Well we have to take verses out of the total context of the message of the Bible, and as we said earlier ‘a text taken from its context is a pretext.’ One of the major comments about animals and men is found in Ecclesiastes 3. Verses 18 through 20 say ‘I also thought, concerning the condition of the sons of men, God tests them, that they may see that they themselves are like animals. For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all is vanity. All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust.’ This is often taken to mean that animals have some rights because they are similar to people.

“Then the Fourth Commandment gives animals a resting day on the Sabbath, just as people are commanded to take. (85) So animals seem to have a special place in God’s eyes.



—“Maybe they get to rest because there were no non-Israelites to work them!”



—“The commandments are for everybody, Lee. These are universal ethical standards. Additionally in Matthew 6:26 it is clear that God takes care of both men and animals. I guess we could also look to Isaiah Chapter 11 verses 1 to 9 to see the prophesied time when all humans and animals will live peacefully together.”



—“I guess now we come to the question of whether or not animals go to heaven. I read a Washington Post survey in 2006 it found that 43 percent of Americans believe pets can go to heaven, and of those people, nearly all (93 percent) said, ‘People’s pets can go to heaven even if their owners do not.’ On the other hand 28% said that animals can’t go to heaven and 7% of the respondents didn’t even believe in heaven.

“Catholics bring their pets to be blessed in October on the feast day of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals. Would they be blessed if they can’t get to heaven? Dan Paden, a researcher with PETA, has a master’s degree in theology from Boston College, a Jesuit University. He said that ‘I think it’s a shame that half of believers still don’t see animals as individuals with souls who were created by God and will end up enjoying paradise with him.’ As you might expect, more pet owners than non-pet owners believe that pets go to heaven. We have pets that have personalities and feelings, and can think and reason. It seems as though whatever it is that makes each pet unique, a personality, or perhaps a soul, is like that which makes each human unique.”



—“I find it hard to believe that animals go to heaven. But maybe you have heard about Pope John Paul II’s remark that ‘the animals possess a soul and men must love and feel solidarity with our smaller brethren’ since they are ‘the fruit of the creative action of the Holy Spirit and merit respect’ because ‘they are as near to God as men are.’ He obviously took a major step in moving away from the concepts of soul that St. Thomas laid out.



—“I’m disappointed in you Ray. You’re not the Pope follower I thought you were. Er, but maybe you’re just your old reactionary self—a throwback to Aristotle and Aquinas.”



—“Well let me put on my scriptural cap. In 2 Kings 2:11 Elijah is taken up to heaven in a horse drawn chariot of fire. Or in Revelation 5:13 ‘Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth’ and again in Revelation at 19:14, ‘The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses. . .’

“Some people think that the term ‘all things’ in passages from the King James version, like in Acts 3:19 to 21, Philippians 3:20 and 21, Hebrews 2 verse 8 and Revelation 21:5 includes animals. But not all Bible translations use the term ‘all things’ in these verses. The New International Version does not use the term ‘all things’ in its translation. And as I’m sure you are aware Lee, it is these changes in translations that make some people believe that the Bible is not the inspired word of God.”



—“That’s only one of the major questions I have about the Bible’s authenticity, especially as being the inspired word of God. Does God’s opinion keep changing? So often you read the same verse in different Bibles and you wonder if they are really talking about the same thing.”



—“But our Catholic translations stay pretty consistent. Now on a more important track, if pets go to heaven, their owners had better live good lives if they want to see them there. It is clear in Matthew 7 verses 13 and 14 that ‘only a few will find the gate’ to heaven.’



—“I do have one question. Do animals have to accept Christ as their personal savior to get into heaven?

GOD Animals have no rights



—“If animal rights depend on their having souls, do all animals have souls? The answer is ‘no’ for Jews and Muslims and probably for most Christians. Do animals go to heaven? Might I meet the soul of a clam I ate in a spaghetti vognole? If they go to heaven, do all lobsters have their own heaven? All rattlesnakes? All great white sharks? How do you tell if a great white lived a good life? If he ate 2 people and 100 seals, does that qualify for shark sainthood?



—“You know I am not one who believes that animals have souls. But I think we should be kind to them. I wouldn’t approve of Pope Pius IX’s decision, when over a hundred years ago he wouldn’t allow a cruelty to animals office to open in Rome because humans have no duty to animals.

“According to Jewish and Christian scriptures man has dominion over animals. St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas agreed that humans have no moral duty to animals. However they should be kind to animals because cruelty to animals might lead people to adopt cruelty towards each other.

“Then there was the situation involving Jesus in Matthew 8 verses 28 to 33. He was near Gaderenes when two men possessed by demons asked him to remove the demons. Jesus removed the demons from the men and put them into a herd of pigs. The pigs then ran into the water and drowned. Does this sound like Jesus was concerned with the pigs? Does it sound like he thought that the pigs had souls?

“And in James Chapter 3 verse 7 it says that ‘every creature—animal or bird, reptile or fish—is tamed and has been tamed by man,’”



—“Jumping back to philosophy, in the 17th century, the French philosopher Rene Descartes wrote that animals have no souls or minds, and are only complex automata. So they cannot think or even feel pain. They do have sensory equipment so they can see, hear and touch, and may even feel anger and fear, but they are not, in any sense, conscious. And in Islam animals can be eaten, hunted and sacrificed according to Surah 5 verses 1 to 3 and 95



—“If Jesus is the one and only Savior, as is stated in John 14:6 which says ‘I am the way the truth and the light. No one comes to the Father except through me.’ Or in Acts 4:12 it says ‘Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which

we must be saved.' I can't see how animals can get to heaven based on these verses. Can any animals understand what it takes to be saved through Jesus? I don't think so.

Society yes animals have rights



—“Jeremy Bentham’s ethics dealt with gaining pleasure and avoiding pain. So if animals feel equal pain to humans their needs can be equal. Others, like Aquinas and Kant believed that humans have some obligation to animals.”



—“If it is the ability to adhere to a social contract, do we drop out humans who don’t, and include animals that seem to have a sense of social duty, like a pet dog defending its owner from attack.”



—“Rights come from the powerful. They don’t exist because some people want them. They come from human leaders in government, not from the workers of the world. No person possesses a right unless it has been given by a powerful civil or religious force. And even if given by a religious power it has no force unless the religion controls the civil. So should non-human animals should have the right not to be treated as the property of humans.



--One of Aristotle’s students, Theophrastus, believed that robbing an animal of life was unjust. He wrote that non-human animals can reason, sense, and feel just as human beings do. He didn’t postulate whether they could reason, feel or sense to the same degree that humans can. Rousseau, in the mid-18th century, wrote that animals have certain rights from nature and that humans have a duty to them to not mistreat them.”



—“Can there be other factors than the ability to feel pain or some hypothetical level of reasoning ability? Since humans have 46 chromosomes, should that be the criterion? But some humans have one or two, more or less.”



—“If we use chromosomes as the criterion, our chromosomal equals would be hares. So the Easter bunny should be treated as a brother. And if we assume that more is better, we would have to bow to our betters: chimpanzees, gorillas, tobacco and potatoes with 48, skunks with 50, cows and horses with 60 and 64, dogs with 78 and a protozoa with 1600. If we think that fewer is better we would have to let in mosquitoes with their 6, kangaroos with 12, peas and rye with 14, doves and guinea pigs with 16, earthworms and rice with 24, and rats and oats with 42.

“Maybe we could use brain structure, with the more advanced brain having a more advanced and full frontal lobe. Or could we use magnetic resonance imaging to somehow test brain reactions to certain stimuli.”



--“While we’re categorizing, do we let plants into the mix. Do we stop eating them and torturing them by cutting them and placing them in floral arrangements in our homes and funeral parlors?

“Do we limit any rights to only mammals, so we can cruelly keep catching fish and shooting birds? Should we limit it to mammals whose adult weight is over ten pounds so we can eliminate rats and mice?”



--“If we don’t use some sort of physical basis for equality, should we use a psychological or social basis? How many animals can agree to a social contract, such as living in a democratic-republic? How many can make ethical decisions?

“I remember a case of a dolphin, I think it was in New Zealand. The dolphin would guide ships through the narrow inlet to the port. Someone took a shot at it so it stopped its thoughtful mission and eventually the ship hit a rock and sunk. Wasn’t this an ethical dolphin? And we’ve all heard of dogs saving their masters from fires and other perils. And what about animals in the wild protecting their young? If humans did these things we would consider them to be highly moral.

“How many people can reason? Look at the idiots and criminals who have been voted into public office and have had huge negative effects on the world and even their electorate.”



--“Are animal rights of the same order as rights for slaves, women, homosexuals. Here we may have factual concerns—do women contribute to the society, do homosexuals? Do animals contribute as much?

“In Sweden recently 78% of those surveyed believed that animals have the same intrinsic value as humans and have the same right to life. (86) I don’t know if the Swedes thought their way into this idea or whether they just thought it was a nice socialistic opinion to have.

Society-- animals have no rights

“On the other hand while hunting in the U.S. has dropped about 3% each year. This has dropped many states’ income from selling hunting licenses. So West Virginia, for example, has lost \$1.5 million in hunting license income each year, so it is now offering hunting classes in school. A number of states have passed laws to increase hunting by reducing the age of those allowed to hunt. I wonder if hunting deer and squirrels will reduce the desire of the young to shoot each other in school.

“If we follow the thinking of Rene DesCartes we have no obligation to animals because animals have no language so there was no duty toward them.”



--“On another note, breeding for fur certainly helps the human economy. Fur buying grosses over \$13 billion a year and has been increasing rapidly. Without fur and leather it leaves only plants and plastics for food and clothes. But if plants have feelings we must eliminate them for food and clothing. That leaves synthetics for clothes. But what about food?”



--“ This is not only an animal rights issue but it is also a human issue. If we stopped all animal breeding we would also do some good for the global warming problem and the water shortage problem because we wouldn’t have the methane and CO2 flatulence problem from cows

and other animals and since they wouldn't be drinking water there would be more for people. So by eliminating all pets and food animals as well as animals used for clothing, we would be doing the Earth a favor. The problem would be that since vegans usually live longer than meat eaters, we might increase the human population."



-- "Remember that laws are enacted for humans. If other animals enact laws, then we might enter into a dialogue with them and reach a compromise between our various laws. And if animals do not grant themselves rights, why should we? But we do grant them certain protections by imposing laws for animal welfare on us humans. So human animals and other animals exist in different legal and moral categories

"Should we give rights to animals who do not give other animals the same rights. While chimpanzees are generally herbivores, they do eat monkeys. Dolphins eat fish. Should we require dolphins to eat seaweed? Would there be enough nutrients in seaweed to sustain them? We used to believe that chimps and gorillas were herbivores, but Jane Goodall and others have shown that they are both omnivores, like most humans.

"If we give them rights and they do not grant other animals similar rights, do we put them in prison, like we do murderers and rapists who do not grant others their rights to freedom and life?

"Is it the survival of the fittest that should be the ethical criterion? If so, only the fittest animals might be granted rights."



----"Which animals might qualify?"



—"Perhaps the winners of the Westminster Kennel Club dog show, the winner of the Kentucky Derby, or a psychologist's favorite rat."



—"Let's get back to philosophy. Aristotle, writing in the 4th century BC, believed that the essence of non-human animals was far below that of the human animal."



—"Humans think they are so superior. How many animals go to war, eat their own species, molest their young?"



—"Well many animals eat other animals, just as we do. Does that bring them down to our level? Or should we eliminate lions and tigers from our list of animals to be treated nicely and only include herbivores, like giraffes and cows? If so should we eliminate people who eat meat from our group of animals to be treated nicely?"



---"Don't be absurd! The idea is to not make animals suffer. Why should a rat be tested to see how long he swims before he drowns? Why should a monkey have to suffer the pains of AIDS so that people may eventually be cured? Why not use humans who already have the disease?"



—“Are you suggesting that we only use humans to test drug therapies or psychological stresses? We sometimes get volunteer prisoners to act as the guinea pigs. But what if we don't get enough volunteers?”



—“Perhaps we should develop criteria for personhood. Maybe some homo sapiens would not qualify, like murderers, war criminals, rapists and child molesters. Maybe some animals might qualify, like some dolphins or chimpanzees.”



—“We're getting a bit too philosophical! We just need more humane treatment for animals.”



—“Humane means ‘human’ such as in the humanistic values of compassion, and kindness. Do we treat all humans humanely? If not, should we? What if my dog treats me with kindness, but my neighbor does not? With all the killings and starvation of people, shouldn't our concerns start with us? Should the millions of dollars spent on acting humanely towards animals be redirected to the concern for humans. Then when all the humans are taken care of we can start with animals. I understand that most of the money for the kinder treatment for animals comes from the rich countries where the donors have no problems of need for themselves. I would guess that in Darfur or Gaza any money is spent on people.

“We keep coming back to personhood—what qualities does any animal, human or non-human, need to have any rights. And what rights are to be accorded to any of us animals? We need some test to separate those who will be admitted to personhood. Or will every mosquito and flea get to vote? Should we analyze the brain to see which animals have whatever requirements are determined to qualify?”



—“Why should humans decide?”



—“They're the ones who want to let animals have the rights that they have determined for themselves. I don't think I'd mind being a rich person's pet in the developed countries. It would sure beat being a starving child in Africa.



—“I do question the activities of some animal rights groups when they burn down buildings to save the animals. The FBI has said that the violent animal rights people are the number one terrorist group in the US. They release lab animals, destroying years of research because they call the research torturing animals. There are about 15 major incidents a year, resulting in millions of dollars in damage and property loss.



—“We mentioned that some are advocating killing people who in some way harm animals, such as pharmaceutical researchers. Is this rational behavior? Should we listen to people proposing laws when they are breaking the laws?”

“I remember a case a year ago where a pig rancher took very good care of his pigs, but he did sell them for food. Animal activists tore down the fences of the ranch. Three hogs of different species started fighting, two were killed, as were several piglets and a pregnant sow lost all her potential piglets. Then the activists broke windows at a pub that bought pork from the farmer, and vandalized the pub. Was this for animal rights or was it merely anti-social people using the animal rights cause to wreak havoc?”

“If the animal rights activists will take in unwanted pets and protect them and not release them in the cities, I might support it. But the cost to the city of keeping animals that were once pets, then became unwanted, is too much. There is not enough money to support the needs of the taxpaying and non-taxpaying human citizens. Perhaps if we figure that race horses or circus animals contributed something to taxes, they might be exempted. On the other hand look at what a few dollars could do for starving humans. But then we have to assume that a mother or child in Darfur has a worth equal to an unwanted pet, or possibly a pit bull that killed a child.

“It is strange that PETA will protest the euthanizing of unwanted pets by the government, but will do it themselves if they can’t find decent homes for unwanted animals.

TORTURE



-- “Some think that animals are being tortured when they are used in research, but some humans are purposely tortured. Torture has been done for thousands of years to either punish or to get information.

“Since there are two major reasons for torturing, let’s discuss them separately. Let’s start with torture as punishment.”

Moral from a self centered point of view



—“I think people who do hideous things should suffer hideous punishments. Maybe it will discourage others from following their examples and hurting me or my family.

Immoral from a self-centered point of view

“On the other hand, if torture is allowed and I am arrested for real or false reasons, I don’t want to be subjected to torture.”

Moral from a God based viewpoint



-- “I hate to say it, but my church was guilty of this during the Inquisition. If it did in fact save some souls it might have been worth it.

Immoral from a God based point of view

“But in today’s moral climate we bend toward ‘turning the other cheek’ and towards toleration, so it has no place in today’s religious world.

Moral from a societal point of view

“I suppose that if it could be proven that torturing criminals would reduce crime it would have some value.

Immoral from a society centered point of view

“But if we allow torture we are bringing ourselves down to the level of the sociopathic criminal. We must raise our standards and hopefully the society will rise with it. It’s like Norwegian or British police not carrying guns, so few criminals in those countries carry them. This ideal is reflected in the UN Declaration of Human Rights in Article 5 where it says ‘No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.’

TORTURE TO GAIN LIFE SAVING INFORMATION FROM ENEMIES



—“Torture, or ‘aggressive interrogation methods’ in Bush-speak, would include: induced hypothermia, long periods of forced standing, sleep deprivation, the “attention grab” (forcefully seizing the suspect’s shirt), the ‘attention slap,’ the ‘belly slap’ and sound and light manipulation. It would not include ‘waterboarding’ which comes close to drowning the victim. If the prisoner is not a 100%er in the opposition he may give up some secrets, if he knows any. If his terroristic fervor is tied to a strong religious belief it is probably useless.

“People using enhanced interrogation techniques should seek information that is important and accurate so what method will give you the best information. Torture is only one method. Marketing and advertising people are pretty good at getting us to do things we wouldn’t normally do. There are other methods than producing pain or fear of pain. Police interrogation techniques are often effective and don’t use physical pain. Torture just seems so obvious and simple, and we assume it will work. It probably would on us!

“Modern torture methods like sleep deprivation, extreme heat or cold, and simulating drowning pale in contrast with the torture of earlier years when thumb screws and being stretched on the rack created pain, iron masks slowly choked and suffocated the victim, or perhaps the ultimate tortures of being slowly burned or having one’s hands tied behind the back then, with a rope around the hands, lifting the victim to the ceiling. If that didn’t dislocate the shoulder joints and elbows, then dropping them almost to the floor would dislocate the shoulders.

“A group of experts has criticized some of the methods used by the interrogators in the Bush war. They were called amateurish and outmoded. Many were patterned after the old Soviet techniques and were said to violate both American values and the Geneva Conventions. There was no proof that they were effective in gaining useful information. Gaining valid information is not related to the intensity of the pain.

“Torture may elicit false confessions from innocent people and true confessions from some, but highly devoted adherents to a cause will tell little truth and may give false leads.”



---”Is everybody equally worthy because they are human? If not, why not torture. But if human life is generally valued in advanced democracies. are you cutting the democratic underpinnings through torture. Let me take a crack at analyzing the positions people might take.

Moral from a self centered point of view

“You have captured a conspirator to your child’s kidnapping. The kidnapers have threatened to kill your son unless they are given a million dollars, which you don’t have. Your captive knows where your son is kept. Would you approve of torturing your captive to find the location of your son?”

Immoral from a self-centered point of view

“If I’m going to be tortured for any reason, even if I could save your son, I don’t want to be tortured no matter how many lives I could save if I told you what I know.”

Moral from a God based viewpoint

“All torture is political—it may be for punishment, interrogation or to change people’s religious or political beliefs. Certainly the inquisitional torture was good because it saved the person from hell as long as he really changed his mind.”



-- “Self torture, such as doing penance for one’s sins, is a worthwhile idea. Some Catholics in Opus Dei use the cilice, a chain with spikes around thigh. They may also use a small whip on themselves. In some areas some Moslems will also flagellate themselves. I saw one carrying a penitent hub of a heavy half wheel supported by spokes of spikes piercing deeply into his flesh.”

“The Koran, Surah 5 verse 33, states that ‘Those who wage war against God and His Messenger and strive to spread corruption in the land should be punished by death, crucifixion, the amputation of an alternate hand and foot or banishment from the land: a disgrace for them in this world, and then a terrible punishment in the Hereafter.’”

“Most people think of the Inquisitional years as the major torture time for religions. The inquisitional methods used by Christians started with the secular rulers in Rome. In the fourth century death was approved for some religious heretics, like the Manichaeans and Donatists.”

“While most of the early Christians were forgiving of people who handed over Christians to the Romans. The Donatists were not. They also refused to accept the authority of the bishops and priests who left the church during the Roman persecutions. While other Christians thought that the sacrament of Penance would absolve those who left the religion, the Donatists thought that these sins were unforgivable. Consequently taking the sacraments from clergy who had betrayed their beliefs was also forbidden by the Donatists. At the Council of Arles in 314 the decision of the council, relative to their beliefs, went against them. They refused to accept the decision. This resulted in the first Christian versus Christian war in 317. The Donatists beat Constantine, who was the Roman emperor and leader of the Catholic Church.”

“While the Donatists were Christians, the Manichaeans were a Persian religion that was religiously eclectic. They included Jesus as one of their prophets. One of the tenets of Manichaeism was that it presented the complete version of teachings only revealed partially by teachers such as Zoroaster, Buddha, and Jesus. As it matured and moved through different cultures local gods were often included in its belief system. However Mani believed that he was the last in the line of prophets, which included Zoroaster, Plato, Siddhartha, Jesus and others.”



--“There always seems to be one last prophet, Muhammad, Joseph Smith, Bahá’u’lláh. Where will it end?”



—“The Persian Manichaean idea is that the universe is dualistic between light and darkness, or in the human, between soul and body. There was no special ‘god’. Mani himself was often referred to as a Buddha, an enlightened one. It seems that many of the ideas of Siddhartha permeated the teachings of Mani.

“The martyring of Mani in the third century helped to spread the religion from Persia to China and across Africa and Europe. The Manichaeans, as have the Bahais, tried to include all religious ideas in their religion. In fact it is said that Mani called himself a disciple of Jesus Christ, but he was rejected as a heretic—as are most truly holy people down through history. Just look at Jesus and Socrates!

“The Roman emperor Theodosius I decreed death for the Manichaeans, saying that only Christianity could be tolerated as the true religion. St Augustine was originally a Manichaean but he eventually criticized their belief, that knowledge was the key to salvation, as being too passive. He believed that any change in one’s life must be effected by oneself. It was too easy to accept one’s sin as being caused by the dark forces of the universe rather than oneself.

“The torture and death of heretics dropped off during the 6th to the 11th centuries, although the Manichaeans and Donatists were often targeted. In the 12th century death by fire for heretics became more common again. Manichaeans and witches were targeted, but heretics were generally seen as worse than sorcerers. The Church wasn’t too involved in these executions, it preferred excommunication or banishment for heretics. As St. Bernard said ‘Faith is to be produced by persuasion, not imposed by force.’ It wasn’t until Pope Innocent III decided that heresy was high treason against God, but he didn’t call for death, just the taking of the heretic’s property and banishing him. The religious Inquisition really began in 1229. Pope Gregory IX disapproved of torture but Urban IV in the early 1260s allowed it.

“Heretics were imprisoned in both Catholic and Protestant countries. Martin Luther and John Calvin were among the Protestant reformers who advocated capital punishment for heretics.

Immoral from a God based point of view

“Most saints, like Martin of Tours and John Chrysostom, disapproved of the violence that was creeping into Christianity, backed by Roman law and the blind fervor of the all-knowing laity and clergy. In the early days of Christianity, excommunication from the Church was the major punishment of heretics.

“Except for a few self-suffering sinners, the Golden Rule should measure the morals of most believers. Torture of others or of oneself is definitely outside of the desires of a merciful God.

“In the Acts of the Councils of the eleventh and twelfth centuries which dealt with the combating of heresy there is never even a suggestion of capital punishment. Neither did any secular law before 1197 demand the death penalty for heresy. But there were some who based their opinion on Roman law and declared that impenitent heretics may, and even should, be punished by death.

“But as Paul tells us in First Corinthians 13 ‘If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I knew all the mysteries of the future and knew everything about everything, but didn’t love others, what good would I be? And if I had the gift of faith so that I could speak to a mountain and make it move, without love I would be no good to anybody.’ So clearly the message of our religion is love, not torture, pain and death.

Moral from a societal point of view



—“Enough of that God stuff, lets get to society. If killing is permissible in a war, and capital punishment is legal, torture is a lesser evil because the person doesn’t die. So what’s the big deal if it may save our lives from injury or death. In the U.S. the Bush administration took the position that some terrorism suspects are “enemy combatants” who are not protected by the Geneva Conventions or international treaties on the rights of prisoners of war.

Utilitarianism would allow some torture, some lying, some manipulation—as long as more good than bad came out of it.

Since terrorists have put themselves outside of the community values, the social contract, do we have to include them in the human community? Or do we only need to not torture people who are civilized? Chile and the U.S. are among the countries that have tortured prisoners recently. With the terrorists’ threats, the majority of people in the U.S. South Korea, France and the UK approve of torture in at least some cases.

Immoral from a societal centered point of view



—“Once a government uses torture for any reason, it is easier to use it for lesser offenses. Then just those suspected of knowledge that might help society’s cause, whatever it is, may be tortured. If we are ever to eliminate inhumane activities from our world we have to start here and now. The Spaniards and Italians are very much against torture. Probably the fallout of the excesses of the Inquisition still influences these people.

“But how can a government be restricted? Especially a powerful government? Will politicians ever accept Kant’s ethical precept that we should always treat people as ends in themselves, never as merely means to an end.

“Must we eliminate torture so that other societies will at least think twice before using it? What if we developed a drug that would make a person tell the truth? I assume that it would eliminate the torture.”

LIBERTY OR SAFETY



—“When there is danger to a society the government often infringes on the freedom and privacy of the citizens. A curfew; opening one’s mail, bugging the phones and the internet of private citizens; requiring identity cards; camera surveillance of the citizenry, x-raying luggage; and worse.

“Franklin Roosevelt interred American citizens of Japanese descent during World War II. He didn’t do this to those of German or Italian descent even though Germany and Italy were two-thirds of the axis powers we were fighting. Abe Lincoln suspended the Constitutional habeas corpus guarantee during the Civil War. John Adams and Woodrow Wilson enacted anti-spy rules and George Bush spied on citizens without first getting judicial warrants. Each felt that his actions protected the citizenry. But each reduced the freedom of the population. How much of Big Brother’s prying can a free society take, in order to be safe. How much liberty are we willing to give up to stay alive or to continue to live in our chosen land? Is death really preferable to a lack of liberty as Patrick Henry charged? Let’s see how.

Spying on the citizens has value from a self centered point of view

“I’m a law abiding citizen and I want to live, but there are those who might injure me or my family. They might be common criminals or they might be terrorists. I prefer safety to a loss of privacy.”

Immoral from a self-centered point of view



—“The thing that differentiates modern humans in the developed countries is that we are free and entitled to our privacy. I’m not willing to give up that basic right of humanness. We keep getting closer to Orwell’s 1984—and it’s worrisome. We are losing our freedom.”



—“But aren’t you willing to give up some freedom to reduce your chances of being blown up on a plane or a subway?”



—“I’ll give up some freedom there to save lives, but I don’t want me photographed everywhere I go in the world. If I have a secret political meeting or even a sexual liaison, I don’t want to be tracked. How far would the American or French revolutions have gone if the plotters had microchips implanted in them so that King George or King Louie knew everything that was happening in their kingdoms?”



—“And how many al Queda attacks and suicide bombings would have been foiled if they all had traceable implants?”



—“You have undoubtedly heard that many child molesters have to wear devices that tell where they are all the time. Now they are using these with the worst gang leaders. I feel a bit relieved that my granddaughter is a bit safer from the chance of molestation. And maybe the gang’s murder rates and drug dealings will decrease. But unless I am a danger to society, I don’t want to be spied on.”

It’s OK from a God based point of view



—“Catholics have confessions in which people tell their secrets. And the priest may very well know their voices. Alcoholics Anonymous and the many self help groups that follow it generally accept the existence of a higher power, which most believe to be God, and they must make amends to any people they have hurt. Those both infringe on one’s privacy, while hopefully lifting psychological burdens.

God no

“Many Muslim women wearing the burqua do not want to give up the privacy of hiding their faces.

Society yes

“In order to preserve our society we sometimes must limit some individual freedoms or we increase the chances of losing our whole society. Whether that be enforced blackouts during World War II to decrease the chance of enemy bombers seeing us, or having our luggage x-rayed to prevent our plane from being exploded, if we prefer the society we have, we must bear up when it is threatened.

Society no

“But a contrary argument would be that if our society is built on freedom, we must show it off to the world—and others will see its value.”

LIFE AND DEATH ISSUES WHAT IS THE VALUE OF HUMAN LIFE?



-- “Let’s look at some issues of life or death. What is the value of human life? Mine or Einstein’s, Thomas Edison’s or Joe Doakes, Bill Gates’ or Saddam Hussein’s? Certainly not every person with 46 chromosomes has equal value to the world’s present or future. They don’t have equal value to God because some will go to Heaven and others to Hell. Some will experience immense tragedies while others will lead rewarding lives. Are the terrorists doing us a favor by killing off unimportant people? Is AIDS a God-send by ridding the population of unneeded people? Was David Hume right when he said that a person is no more important to the universe than is an oyster?

“In China a few years ago an accident took the lives of three young school girls. All were native to the same village and had lived there 15 years. But two were worth 3 times the amount of the other because the parents of two were registered residents of the village while the parents of the other were migrant workers.

“Back in 2008 after a huge storm that killed 100,000 people in Myanmar, the world was generous with its relief supplies, but the government wouldn’t let the supplies in until it had re-stamped the gifts indicating that the supplies were from the government. And it refused outright many gifts of supplies. Huge numbers of people died as a result of the government’s decision that the lives of the citizens were worthless..

Recently Stanford University placed the cost of maintaining a person for a year on kidney dialysis at \$129,000. If the person can pay it, that is one thing. But if it is universal health care paying, that is another. Universal health care is not universal. Each country sets its own limits. How much would an Edison or an Einstein be worth? A Hitler or an Al Capone. A George W. Bush or a Tony Blair? You or your grandmother?

“With 20,000 murders annually in South Africa, 28,000 in Russia, 16,000 in the U.S., 26,000 in Columbia and 37,000 in India it seems that not everyone values the lives of others. Columbia leads in murders per capita, with South Africa second. Your country ranks only 24th.



—“In the U.S., lawyers are well aware of the unwritten rules that show that the life of a child or a retired person in the same accident are worth much less than the life of a young worker who has a family. So the worth of lives does vary in the court systems of societies, even though we may say that every life is of ultimate value. It is not the financial reality in society’s courts.

“Many democratic people like to talk about the sanctity of human life. Some will even kill doctors who perform abortions—so valuable is human life! In that case the potential life of an

embryo is judged to be more valuable than that of a trained physician who might have saved many other lives if he had not been murdered.”

“What about capital punishment. That person’s life wasn’t worth much—although in the U.S. millions may have been spent for his defense and his appeals. So a serial killer may be worth millions, while a child genius in school may get only a few thousand dollars from society. And what about cultures where a father or brother can kill a daughter or sister because she engages in pre-marital sex or marries someone not chosen by the family? And what about wars where the leader of a country sends the finest young people, except for his own relatives, into battle to kill the finest young people in another society. What about killing someone in another tribe or gang—who might even be ethnically the same as you? Whose life is as valuable as yours? Who would you die for Con?”



--“My kids and my wife, when she was alive, but probably no one else.”



—“What about the soldier who throws his body on a grenade to save his friends? Compare his value with a speeding drunk teenager who doesn’t care for the safety of his passengers.”



--“What did you do for the victims of the quakes in Turkey or Pakistan, the hurricane in New Orleans, the starving people of Somalia? The truth is that while we may ‘mouth’ the slogan of the equal value of human life, few people honestly believe it and fewer still practice it. And don’t you have those sayings ‘that we must practice what we preach’ or that ‘we must walk the walk, not only talk the talk.’?”



—“But professor we all have souls. I think that makes us equal and gives each of us an ultimate worth.”



—“But father are those souls really equal or are they unequal? Both of your favorite philosophers, Aristotle and Aquinas, believed that our souls might be equal at one time then unequal at another?”



—“The Church’s thinking is quite clear today. We are all equal because our souls are equal. But even if we take a society-based view, it seems rather simple. If I respect you and value your life, my own chances for your respect are increased, and our mutual safety is increased.”



—“Let’s look at it another way. Based on their performance for the betterment of the world who would you keep? A Ku Klux Klan murderer of ten children? An al-Qaida jihadist? A cancer victim in great pain who wants to die? Albert Einstein, Bill Gates or Thomas Edison?

“Or what about this question, based on their potential for society or their intrinsic value, who would you keep if you were allowed to keep only three of these? A five week embryo? A five year old child? A 90 year old homeless person? A retired person who no longer produces goods or services? A severely mentally retarded person?”



---“That reminds me of a story. Osama bin Ladin, the Pope, President Bush and a ten year old were traveling together on a plane. The pilot told them that the plane was in trouble and had to crash land. He said there were only three parachutes. Osama grabbed one chute and yelled that he had to save the world for Islam, then jumped. George W. yelled that he had to save the world for democracy, then grabbed a chute and jumped. The Pope told the young boy to take the remaining parachute and save himself. But the boy told the Pope that there were still two parachutes, the President had grabbed his backpack.”



—“Most of us think of our own lives as ultimately valuable. Some of us may give them up for our children, a few for our mates, some would give their lives for their friends and some for people they don’t even know. But human life does not have ultimate value or every country would have raced into Africa to stop the genocide in Darfur or in the Congo. Would you give up your life to save five young girls who are chained and will be raped then cast into a fire to be burned alive?

“Is life is absolutely sacred? If so why are there wars, suicide bombers, capital punishment, sports that can increase death like boxing, cheerleading, auto racing and marathons?

“Was the worth of Winston Churchill, Mother Theresa or Mikhail Gorbachev equal to the worth of Al Capone, the Boston strangler, or Jack the Ripper? Was the worth of an Adolph Hitler, George W. Bush, Genghis Khan, or Napoleon Bonaparte equal or superior to the potential national leaders who died as soldiers in the armies of those leaders.

“Are all people always equal in the eyes of God, if so why would there be the possibility of a Hell? Or do people rise and fall in the eyes of God as they bob and weave through their lives? Is their favorability in the eyes of God dependant on whether they believe in that God? If so are all non-saved people doomed to Hell? If so should those people be allowed to die from starvation and disease in order to control the population explosion. Is it OK to allow civil wars in Africa, imprisonments of dissidents in the U.S., guerrilla warfare in South America, slavery in Mali, the ‘white slave’ trade from East Europe, or anything else that reduces people’s abilities to procreate. Or do all those people have ultimate worth? And if you believe it, what are you doing to end these practices? Are you giving money? Have you sold your house to contribute to their plights? Have you joined the organizations that are helping these people?

“In the USA if you commit a terrible pre-meditated murder, in some states your life will be forfeited. At times religions have found that those who do not believe exactly as they do should be killed. The Thirty Years War pitted Roman Catholics against Protestants. In modern Iraq Shi-ites were killed by Sunnis who were repaid in kind. In India people have been killed for preferring English to Hindi—or Hindi to English.

“I guess the point is that actions speak louder than words and we don’t really value each other equally.”



—“Unless you are a politician running for office, then you are for equal educational opportunities, equal pay and equal rights for those who agree with you. You would certainly advocate universal health care for the people of your country. You would want equal retirement rights. And of course you would want to keep the taxes low.”



—“You’re right about the politicians. Tell everybody they are all entitled to everything and that it won’t cost them anything. I wonder if the World Bank has considered

issuing credit cards to all the debtor nations. Are there any politicians honest enough to tell the people that a new program is going to cost them? And if the country can't afford all the goodies it promised, who will be cut out? The illegal aliens? The elderly? The mentally or physically handicapped? The poor? Legislators generally find ways to legislate inequality, with their backers ending up as kings of the hill when the social or economic skirmish is over."



—“When we look at the reality, we find that the rhetoric that started the legislative process is buried under the actuality of those who wield the power.

“Let’s move to some life or death issues. Naturally many of these will hinge on whether people have equal worth. Let’s look at several types of killing and how they may be viewed as moral or immoral depending on the basic assumptions used and the evidence used with that assumption.”

WHEN IS IT KILLING AND WHEN IS IT MURDER?

“First for the Jews and Christians we have to clarify the definitions. Killing of a person can be planned or accidental. In war it is expected and valued. But murder is killing someone in your own society who doesn’t want to be killed. Let’s look first at killing in general, since that is an essential concept in so many value questions, like: euthanasia, abortion, warfare, suicide and capital punishment. From a self centered point of view it might be good or bad, that is it might have value or not have value.

Killing is good from a self centered viewpoint

“From a self centered point of view killing could be moral or have value for me if I am getting revenge against someone who hurt me or someone who was important to me. This however would be murder so would be a particularly illegal type of killing. Or maybe I want to get into a gang and am required to kill a person as an initiation. Here we have murder again. But even if it is murder, it is right for me to kill. Or perhaps I find you in bed with my wife or you are kidnapping my daughter, then I think killing you is good. And that may or may not be a murder.

“There may even be a genetic tendency in our species, like that of our chimpanzee relatives, to attack and kill others for no reason except that they aren’t “one of us. There has long been a question of whether it isn’t true that we are basically violent.” (87)

Killing can be immoral from a self-centered point of view

“On the other hand, killing can certainly be unethical from a self centered point of view. I don’t want to be killed. I don’t want my family killed. In fact I can’t think of anyone I want killed.

Killing is moral from a God-based point of view

“Now let’s look at it from a God based basic assumption. Here it seems to depend on whether or not all killing is bad.”



—“Certainly killing has been good, from a God based point of view, in many cases, particularly in the Old Testament. God either does the killing or orders it done. Sodom and Gomorrah are cases in point, but the story also shows God’s merciful side. Abraham came near and said, ‘Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? So the LORD said, ‘If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare the whole place on their account.’ ‘Suppose the fifty righteous are lacking five, will You destroy the whole city because of five?’ And He said, ‘I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.’ He spoke to Him yet again and said, ‘Suppose forty are found there?’ And God said, ‘I will not do it on account of the forty.’ Then

Abraham said, ‘Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak; suppose thirty are found there?’ And He said, ‘I will not do it if I find thirty there.’ And Abraham said, ‘Now behold, I have ventured to speak to the Lord; suppose twenty are found there?’ And He said, ‘I will not destroy it on account of the twenty.’ Then Abraham said, ‘Oh may the Lord not be angry, and I shall speak only this once; suppose ten are found there?’ And He said in Genesis 18 verses:23 through 32, ‘I will not destroy it on account of the ten.’ But He couldn’t find even ten, Genesis 19:15 tells us that ‘When morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, ‘Up, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away in the punishment of the city.’”



—“Ray, if God is moral and tells us not to murder, can God murder? Or are there times when killing is not murder, like in war or when killing someone who has murdered? Or is killing OK when there are unbelievers who have not repented.”



---“To answer the question whether God breaks His own commandments, we need to determine if God committed murder, that is, did He kill people without cause. The Bible is quite clear that God has killed people directly, the most prominent example being the flood, where he killed everyone in the world except Noah and his family, because the people of the world were all wicked.



—“You mean that all of the newborn babies were wicked?”



—“God saw it that way with his infinite intelligence. And He killed people indirectly by ordering them to be killed. If God ordered or participated in the killing of innocent people, then some might say that He was guilty of murder. Of course, as mortals we can’t see all the possible causes that God sees and we can’t see the potential advantages for His actions. For example, in killing everyone in the flood, perhaps He illustrated to billions of future people His power and why they should follow His laws so that they might enjoy eternal life. Maybe he was looking for the greatest good for the greatest number.

“According to the Bible, God killed every human except Noah, his wife, his sons, and their wives in the flood. Were any of the other people killed unjustly? The Bible says specifically that, with the exception of Noah and his family the rest of the people in the world were corrupt—every man, woman and child. Not only had all people become corrupted, but they were continually plotting evil! So, the Bible indicates that no innocent people were killed in the flood.



---“Is it possible that an entire culture can become corrupted? You bet! Recent history proves the point rather well. When the Nazis took over Germany before WWII, opposition was crushed and removed. When they began their purging of the undesirable Jews and gypsies it seems that most, if not all, of the whole German society acquiesced.



—“Lee you may remember the parable that Luke, in Chapter 13 verses 2 to 5, recounts of Jesus’s lesson to those who sin and don’t repent, that ‘they will die as did people who were killed when the tower of Siloam in Jerusalem fell and killed 18 people. And Jesus answering said

unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”



—“God certainly has often not turned the other cheek to unbelievers. When commenting on his reasons for causing the great flood as I remember that ‘the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.’ That was Genesis 6 verse 5. Then in verses 11 and 12 it says ‘Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence. God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.’ “



--“Maybe we’re ready for another flood! Is that what global warming and the melting of the polar ice caps is all about?”



--“That’s a thought, Ray. Are you building your boat? What about you Con?”



—“Ya, I’m building it with fiberglass. But I’m only taking in a few animals: my dog, a race horse or two and a couple of butterflies. I assume there will be plenty of fish in the sea so I won’t need to bring a pair of smoked salmon to reproduce my sandwich ‘fixins’!”



--“Let’s get back to God’s approved killings. God drowned all but Noah’s family, burned all but Lot’s family, and killed lots of non-believing tribes and disobeying individuals. In Joshua chapter 10, verse 40 the Bible tells us that ‘Thus Joshua struck all the land, the hill country and the Negev and the lowland and the slopes and all their kings. He left no survivor, but he utterly destroyed all who breathed, just as the LORD, the God of Israel, had commanded.’

“As I remember there are many Biblical situations in which the moral God resorts to killing. In Genesis 38:7 it says ‘God saw Judah’s first born son, Er, as evil, so he killed him.’ Then in Genesis 38:10, When Onan was told by Judah to procreate with his brother’s wife after God had killed his brother, and Onan went into the tent but did not procreate, because ‘he spilled his seed on the ground’, God killed him too. Then with Moses in Egypt, when the Pharaoh would not let the Israelites go, God killed all the firstborn of both man and beast of the Egyptians according to Exodus Chapter 13, verse 15. In Numbers 31 verses 7 to 10 God told Moses to go to war against the Midianites, he did and his followers killed all the males, took the women and children captives and burned their cities. In Joshua 10:11 God Himself ‘cast down great stones from heaven’ and more people died from the hailstones than from the swords of the Israelites. But there are so many illustrations of God killing people by Himself or telling others to kill them, that I don’t have time to recite them all. Just read your Bible.”



—“What about when God ordered Joshua and his people to kill every man, woman and child in Canaan? What crime could be so great that entire populations of cities were designated for destruction? God told Moses that the nations which the Hebrews were replacing were wicked.

How ‘wicked’ were these people? The text tells us that they were burning their own sons and daughters in sacrifices to their gods. So we see that these people were not really innocent. For these reasons, God ordered the destruction of the peoples whom the Israelites dispossessed.”



----Is it possible that there might have been some innocents, such as small children, in these societies? Surely God could have spared the children! People tend to assume that children are innocent, even if their parents are doing bad things.”



--“From a God based point of view, if I am a Jew or Christian I can cite the Sixth Commandment for guidance. But as Bible scholars know the Commandments were incorrectly translated in some Bibles, especially in earlier versions. The Commandment should read ‘Thou shalt not murder.’ The New King James Bible changes ‘kill’ to ‘murder’ because the word ‘kill’ was erroneous in the earlier version in Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17. The Qur’an 5:32 echoes this. So killing wouldn’t necessarily be immoral from a God based point of view, while murder would be.

“This earlier mistranslation has resulted in a number of social customs, such as: for conscientious objectors who were able to escape military service based on the command not to kill; those against capital punishment; and even some who are against killing animals. But the correct translation, as the Jews have always known, is to not kill someone in your own society who doesn’t want to be killed, unless he or she has done something against society or against God which is punishable by death—and there are lots of such crimes.

“There are a number of different Hebrew words that refer to killing, such as pre-meditated murder, accidental killing, assassination, killing in war, sacrifice, killing those who worship another God, and so forth. A correct Bible translation will take these variations into account and not blanket them with the word ‘kill.’”



--“If God told Moses that the Commandment should be “Thou shalt not kill” and Moses wrote it correctly, was it mistranslated sometime during the next millennium during the time that we have no written records. Certainly the records we have use the Hebrew word for ‘murder.’



-- “If the Bible was correctly handed down from Moses until the written texts we have first appeared about 2000 years ago, the verb used was ratsah which means ‘murder,’ not ‘kill.’ If the commandment, as translated in the original King James version, proscribed killing, the Jews would have been pacifists and would be against capital punishment. So was the original King James version right in saying ‘thou shalt not kill’ or are most modern and ancient versions correct in saying ‘thou shalt not murder’? Certainly the ideas of Jesus to ‘love your enemies’ and to turn the other cheek’ might be better served by prohibiting all killing. The Jewish approach, however, is different in possibly allowing for pre-emptive strikes. In the Torah, Shemot Chapter 22:1 and in numerous commentaries this phrase repeats, ‘he who comes to kill you, kill him first.’ Or in Sanhedrin: Folio 72b it mentions attacking the pursuer and saving the pursued, ‘Save the blood of this one with the blood of that one,’ and in Yirmiyahu or Jeremiah 48:10 it says ‘cursed be he who keeps back his sword from blood.’

“If we look at our major Biblical source, St. Jerome’s Latin Vulgate, the first major Christian Bible, we find that it relied on earlier Jewish texts that might be read as either ‘murder’ or ‘kill.’

So while the evidence strongly suggests that ‘murder’ is the more correct term, there is at least a small doubt that must be harbored. On the other hand, if a proscription against general killing was what was intended in the Torah the word ‘harag’ would have been used. Those who insist that the Bible says that ‘thou shalt not kill’ seem to overlook the Biblical commands for warring, for capital punishment and for the sacrifices of animals.”



--“But father don’t you hold at least the possibility that the oral tradition from Moses for the next thousand years might have changed the Bible stories and commands even a little bit?”



---“But, Wanda, this is the inspired word of God so it would not be mistranslated. If ‘kill’ is the correct translation it is obvious that it doesn’t include killing plants and animals for food. Then there is the question whether that commandment would include a proscription against suicide.”



—“As we move into New Testament times we find both the Christians and the Muslims killing in religious wars or in missionary conquests. Jesus seems to have been a pacifist, as was Mohammad in his earlier days, before he was attacked by non-believers.

Killing immoral from a God based viewpoint



—“But there is certainly strong evidence that killing is unethical from a God based point of view. Any killing that is murder it is certainly against the Sixth Commandment for Jews and Christians. In Islam, death is the punishment for murder. As in the Jewish Bible there is a difference between killing generally and murder. Murder is always evil. And looking at the pantheistic view, the Hindu approach, because of their belief that all is God, is reverence for life, all animal life. If we look to the advice of Jesus he said to ‘turn the other cheek.’ Unhappily there don’t seem to be many who adhere to this approach. A few, like the Amish and Quakers, would certainly qualify.

“In John’s version of the arrest of Jesus (18:3-11), the disciple who uses his sword is said to be Simon Peter, and the servant’s name is given as Malchus. John quotes Jesus as saying to Peter, “Put your sword back into its sheath. ‘Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?’ Is this evidence of Jesus’s pacifism?”



—“Hindus and Buddhists are more likely to be pacifists because all life is sacred and part of the totality of god. Justice comes when one’s karma delegates one’s being to a higher or lower life form in the next life.

Killing is moral from a society-centered point of view.

“Now let’s look for a moment at how killing can be moral from a societal perspective. In what is perhaps the most ancient of all codes of justice, that of Hammurabi, even if it was not a pre-meditated murder it could be punished by death. If a man builds a house for another man and it fell down and killed the new owner’s son, the builder had to build a new house and kill his own son. If the house fell and killed a slave, he must build a new house and pay for the slave.

Remember that King Hammurabi headed an advanced civilization when Abraham was merely a herder—a rather rich herder.

“In fact, society may be better off if some people are killed. Should mass murderers or child molesters be killed? Possibly. Many societies eliminate their undesirables, especially the criminals, by killing them. And as with the ancient Spartans and many other societies, killing of undesirable infants is good for the society. And killing in war seems to be always acceptable. It seems that the scriptures always support those who wield political power! Pol Pot killed 20% of his Cambodian countrymen. Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia, Communist China all killed millions of their own people or their neighbors. And the regimes of Africa have added millions to the recent international count of corpses.

“Rapes and murders of rural women in Pakistan were cowardly acts of revenge by men of other families whose masculine egos had been slighted. But this is feudal tradition—not Pakistani law. Killing daughters or sisters, often by stoning them to death, when the male family members think they have been dishonored, is still prevalent from Turkey to Norway among some Muslims.

Killing can be immoral from a societal point of view.

“Certainly from a societal point of view killing can be counterproductive to a well functioning society. We can have a social contract. I won’t kill you if you won’t kill me. And you certainly don’t want socially valuable people killed. Caring knowledgeable doctors, effective researchers and good teachers certainly shouldn’t be killed.

“So you see, an action such as killing a person can be moral or immoral depending on the basic assumption used and the facts or opinions that are called upon to make the judgment.

We will look at a number of other moral questions but you will see that individuals and societies often jump from one basic assumption to another or, if using the same assumption, use different evidence to back up their changing opinions. So while Jews, Christians and Muslims nearly universally hold to the ‘sanctity of life’ principle when talking about suicide or euthanasia, they often switch when the issue is about sending young people to their possible deaths in a war or to their certain deaths in a suicide bombing or in capital punishment. Buddhists, on the other hand, tend to avoid all killing. To find a war in which Buddhists were involved in a religious fight you have to go back about a thousand years, with the exception of the Sri Lanka civil war, which is not a religious war even though it is mainly between Hindu and Buddhist citizens. To find a war in which Christians, Jews or Muslims were fighting for religiously related issues you probably have to go back only three or four hours.

WHAT IS DEATH?



—“There are lots of moral issues surrounding life or death. For our next ethical question let’s look at euthanasia, mercy killing. But before looking at the ethical points of view relative to mercy killing we must first determine what is death and who should be allowed, or forced, to die. Throughout history death has generally been determined by when a person’s biological functioning stops—when the heart stops or breathing stops. But as machines provided the means to keep the red blood cells oxygenated and circulating, as if there were functioning lungs and hearts, the question became can we re-label death? Should brain death be an alternative definition of death? But what is brain death? Is it the time when a person stops functioning mentally? Another definition, a religious concept, has defined the time of death at the moment when the soul leaves the body. Some people have said that they have seen the soul leave the body as a whisk of nearly transparent smoke.

”Not long ago a man in Poland, who had been in a coma for many years, woke up. He said he could hear things when in the coma, but couldn’t move or talk. Could we tell if he was alive?

What if we had pulled the plug—would his life really count much against the money spent to keep him alive, or the money spent to keep all comatose people alive—contrasted with the use of that money for other health care or education expenses.

“The issue may also force us to answer the question of ‘what is a human life’ and when does that life start. Is it a heart beating, even if aided from the outside? Is it brain activity—possibly identifiable waves or the ability to think or communicate? Is it the ability to contribute to one’s society? And if the society is being drained financially to pay for a person’s medical, expenses has the individual lost his or her social usefulness? Yes father.”



—“But we might see the most basic element of life not as blood and bones but of spirit or soul.”



—“If this is the case, then the physical body is of no particular import. In fact allowing the spirit to be free of its limiting and corrupting body may be the most intelligent and merciful approach to euthanasia, and even to suicide!

“First let’s look at death from a Muslim point of view. Modern Muslim doctors have determined that death is a complete stoppage of the heart and breathing, that the doctors have decided is irreversible. Or it can be a complete stoppage of all vital functions of the brain such as when the brain has started to degenerate. But some conservative Muslim thinkers believe that there is always the possibility of a misdiagnosis. So they believe that the concept of brain death is not acceptable. There is always the possibility of a miracle. But, as is normal in most debates on ethics, there are those who believe that even a partial brain death is sufficient to rule the person dead.



—“Wanda, I’m sure you are familiar with the recent celebrated case of Terri Schiavo in Florida. She had been brain dead for 14 years. Her wishes had been that if she were ever in this state she would want to die. Her husband followed her self-centered wishes that she not be permitted to survive in a vegetative state. Her parents’ self-centered wishes were for her to stay on life support. The national and state governments got into the act using God based assumptions that removing her feeding tubes would be against the Sixth Commandment, but couched the law in social, rather than religious, terms. But a federal judge said that the Florida law passed to keep her on life support was not Constitutional. The judge wrote that ‘By substituting the personal judgment of the governor for that of the patient the act deprives every individual, who is subject to its terms, of his or her constitutionally guaranteed right to the privacy of his or her own medical decisions.’ At the same time that Congress was enacting a federal law to prevent her tubes from being removed, the national government was busy cutting \$15 billion from the Medicaid program that was paying her hospital bills. So in that one case we had self-centered, God based and society based assumptions in conflict, and complicated by political considerations of both the Florida and the U.S. governments.”

“Yes Con, societies may define, or pre-ordain, death when the person has either stopped functioning as a productive or ethical being or does not show the potential for such capabilities. Were the infants of Sparta euthanized when they didn’t survive the elements when placed on the hill? Are martyrs euthanized or punished when they cannot fit into an existing society? Are the victims of capital punishment euthanized because they cannot fit into the ethical norms of their society? Were the Russian pogroms, the Nazi gassings and the cleansings of Pol Pot merely finishing off the societal cancers of those who were not socially valuable? If this is true then death can be defined socially rather than biologically or religiously.

“But for the sake of our discussion let’s assume that death is the cessation of biological functions, including brain function. So we’ll move to the next consideration euthanasia or mercy killing.

SUICIDE

“Now let’s look at suicide. Many of the arguments for or against suicide are the same as for euthanasia. The person wants to die. The difference here is that he or she may not be terminally ill. Over 1000 people a day in the U.S. commit suicide

“Suicide is certainly an old escape, whether for avoiding pain or for avoiding dishonor.

The pain to be avoided can vary from the intense physical pain of illness or injury to the intense psychological pain of embarrassment or frustration, like a recent teen suicide prompted when his favorite rock band cancelled a local concert. What could be more painful and frustrating than that? Then you have those who do it for religious or a political cause. Some call them martyrs.

“Suicide rates don’t indicate that people in welfare states are less depressed than those in other states. Looking at the rate of suicide per 100,000 people we find some warm countries like the Bahamas and Jamaica have less than 1 suicide per 100,000 and Greece has only 4, while the Scandinavian countries averaged 14 with Finland double that. The U.S. and Canada were in the 11 to 12 per 100,000 range, but poor Catholic countries like Guatemala and Nicaragua are in the 3 to 4 area, while poor former Soviet states were off the charts at over 30.

If these statistics are true it looks like living in the sun and by a beach seems to be more important than a welfare state in keeping people happy.

It has value from a self-centered point of view

“From a self centered point of view it is obvious. I have decided that because of physical or psychological pain I don’t want to live and I will take my own life without help. Possibly I have a painful cancer, or my business has gone bankrupt, or I have been exposed as a major white collar criminal and am so embarrassed that I can’t face my family, friends or the courts. I want to die.

It is immoral from a self centered point of view

“On the other hand it can be seen as immoral from a self-centered point of view. If a parent, mate or friend says ‘I love you very much and I want you alive no matter how bad you feel. I will help you through this. Don’t commit suicide. I want you to live’ your suicide would not have value for them.

It has value from a God based point of view

“In your Bible, in a war against the Philistines, Saul’s sons Jonathan, Abinadab and Melchishua were killed, and Saul himself was seriously wounded. He asked his armor bearer to kill him, but his assistant refused. So he took a sword and fell on it. The armor bearer then also fell on his sword. Both committed suicide. (1 Samuel 31:4-6 and 1 Chronicles 10:3-7) Saul’s justification for committing suicide was that because of his injuries, if the Philistines arrived, he would be abused and killed by uncircumcised men.

“Even in your New Testament Paul is contemplating whether it is better to live or die. He is hard pressed to decide between the two, ‘having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you...yet what I shall choose I cannot tell.’ (Philippians 1:20-26) One commentator writes of this passage that Paul “does not know whether he prefers life with labor or death with gain...in a life-and-death situation, he scarcely knows which alternative is to be preferred.” But he did choose life. But his assumption was that if he committed suicide he would go to heaven and be with Christ!

“Your Bible contains a number of references to men seeking suicide, either by taking direct action or by begging God to kill them on the spot. In these passages, the authors of the Bible do not

appear to consider suicide to be against God's wishes. The act of committing suicide or of asking that God kill them are simply reported in a factual manner. The authors do not interpret these acts as sinful. They seem to be regarded simply as straightforward personal decisions

"While suicide is against the faith of Islam, Muslim females are often talked into suicide in Turkey for dishonoring the family, usually because of a sexual indiscretion. They used to be killed by their fathers or brothers, but now that is considered murder, so they are asked to do it themselves. A survey in southeast Turkey showed that 40% of the Muslim men thought that a woman who committed adultery should be killed. In the UK it was only 10% of the Muslim men who believed it."



—"But if the ultimate reason for existence is to die and go to heaven after living a good life why would suicide be bad if it was a good person who wanted to die? After all Jesus chose to die. And killing oneself is not murdering as stated in the commandments. But we already covered that didn't we Wanda?"



—"There are many stories of individuals who either pleaded with God to end their lives, or who killed themselves, or who sought the assistance of another to kill them:

"As we mentioned earlier, in Judges 9:52-54, Abimelech the warrior-king of Israel, was attacking a tower in Thebez, hoping to exterminate large numbers of unarmed civilians as he had just done in Shechem. As he attempted to burn the door to the tower, a woman dropped a piece of a millstone on Abimelech's head. He felt that he was mortally wounded. The king's contempt for women was so great that he quickly asked his armor bearer to kill him with his sword, in order that people not say that he had been killed by a woman.

"A few chapters later Samson had been chained to the two middle pillars of a temple. He pushed them apart. He knew it would collapse of the building, cause his own suicide and the death of a few thousand people inside. The death toll exceeded the number of people that he had killed during the rest of his life—which was considerable. Since he had been blinded and no longer wanted to live as a captive he caused his own death. This is found in Judges 16:29-30.

"A while ago we mentioned Saul's death. But which version of Saul's death do we want, the one in Second Samuel 1:2-17 where it was euthanasia, or the versions in First Samuel 31 and 1 Chronicles 10, that describe his suicide? There is no criticism of Saul asking for help in committing suicide.

"In Jonah, Chapter 4 verses 1 to 11 God had threatened the destruction of Nineveh, a city of 120,000 people. He forced Jonah to go to the city and tell them of their wrongs and God's threat. The king and people of the city listened to Jonah, repented of their sins, and fasted. God changed his mind and did not destroy the city. Jonah was so angry at God's display of mercy that he asked God to kill him, 'for it is better for me to die than to live!' He repeated the same request to God on the next day.

"Elijah, too, asked that God take him in First Kings 19:4, after he had executed all the prophets with his sword. Also in First Kings 18:40, he 'prayed that he might die.' He said, 'It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!'



—"Ray, that may give us an idea of some Old Testament situations, but what does the Bible say about a Christian who commits suicide? I do not believe that a Christian who commits suicide will lose salvation and go to hell. The John 3, verse 16, teaches that from the moment a person truly believes in Christ, he or she is eternally secure. According to the Bible, Christians can know beyond any doubt that they possess eternal life no matter what happens. 'These things I have

written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God', it says in 1 John 5:13. Nothing can separate a Christian from God's love! 'For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' That was from ,Romans 8:38 and 39. If no 'created thing' can separate a Christian from God's love, and even a Christian who commits suicide is a 'created thing,' then not even suicide can separate him from God's love. Jesus died for all of our sins. . . and if a true Christian were to commit suicide in a time of spiritual attack and weakness, wouldn't that be a sin that Jesus died for?

"In First John 5:11-13 the epistle says 'And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.' And in the gospel of John 10:27-20 it says 'My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand.' This might very well indicate that believers will be with God and that suicide would not be the unforgivable sin that some say it is.

"When Matthew, at 18 verse 8, writes 'If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire.' Might that also be extended to the whole body if one's suffering were such that it might make him curse or doubt a merciful God because of the pain or anguish? And if that person has lived a charitable life, as mentioned in Matthew 19:29 and 25:34-46 would suicide be acceptable? And in Luke, 10, verses 25 to 28, when the lawyer asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus asked what was written and the man answered 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart with all thy soul and with all thy strength, and thy neighbor as thyself' and Jesus said 'Thou hast answered right.'



—"But if you decide to take your life rather than let God take it, can you really love your God?"



—"But this does not seem to be the major issue! It seems that believing strongly in God and doing good works is far and away the essential message of Jesus."

Immoral from a God-based viewpoint



—"The Christian church has traditionally deviated from the biblical message and has considered suicide to be a great mortal sin. Some denominations have even refused to bury people who have committed suicide. My understanding of the Bible is that suicide is murder, it is always wrong. I would have serious doubts about the genuineness of faith of anyone who claimed to be a Christian yet committed suicide. There is no circumstance that can justify someone, especially a Christian, taking his or her own life. Christians are called to live their lives for God – the decision on when to die is God's and God's alone. Perhaps a good way to illustrate suicide for a Christian would be from the Book of Esther. In Persia, they had a law that anyone who came before the king uninvited could be put to death unless the king extended his scepter towards the person - indicating

mercy. Suicide for a Christian would be forcing your way in to see the King instead of waiting for Him to summon you. He will point His scepter towards you, sparing your eternal life, but that does not mean He is happy with you. Although it is not describing suicide, Paul, in First Corinthians 3:15, gives a good description of what happens to a Christian who commits suicide: “He himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.”



--“In Islam suicide is clearly prohibited. The Koran, in Surah 4:29, says ‘O you who believe! Eat not up your property among yourselves unjustly except it be a trade amongst you, by mutual consent. And do not kill yourselves (nor kill one another). Surely, Allah is Most Merciful to you.’ During a military campaign a Muslim was killed, and although his companions praised his bravery the Prophet commented, ‘His lot is hell’ because after being seriously injured he fell on his sword and died. The Prophet also said, in Surah 8:603, ‘There was a man in older times who had an infliction that taxed his patience, so he took a knife, cut his wrist and bled to death. Upon this God said: My subject hastened his end, I deny him paradise.’ Since Allah gives life, only He can take it. The Koran again says, in 4:29, ‘Do not kill (or destroy) yourselves, for verily Allah has been to you most Merciful.’“



—“Then why do we still we have suicide bombers? I guess that suicide bombings are win-win situations, your enemies go to hell and you go to heaven. I suppose that if they do it for God or for a political cause they are called martyrs, rather than suicidal cowards. And after all, martyrdom is an easy way to fame if you have no ability.”



—“As you well know many people claim to profess their religion, but they don’t understand it. They use it more as a rationalization than a reason, more for an excuse than an exhortation. Our Catholic position was possibly best explained by St. Augustine where he illustrates several instances where, no matter how much one is shamed by the acts of others or by his own acts, suicide is the more grievous sin. Whether it is taking consecrated virgins in lust by their captors or Judas hanging himself—suicide is not an option.(88) Christ said, in Matthew 11:23. ‘Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.’

“Augustine argued in the fifth century that suicide was a violation of the sixth commandment, “Thou shalt not murder”. Aquinas said that suicide is the worst sin because for other sins you can ask forgiveness, but you can’t ask for forgiveness after you have died. Some believe, however, that since we are saved by the grace of God, suicide might not necessarily condemn us for a life with Lucifer. If we are saved by the grace of God, not by works, as Saint Paul tells us in his letter to the Ephesians, Chapter 2, verses 8 and 9, and if nothing can separate a Christian from the love of God, as we find in Romans 8:37-39 there may be hope for salvation. But why take the chance?

“Certainly suicide is seen as an act of desperation in society and in religion. Biblically it has happened when a battle was lost, as with Saul, for revenge or desperation, as with Sampson in Judges 16:25-30, or to save oneself from embarrassment or to punish himself as with Judas. We see this in Matthew 27:5 and in Acts 1:18. But a major question remains regarding Paul’s message in First Corinthians 3:17, when he wrote not to defile or violate one’s body. Was he referring to sexual defilement, as he later warned them in Chapter 7 verses 8 and 9. He did not mention suicide. Might he have meant self-flagellation as some devout believers practiced? We don’t know.

“So in Judaism and Christianity there is not the clear proscription against suicide that there is in Islam so we have to make some inferences from certain passages. We are made in the image of God so should not destroy ourselves, but God the Father sent His Son Jesus to be killed.

“Even if suicide were not the path to eternal damnation, I would certainly doubt the faith of one who did it. Aquinas said that suicide is against man’s natural inclination and contrary to the charity a person must show to himself. And a sorrowful life is preparation for the hereafter with trials to the body and mind.”



—“But Ray, here is a hypothetical problem. What if a number of people are on a sinking lifeboat and some volunteer to lighten the load by jumping overboard—are they heroes or morally deficient and doomed for hell. So is every suicide evil?”



—“As in so many hypothetical problems, only God can answer. We can find Biblical references to support either side of the question.”



“Let me end this discussion with the question as to whether suicide is murder. If murder is killing someone in your society who doesn’t want to die, and you want to die—that’s not murder. But if the proper translation of the commandment is ‘Thou shalt not kill’ suicide might be killing unless the commandment applied only to killing others and not yourself. Just another loose end the Bible has left us with. But let’s go to society values.

It is moral from a societal viewpoint

”It could certainly be ethical from a society based view, if a person will save the society money and time it is better to be rid of him or her. If that person will spend time in jail, in state paid mental hospitals, in other hospitals, in state paid drug treatment facilities or if the person will not have to receive state welfare payments the society will be better without him. This would also apply to a worker who contributed lifelong to a government retirement plan then killed himself before using up all his benefits.

“It would be a great advantage for global warming if more unhappy people would commit suicide. In fact the suicide bombers are doing the Earth a world of good by killing themselves along with others. Fewer babies to reproduce themselves, fewer adults to use electricity and drive their cars, no wonder the bombers go immediately to paradise.”

It is immoral from a societal viewpoint



--“But if that person might have been an eventual productive member of the society, the society would be hurt by his not achieving his potentials. A number of college freshmen take their lives when they find out that they are not as successful as they were in high school. How many would have made contributions to their society if they had not taken that fatal leap, because suicide is forever. You don’t get another chance. Obviously being depressed is the major cause of suicide. There are so many causes of depression and so many ways to try to handle them. Poor grades, a lack of popularity or achievement—in sports, arts, or other areas, and estrangement from parents are some of the social causes. But biochemical problems such as a lack of dopamine in the brain can also cause it. Then the person may try to solve or forget the problem with alcohol or other drugs, or through risk behavior such as promiscuity or gang violence.

“Suicide is the second leading cause of death for college students. Nearly half of all college students have reported trouble in functioning at times. And 60% reported thinking that things were hopeless at least once during the last year. Ten percent of college students and 25% of high school

students considered suicide at least once during the last year. Every hundred minutes a teenager commits suicide. Family income level is not a factor. It is certainly highly likely that at least some of these depressed students would become highly valuable citizens, such as these people who were victims of depression: British Prime Minister Winston Churchill; American presidents Richard Nixon and Calvin Coolidge; Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin; former first lady Barbara Bush; Princess Diana of Wales; writers like Ernest Hemmingway, Jack London, Truman Capote, Franz Kafka, Eugene O'Neill, Dorothy Parker, Samuel Becket and Tennessee Williams; artists like Claude Monet; musicians like John Lennon, Elton John; and a number of actors and actresses. Aren't we lucky that those people didn't choose a quick and easy death? Without a doubt, society should do what it can to prevent

EUTHANASIA



--“Let's look at mercy killing for a while. Is it murder? Is it assisted suicide? Is it a modern medical necessity? Is it the merciful thing to do?”

“There is the differentiation between active and passive euthanasia. In active euthanasia the person is killed, possibly by a lethal injection of pain-killing drugs. In passive euthanasia an artificial means of life support is removed. This might be a heart-lung machine or a breathing or feeding tube. The intention of both approaches is the same, as is the outcome. So are they really different? Are they morally equivalent. Then we might ask that since we will all die, are we talking only about premature death? And if so, was Jesus's death merely premature?”

“Passive euthanasia is seen by some as not actually killing. It is only removing some of the artificial impediments to the natural death that was being stalled by extraordinary medical intervention. Orthodox Jewish ethicists are more often against passive euthanasia than are orthodox Muslims and Christians because the afterlife is more important for the younger religions. The more liberal people in the religions are more likely to be favorable to it. On the other hand, Jewish law forbids active euthanasia and sees it as being murder.

“While the objective of both active and passive euthanasia is the same, the death of the patient, the intent is not exactly the same. One leaves the body to shift for itself, probably dying. The other sets the definite time for one's death. One puts the family immediately at rest and ends their concerns and ends society's financial involvement, the other continues the family's anguish for more hours or days and may increase the financial expenditures by the family, the government or by insurers. If we judge the action or inaction, by intent, we should include all involved parties—with the patient being primary. If we judge according to the outcome we might have, quite different total effects depending on whether active or passive euthanasia was utilized. The family's grief might be prolonged and the costs would increase with passive euthanasia.

“There is also the question as to where either active or passive euthanasia might fall on the continuum of killing. The continuum could include: seeking a desired end for oneself through suicide or euthanasia, through accidental death, through death in a war, through martyrdom, and on to manslaughter, capital punishment and two or three degrees of murder, ending with pre-meditated murder. But we're discussing euthanasia now, so who thinks mercy killing is moral from a self-centered viewpoint?”

Euthanasia is moral from a self-centered point of view.

“Let's look at how people's basic assumptions come into play in this area of mercy killing. From a self-centered point of view it could be moral if you are in great pain and want to die. Maybe you have lost all of your physical control such as the ability to swallow or communicate, or a loss of your dignity as a human being. What if you are just tired of living? Whose life is it anyway?”

“Or perhaps you have a loved one who is in great pain and wants to die and you agree. Or maybe your grandfather is quite ill and is in the hospital. He has no hope of living more than a month or two but the hospital bills are \$20,000 a day. If he uses his money to pay the bills it reduces your inheritance. Or maybe he has no money so you will have to mortgage your house to pay for it. The money you will pay is what you had expected to be ready for your children’s college education. All of these are self-centered reasons for permitting euthanasia.”



—“I am completely for mercy killing. My mother, the dearest and most important person in my life, told me she wished she had died in an auto accident she had when she was 75 because all her friends were gone. Heroic efforts saved her. In her late eighty’s she developed Alzheimer’s and she eventually died at 92. It was a blessing for her. I hated for her to leave, but then she had mentally left us some years before.

“But aside from my personal opinion, if there are any human rights, I would think that the most important one would be for a person to be able to choose his or her own life or death. International groups have spelled out all kinds of rights, but most have no way for the person to enjoy them. There is a human right to not be enslaved. But if you are a slave you must escape your owner. There is a right to food and water. But look at all the people starving to death. There is a right to not be tortured, but you have to escape your torturer. But if you want to escape life, for any reason, people are always standing ready to stop you in our society.

“But in most primitive societies, where incurable diseases rage, where pain controlling medication is unavailable, the beckoning of the grim reaper make many seek the joy of release from the curses of Pandora. Breast cancers the erupt through the skin as cauliflower-like cauldrons of torture, the blazing fire of a malarial attack, the untreated end results of ebola, AIDS, typhoid, smallpox, cobra bites, cholera and the myriad of other worldly tortures are often ended by suicides of noose or knife. It makes sense to me.



—“What about a financial reason for allowing someone to die. The sooner they die, the sooner I inherit their money. Or if I have to mortgage my house to pay the hospital expenses of a comatose father, I might certainly be for putting him out of his misery. Then of course if I am truly compassionate, how can I want one to continue to exist against his wishes. It is certainly not a loving thing to do.

Euthanasia is immoral from a self centered point of view.

“But then, under other circumstances euthanasia might not have value, for you. Perhaps your mother wants to die now, but you want her to stay alive because you would miss her too much. Perhaps if she stayed alive for only another month a cure could be found for her disease—as unlikely as that might be. As with Terri Schiavo, her parents wanted her to stay alive, if we can call it a life! They had taken her home for three weeks and tried to take care of her but it was too exhausting, so they wanted her alive with the government paying for it.

“Another case that gained widespread publicity was that of Emilio Gonzales, an 18 month old child with Leigh’s disease, an incurable neuro-metabolic disorder that is progressive and fatal. He had been on life support in intensive care for five months. The Texas legislature had passed the Texas Advance Directives Act that authorized withdrawing life support if an ethics committee determined that further life support was medically inappropriate. The family had to be given ten days notice of the action. Mrs. Gonzales was successful in getting extensions of that ten day deadline. The hospital attempted to find an alternate care facility but was prevented from moving the child until a judge ruled on the issue. Emilio died before the judge could rule.

“I can imagine that if someone close to me wanted to die and I would miss them very much, I would be against it. What about your God based views Ray?”

Mercy killing is moral from a God based point of view



—“The Judeo-Christian approach is based on the Bible and other scriptures as well as on the commentaries of learned scholars and religious leaders. The general Western monotheistic position, not just our Catholic position, is that euthanasia is immoral. The Jews, Christians and Muslims believe that the major reason is that since God gives life, only God can take it. And while it may or may not be murder if the dying person wanted to die, it would be usurping God’s power. But some ethicists find a few reasons for permitting some mercy killing—even though the weight of the evidence is against it.”

“Scriptures don’t deal with the issues that modern medical technology allows. Passive euthanasia merely brings the patient back to the physical state referred to in the scriptures. If one requested active euthanasia it probably doesn’t fall under the category of murder, because it was the wish of the patient. But it might fall under the category of suicide, which those of us in the Western monotheistic religions abhor because people are made in the image of God.”



---“Ray I have a couple of questions, from the Christian point of view, if Jesus is God and we are made in the Image of God, should we all be crucified? If life is utterly valuable, but martyrs chose death over giving up their Christian beliefs, is life the primary value or is the primary value one’s religious belief? And if it is belief that is primary, then a believing person could choose death, particularly if the pain being suffered might make the person doubt God’s mercy and in fact, to doubt God.

“If we are made in the image of God, how much intelligence and power go with that image. Or are we merely robot-like beings being told at every step what to do? And if so is that enough for eternal life? Do we have free will, and if so what are we free to decide? How fast to drive, what to have for breakfast, whether or not to end a painful life? Being in the Image of God do I have the right to take another’s life, as God the Father did with Jesus? Or do I have the right to knowingly proceed to my own death, as Jesus did in the garden of Gethsemane? As it is written in Matthew 26:42, ‘He went again a second time, and prayed, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.’ And after Peter had tried to defend him Jesus said, in Chapter 26 verse 53, ‘Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently send me twelve legions of angels?’ His willingness to die is also clearly shown in John 18 verses 4 through 11.

“I know that the Jewish tradition sees preserving human life as a major moral value and forbids doing anything that might shorten a life. The fact that we are made in the image of God gives life a special sanctity. But it doesn’t require prolonging artificially a dying body. However it does not require doctors to make dying last longer than it naturally would. There is high level rabbinical opinion that a person cannot be forced to accept medical treatment, such as life prolonging treatment, but he may be required to accept life saving treatment. However when there is great pain and suffering, a Jew may request that life prolonging treatment be withheld.”



—“We also believe that all people are equally valuable. So no one should be allowed, or forced, to die early.”



---“But your God does not seem to believe it. Look at how many times he killed people before they had a chance for a natural death, even the smallest infants. But answer this father, if a comatose person is being kept alive by machines, how long should it be continued? Most people who will regain consciousness do it within two weeks. But once in a hundred thousand cases a person will regain consciousness after twenty years.



—“I would think that if there is a chance to save the life then it would be immoral to end that life.”



—“What if the person had been a good religious person throughout life, but the physical or psychological pain being endured makes her say ‘God damn the politicians and doctors who won’t allow me to rest in peace.’ Having broken the First Commandment, as written in Deuteronomy 5:11, ‘Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain’ will she now go to hell? Is God merciful, and if so would He deny salvation to a good person who wanted to die because he was in great pain from a terminal disease and did not have the God-like ability to overcome that pain?

“If we look at God as being merciful, is it the merciful thing to do to allow a suffering person to die with his own hand or by the hand of another? If we look at the Golden Rule, as found in all religions, to ‘do unto others as you would have them do unto you’ then mercy killing is certainly moral for me if I want to die. And if I am made in the image of God and want to join God in Heaven, is that an unacceptable desire?

“What about this idea Ray, if God sent Jesus to die for the sins of humanity, and Jesus gladly did it, is that akin to suicide or even active euthanasia? If death is not desirable, was God immoral in sending His Son to die? Paul wrote that ‘He who did not spare His own son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.’ So says Romans 8:32, and 35,37.

“If Jesus was killed to save humanity, can we read into this that it is not one’s death that is all-important, but that it must be measured against a greater good? If so can one decide to be euthanized to save the society millions of dollars or to save one’s family from long term sorrow or financial disaster? Might these be greater goods?”



—“Liberal Christian ethicists seem to be more open to evaluating the wishes of the family and of the dying person. The Qur’an is very clear in disallowing it. But the Bible allows for many interpretations. Then when you read the pronouncements in the Talmud or the encyclicals of the Pope you can be directed more forcefully in one direction.

“On a personal level I can not accept the idea that a God worthy of worship would be capricious enough to deny salvation to people who request or assist in euthanasia so long as it is practiced voluntarily and for reasons of mercy.”



—“One wonders if we should resort to the life saving techniques available at the time of the ethical dictum. So if a proscription against euthanasia was written in 300 BCE or 700

AD we should use only the methods available then. Organ transplants, heart-lung machines, dialysis machines and such have not always been options. So shouldn't we interpret scriptural verses based on the life and times of the writer?

“If the cessation of breathing on his own is the definition of death, as it has been throughout history, and certainly was during the times that the monotheistic scriptures were written, then when a person can't breathe on his own he is dead. Withdrawing the oxygen, the feeding tubes, or any other scientifically developed machines that keep the dead person oxygenated and fed. It is true that sometimes these people are brought back to life and can breathe again. Some will have no cognitive brain function, others will. Some who survive the miracle will be able to regain a normal life, some won't. But is human life determined by how long machines can keep the red cells churning?”

Mercy killing is immoral from a God based point of view.



—“According to the teachings of all three monotheistic religions, every individual is created in the image of God, and every individual has a purpose for living even though he or she may not be cognizant of that purpose. Many theists, as well as non-theists, believe that the ultimate meaning of human life is unfathomable; some religious ethicists therefore oppose euthanasia on the grounds that it could serve to prevent people from fulfilling their earthly destinies. For example, some religious ethicists suggest that certain people may, knowingly or unknowingly, fulfill their life's purpose by choosing to live courageously in the face of death, thereby serving as exemplary role models for the people around them.

“Elderly, terminally ill, and dying patients have the potential to inspire and influence other people in profound ways. This is confirmed in St. Paul's epistle to the Corinthians, ‘Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy and that is what you are.’ That was in First Corinthians Chapter 3 verses 16 and 17. So you see that we are made in the Image of God or that we are the temple of God.

Pope John Paul II approved the Declaration on Euthanasia by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, on May 5, 1980. The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council solemnly reaffirmed the lofty dignity of the human person, and in a special way his or her right to life. The Council therefore condemned crimes against life ‘such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, or willful suicide.’ (89) More recently, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has reminded all the faithful of the Catholic teaching on procured abortion. (90) The Congregation then set out the Church's teaching about euthanasia. The recent Popes have explained the basic ideas of the Church. (91)

“With the progress of medical science we have to add ethical reasons for continuing the Church's tradition of abhorring euthanasia and suicide. We must still remember what St. Paul said: “If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord” (92)



—“I've read the declarations you have cited. I remember that they talked about the ‘fundamental rights inherent in every human person’ but then said that it was obviously wrong to have ‘recourse to arguments from political pluralism or religious freedom in order to deny the universal value of those rights.’ That didn't make sense to me. If you have fundamental human rights, why must you accept teachings of Church that tells you that your human rights are valid only if you accept the church's position?”



—“It is God that gives us those fundamental human rights so we must use them as God intended.”



—“But how do you know that God intended that the individual must follow the pronouncements of any sectarian view? If free will is one of those rights, and you freely choose to have your life ended to ease your pain, to end the concern of your family and to save the family’s or the state’s money—isn’t that an intelligent decision? And if it’s intelligent, wouldn’t it be the kind of decision that would be approved of by God? It seems that all of your reasons should follow the dictate to love your neighbor as yourself.

“Then the declaration said that life is a ‘gift of God’s love’, if so isn’t death then the withdrawing of God’s love? It talks about the life of an innocent person needing to be saved, this would indicate that the Bible’s call for capital punishment is not to be changed. It said that ‘Everyone has the duty to lead his or her life in accordance with God’s plan. That life is entrusted to the individual as a good that must bear fruit already here on earth, but that finds its full perfection only in eternal life.’ So it seems that the afterlife is more important than the present life. It seems to me that as so often happens in theological arguments, there are fundamental inconsistencies.

“It was against suicide, but approved of martyrdom because that was done for a higher cause, to show God’s glory. While suicide is not specifically disapproved of in your Bible,

why is not an individual’s desire to die to end suffering here and now not equated with a martyr’s suicide? Today’s suffering patient wants to be with God, the martyr wants to be with God, what is the difference? If you are going to be logical, you need to apply the same criteria to both groups of people who want to die.

“On the other hand, the Catholic Church doctrine, and it’s been fairly consistent for 400 years, is that a person is not morally obliged to undergo any intervention to save a life. And, of course, 400 years ago they weren’t talking about high technology. Here’s the example one of the moralists of the 16th century gave: if you could sustain your life with partridge eggs, which were very expensive and exotic, would you be obliged to do so? The answer is no, they’re too expensive. They’re too rare. You can’t get them. They would be too heavy an obligation to put on people.



--“The Catholic position on euthanasia and life support has to be seen in the context of the Pope’s 1980 Declaration on Euthanasia, which says that one need not use disproportionately burdensome measures. The terms many people use, both religious and non-religious people, are ‘ordinary’ and ‘extraordinary.’ We come back to semantics, what do you mean? Does ‘extraordinary’ mean intravenous feeding?, a heart-lung or a dialysis machine?, cardiac resuscitation?, a heart transplant? What was impossible at one time may be extraordinary or even ordinary today. So do the definitions of ‘ordinary’ and ‘extraordinary’ change yearly, or monthly? Or is it that those words are so confused in the minds of the public that they no longer serve any useful purpose. People think of extraordinary as respirators or heart transplants. Extraordinary probably never referred to techniques or to machines—it most likely referred to moral obligation. What are we obliged to do?

“We continue to rely on the Pope for his guidance. Catholics may argue among themselves, but when the Pope speaks he settles the question on current church policy. In 2004 Pope John Paul issued the first clear and explicit papal statement on the obligation to provide food and water for patients in a ‘persistent vegetative state’. Passive euthanasia is therefore now ruled out for

Catholics. But most Catholic hospitals will abide by the patient's wishes in a living will, so extraordinary means for physical life preservation can be averted.

"As an aside, if we look to the Old Testament we can see a few situations where a person was either asking for help in a suicide, or possibly asking for active euthanasia. We have already talked about Saul and his desire for death. But then it was the Amalekite who adhered to Saul's wishes to die and killed him. But then when the man went to King David bringing Saul's armor David ordered the man killed, according to Second Samuel 1, verses 1 through 16. So no good deed shall go unpunished!



---"The question here is whether Saul was right in asking to die. Or in the second story, if David was right in punishing the person who assisted in the mercy killing or suicide. And how come there are two conflicting stories in adjacent chapters of the Bible if it is the inspired word of God?"



—"I don't have an answer for you on that one."



—"Ray, I've wondered about Abimelech in Judges Chapter 9, who we have already mentioned. First he kills everybody in the city, then he has a stone dropped on him by a woman. 'Then he called hastily unto the young man who was his armor bearer, and said unto him, Draw thy sword, and kill me, that men say not of me, a woman slew him. And his young man thrust him through, and he died.' This was in Judges 9:54. But a few verses later, in verse 57, God judged him wicked. Was he wicked because he killed unmercifully, because he asked for a mercy killing or for some other reason?"



—"Well you remember that he murdered the seventy sons of his father. So it could have been that. He was not one of the nicer people in the Old Testament. So who knows."

"Wanda, I suppose you might look at the famous Biblical verse in Ecclesiastes 3 verses 1 and 2 that state 'There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven a time to give birth, and a time to die....' But this says nothing about when each person is to die. Maybe we could assume that since it was written a few thousand years ago that it would not assume that modern medical technology would be used. In fact maybe they should not be used because they would interfere with God's plan for a time to die."



—"Ray you don't sound so reactionary right now."



—"I'm just playing thought games with Wanda. But have you considered that we are all dying. Some are just closer to death than others. Or we might say that some are dying faster than others. We might even wonder if God is eager for us to join Him? In Psalms 116:15 it says 'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.' So this might be a reason for allowing holy people to die. But what about the rest of us?"



—“A number of studies have shown that some doctors will comply with a patient’s wishes to die. A ‘Do Not Resuscitate’ request of the family will usually be followed by the doctor. Is this passive euthanasia or is it a still lesser evil?”



--- “While passive euthanasia is more often used in medical practice it certainly isn’t universally approved. Jewish law says that doctors, as well as patients, have a duty to preserve life, and a doctor must do everything he or she can to save a patient’s life, even if it against the patient’s wishes. Of course there is the flip side. Some Jewish ethicists think that if the medical technologies being used are not designed to cure the patient and the patient is in great pain, that they can be discontinued. The doctor can’t hasten death but can remove impediments to the impending death. This would mean that if a ventilator was keeping the dying person from death, it could be removed.

“As a lawyer I’ve often wondered about what is it that makes humanness? A body, a soul, a mind, a productive life, a loving life? And who is to judge any of these? Is a person without arms and legs human? Is a murderer human? Is a psychotic human? Is a brain dead person, in a permanently vegetative state, human? Is a burglar, who puts his needs for cash for his drugs, equally human to his victims? Hindus and Buddhists tend to believe that our humanness comes from our oneness with our God-Nature. But some Jews, Christians and Muslims believe that we are all made in the image of God so we accept some kind of common humanity? And if we are, is it our bodies, minds or both that that are like God’s? You’re the expert Ray, what about it?”



----“Saying that God created humankind in his own image doesn’t mean that people actually look like God, but that people have a unique capacity for rational existence that enables them to see what is good—and to want what is good. As people develop these abilities they live a life that is as close as possible to God’s life of love. This is a good thing, and life should be preserved so that people can go on doing this. God will take you when He wants to, not when you want to go. We can’t understand God’s motives.



--“That’s something to think about Commander. Now let us look more deeply into the religious idea that euthanasia is immoral from a God based point of view. While we have looked at some possible reasons for allowing or disallowing euthanasia, and they are often couched in a lot of ‘what ifs’, there are strong God based reasons against it. The preponderance of opinion in the Western tradition is not to allow euthanasia because we are made in the image of God and God alone has the power to determine when we shall be born and when we shall die. It is not among the options of free will for anyone to determine that the life of oneself or another person is not worthwhile. So arguments based on the quality of life are irrelevant. Even if you think your own life is valueless, you don’t have that option.



—“The Bible is not specific in terms of mercy killing. There are verses that might, or might not, refer to it. The Qur’an, on the other hand, is quite clearly negative. But it is clear that we must let God decide and not temper with His will.”



--- “This idea assumes that God does not have either the desire or the power to stop the death. If He does not have the will to stop it, then the merciful death would be moral. If He does not have the power, He is not the omnipotent creating God that the monotheistic religions believe in.”



—“Obviously God has the power, but we can’t know what He is thinking because we are not omniscient. However we are made in the Image of God, so we share in God’s goodness and powers. This assumes that people will lead a rational life and will see what is ethical and unethical. They should live a loving life and continue doing this as long as possible.



--“But a brain dead person has no brain waves and obviously cannot think. Is this in the Image of God? Or is the Image of God only the body, with no ability to think and no ability to make ethical decisions?”



—“It is the soul that is in the Image of God. It is merely housed in the body. It stays with the body until the body dies, then it will reunite with that body on the day of final judgment.”



—“Then I suppose that there is the question as to whether only God should be the deciding factor, taking a life when He decides to. If this is the criterion then any war is immoral and capital punishment is immoral unless God has personally proclaimed it—because other people, than the people who will die, are involved in the decision that should be God’s prerogative alone. Of course it can be argued that God has allowed all in this world to happen. So the possibility of euthanasia has been allowed by God, in fact it may be the will of God.”



—“Wanda, it’s true that there are many possible conclusions that one may make when wrestling with the Scriptures, the commentators on the Scriptures, and the comments on the commentators comments. Then when you add in the various social situations in the world, you are going to have a myriad of ideas. That’s why we have the Pope to sort it all out and give us an opinion or a command based on all of these factors.

“There are many who believe that it is wrong to shorten a life even if it would end very soon, because every moment of human life is considered equal in value to many years of life. The value of human life is infinite and beyond measure, so that any part of life - even if only an hour or a second - is of precisely the same worth as seventy years of it, just as any fraction of infinity, being indivisible, remains infinite.”



—“If the value of human life is so great, isn’t the soul’s life and happiness even greater after the soul has been released from the body and joins God in paradise?”



—“That’s a question that often stumps the religious ethicists. But Ray, we mentioned the passage in Second Samuel 1, verses 1 through 16 when the Amalekite came to David to give him Saul’s crown and bracelet, saying that Saul asked him to kill him because he was going to die from the battle wounds, and he did as Saul wanted. But then David had the young man killed because he had killed God’s anointed one. Was David unmerciful because the Amalekite had done as Saul had asked, then even returned his armor to David? Did David kill him because he had assisted in euthanasia? Was it just an unprovoked murder by David?”



—“I believe that the capital crime was assisting in euthanasia. But I’m not really sure of the official Church position on that situation.

“According to the teachings of all three of the major monotheistic religions, every individual is created in the image of God, and every individual has a purpose for living even though he or she may not be cognizant of that purpose. Many theists, as well as non-theists, believe that the ultimate meaning of human life is unfathomable; some religious ethicists therefore oppose euthanasia on the grounds that it could serve to prevent people from fulfilling their earthly destinies—whatever those might be.”



---”Ray, I think this is obviously a nebulous reaching for scriptural straws.”



—“If every line in the Scriptures illustrates an eternal truth then you can see why the Israelis killed hundreds of innocents, along with a few Hezbollah, in reacting to the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers. You can also understand why in 2006 Israel violated the truce and cease fire agreement it had just signed. Look in the Bible for ample evidence of both provoked and unprovoked attacks on Israel’s ancient neighbors.

“It is generally quite simple to search your scriptures to find approval for what you want to do as an individual or as a society. Then there are usually commentators on both sides of most issues. But some are commenting from a point of view of several hundred years ago, others are commenting from today’s perspective. Then, when reading an informed person’s comments on a biblical question we might wonder if one person’s opinion is sufficient to cover the beliefs of all the people of authority in that religion.”



---“While the Pope has spoken as the voice of the Church, a number of Catholic theologians have viewed the persistent vegetative state as a terminal illness, so intervening in the process of dying would require special justifications. Keeping a person biologically alive, by mechanically circulating her red blood cells does not allow that person to pursue any higher spiritual purposes. It may therefore not be theologically necessary. So withdrawing feeding tubes would only speed the inevitable physical death. But in spite of the theological theories developed, the papal pronouncement takes precedence. He determined that no human being ever descends to the level of a vegetable or animal. Because of the dignity of life, feeding through a tube helps to preserve that life.”



—“There is still another dimension to the question of pain and suffering. Patience and endurance are highly regarded and highly rewarded values in both Christianity and Islam. The Koran in 39:10 says ‘Those who patiently preserve will truly receive a reward without measure’ And further, in 31:17, ‘And bear in patience whatever (ill) maybe fall you: this, behold, is something to set one’s heart upon’. When the medical means of preventing or alleviating pain fall short, this spiritual dimension can be very effectively called upon to support the patient who believes that accepting and enduring unavoidable pain will be to his or her credit in the hereafter, which is the real and enduring life.”



—“In an Islamic setting the question of euthanasia usually does not arise, and if it does, it is dismissed as religiously unlawful. The patient should receive every possible psychological support and compassion from family and friends, including the patient’s spiritual resources. The doctor also participates in this, as well, and provides the therapeutic measures for the relief of pain. A dilemma arises when the dose of the pain killer necessary to alleviate pain approximates or overlaps with the lethal dose that might bring about the patient’s death.

“Ingenuity on the part of the doctor is called upon to avoid this situation, but from a religious point of view the critical issue is the doctor’s intention: is it to kill or to alleviate pain? Intention is beyond verification by the law but according to Islam it cannot escape the ever watchful eye of God who according to the Qur’an, 40:19 “knows the treachery of the eyes, and all that hearts conceal.

“Pain should be able to be reduced because the seeking of medical treatment for illness is mandatory in Islam, according to two sayings of the prophet ‘Seek treatment and cure, subjects of God, because for every illness God has made a cure’, and ‘Your body has a right on you.’ But when the treatment holds no promise it ceases to be mandatory. This applies both to surgical and drug measures, and, according to many Islamic scholars, to extraordinary medical procedures. Life’s ordinary needs, such as food and drink, are the rights of everyone and should not be withheld.

“But I wonder, does one get a higher place in Paradise if he suffers more before dying or lives extra days or years in a vegetative state? Is earthly life more sacred than eternal life? To a person who does not believe in a hereafter this might sound like nonsense, but to one who does, euthanasia is certainly not nonsense.

“Let’s look at Islam’s position on euthanasia. Islam is much clearer on euthanasia and suicide than is the Judeo-Christian tradition. So let’s look at what the Qur’an says. Human life per se is a value to be respected unconditionally, irrespective of other circumstances. The concept of a life not worthy of living does not exist in Islam. Finding a justification for taking life to escape suffering is not acceptable in Islam.

“The Qur’an says in 6:151 and 17:33, ‘Take not life which Allah made sacred otherwise than in the course of justice’. This passage might mean any type of killing, even euthanasia and suicide bombings. So the question is—Is it ‘just’ to allow a person who desires death to die or is ‘justice’ only to be considered to be adhering to society’s laws? And if so, what if the society legislated that euthanasia was acceptable? The Shari’a goes into great detail in defining the conditions where taking a life is permissible in war or in peace when a serious crime has been committed. The Islamic law of Shari’a listed and specified the indications for taking life. These are exceptions to the general rule of sanctity of human life, and they do not include mercy killing or make allowance for it.

“I brought a copy of The Islamic Code of Medical Ethics endorsed by the First International Conference on Islamic Medicine. (93) It includes: ‘Mercy killing, like suicide, finds no support

except in the atheistic way of thinking that believes that our life on this earth is followed by void. The claim of killing for painful hopeless illness is also refuted, for there is no human pain that cannot be largely conquered by medication or by suitable neurosurgery. . .’ On the other hand it may relax a bit the traditional Islamic view in another section. It states: ‘In his or her defense of life, however, the Doctor is well advised to realize his limit and not transgress it. If it is scientifically certain that life cannot be restored, then it is futile to diligently keep the patient in a vegetative state by heroic means or to preserve the patient by deep freezing or other artificial methods. It is the process of life that the doctor aims to maintain and not the process of dying. In any case, the doctor shall not take a positive measure to terminate the patient’s life.’ (94) So we see a more permissive approach to passive euthanasia among some Muslims.”



--- “For the monotheistic religions, if union with the Maker is the absolute and ultimate goal of life—why the strong proscriptions against allowing a believer that ultimate wish to be with God? Does one get a higher place in Paradise if he suffers more before dying or lives extra days or years in a vegetative state? Is earthly life more sacred than eternal life?

“Of course I would disagree with the Pope, but let’s assume that we accept your sectarian position, why should the sick person who wants to die, or the society that is in dire financial straits have to pay for what your Pope wants, when the Pope’s church is so rich. If he wants people to live, and the people who are gravely ill are Catholics who wish to die but will follow the Pope’s wishes, why shouldn’t the Pope pay?”



—“It’s not just the Catholic position, but the position of most civilized societies that people should not be able to end their lives when they want to. It’s a civil duty to keep people alive. In fact these rights have often been proclaimed in recent years through declarations issued by International Congresses (95)

Euthanasia is moral from a society viewpoint.



—“But the disapproval of euthanasia has not been universal. In 2005 thirty three delegates to the European Parliament tried to get a declaration to ban euthanasia and abortion. It failed because they needed 367 signatures to pass it. So modern Europe doesn’t seem to be going along with the older ideas.



—“Let’s look at societal basic assumptions and the evidence that might be used to make societally based decisions on euthanasia. Some societies hold the same values as their state religion. Saudi Arabia would be an example. Some are swayed, but not necessarily controlled, by what they believe to be God’s desires. The United States is an example. One of the major approaches is the secularized religious idea of the dignity of man, giving the individual the self-centered choice to die, if that is his or her wish. However the religious remnants in the society often require medical or psychological permission to die. They would argue that it is not yet a decision that can be made by the person alone. The Netherlands is an example of a society that is allowing more self-centered decisions. Sympathy for the patient or the family is occasionally a judge’s reason for allowing mercy killing. And, sometimes the society may be swayed by the financial factors involved in keeping people alive. This isn’t yet a reason that is given by the legislators as being acceptable, but it soon will have to be openly acknowledged as medical

expenses for the aging populations flush the dwindling governmental funds away from essential outlays required for the society's future, like education and defense.



--“Certainly the society will save money if it allows euthanasia. No society has enough money to do all the things it would like to do. Education, roads, eliminating poverty, building prisons, giving foreign aid, and increased retirement benefits for the legislators are all essentials that modern societies require. The problem is where do you draw the line on society allowed, or society imposed, deaths: cancer patients, murderers, burglars, idiots, child molesters, drug dealers?



---“In Kino, as part of the yearly health evaluation, one question asked is when that person would have his or her life terminated if there were no, or little, medical hope. It seems that this would be an acceptable reason for a society to allow a merciful end of one's life. Admittedly it is a self-centered value but it has been accepted by our society. For those who choose not to end their lives when there is no medical hope, their health insurance costs are increased. As you know, in our society the individual has a great deal of autonomy, but he or she is financially responsible for any health decisions made.

“Another question at the annual physical is whether or not they wish to donate their body organs to others who might need them or whether they want to leave their body to science.

“When a society is not controlled by literal interpretations of religious scriptures, it may look at other factors in determining that euthanasia is an acceptable practice. The non-religious factors that are most common in making a decision for a society are the financial expenditures required for extending one's life and where that money might be better used by the society.

The other financial concern might be preserving the family's funds for other purposes than extending a life of one who wants it terminated. The other major factor is the wishes of the patient or the patient's family in reducing the pain and suffering that any of them might be experiencing.

“Modern 'democratic' thinking, emphasizing the rights to freedom and privacy, versus the traditions and scriptures of religions, pits the freedom of the individual to end his life against what some believe to be the will of God to preserve it. This democratic thinking is often more aligned with the liberal thinkers in the three religions who are usually more influenced by the theories of the Enlightenment writers than those of the conservative-fundamentalists of the three monotheistic religions who tend to look only at the literal reading of their scriptures. We might also see religious believers lining up on either side of the scriptural paradox of a totally controlling God versus a totally merciful God.

“From a societal point of view, euthanasia can often be seen to be moral. If someone wants to die because of psychological or physical pain, society is nearly always better off without him or her. If we have a terminally ill person whose hospitalization is costing the society \$20,000 a day and that person can be kept alive, against his wishes, for another year through ordinary or extraordinary means that would cost seven and a half million dollars, should it be done? No society has unlimited money. Might that money be better spent for education of primary school children or even university students? Another question is whether a citizen has the right to do something relative to his or her own life. Is it the ideal society to let citizens decide for themselves how they will run their lives or is the ideal required to have the legislators and judges make all the decisions for all the people?”



---“There are those who wonder whether society should permit extraordinary measures to keep blood flowing. A New York Supreme Court ruling indicated that even antibiotics could be considered to be extraordinary if they weren't going to save a dying person. And for how long

should any extraordinary methods be used? If the patient seems to smile or grunt, is that evidence that they are not in a vegetative state? And if they don't move, how long must they stay in that condition before the condition is considered permanent—a month, a year, ten years? My gosh, we already allow a 'Do Not Resuscitate' request from a patient. How much different is it to allow them to die before a 'Code Blue' situation does them in?

"A court in Massachusetts recently allowed life support to be withdrawn from an 11 year old girl who had been beaten nearly to death by her adoptive parents. The father had asked the court not to take her off life support. Obviously if she died the adults could be tried for murder.

"We mentioned the Emilio Gonzales case earlier. While the hospital did not mention any financial considerations in its ruling, finances are an ethical concern. I would guess that being on life support for five months would cost at least \$5,000 a day. That would make it \$750,000 up to the time that the ethics committee was to make its decision. If Texas had unlimited money that would be one thing. But every state has financial problems. That three quarters of a million could build thirty classrooms, pay thirty teachers for a year, or send three poor students through school from pre-school to the doctorate.. If you have an 'either-or' possibility which would you choose—keeping a doomed child alive for a few months or educating 3 highly productive future citizens?

"People often think that only scriptures or commentators on the scriptures can give us ethics or morals. But philosophers have created ethical theories for centuries. Cities and states make laws based on the values, or ethics, they want from their citizens. Violence, economics, common courtesy, vandalism, and a myriad of other considerations that may regulate our behavior are concerns of ethics. When we look at societally-based questions of value finances are often foremost."



--"There is no disagreement that the financial cost of maintaining the incurably ill and the senile is a growing concern, so much so that some groups have gone beyond the concept of the "right to die" to that of a "duty to die". They claim that when the human machine has outlived its productive span, its maintenance is an unacceptable burden on the productive stratum of society, and it should be disposed of, abruptly if necessary, rather than allowing the body to deteriorate gradually

"If families are forced to support the dying person, particularly if they have to pay the hospital in advance so that the hospital does not have to pay for the patient's decision, the 2 to 3% of the dying population who opts for active euthanasia may increase.

"There could certainly be pressure from insurance companies, or even patients' relatives, to prematurely end the lives of terminally ill and elderly patients. Insurance costs must be reflected in their rates. Similarly, economic considerations could put undue pressure on doctors to avoid the implementation of risky and expensive life-saving treatment options. Economic considerations could also influence the decisions of terminally ill patients who would fear becoming economic burdens on their families or who would fear draining the inheritance of their heirs. Because of cost considerations, poorer patients could potentially become more likely candidates for euthanasia as compared to their wealthier counterparts.

"About 30% of Medicare costs are spent on the 5% of the population that dies each year.

According to recent Medicare data, for a beneficiary who dies of cancer after receiving conventional care, \$75,000 today is spent on medical care in the last year of life. Fully 33 percent of the last year's costs were spent in the last month of life, and 50 percent in the last two months of life.

"Computing the likely cost savings from legalizing physician-assisted suicide is based on three factors: (1) the number of patients who might commit suicide with the assistance of a physician if it is legalized; (2) the proportion of medical costs that might be saved by the use of physician-assisted suicide, which is related to the amount of time that a patient's life might be shortened; and (3) the total cost of medical care for patients who die."



—“Then would one have to be terminally ill, as in Oregon’s law, or merely very sick or in great pain, or maybe well enough to live but with no desire to. When my mother was living out her last days as an Alzheimer’s patient in a nursing home, her roommate told me that 80% of the patients at their facility would opt to die if they were allowed to.”



—“The Netherlands in 2002 accepted the idea that people should be able to die when they want to—the government there has decided that the ‘good death’ or euthanasia is desirable for the society. 44% of requests for euthanasia are approved in the Netherlands. About eighty percent of those who opt for a physician assisted death are cancer patients. This amounts to 6% of the cancer patients. But the total deaths due to this active euthanasia is only about 3% of the total number of deaths. If the U.S. had the same rates as the Dutch approximately 62,000 Americans, that is 2.7 percent of the 2.3 million who die in the United States each year, might choose physician-assisted suicide if it were legalized and carried out with their explicit instructions. On the average a Dutch person’s life was shortened by only 3 ½ weeks because of them opting for suicide.”



---“In the U.S. the states are allowed to opt for euthanasia laws. Oregon’s Death with Dignity Act was passed by a ballot measure in 1994 and enacted in 2001. But the federal government, as a result of the Patient Self Determination Act of 1990, entered the picture. American patients can now exert more control over the medical care they receive at the end of life by completing a non-binding Health Care Advance Directive. Although physicians are not bound to carry out the patient’s wishes, it is generally recognized that they must transfer the patient to someone who will.

“The Oregon act requires the patient to make two requests and two physicians must agree to the severity of the medical problem. But why are physicians superior to the suffering patient?

“But then you have cases in which medical personnel take lives that are ending or will soon end. One such case occurred after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005. A doctor and two nurses at a flood damaged hospital were accused of mercy killing four very ill patients, the oldest of whom was 90. Forty seven patients had already died in that hospital during the flood and about 200 had already died in other hospitals during that time. Energy and food shortages as well as the increased number of hospital admissions increased the need for hospital beds, coupled with the chances of a violent or lingering death of the euthanized patients, showed a merciful intent of the medical workers.

“Naturally, being in the United States, lawyers were immediately on hand to sue on behalf of all who died in the hospitals. One of these attorneys said that ‘I think the staff thought they were being merciful, but ... no one can play God.’ Here is a classic case of a merciful action, as a merciful God might approve and which probably prevented more suffering, contrasted with a God based value based on the incorrect translation of the word for murder. Or more likely, it was a self centered lawyer, looking to line his pockets, making the issue sound like a God based value in a societal setting.”



—“But Lee, we play God when we go to war, when we prevent a suicide, when we save a drowning person, and when we do a number of other things. I’m surprised that you

didn't criticize that attorney's concept of God. Was it a Judeo-Christian, Hindu, Mayan, or animistic god? In fact, I expected you to criticize the idea that there is a God."



—"You beat me to it Con. And who is to say that the person who wants to die is not expressing the will of God Who has spoken through his soul or heart?"

"But along these lines, Dr. Jack Kevorkian served 8 years for his second degree murder sentence in Michigan for having allowed people who wanted to die to kill themselves with a machine he invented. Here you had the self centered interests of the patients and the merciful help of a physician confronting the God based laws of Michigan.

"Dr. Kevorkian had a continued interest in euthanasia, and had written a number of articles in medical journals. He then invented a machine by which seriously ill patients could end their own lives by the injection of drugs or by breathing carbon monoxide. He was told by a lower court to stop assisting in suicides although several judges had found him not guilty of murder.

In 1992 the legislature of Michigan enacted a law that banned assisting in suicides. In 1994 a jury acquitted him of violating the law. The Michigan Court of Appeals struck down the law, but the State's supreme court overturned the appellate court's ruling. This reinstated the four cases of murder against Kevorkian.

In the far west in 1996 the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that in its district, the western United States, terminally ill adults have a Constitutional right to die with the assistance of doctors. In 1996 Kevorkian was again tried for murder and a jury again acquitted him. In 1997 in *Washington v. Glucksberg*, (96) the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled that there is no Constitutional right to assisted suicide, it is a state issue.

"Catholic leaders and others have brought forceful actions against states that have sought to follow Oregon. They know what God wants and don't want legislators to ease the pain of severely ill patients or to reduce the governmental spending needed to keep these patients alive against their wills. This has had another effect. Many doctors are afraid to give enough medication to stop the pain because they fear being charged with murder.

"It is not uncommon for the judges or legislators to go against the traditional religious beliefs. In Israel, for example, while Jewish scholars will generally say that suicide and euthanasia are immoral because we value the sanctity of life, Israeli judges sometimes allow passive euthanasia where people have left a living will or have clearly specified their intent to refuse extraordinary methods of life support. So the judges have ruled based on the self-centered desires of terminally ill patients, rather than following some scholars' opinions of what their faith requires. But the so-called scholars, or perhaps we should say commentators, often disagree. One says that withholding insulin is acceptable, another disagrees. Who is to settle this when each believes he is absolutely right?

"Israeli law is a combination of scriptures, which say God controls all, and democratic theory that emphasizes the dignity of man and his control over his own life. In those circumstances judges may find that there is no duty to aggravate one's suffering by artificially extending a person's dying moments or days. Under US law, by contrast, the starting point is the patient's individual liberty, as enshrined in the 14th Amendment, and that principle is balanced against what the US courts call 'compelling state interests'. The nebulous concept of 'compelling state interests' is sometimes shown by a vote of the people on a particular issue. But other times by a five to four decision of the U.S. Supreme Court which can negate what millions of people of the state have decided they want.

"In Israel there has been a great legal debate over the importance of the democratic idea. The President of the Supreme Court has the view that the 'dignity of man' has to be determined in view of 'the enlightened community of Israel'. He believed that the traditional Jewish ideas can be harmonized with the democratic ideas, and where they remain in conflict, the values of the

‘enlightened state of Israel’ should prevail. The question is, who is this ‘enlightened state of Israel.’ The same can be asked in the United States about whether only one to five judges can determine what are ‘compelling state interests.’ The more recent judicial opinions in Israel relative to euthanasia seem to be moving away from the oppressing God to the merciful God as seen by Maimonides who said, ‘the ordinances of the Law were meant to bring upon the world not vengeance, but mercy, loving kindness, and peace.’”



—“China is moving in that same democratic direction, even though it seems to be against the teachings of Confucius. China and the Netherlands seem to base their values, in this instance, on the self-centered wishes of the person who wants to die or the good for the society which does not need more old or sick people because of their pension costs or socially paid medical expenses. In the U.S.A. the laws are often based on ideas that are said to be Christian, because they erroneously believe that their Scriptures say that they shouldn’t ‘kill’, and euthanasia would be killing. And the government should foot the bill.”



---“It seems that when a religion tells a society how to spend its money it is treading on grounds where it has no right. It’s kind of like one boy telling two others ‘why don’t you and him fight’. Maybe after society has determined to stop life support because the cost is too great, the society might let individuals or churches pay for the treatment that they consider essential. If society decides to stop heart lung treatment for a 95 year old victim of Alzheimer’s who also has severe heart problems, and decides to use that money to support hospitalization for poor children. If the patient is unconscious and if someone wanted to pay for continued treatment, and the dying individual might have objected, society might let outside sources pay for continuing the use of machines that keep the red blood cells oxygenated. But many people believe that losing their dignity is ultimately degrading and would have preferred having the treatment stopped. So even if someone wanted to pay for continued treatment, the individual might have objected. So if the Pope John Paul says ‘don’t remove feeding tubes’—let his rich church pay the costs of this. Even though his doctors didn’t use them on him in his last days as he fought influenza, breathing problems, and his other afflictions, which probably included Parkinson’s.”



—“The Vatican issues annual statements of its income and spending and it generally shows a relatively small profit of about ten million dollars. But this audit does not mention the extensive real estate holdings world wide or the value of Vatican’s art and other possessions.

“Just as corporations often do, the church can value possessions differently. For example, I’ve heard that the church’s property in Los Angeles is valued at the price it paid, and most was bought prior to 1950, and much of it over 100 years ago. The values have increased hundreds of times. I assume that’s the same for most of their real estate in all the major cities and in the rest of the country and the world. You know that the Catholic Church is the world’s largest non-governmental land owner. It has huge stock market investments and several billion dollars in gold. I have heard that it is the single biggest financial power in the world. So since the church is so rich, and only one or two countries have a positive financial balance it would certainly be an option to let it pay for those it wanted to keep on machines. Obviously with the U.S. owing trillions of dollars and the Vatican so rich, I think it might be a good idea if they would pay for the procedures they require in America and in all other Christian countries.



—“I agree, when people want to make a value decision that controls other people’s lives and costs society money, I think they should put their money where their mouth is.

“Research at Dartmouth University showed that the last two years of life costs to Medicare ranged from over \$50,000 to almost \$100,000, averaging \$85,000, depending on the hospital. The last six months of life costs were from \$28,000 to \$53,000. The study included only the country’s top five hospitals. (97) Since seven of ten Americans die of chronic and degenerative diseases, such as cancer, heart problems and diabetes, a major question is whether the money spent here is its best use. With a multi-trillion dollar national debt, another trillion and a half necessary to repair the country’s infrastructure, like roads and bridges, not to mention needed expenses for education—The U.S. does not have deep pockets.

“So some major questions are whether the government should spend its money on such a ‘dead end’ expense, especially if the patient doesn’t want it. Whether the government or the doctors should withdraw treatment even if the patient wants it or whether the government should mandate a top age for end of life medical care. Will the 70 or 90 year old give back to society what it cost to prolong his life, or will he merely die after all the treatment? How much should be borrowed from China to pay for expenses with no financial return to the society. And how much are taxpayers willing to pay China as interest on the money?”

Euthanasia can be immoral from a societal viewpoint



—“Let’s play with the idea of euthanasia as being immoral from a societal viewpoint. It is a major question as to whether allowing it for willing subjects might make us more willing to use it against the unwilling citizens who are undesirable because of illness or non-productability and perhaps eventually to allow wholesale killings based on religion, ethnicity or even for politically unpopular beliefs. All of these have occurred in the recent past. In Germany, China, Cambodia, Congo and Somalia life was cheapened in genocides.”



--“With the U.S. Supreme Court’s unanimous rejection of euthanasia as a Constitutional right, if euthanasia is accomplished by assisted suicide. (98) The rulings found that no compelling state interests could be found that would be served by allowing assisted suicide, even if passive euthanasia is allowed. Asking to die with the aid of a physician is not a constitutionally protected interest under the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution. However asking to be taken off life support is acceptable. The Court left the issue to the legislatures.

“The decision can be seen as accepting passive euthanasia but not active euthanasia. A person can refuse unwanted treatment, but not ask for help in speeding one’s death in other ways. Chief Justice Rehnquist set forth a number of governmental interests that would justify a ban on assisted suicide: the state’s unqualified interest in the preservation of human life; the interest in preventing suicide as a public health problem; the interest in protecting those suffering from depression and pain; the interest in protecting the integrity and ethics of the medical profession; the interest in protecting vulnerable groups (the poor, the elderly, the disabled) from abuse, neglect, and mistakes, as well as from prejudice, stereotypes, and societal indifference; and the interest in avoiding a possible slide toward voluntary and perhaps even involuntary euthanasia.

“Justice Stevens, in his concurring opinion, stating bluntly that under certain circumstances, an interest in hastening death ‘is entitled to constitutional protection.’ He agreed with the Court that history and tradition provide adequate support for refusing to recognize an open-ended

constitutional right to commit suicide. But he pointed out that the death penalty has been allowed, so acknowledging that there is a belief that there is a sanctity in human life does not mean that it must always be preserved. He wrote that the interest in the preservation of human life is not itself sufficient to outweigh the interest in liberty that may justify the only possible means of preserving a dying patient's dignity and alleviating her intolerable suffering. And Justice Souter left open the possibility that the asserted right to assisted suicide might be recognized in some circumstances in the future. Justice Souter took especially seriously the concern about possible progression from assisted suicide to euthanasia; this, he felt, was sufficient reason to uphold the statute. He stated that at this time, the legislatures are better suited than the courts to deal with the issue."



—“Why would he say that the state has an overriding interest in preserving life when it sends soldiers off in a war of aggression or when it allows capital punishment? And is suicide a public health problem when a severely unhappy person does not want to suffer anymore? Then where is the public health advantage of not having another person populating the planet and contributing to global warming. And why would he say we should protect those suffering from depression and pain. He doesn't mention trying to cure them, yet many have been turned out in the streets as governments have closed mental hospitals as a way of balancing their budgets. And when he mentions protecting the integrity of the medical profession, is that more important than protecting the integrity and dignity of the suffering patient? And is the integrity of the medical profession strengthened by keeping people suffering mentally or physically? Then he mentions involuntary euthanasia, but that was not an issue in the case and if it occurred it would certainly become another Supreme Court case.

“He did not, however, list some major factors that are of ‘compelling state interest’ the costs to the state and nation for the medical care needed for that person are not insignificant in a nation with a multi-trillion dollar debt and states facing huge financial problems. Some caused by the Supreme Courts ruling that children of illegal must be educated by the states and at the state's expense, as in the Plyler case. The savings in medical costs, assuming that only 2 to 3% of dying people would opt for it, would be over a billion dollars a year. However some have suggested that the number opting for active euthanasia would be several times the 2 to 3% number, so the actual savings could be in the multiple billions of dollars.

“But if it were only a billion dollars that isn't much. It would only build about 14,000 classrooms or 50,000 prison cells. Or it could reduce by 40% one day's 2.5 billion dollar deficit on the national debt. But the question is moot because the Medicare system is now bankrupt and it had paid most of those expenses that the Supreme Court now allows. The private health insurance bills now pick up much of it, but they have lowered the lifetime maximum benefit that they allow. Even so, if assisted suicide is allowed, the savings on health insurance premiums would only be about 1%.



--- “In the U.S. when judges use the term ‘compelling state interests’ to turn a decision left, right or in the opposite direction. There is always a way for a magistrate to strip an individual of what many would say is a basic freedom. The Supreme Court relied heavily on ‘history and tradition’ which is strongly religiously based and which denies the right to end one's life. But ‘history and tradition’ do not include modern medical procedures which can continue a heart beating long after it would have stopped naturally in Biblical days, or even World War II days. In fact we annually develop techniques to substitute for a working circulatory system. We just don't have such techniques to keep the brain functioning effectively.

“Italy seems to be even more against euthanasia than the U.S. In a case where a man paralyzed by muscular dystrophy had repeatedly asked to have his respirator removed, the judge

denied his request because the law did not allow it. The judge asked the legislators to address the issue. The Roman Catholic Church, which wields significant moral and political influence in Italy, teaches that life should reach its ‘natural end.’ The man who is dependant on a respirator to breathe, feeding tubes for nourishment, and a voice synthesizer to talk might be considered to have reached his ‘natural end.’

“The judge ruled that while the patient had a Constitutional right to stop his treatment, such an action plays against Italy’s medical code that requires doctors to maintain the life of the patient and that if the patient requests treatments that would cause death the doctor must not carry it out. Also, Italy’s criminal code states that assisting a suicide is murder. So a Constitutional right is negated by a criminal code and a medical code. Human suffering is apparently not a factor in civil law.

“Many of the religious and secular ethicists who oppose sanctioning any form of active euthanasia are afraid that even minor changes might lead to major consequences.

“A while ago we talked about Israeli judges sometimes allowing passive euthanasia. But the traditions of Israel are more anti-euthanasia. The Torah states: ‘And you shall guard your own lives exceedingly’. The duty to preserve one’s own life overrides all other commandments in the Torah, except for three: idolatry, shedding blood and incest. It is a person’s duty to preserve his life. It is not a right that can be refused.’

“Israel does not yet have a Constitution but rather a set of ‘basic laws’. One such law provides that it is prohibited to ‘infringe against a person’s life, body or dignity’ and also that ‘every person is entitled to be protected in his life, his body and his dignity.’ When nebulous terms are not defined they leave judges great leeway in making their decisions. The term ‘dignity’ creates such a confusion. One high court judge has determined that man possesses such dignity because he is made in the image of God.

“In Israel, as other countries, there has been a legal conflict between the religious tradition which is generally against euthanasia and the newer democratic concepts of freedom of the individual. The ephemeral idea of the dignity of the individual is often measured against the equally transparent standard of ‘the enlightened community of Israel’. As happens in nearly all religious democratic societies we have scriptural passages that are not clear, set against the needs of the society which are equally vague. Neither set of standards yields the ethical certainty we would prefer.

“As in Italy, the duties of doctors to preserve life with the technological means available may conflict with the patient’s desires. In fact a doctor assisting in a death may be tried for murder and even executed, because a patient can’t exempt the doctor from breaking a law that supposedly protects the patient. In the Third World, where so many Muslims live, the technology is usually lacking, so a quicker end may ameliorate the misery.”



—“If we are made in the image of God is that image physical, mental and or spiritual? I guess that Michelangelo correctly portrayed God on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. So God must be a physical being, possibly sitting on a cloud? I may have been wrong, I always thought of God as pure spirit? If He is spiritual then it is our spiritual essence that should be our concern, not the physical body.”



---“That’s a good point and it would add to the courts’ confusions, I’m sure. But there is another confusing element. The same basic Israeli law also says that ‘every person is entitled to his personal privacy’ this, of course, intended to protect a person’s autonomy and liberty. So we have a triangle of divergent ideas pulling opinions from the trough of truth. But then there is another amorphous idea that complicates the issue even more, because if there is a controversy in a

decision it should be made consistent with the ‘values of the State of Israel’, as a Jewish and democratic state.”



—“I can guess at the problems. With the Jewish tradition for arguing and questioning and the universal tendency of politicians to use imprecise words that excite their constituencies with guarantees for whatever the constituent thinks it means, we have the same fertile ground for confusion that gives judges the opportunity to infuse their own beliefs into the laws of every land. What does dignity mean?, democratic?, image of God?, even Jewish? We have a valley full of semantic variants waiting to be written into pious pronouncements that will be written in stone, until a higher judge with a different opinion takes the bench and chisels a new ‘universal’ edict.”

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT



—“Let’s look at another life and death issue. Capital punishment has been around for as long as there have been laws. When we look at the developed countries, the United States is the most demonstrably religious country, and three quarters of the states allow the death penalty, but most seldom use it. About forty percent of the world’s countries have no capital punishment, among them are Columbia and South Africa with the world’s highest murder rates. But most developed countries don’t allow it. Here again, depending on how we apply the evidence to the basic assumptions, we can be for or against it.

Capital punishment if moral from a self-centered viewpoint



—“If my daughter were brutally raped and killed, I might well want the killer to suffer as she did. But how will he suffer more? In solitary confinement for life? In prison for life? In the U.S he won’t suffer as much in dying because most methods of capital punishment have been ruled to be ‘cruel and unusual punishment’ under the Constitution. He will probably die from a generally painless lethal injection or gas.

Capital punishment is immoral from a self centered point of view



—“But here is another point of view. I’m on death row. I have realized my wrongs and have been working to rehabilitate myself. I have written books and articles about why killing is bad. I have tried to influence youth to drop out of gangs. And I don’t want to die now. So from my self-centered point of view, capital punishment is not moral.

Capital punishment is moral from a God-based perspective



—“The death penalty is required in the Old Testament for taking Lord’s name in vain in Leviticus 24:16. It is also prescribed for working on the Sabbath in Exodus 30:15, so all your golfing buddies are heading for that great deep 18th hole at the end of life, Con. Cursing your parent will require it according to Exodus 21:17, as will adultery according to Exodus 20:10. But it seems that our adulterous legislators, like Newt Gingrich, are not pushing this one as a civil law.

Heretics must be put to death in the Bible and the Koran, so Lee you're in deep trouble. Maybe double trouble. Remember Shakespeare's comment from the mouth of Dick the Butcher in Henry VI, 'First let's kill all the lawyers.'"



—“Ya, Shakespeare was tough on us. But remember that Dick the Butcher was a killer who was plotting an overthrow of the king. It was those of us in the legal profession who were standing in his way.”



—“Spoken like a true meaning-twisting barrister. Maybe you didn't get the same meaning from the scene that I did. I understood it as lawyers being obstacles to the utopia Jack Cade was suggesting for when he became king. In fact Shakespeare was rather outspoken in his derision of lawyers, in 'Romeo and Juliet' it is about your primary concern being your fees, possibly to the neglect of justice. In King Lear he criticizes your lawyer propensity for speaking in riddles and obscuring the truth. And in Hamlet he talks of the trickery used in trials. Looks like nothing has changed.”



—“Such a pity he didn't think more of us. We might have been able to enact copyright laws. You know that Shakespeare's works became public property once his pen had dotted the last period of a play or sonnet.



—“But now from literature let's return to philosophy. From a God-based point of view capital punishment still raises some difficult questions about the Latin Vulgate translation. St. Jerome, the author who died in 420, spent much of his career in Palestine where he consulted frequently with Jewish scholars whose interpretations he often cites with great respect. Even the Septuagint, the old Greek translation of the Bible, translated the commandment with a word that means 'murder' rather than 'kill.' St. Augustine, basing himself on the standard translations, made it clear that the commandment does not extend to wars or capital punishment that are explicitly ordained by God.

“The most cited Biblical reference is 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' (99), but it is more specific when one has caused the death of another in the Hebrew society, that he shall be put to death.” (100)



—“But Ray, some would say that an eye for an eye makes the whole world blind.”



—“I think that's what Jesus thought! But our Western religions have typically taken the idea of revenge as God's law. In Islam murder is repaid by killing the murderer under Sharia. The Qur'an says 'On that account We ordained for the children of Israel that if anyone slay a person - unless it be for murder or spreading mischief in the land- -it would be as if he slew the whole people. And if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people.' That was in Surah 5:32. The Christian and Jewish faiths have typically followed the Biblical requirements for punishing by death in certain situations. And recently in the Philippines the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches reiterated its pro-death penalty stand, saying crimes

that lead to the loss of lives deserve capital punishment. They said that ‘We uphold the principle of a life for life. The punishment must fit the crime. The penalty must be commensurate to the gravity of the offense.’ It called for death when innocent civilians were massacred. So the idea of capital punishment is not dead in modern society.

“And Jesus did not seem to disapprove of his own capital punishment on Golgatha. (101)

Capital punishment is immoral from God’s perspective.

“On the other hand, showing love and mercy is the message of Christ. ‘Turn the other cheek.’ And forgive. As Matthew recants in 5:38-39, ‘Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.’”

Moral from a societal viewpoint



—“If capital punishment reduces crime, it is an effective deterrent so it can be seen to be moral from a society based assumption. Certainly it makes prison inmates less likely to kill each other if they know it is a capital offense. But then maybe society would be better off and more prison space would be available if more criminals are killed while in prison! When we look at the evidence, it may reduce murder. A report from South Africa noted a sharp increase of violent crime, particularly murder, when capital punishment was suspended in 1989 then abolished in 1996.



—“Maybe when you have a more violent society, like South Africa or the United States, you need capital punishment, but in more civilized societies it isn’t needed and may be counterproductive to fostering the idea of the worth of the individual.”

“A good point. Some people wonder about South Africa’s rigid gun control laws and the



ir abolition of capital punishment when organized crime and violent crimes are out of control. But maybe it isn’t the severity of punishment, but rather the certainty of punishment that should be the thrust of their government. More money for police and prisons might be an answer. As the Bible says in Ecclesiastes 8:11 ‘When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong.’ More psychologists and criminologists are coming to this view.

Immoral from society’s point of view



—“The strongest societal argument I ever heard against capital punishment was when the former warden of San Quentin Prison, Clinton Duffy, spoke at Los Angeles Pierce College. He said that it cost society much more to execute a person than to keep him in prison for life. Capital cases have almost unlimited appeals to the courts. Public defending lawyers are paid high fees. Every possible Constitutional appeal can be used. Possible new evidence may be introduced. Appeals to the governor are made. By the time a person is executed he has been in prison 15 to 20 years. It certainly seems that taking the less expensive approach might benefit society. Of course you also have the argument that rich people can afford the best lawyers so are more likely to escape the death penalty.

“But even in the U.S. the number of death sentences is being reduced. This may be due to the fact that sometimes there is an innocent person on death row. Public opinion is also changing with almost 50% of the people now favoring life imprisonment rather than death for murder.”

STEM CELL RESEARCH



--“Let’s move to another life and death issue—stem cell research? Here we find a cogent question between the ‘is’ of science and the ‘ought’ of ethics.

“As you know, stem cells are cells that have the potential of developing into many different types of cells. The most malleable of these cells are found in embryonic cells and in cells of the umbilical cord and the amniotic fluid. These may develop into any type of tissue from nerves to skin. Adult stem cells, such as found in bone marrow, are more limited. They may become blood, bone or marrow. But adult stem cells are already being used to treat diseases such as cancer and sickle cell anemia. The problem for some people is whether to use the embryonic cells for research or for cures because they are thought to be living beings. So a major question is whether a stem cell in a Petri dish has any rights. So there are some similarities with the arguments we will see when we discuss abortion.

“Korea stem cell researcher Hwang Woo was considered unethical because in his human stem cell research he used the ova of his research assistants, who were paid \$1500 each for their eggs. This was later declared illegal. The problem was primarily that he denied using the eggs of his fellow workers. It created a huge ethical storm when he admitted that he had lied. He was a hero in Korea. 600 women asked to donate eggs to the project after the public flak. What were the ethical concerns? That he lied? That he was doing stem cell research? That his research was criticized by religious ethicists? From a self centered point of view—everybody was happy. From a God point of view the lie would be immoral and the research could be good or bad. From a societal point of view the lie was bad, but the research may have been lifesaving. So are we looking for the overall effect, or any other ethical problem. Should we weigh the major good against the minor evil—or is any unethical reaction controlling in a scientific situation?

”Under George W. Bush the morality question of stem cell research reached its zenith. The majority of the voters wanted it. The majority of the legislators wanted it. But the two-thirds vote of the Congress needed to overcome a Bush veto was not there. As with the other issues we have discussed, what is ‘moral’ depends on which non-provable basic assumption you start with and the type of evidence you choose to apply to that assumption. No matter which approach you use there are five other ways of determining the morality of the issue being discussed. Yet every person is so convinced of the certainty and rightness of his or her position that consensus is not possible. In most of the issues in which God has spoken clearly, non-god societies or philosophers have come up with the same ideas, such as honor your parents, and don’t steal, kill or lie. The problem often is where God hasn’t spoken, but where humans know exactly what He wants.

“Stem cells can be harvested just from the ova, without having to have a fertilized cell.

They could be collected from both normal women and women with diseases, such as cancers, then the researchers could more easily produce normal stem cells and also abnormal cells so that the genetic causes of the diseases can be analyzed and treated.”

Stem cell research is moral from a self-centered viewpoint



—“I am certainly for stem cell research. It may be able to find a cure for myself or for someone I love. Whether it is an eventual cancer, Alzheimer’s or a heart attack, it would be welcomed. They are already making heart valves for infants and adults from their own tissue.

“You know of the work using stem cell research and genetics in looking for the gene or genes that suppress cancer tumors. If scientists can find a way to stop cells from dividing they can control cancer. Since it seems that many of the diseases of aging are caused by the turning off of the stem cells’ ability to regenerate the body’s various tissues. It isn’t so much that cells just wear out, but that they can’t regenerate. We probably need embryonic stem cells to correct this problem because they are so much more versatile and are many years removed from an inability to divide normally. The body’s production of certain proteins that protect against cancers reduces considerably as we age, while negative proteins tend to be produced in much greater quantities as we age. With stem cell research we may be able to reverse the genetic factors that make us age.

“As scientists are finding ways of extracting embryonic stem cells without destroying the embryo, we are getting closer to countering the religious objections that we are destroying embryos.

“Some are not waiting, some professional English soccer players are having umbilical cells from their newborn babies frozen so that if they or their children need organs or tissues, such as ligaments or cartilages, they would be available. In fact, many thousands of British parents have paid a few thousand dollars each to store their babies’ stem cells. There are several cases in which they have already been used to treat serious childhood medical problems.

Stem cell research is immoral from a self centered point of view.



--- It costs extra tax money to pay for all that research. I prefer to spend my money the way I want. If I want to spend money on stem cell research to aid heart patients, but not diabetes patients, that is my right.

“While I would like to live forever, we can’t have six billion people and their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren living forever. It would make my longevity, and that of my progeny, intolerable.”

Stem cell research is moral from a God based point of view



—“There is nothing in the scriptures against stem cell research. It is just because it has not been done before that some oppose it. It’s the same as using electric lights, internet, or TV. None of them have been Biblically sanctioned. And with the way scientists are making things from adult stem cells or from amniotic fluid, the ridiculous claims of my religious comrades are being bypassed daily. They are just holding back the ability to cure diseases. And if a longer life is desired, such as for those who oppose euthanasia, stem cell research should be promoted.”



—“If God is merciful and gave us the intelligence to solve problems that will alleviate human misery, should we follow the path of mercy? Or should we, as some religions have continued to do, fight mental and physical wars over some unprovable idea. I don’t understand how some supposed Judeo-Christian religions can depart so radically from the Jewish tradition in

some areas, such as when life starts, then assume the truth of their novel and non-Biblical idea, then force their followers to accept it.

“Surveys show growing support for stem cell research among all major religious groups - with the exception of white evangelical Protestants. About a third of white evangelicals support the research, compared with 70% of mainline Protestants, 61% of white Catholics and 77% of non-churchgoers.

“But the more religious people tend to be more conservative or reactionary in most areas, such as history, ethics and science. So it is no surprise that they are against anything new. But with the Bible and Koran both seeing great value in life and healing, how can people be against it? When Jesus awakened Lazarus from his death it illustrated a sanctity of life—even though he didn’t use stem cells to do it.

Stem cell research does not have value from a God based viewpoint

“It would seem that there are two factors that might make stem cell research unethical from a God based point of view. One is that if God creates an illness, it is His desire to not have it healed. This would assume that scientists are more powerful than God and can cure what He doesn’t want cured. The other reason is the sanctity of life, which is a gift of the Creator. If an embryo is destroyed to harvest its stem cells, it would be killing the life that started when the sperm fraternized with the ovum. It is even worse if these harvested stem cells are sold for research. But if people’s own stem cells are used, or if people volunteer their stem cells, this might not be an objection. A Vatican official has said that scientists who research with stem cells from human embryos should be excommunicated from the church. Since destroying an embryo is the same as having an abortion, scientists who do this should be treated the same way as women who have abortions and the doctors who perform them.”



—“The church regards early-stage embryos as human lives, not to be used or destroyed. It maintains that there are other ways to obtain stem cells for research purposes — from umbilical cord blood after a birth, for example — though it acknowledges that they are significantly more cumbersome.

“The use of adult stem cells or embryonic cells, without destroying the embryo, could reduce the religious objections to ending the potential life of an embryo. But there are still religious objections. The Conference of Catholic Bishops said that this did not solve the ethical dilemma. That dilemma was of course created in 1854 when the pope decided that the soul is present when the sperm meets the ovum.”

Stem cell research has value from a societal point of view



—“If promoting health and happiness is a legitimate goal of government, stem cell research is a ‘must.’ Heart and brain problems, cancers, Parkinson’s, diabetes, cancer and spinal damage are only a few areas that may be made healthier through stem cell research and therapy.

“I would think that society’s major concern in passing laws would be for the greatest good for the greatest number. Why should religion dictate your laws? Those who oppose embryonic stem cell research have it backward. We who value life should rejoice that a human embryo, slated for being discarded, evades complete destruction when a part of it is endowed with potential immortality in a cell culture.

“Opponents say that any research that destroys human embryos is unacceptable. They say adult stem cells, which can be found in bone marrow, newborns’ umbilical cords and elsewhere in the body should be used for research instead.

Stem cell research is immoral from a societal viewpoint



---“If you are in a Catholic country that used the Pope’s reasoning to form its laws it would be a negative. What if in that Catholic country they give tax breaks for children or for dependents. Since the embryonic stem cells are alive, people could adopt thousands of them and take the allowed tax deductions, you will never have to pay taxes. So there would be no money to run the government!

“President Bush, in the U.S., used pope-like reasoning to issue an executive order, banning scientists from receiving federal grants for conducting research on human embryos. He then vetoed a bill that would have allowed the stem cell research that 70% of Americans wanted. This forced researchers to search for private funding. This research is believed by many scientists to hold the most promise for curing diseases such as Alzheimer’s, juvenile diabetes, and Parkinson’s that strike millions of people. Former President Ronald Reagan’s wife Nancy lobbied Congress against Bush’s action. Her husband had died with Alzheimer’s, which is one of the major targets of stem cell research.



—“Why should society’s taxes pay for the research? Let the money come from private foundations and the pharmaceutical companies. They’re the ones who will eventually make all the money on the research.”



—“Some conservatives oppose stem cell research that can save lives while allowing for soldiers and civilians to lose arms and legs in war. They oppose abortion because it costs the life of an unborn but send fully grown people to war—knowing that many will lose their adult lives. I can’t see that this makes sense.”



—“Stem cell research will just prolong lives and contribute to the overpopulation problem and the increase of old people, many of whom will be non-productive so that is a major negative.”

QUESTIONS OF WAR



—“War presents a number of ethical problems. In the 1960s some said ‘Better Red than dead’ figuring it was better to be a live communist than a dead American. There is the probability of killing off many of your brightest and best, including effective future leaders. There is the expense of the war effort. On the other hand a war may bring your country out of an economic depression or recession or it might capture needed raw materials. It’s obvious what arguments might be given for the morality and immorality of war. So let’s look at a couple of war related problems.

“Let’s start with conscientious objectors.

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS

“Conscientious objectors are against all wars. The Quakers have a long standing aversion to all wars. Sometimes they are exempted from the war, sometimes they serve in the medical corps.

Others just don't want to be killed and escape to a non-belligerent country, as many Americans did when they went to Canada to escape service in Vietnam.

Being a conscientious objector is moral from a self-centered viewpoint

"I don't believe in wars and I don't want to die.

Being a conscientious objector is immoral from a self-centered viewpoint

"If I have to go into the army, so should you.

Being a conscientious objector is moral from a God-based viewpoint

"If all killing is immoral, then war is immoral.

"In Christianity the erroneous translation of "Thou shalt not murder" to "Thou shalt not kill" has allowed potential soldiers to evade their national duty by becoming conscientious objectors. It would seem that the stories of the original Judaic scriptures not only condoned war and killing but often required it."



--- "Mohammed Ali, whom some consider the greatest fighter of all time, claimed his right to object to killing because of his Muslim beliefs. He would serve only in wars called by Allah. The U.S. Supreme Court supported his position in an 8 to 0 decision. (102) The court ruled that the lower courts had not told him why he was denied the conscientious objector status.

Being a conscientious objector is immoral from a God-based viewpoint

"We already discussed killing, and it is not necessarily bad. In fact God approved of many wars in the Old Testament days and wars are continually being fought in His name.

"The case of Mohammad Ali is puzzling because the U.S. was trying to stop the continued conquering of nations, often religious nations, by the godless communist governments of the Soviet Union and China. You would think that any religious person should have seen the value of stopping the forces of atheism. If Allah were ever to call for a war, this is undoubtedly the one he would have chosen.



-- "Some mullahs said that Allah called for war against the infidels in Iraq, do you think that Ali would have volunteered for a suicidal bombing mission? And if so against whom, the Shia, the Sunnis or the forces of America?"

Being a conscientious objector is moral from a society-based viewpoint

"Aristophanes play Lysistrata told us how women, by withholding sex, could make conscientious objectors out of warriors.



—"You mean that for the ancient Greeks making love was more fun than making war? I guess I would rather be a lover than a fighter too! I guess if all young people refused to go to war, we would have no more wars.



—"But then look at all the money we would lose if we closed down all the munitions factories and the assembly lines for tanks, fighters and bombers.

Being a conscientious objector is immoral from a society-based viewpoint



-- "As much as I abhor war, there are times when it is necessary for the defense of a country or an ideal. Somebody has to fight it. The Romans found that mercenaries were not the

strongest force. Fighting for pay did not elicit the same fervor that fighting to save ones family and state uncovered.”

TERRORISM

“Terrorism is really a technique of politics, and we will get into political techniques when we visit Indus and talk to Jana Ghosh. But let’s look briefly at the ethical ideals that may influence it. It certainly has become a major problem for many of the world’s countries.

Terrorism is moral from a self-centered viewpoint

“Physical force is the most primitive of all political techniques. If I want something passionately and have exhausted all of the other options of persuasion, force may be my only option. That might include everything from spanking my child to crashing a plane into a building or carrying a bomb into a holy shrine and detonating it. In many conservative Muslim families when a daughter disobeys her father, especially relative to sex or marriage, she may be killed.

Terrorism is immoral from a self-centered viewpoint



—“But what if my violence does not have the desired effect. What if my spanked infant become more defiant or what if he becomes an abusive parent to my grandchildren? What if my family or I are injured or killed by the terrorist. It certainly is immoral for me.



“The inquisitional Christians, the Ku Klux Klansmen, the Jewish Defense League and the Jewish terrorists in the pre-Israel Palestine, the Hindu Thuggi, and the Tamil Tigers, who started the suicide bombings, all saw terror as pleasing to God.

"Stopping Western education, especially education for girls, is required by Boku Haran because all knowledge is contained in the Koran. Western knowledge only corrupts people's minds.

Today it is the radical Islamists who are the most terror-prone. There are over hundred verses in the Quran bad allow or require violence. Sura 2:191 is an example. 'And kill them wherever you find them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out. And Al-Fitnah [disbelief or unrest] is worse than killing...'"



--"It puzzles me that they use the tools that modern education and science have developed—like guns, computers, smart phones, and gasoline powered vehicles but disavow its value. Totally irrational! But who expects rationality from uneducated unemployed people with huge inferiority complexes?"



--"Judaism and Christianity have also advocated or foreseen incredible violence. In Deuteronomy 20:16-18 in the conquest of the Canaanites, who owned the area we now call Israel before they were conquered, God ordered the Israelites to 'not leave alive anything that breathes... completely destroy them ...' There are numerous other examples in the time before Jesus. After he arrived things changed only a little. The Book of Revelation is full of the imagery of war. For example, in 6:8 it says that 'And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.'

Then when we look at the Popes advocating the Crusades or the Inquisition, others advocating burning people at the stake for non-Christian actions, we see that religious terrorism is not new to the world"



--"One of the worst Christian atrocities, in my mind, was the conviction of William Tyndale for heresy because he translated the Bible into English. For this he was strangled then burned at the stake by those who believed that only the clergy should interpret the Bible to the masses."

Terrorism is immoral from a God-based viewpoint



—"We come back to the Golden Rule. The Bible states in Matthew 7:12 that Jesus said 'Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.'

"The Buddha said "Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.' Similarly the gilded guide found in every religion makes terrorism an abomination to all believers."

Terrorism is moral from a society-based viewpoint



—"While much of recent terrorism has been God based, at least theoretically, in the middle of the 20th century it was society based: Marxism-Leninism, Naziism, the Khmer Rouge, and the problems in Sri Lanka. Northern Ireland's Catholic versus Protestant violence was more about the civil denial of rights to the Catholics, but its violence played out as religious. But it was solved civilly by including the warring factions in a government in a country wearied of internal war. So it took the terrorism to bring about minority rights.

"I guess, Wreck, that those suicide bombers help to control the population. Luckily most of them will never reproduce. And the people they kill won't reproduce. So there are some positives for the planet!

Terrorism is immoral from a society-based viewpoint



—"It is enough to see the negative effects on the people of Iraq because of the terrorism of Saddam, Bush, bin Ladin, ISIS and the Sunni and Shia terrorists. If people are important in a society, and they are the society, terrorism certainly is a negative, at least in the short term.

"But I wonder if Hitler is not somewhat responsible for the recent peace in Europe and the cooperation of the countries that had warred for a thousand years. Was the terror of Mao responsible for the advances of China? I wonder.

REPRODUCTION

"A number of value questions arise from the area of reproduction, particularly for those who are for limiting it for self centered or for society based reasons and those who want no limitation or who want more children to be born for religious or society based reasons. Then there are questions about having sex when procreation is not desired, such as in pre-marital or extra-marital sex, or even post-marital sex. If you have a retiree who has gone through menopause and procreation is

not possible, is it moral to have sex? What about child custody cases. Does the mother or father have the primary right to the child? What about grandparents? What about abortion?



—“Let’s start with looking at the ebbing and flowing of the timeless tides of abortion beliefs and practices.

ABORTION

“We have some semantic problems. When people talk about killing unborn children in the first few weeks of pregnancy, should we use instead the biological and medical definitions in which we move from the single cell fertilized ovum called a zygote, which might be the object of abortion when using the ‘morning after’ pill. Is this an unborn child? It does have all the DNA of its parents but is only one or a few cells compared with a hundred trillion or so in an adult and probably five trillion in a newborn infant. The floating embryo should attach to the wall of the uterus within one to two weeks. After a month it is about the size of a pencil point. It then continues to grow and somewhere around eight weeks, as its organs begin to develop, it is called a fetus. At three months it only weighs about an ounce. It remains a fetus until it is born. Are these sizes such that we can call them unborn children? Are they really only potential children through part or all of the pregnancy?

“What is it that makes a one celled zygote equal to a 5 trillion cell infant? Or what is the difference between a human zygote with 46 chromosomes and a hare with 46 chromosomes? Is it only potential? If so, is it potential for living, for thinking, for communicating, for being positive influences on human society, for entering heaven? Certainly both may live. But a few humans will not have the ability to think or communicate as well as some hares. The human might contribute either more or less to society than the hare, the human might pollute more or become a criminal, while the hare might make a good meal or contribute a foot or two towards the good luck of some humans. And if some of the animal rights people are correct, they might both find their way to heaven.

“Is the zygote fully possessing of all human rights, including the right to vote. And if it can’t read should its parents be allowed to record his vote? Should it be jailed if has absorbed some heroin from its addicted mother? Should this crime be recorded on its criminal record? If it doesn’t have any rights, when does it gain them? Does it only have a right to life? And if so why don’t all adults have that right, like soldiers drafted into the army, doctors who perform abortions or use animals in research, or death row prisoners?

“If it has the right to life, does it have the right to the best intrauterine life possible? What if its mother or father smokes? What if its mother is malnourished? What if its mother is a drug addict? Does it have the right to the best childhood possible, with adequate food, education, emotional warmth and love?

“Is the life of the zygote more important than the life or the happiness of the woman whose womb harbors it? Is there a gradation of rights that mature as we age, such as education at 5 or 6 and voting at 18? There are so many questions about the rights of this cell which is invisible to the human eye.”



—“What is the difference between being a person and being a potential person? I hear people say that life begins at conception. Is it a human life or a potential human life? What if God decides to start a miscarriage? Is God guilty of murder? If it’s not a human life yet, they it obviously would not be a murder. Is it a person in the Biblical sense, or are the Jews right that human life starts at birth?”



—“We must define what a person is. Is it a body? A mind? Is it spiritual, being in the image of God? To be a person is it required to reach a certain intellectual or moral level. Are chimps or dolphins persons? What if they are more intelligent or more moral than some people? If a chimpanzee is more intelligent than some child or adult do we drop the lower achieving homo sapiens from our species or do we widen our definition of ‘person’ to include some of the genus of mammals into personhood?”



—“But Wanda you haven’t considered the soul. I believe that even the single celled zygote has a full soul, so killing its body would be murder.”



—“I can’t argue with you father, I’ve never weighed a soul. I’ve never even seen one. And you know I don’t believe that there is such a thing. But even so, abortion is always a last resort. It is sometimes found to be moral from a self centered or a society based assumption. It is often believed to be immoral from a God-based assumption. The major questions are: when does life start and what is the value of a human life or a potential human life. Let’s look at the positions people take depending on their different basic assumptions.

Abortion is moral from a self-centered viewpoint

“The battle cry of the self centered proponents is that women have the right to choose. Poor unmarried women, and even married women, generally prefer an abortion to having to devote twenty years or more of caring for a ‘love child’. The financial, economic and emotional needs of the child generally fall on the mother—and when abortion is available it is usually her choice. Even in Catholic Latin American countries the poor generally opt for pregnancy termination through pills, coat hangers or surgical inducement. Illegal clinics may charge the poor women high fees for abortions. But it is worth the cost for most, if they can find the money. Pills of many sorts can upset the body’s metabolism enough to cause a miscarriage, so they tend to be the method used when the self interested pregnant woman confronts a religious anti-abortion rule.

“I’ve heard that there are twice as many abortions in Russia as there are live births, about three million abortions per year. It seems that the Russian women think that the ‘pill’ may give them cancer so they opt for the abortion.(103) A friend of mine said she knew a woman who had had ten abortions and didn’t fear having more.”



—“What if the potential child could choose and realized that it would be unwanted, and possibly severely abused?”



“That of course is a moot point, or maybe a mute point, since the embryo has neither voice nor clairvoyance. But we certainly might assume that it would not have the loving care of a child who was wanted.”



—In the U.S. most of the abortions are performed on women over 25 and 60% already have children. Most of these said that they wanted to give their children the best possible life and another child would take from her existing children. The majority are white, and as you might

expect, more than 4 out of 5 are unmarried. I don't know if more teenagers would or should have abortions to save their children from being raised by immature mothers.

It seems strange that mothers with children aren't more adept at using contraception.

“While only a little more than a third of the American abortions are blacks, since about 12% of Americans are African Americans, it would give an abortion rate of nearly three times that of the whites. However since 75% of Americans are white and half of abortions are to whites, this also raises the percentage of abortions to whites.

“Since the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision in 1973 there have been about 50 million abortions in the U.S. and about 30% of women have had them.

Abortion is immoral from a self centered point of view

“Now on the other side of the issue. I might later regret not having the child. Perhaps as I grow older might I wish that I had someone related to me to talk to and to love. In that case my abortion would not have been moral from my self centered point of view. So the abortion might have had value for me when I was younger, but not have value for me today.”



—“But you don't have to have a blood relative to have a companion. In fact I would guess that having a longtime friend might be more of a companion than a person many years younger who might well have a life of her own to create.”

Abortion is moral from a God-based viewpoint



—“Western religions have never been for abortion as a moral ideal, but often they have not been against it. So let us look at abortion as not necessarily being evil. The major questions for monotheism relative to abortion are: Do we have a soul? And if so, when does the soul enter the body? Then if the pregnancy is terminated naturally, by a miscarriage, or through an induced abortion where does the soul go?

“Then we should understand the historical path of our position. We often think that history backs up our quest for justice. But often history is quite different from what we imagine. A confident preacher may shout his demands for action, which he thinks are eternal truths, while ignorant of the oceans of opinions from the past whose truths he expects to evaporate with his fiery oratory. I think we will find that the history of religious thought has not been as concrete as some may want to believe.”



—“Ray you have to admit that your major church father, Thomas Aquinas believed, with his hero Aristotle, that boy babies got their souls forty days after conception and girl babies got theirs ninety days after conception.(104) And if that is true then aborting a male before 40 days or a female before 90 days would not be killing a person. So it wouldn't be an abortion.”



—“Lee do you mean that you buy into that long dead idea? First let's clarify his ideas before we knock them down. It's true that Aquinas did not believe that the soul was transmitted in the semen but was created by God.(105) He seemed to buy into Aristotle's idea that there are three souls, the nutritive, the sensitive and the intellectual. The nutritive, or vegetative, soul is there from the beginning (106) but the intellectual soul is created by God at the end of human generation, those are the forty and ninety day periods. After that the two previous souls became one with the

intellectual soul so that only a single soul exists. But although he was a highly influential church father his views were never accepted as church dogma for eternity like the truths of the resurrection of Jesus or the belief in the Holy Trinity. But the fact is that from the earliest days most Christian writers have been against abortion. It was murder to kill a woman with child.”



—“But that idea of being ‘with child’ does not have to be from conception. We could use that forty or ninety day period or a more modern medical definition to determine when the fertilized ovum became a potential child. In fact it is never a child before it is born?”



—“The point is, Lee, that the Pope has taught that the soul is infused into the fertilized cell at conception.”



—“So is he speaking ex cathedra when he says that?”



—“Whoa. That’s a question I can’t answer. Not every opinion of a pope is spoken ex cathedra, ‘from the chair’ it means in Latin. In fact there are a number of questions about which teachings are ‘from the chair.’ Some truths are the results of church councils, some are the considered opinions of a pope. These ideas we assume are those coming directly from God.”



--“Wanda, I would guess that most of the thinking against abortion would come from religions.”



—“True commander. There seem to be a couple of major reasons. One is that religions tend to protect the status quo of society and of their traditions. The major question from a monotheistic religious position is whether or not there is a soul in the embryo or the fetus when it is aborted. Still, highly respected religious leaders, including two Nobel laureates, have opened the door to admit abortion in some circumstances. But they both are obviously using self-centered and society-based reasons for their decisions. Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu supported the South African constitutional provision legalizing abortion. And the Dalai Lama, while generally opposed to abortion, said that, ‘I think abortion should be approved or disapproved according to the circumstances.’

“Indeed, in mainline Christianity, fairly widespread support exists for population stabilization and for family planning and even abortion, as necessary, to save the planet. For many Christians it is not a women’s-rights issue, but an overpopulation issue. And nebulous ideas such as questions of whether a soul is made in the image of God are left to theologians who can add such questions to the other enduring questions of theology, like how many angels can dance on the head of a pin.”



---“Since about a quarter of all human fertilizations end in natural miscarriages, isn’t God the major cause of abortions?”

“It seems that whenever people get together differences of opinion are the order of the day. Whether they are aligned at the roulette table choosing red or black, at the coffee machine choosing sugar or cream, betting on the home team or the visitors, or in the church or synagogue debating when the homo sapiens gets a soul. It seems that the farther the issue is from empirical verification the louder and more certain become the guessers.”



-- “In the area of ensoulment it is not so much Jews versus Christians but rather conservatives versus liberals. Without scientific certainty or clear passages from scripture we can find believers of all hues arguing about when the souls were created—some believe it was eons before conception, or that the soul arrived with the sperm, or that God created it at the instant the sperm wiggled into the ovum, or that it was created a number of days after conception, or that it appeared upon birth, or even that it entered the body some time after birth, as seemed to have happened to Adam and Eve. Then there is the question as to whether we even have souls.

“Jacques Maritain, the eminent Catholic philosopher, said many years ago that ‘To admit that the human fetus receives the intellectual soul from the moment of its conception, when matter is in no way ready for it, sounds to me like a philosophical absurdity. It is as absurd to call a fertilized ovum a baby.’ Of course Jacques was not the Pope!

“If we insist on discussing scriptural citings, we again see the futility of appealing to the authority of religion and all the problems that this involves. It is clear that outside philosophical speculation has played a profound role in interpreting what the phrase ‘the image of God’ means. We might as well rely on our own analysis for defining what is a person.

“Various points during fetal development have been suggested as significant stages at which simple biology gives way to full personhood. The U.S. Supreme Court decision of 1973 chose viability. Today’s conservative Christians and Jews insist that it is the moment of conception. Historical Christianity chose animation in the womb, while historical Judaism opted for ensoulment at birth. And the more liberal people in these religions may even wonder if the soul is important. Let us look at each of these concepts for their philosophical merit.

“It is the rule, rather than the exception, that people believe what their priests, ministers, rabbis, imams or other spiritual advisors say today is the path that their religion has always followed. Gather a group of learned people from any sect and you have a good chance that their opinions on abortion or other moral questions will vary considerably. And if you were able to meet a large group of past prelates in your time machine, the variation would be even greater. The social and economic needs pressing on individuals and societies can influence the way religions are interpreted and followed. Just look at the way that Catholic Popes have shifted from time to time relative to when the body’s physical cells were ensouled.

“Some of your Catholic theologians believed that abortion, at least before the fetus quickened, was not murder. In the eighth century in England and Ireland an abortion carried a much lighter sentence than did murder or other sins. Oral sex carried a seven year penance while abortion was only four months. And in the late 16th century Pope Gregory XIV wrote that the penalty for abortion before ensoulment shouldn’t be any more than civil law called for. And civil law was not harsh at that time. Some thought abortion was OK to save the mother. From the 14th to the 18th century a number of theologians and saints had the same idea. John of Naples, Tomas Sanchez and Alphonsus Liguri are examples. The Vatican, in the past, has allowed abortion if there was cancer in the uterus or if there was an ectopic pregnancy with the embryo attached to a fallopian tube rather than the uterine wall. Some thought it OK if the fetus had not quickened. Some, such as Augustine, Popes Pius the 9th and the 11th and John Paul II were among these.

“But let’s come back to the ‘image of God’ idea. When Genesis tells us that God made man in his image. Does that mean that God has two arms and two legs? Or if God is only spirit, is it the spirit in humans that makes them in the image of God? Or does the newly discovered Assyrian inscription at Tell-Fekheriyeh indicate that it was man’s dominion over the animals, as God has

dominion over the earth, that makes man in the image, or in the shadow of God. Does the Bible verse give humans a political right rather than a spiritual kinship? Western religious theorists however have opted to give themselves the highest spiritual essence.

“In spite of adults being made in the image of God, Jewish tradition has not given that status to a fetus. Their tradition even required abortion to save the life of the mother. This idea of the Jews was similar to that of the Romans and Stoics, that the fetus was a part of the mother, not an independent self. Under Judaism abortion was certainly not desirable but it was not murder. But they were more restrictive than other religions that were around 2000 years ago

“The Koran, as the Bible, is not clear on the morality of abortion if the father or mother wants it. The Koran is clear that if you want to keep the embryo or fetus you should. But if there is a danger to the mother, abortion is acceptable because the adult woman is more important than the embryo. Killing children, however, is certainly wrong according to Surahs 6:151 and 17:31.

“Islam has traditionally regarded ‘personhood’ as something acquired prior to birth, although Muslims have not always agreed as to when that occurs. Several medieval Muslim authorities mentioned “ensoulment” occurring after 120 days of gestation, or about four months into a pregnancy. This probably relates to the ‘quickening’ or life that some mothers may experience about that time. Some believed that abortion was murder after this time. Some thought that any abortion was murder.

“As with other religions, the Hindus have proponents on both sides of the issue. Since some believe that the newly conceived zygote has already received its soul from someone who has recently died, based on their belief in reincarnation, an abortion at any time would be murder. But others believed that the new soul didn’t arrive for three to five months after conception.

“Since the Scriptures are silent in defining when one becomes a person, it has been left to the theologians to debate with fury when that invisible soul entered the unseen embryo or fetus. Meanwhile the people did what made economic sense to them. The traditional patriarchal power of the Romans survived in Medieval England and allowed a father to kill any child who had not yet tasted food. Infanticide was rife when children were economic anchors. The infinitesimal worth of the infant allowed him to be left in the forest, ignored, or sold into slavery by his Christian Catholic parents.

“Abortion is not specifically against the 10 commandments. But by inference it might be murder. It is not specifically against the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount. And we might ask why did God allow the technology to perform abortions if He doesn’t want them?

Abortion is immoral from a God-based point of view

“The belief that abortion is always or usually unethical generally is based on the time the soul enters the body. There is nowhere near universal agreement on when it happens. But before we discuss when it might happen, we should probably define what it is. And here we have more disagreement. Often in the Bible soul seems to mean mind, as was the common Greek perception. And remember, the early Christian scriptures were generally written in Greek. But now it is also commonly understood to mean that spiritual part of a person that is in the Image of God. Aristotle said it was the ‘whatness’ of something, the essential nature of it. He said we had four different souls or four levels of soul.(107) The most primitive level of soul is the nutritive, it involves nutrition and reproduction. Both plants and animals may have this kind of soul. The next level of soul, is sensory. Most animals have this. The next level is locomotion and the highest level is intellectual.(108) St. Thomas Aquinas, of all people, said that the soul is not the substance of God. ‘To say that the soul is of the Divine substance involves a manifest improbability. . . and therefore it is evidently false that the soul is of the substance of God’(109) But whatever it is, for the religions of the Mid-East it is the soul that creates the great canyon between humans and other animals”



—“Wanda, theologians are interesting to read, but Catholic teaching should not be based on theologians unless the ideas of these theologians has been confirmed by the Church. Pius IX’s declaration in 1869 making abortion a capital crime was merely the formal act verifying the opinions of many about the sin of abortion throughout Church history. It was added to our Canon law in 1917. Now Pope Benedict XVI has affirmed that stand. In 2006 he reaffirmed Catholic teaching that life begins at the moment of conception, saying embryos are ‘sacred and inviolable’ even before they become implanted in a mother’s uterus. He also said that embryos have rights from conception on.”



—“It seems that the Catholic position on ensoulment comes from a combination of Biblical and papal interpretations.

“Since the soul was present in the first cell, when the sperm met the ovum, is the soul in every body cell? If so when a surgeon removes an organ, is he murdering? Is it the same as abortion?”



—“Hadn’t thought of that. My appendix is probably in Hell.

“But as you said, when the soul enters the embryo, the fetus or the infant is critical for many people’s idea of the morality of abortion. I know that the Catholic Church holds that in vitro fertilization is immoral, but the Pope did not make a distinction between conception inside or outside of the fallopian tubes or the uterus. Is the soul infused in the fertilized ovum in the test tube or Petri dish?”

“Another question, since about half of fertilized ova never attach to the uterine walls do they also have souls? What about spontaneous miscarriages? Is it fair that the soul of a miscarried embryo gets to go to heaven without ever having to prove itself worthy by living on the earth and doing good works, while the rest of us are trying to love our neighbors as ourselves?”

“And since twins occur up to twenty days after conception do you start with two souls at conception or is a new one added when the embryo splits? If a person were cloned when would the soul be added, or would it be split? Or would the new body not have a soul because every DNA sample gets only one soul.

“So now are we to believe that Catholics get their souls at the instant of conception. Protestants may get theirs any time from conception to birth. Muslim embryos get theirs sometime between 6 days and four months. Jewish children get theirs when they are born. So abortions could be moral or immoral depending on a lot of beliefs. But can we find a fact here? Anywhere? I doubt that god, if there is a God, will adjust His soul making to the varying opinions of His believers!

“The Pope says the fertilized ovum already has a soul. If this is true we would assume that any spontaneous abortion or miscarriage should be welcomed because the zygote’s or embryo’s soul goes to heaven. But if it is a Catholic zygote’s soul it has had several destinations because while it hadn’t had a chance to sin yet, it carried the original sin of Adam, because he ate the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge. From the time of St. Augustine, about 400 AD, the soul went to hell. After Aquinas, 800 years later, it went to limbo. Limbo was on the border of either heaven or hell, depending on which theologian you read. Now with Pope Benedict XVI’s disbelief in limbo we’re not sure where it goes. Poor Catholic zygote!

“Is it possible that we don’t get souls until we are adults? Adam and Eve were created as adults in the image of God. Are many Jews right in believing that the child doesn’t get a soul until it is born? Were Aristotle and Aquinas right in believing that the fetus got its soul on ‘quickening’ between the second and third months? Or is there even such a thing as soul?”



—“Lee you make things so complicated. Obviously I can’t comment on all your preposterous ideas. I don’t have the knowledge or the inspiration of the Pope. But you lawyers are in the same boat. Until the U.S. Supreme Court rules on an issue the judges don’t have the final answer. When issues are complicated there must be a final authority to put the issue to rest.

“But from my point of view according to current church law, excommunication for abortion is *latae sententiae*, meaning that it is automatic and does not require an action or proclamation by a church official. This type of excommunication is reserved for acts deemed so serious that no verdict or judgment is required. Even so, many women who have had abortions continue to practice Catholicism, and many parishes take pains to embrace and reintegrate them into church life.”



---“At any rate the embryo’s soul will be in good company with other unbaptized souls such as those of Abraham, Moses, Aristotle and Socrates. Jesus’s mother Mary might also have been among them except that she was born without Original Sin, her Immaculate Conception.



--“It seems that the Catholic view of immediate ensoulment has been influenced by the belief that Jesus’s mother Mary, was conceived immaculately. The idea had its roots in Christian writings at least as early as the fourth century. It was not until 1854 that Pius IX made it an official teaching of the Catholic Church. Obviously if her soul was conceived without sin aren’t all humans conceived with a soul intact? Is that why in 1869 he declared abortion to be murder?

“So we have some questions. If God did put Adam’s original sin into every soul, when was it put there? Aquinas wrote that it was several weeks after conception. But then we have the problem of when conception occurred. Was it the instant that the sperm entered the ovum? Was it when the fertilized sperm attached to the uterus? Since most fertilized ova do not attach but flow out of the uterus, if they have souls, where do they go? That makes the Jewish position, that there is no soul until birth, a bit more biologically believable.

“So let’s look at these areas in a bit more depth.”



—“Before getting into the Immaculate Conception you should know something about Original Sin.

“The Jews didn’t have the idea of original sin. The idea that Adam ‘fell’ seemed to have developed after the exodus from Egypt. But it was Paul who developed the idea in Romans 5:12.. ‘Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.’ The seven verses later he wrote, ‘For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners.’ And again in First Corinthians 15:22 he wrote, ‘For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.’ These passages can be interpreted in two ways. One is that when Adam ate the forbidden fruit all of his progeny would then be subject to sinning in some ways and to dying because Adam was no longer immortal. Or you could assume the idea that Paul may have considered, that all infants were inflicted with a sin not of their own making. Then of course they could take that first sin as a starting point and continue sinning throughout their lives. In either case the death of Jesus allowed all people everlasting life with God, if they so chose.”



—“Is it true that Paul meant that all people are sinners, and that their propensity to sin came from the first human, Adam, when he ate the forbidden fruit. Some have argued that Paul meant that that first sin was inflicted by God on all humans. Some see this as unjust, would a just God do this?”

“Paul then popularized the idea that Jesus died to save all of the sinners since Adam. But his death and his sacrifice for the sins of humankind did not apparently wipe out any original sin that may have existed. Before the death of Jesus, were all people excluded from heaven? Were Moses, David and Solomon excluded from heaven? Did Jesus merely show that all people could sacrifice for the Creator and therefore gain heaven?”

“There are some other questions. Was Jesus also conceived without sin? If so was he born totally God and not at all human?”



—“Saint Augustine, more than 1500 years ago, was the first theologian to teach that we are all born in a state of sin. The basis of his belief is from the Bible in Genesis 3 verses 17 through 19, where Adam is described as having disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge. So we have the first, or the ‘original’ sin.”



—“The Old Testament doesn’t seem to back up the idea of original sin. Some people were seen by God as good. And according to the prophets, people were responsible for their own sins, the son could not inherit a sin from his father. Here are some Biblical quotes I brought along that might make us question the idea of original sin. ‘The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin.’ This was from Deuteronomy 24:16. And similarly, ‘But the children of the murderers he slew not: according unto that which is written in the book of the law of Moses, wherein the LORD commanded, saying, the fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor the children be put to death for the fathers; but every man shall be put to death for his own sin.’ This was in Second Kings 14:6. Ezekiel 18:20 echoes this idea. ‘The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.’ Then he goes on to say in 33:20, ‘Yet ye say, the way of the Lord is not equal. O ye house of Israel, I will judge you every one after his ways.’ Then in Jeremiah, 31: 29 and 30, ‘In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children’s teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge.’”



--“But Catholics claim there can be no way to escape that original sin except by believing in Jesus. Paul wrote to the Romans in Chapter 3, verse 10, ‘As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one.’”



—“Is it possible that Paul hadn’t read the Old Testament?”



—“Not all Christians accept the idea of original sin. The Orthodox Christians have never believed that guilt from original sin existed. By the time Augustine’s ideas were translated into Greek in the 14th century the Great Schism had already occurred and the Eastern Orthodox Christians were on their merry way without the hypothesized inheritance from Adam.”



—”Did God trick Adam into eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge—knowing through His omniscience, that Adam would eat the fruit? Then we would all be burdened by that original sin.”



—“Not everyone carries the sin. Mary, the Blessed Virgin, was born without original sin. This was her immaculate conception.

“Pius IX, the longest reigning pope, had a great devotion to the Virgin Mary. In 1854 he proclaimed that her conception was immaculate, she was born without original sin. Two years later he made it the doctrine of the Church. But it wasn’t until 1870 that he decided that the Pope was infallible in matters of the church.”



—“Might it not be questioned as to whether your dogma of the immaculate conception is infallibly proclaimed since it was declared 16 years before the Pope decided that what he said was infallible. Was it retroactive infallibility for him or for all popes?”



—“There are Biblical statements in Matthew 18: 18 to 20, that allow for such infallibility, even if the Pope hadn’t proclaimed it. ‘Amen I say to you, whatsoever you shall bind upon earth, shall be bound also in heaven: and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in heaven.’ ‘Again I say to you, that if two of you shall consent upon earth, concerning anything whatsoever they shall ask, it shall be done to them by my Father who is in heaven.’ And again, ‘For where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.’ So if two members can have Christ among them and their actions will be accepted in heaven, how much stronger is it that St. Peter’s spiritual descendent can determine ideas that will be affirmed in heaven?

“If sin exists in the soul, and if human beings do not have souls in the first instant of their conception, they could not have sin then, either. That being the case, no one would have sin in the first instant of his conception, and the doctrine of Mary’s Immaculate Conception” would be meaningless, since everyone would have an “immaculate conception.” But since ‘conception’ is the key, we must all have souls at that instant when the sperm enters the ovum.”



—“Ray, according to Matthew, couldn’t any two Christians get together and decide things, like the morality of abortion or suicide? Matthew doesn’t say that it has to be the Bishop of Rome that decides everything. And how do you think that Pope Pius knew about conception in 1854? I can understand that he probably knew that human sperm existed, because that had been discovered nearly 200 years earlier. But I wonder if he knew about the existence of the ovum which wasn’t discovered until 1827 in Prussia. And the little publicized discovery of Dr. Martin

Berry of 1843 that conception occurs when the sperm meets the ovum. That was not a well known fact.”



—“The Pope was probably aware of conception. He certainly knew that in the early 1780s Lazzaro Spallanzani, an Italian priest, who was also a scientist, did the first artificial insemination techniques on dogs and produced three puppies. So I would guess he had an idea of conception. And he may have known that in 1785 John Hunter did the first artificial insemination on a human and was successful.



—“Ya, but in those days they thought that it was all done by the man. He put some little fellas into the woman and they just grew.”



-- “Today Pope Benedict XVI’s opinion is the most important for Catholics. He urges the faithful to develop a new respect for life even when it is “sick or damaged.” He calls for the need to protect all human life and cites the late Pope John Paul II, who delivered the most forceful condemnation of abortion, artificial contraception, euthanasia and experimentation on human embryos. The description of ‘sick or damaged’ life in the church’s teaching refers to situations in which life is in particular need of being defended, including deformed fetuses the severely disabled, terminally ill patients or people in vegetative states. Benedict said people today wrongly think that modern man is the master of life when he is only the custodian. Life depends on God and without God, life disappears, he believes.”

“Evangelicals offer counter-arguments to liberal Christian views by appealing to various Biblical passages. Two in particular appear to imply not only ensoulment in the womb, but even before conception. In Jeremiah 1:5 we read ‘Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you.’ And in Psalms 139: 15 and 16 it says ‘Thou knowest me right well; my frame was not hidden from thee when I was being made in secret, intricately wrought in the depths of the earth. Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance; in thy book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me.’

“Mormons, too, believe in the pre-existence of souls. Consequently more bodies need to be born to house those souls that God had already created.”



—“But with so many people being born in poverty or in unhappy homes, what if they curse God because of their plight. Doesn’t taking the Lord’s name in vain send you to the devil for all eternity? Ray, I don’t want to sound like I’m beating a dead zygote here but is it really so important to have so many souls born?”



—“The more souls that can enjoy union with our Creator, the better for all. But they don’t all have to be born by a week from Tuesday. With the obvious problems facing the Earth I think we can slow down the births. But we need to do it through Church approved abstinence.”



--“Ray I guess our major problem here is why we have sex. As a celibate priest you probably have joys much greater than orgasms. But for those of us living on a more animal plane, sex can be more than for procreation. In a power shortage, with no TV, sex is often a better alternative for us than praying. So if our intention of a mere frolic on the feathers is complicated by a pregnancy, many of us both religious and non-religious, don’t want the pitter-patter of little feet around the conjugal bed. I have to take issue with your St. Augustine who not only was against abortion but also against treating your wife with lust.(110) My wife was into lust! That’s probably one reason that our relationship was unparalleled.”

Abortion is moral from a society viewpoint



--“There are a couple of major reasons for society to allow or even encourage abortions. One is to be able to limit populations that are overcrowded. Another is to protect children from being born into homes that don’t want them. Another is to adhere to the wishes of girls and women who do not want to raise a child at that time. This is sometimes covered under the right to privacy, for a woman to make private and personal decisions about her own life. In opposition to these concerns are the questions of whether society needs more people or whether the potential person has rights superior to those of an existing person.

“The idea of human life or personhood under English law ebbed and flowed from Aristotle’s idea of quickening to the idea that humanness occurred only with birth, and as we just mentioned, it even included the rights of the father to kill his newborn child. Modern English law allows abortion. The UK had legalized abortion for fetuses up to 24 weeks in 1967. In France abortion moved from being a capital crime, with its last execution in 1942, to a maternal right in 1975. The number of abortions in France each year is nearly 150,000.

“In the U.S. most people support the idea of abortion. Most want some restrictions on it, however. The most common reason seems to be that it is up to the woman to decide. Certainly a mother who didn’t want the baby is more likely to be an unloving parent. At six to seven months some countries shift the concern from the mother to the fetus, which is likely to have a good chance to survive.”



--- “The 1973 Roe versus Wade U.S. Supreme Court decision found that the Texas anti-abortion law was unconstitutional. The court thoroughly scrutinized the religious and secular history of abortion from the time of the ancient Greeks. It also found that the opinions and laws relative to abortion had become more restrictive in America as the country matured. It disagreed with this regression. In its decision it also ruled that under the U.S. Constitution the word ‘person’ does not include the unborn.

“This decision has been credited with the drop in the national crime rates—about a 40% drop. This was in spite of a drop in the economy. By contrast, the 1960s had both a thriving economy and a thriving crime rate. (111)

“In spite of the Supreme Court decision, in 1976, the U.S. Congress prohibited Medicaid funding of abortions for poor women, except in cases of rape, incest, or threat to the mother’s life. That law has been upheld by the Supreme Court. So the Congress seems intent on increasing the number of children living in poverty. It is probably the best source for raising and recruiting eventual soldiers.”

“Under the evangelical right in the U.S. during the Bush administration, federal regulations were passed to define pregnancy as the period of time from implantation until delivery. This was

apparently an attempt to somehow make abortions more difficult to obtain, possibly by outlawing the ‘morning after pill.’ But the legislators, not being biologists, may not have realized that implantation would take several days so the ‘morning after pill’ would not be an aborting agent. And at least half of fertilized ova never do implant.

“Then there are others who know God’s wishes and wish to change the Constitution to outlaw abortions or at least to outlaw late term abortions. These, however are less than 1% of all U.S. abortions. About 91% of abortions are performed in the first trimester. Some antagonists have complained that a late term abortion would feel pain. If this is true, this Constitutional non-person’s pain should probably be akin to the pain of other non-persons, such as cows and fish, when they feel pain. If pain is to be Constitutionally disallowed to non-persons, what should be the boundaries of those beings being shielded from pain? Should it include chickens, boxers, football players, worms and soldiers? I understand that neurologically a fetus will probably have to be 6 to 7 ½ months old before the synapses in the brain are sufficiently integrated to be able to register pain.

“We have a problem when defining when life starts since death would be when that spark was no longer there. If life starts with a single cell, is death when all the cells have disappeared, perhaps in a million years. If life starts when the fetus first moves its muscles, is death when the body can no longer move? If life starts when the first breath is taken, is it death when one can no longer breathe on one’s own?”



—“It seems to me that the religious idea of the fetus being alive or near alive in the last three months has often given the fetus rights of survival that are superior to the rights of the mother to terminate the pregnancy.”



--“That’s often true. It seems that even when we have the theoretical separation between church and state, the church’s supposed beliefs may remain with the judges and legislators. Even atheists often carry religious assumptions with them from childhood or from the community. But fetuses have not always been so protected. Historically late term fetuses or even infants have not escaped the possibility that they won’t see tomorrow. Subsistence economies often can’t provide for every product of passion that pops into their financially limited world. Other societies see no need to nurture those infants who are unlikely to strongly wield a scythe or a sword. When the physical is more important than the spiritual, any manner of eugenic device may be allowed or encouraged.

“Certainly throughout the world there are millions of women and men who don’t want to be parents. But in attempting abortion they often have to rely on unsafe methods, either because they don’t have the money to afford the procedure or the government does not allow it.

“In South-central and Southeast Asia, the unsafe abortion rate is about 20 per 1,000 women of reproductive age. A lack of contraceptives or the unavailability of abortion facilities in rural areas are major factors contributing to the need for abortions even if they are unsafe.

“An estimated 80 million women in the world have unintended or unwanted pregnancies each year. Of those, 45 million end in abortion. The World Health Organization says that there are 19 million unsafe abortions a year and that 68,000 women die from them.

“In the U.S. there were 854,000 legal abortions performed last year. This is down about 40% from ten years ago. And remember that a legal abortion is ten times less likely to cause a woman’s death than if she undergoes childbirth.

“Internationally we have some major pronouncements such as the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. These are often used in

courts by women to counter national or state laws that forbid abortions. Judges can therefore sometimes use these international statements of rights to overcome religiously inspired national laws. Columbia's high court made such a ruling. These same international statements of rights that may protect women have not been found to protect fetuses or even newly born infants.

"Societies are often torn between what they see as a need for more children against the democratic right of a woman to control her own body and to decide if she wants to be a mother. Along this line, Norway which wants more children, has enacted laws to allow free abortion pills to those over age 16."

Abortion is immoral from a societal viewpoint



--"On the other side of the coin, a major reason for a society not allowing abortion is when the society needs more workers, particularly if it can't bring in temporary workers. The post-World War II Soviet Union was such a case. The Soviet Union had lost 20 million men from World War I, its civil war and World War II.

"Since people bring their religious beliefs with them into their societies, religion plays a major part in many societal decisions, even though there are often laws separating church and state in many countries. The U.S. has such a legal separation, Saudi Arabia does not. Where there is a legal separation of church and state it would be preferable for opponents of abortion to argue their case without the religious assumptions of soul, and to argue more from the needs of society for more people."



---"Religious beliefs can often interfere with the legal rights granted by the society. For example, the religious beliefs of a pharmacist may require her to refuse to fill prescriptions that might abort a fertilized ovum. A Texas pharmacist refused to give such a drug to a rape victim. So while the pharmacist's license is state issued and there should be a separation of church and state, the individual pharmacist's wishes can contravene the wishes of the person who wants to fill a prescription for a pre- or post intercourse contraceptives, like condoms or the 'morning after' pill.

"Over fifty years ago the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists defined conception as the "implantation of a fertilized ovum." This is the official legal definition in the U.S. Is it at this point that we grant humanhood? We have the democratic idea of the worth of every human being. It has eliminated capital punishment in many countries and criminalized infanticide. The question then is how far back do we push humanhood? To the voting age, to school age, to birth, to conception.

"In the United States, for evangelicals and many other conservatives, preventing abortions ranks above all other social issues. They therefore have used a number of approaches to limit abortions. Some states have added laws to require doctors to tell women that the fetus will feel pain during the procedure. Again we have legislators, who are not neuroscientists, stating as fact a belief which is not true. Medical researchers are not certain if and when pain may occur, but legislators are.

"It is said that soldiers feel pain when shot, but that doesn't stop religious people from going to war. Just how much pain might a fetus feel, if it does feel pain. And for how long does that pain last. And compared to the pain it might well feel if brought up in a situation where it was not loved and cared for—which is the greater and more long standing pain?

"We might even ask if all pain is bad. If my wife pinches me on the cheek to show she loves me. Is that bad? What about a ball carrier being tackled? What about doing sit ups until your abdominal muscles are burning? What about your stomach growing when you'r hungry? Is there good pain, natural pain and bad pain? How do we define it? Where do we draw the line?"



---“Are any legislators passing laws that require the president or the military officers to tell recruits or draftees that they might feel pain during their training or on the battlefield? Is it required of restaurant owners to warn their patrons that they might get food poisoning and be sick? This is to say nothing of your visit to the dentist!!”



--“They are not going far enough. They need to be told by the butcher that chickens and cows experience pain when they are killed. And sport coaches should tell their athletes that they may feel excruciating pain when running or swimming in a race, when tackling or being tackled in football, or when being elbowed in basketball. And parents who spank their children should advise the child that it hurts them more than it hurts the kid. And what about being warned about psychological pain by tax collectors, judges or women who refuse to date you!”



--“It is just another example of not being consistent in our thinking. This is particularly true for legislators who believe that they need to scratch the itch of the voter rather than to develop laws that are intelligent and consistent.”



—“The South Dakota legislature passed an anti-abortion law that bans all abortions except to save a woman’s life. Even rape and incest victims were not allowed abortions. South Dakota’s rape incidence has increased 1000% in forty years and is one of the highest rates in the country, about two and a half times greater than New York’s. The people, however, voted down the law. It was a question of a republican form of government, with the legislature and governor passing the law, and the direct democratic vote eliminating it. Are the people really smarter than their lawmakers? Or are they just on different tracks, with lawmakers doing what they think will get them votes and the people voting for more freedom and fewer stupid government spending escapades? But then the legislature attempted to pass a similar law again. So much for democracy and the will of the people!

“More recently the U.S. Congress, in ‘The Unborn Victims of Violence Act of 2004’ (112) made it criminal to harm an ‘unborn child’. So if an assailant kills the mother, and the fetus dies, it is a double murder. If he harms the mother but kills the fetus it is a single murder. If a person causes death, pain, disfigurement, illness, or any other injury no matter how temporary (113) it is covered by this act. However it specifically excludes injury due to legal abortion or to injuries caused by the mother, such as from smoking, drinking or other drug use. So mothers can harm their babies but no one else can.

“How is it that the embryo or fetus has no protective rights in an abortion or when its mother causes it damage by smoking or drinking, but has such rights if another party causes an injury. And how does it get any rights at all since the Supreme Court has ruled that it is not a person under the Constitution? I guess it’s just another instance of our legislators being more psychological than logical. That phrase sure keeps popping into our analyses, doesn’t it?

“Then there was the Communist dictator of Romania, Nicolae Ceausescu. He made abortion illegal saying ‘Anyone who avoids having children is a deserter who avoids the laws of national continuity’ and declared that ‘the fetus is the property of the entire society.’ But in spite of his authoritarian legal pronouncements, the unwanted children once born were abandoned to the overflowing state orphanages. The neglect and cruelty there has been a major blot on European civilization.”

PRE-MARITAL SEX



---“Sex before marriage has sometimes been encouraged, sometimes discouraged and sometimes has become the essential act to start the marriage. Let’s look into this issue. It certainly was a major concern of your President George W. Bush.”



--- “First we have to define what you mean by sex. You probably mean only genital sexual intercourse. In recent years in the U.S. teenage genital sex has reduced. We don’t know whether that is because of a fear of AIDS, the president’s abstinence messages, an increase in oral sex, the ecumenical movement, a reaction against the freer sex of earlier years, a rise in women’s awareness of the importance of a career, or of the requirement for a greater relationship commitment? We also have another problem. Since so many people live together, and may or may not get married, Is their ‘living together sex’ in a stable relationship pre-marital sex or is it like being married?”

Pre-marital sex is moral from a self centered point of view

“Well, let me start with how it can be moral from a self-centered point of view. It’s fun. Orgasms are better than Big Macs. Most people today want sex as a part of a full relationship. I know that if I don’t have sex in a heterosexual relationship that relationship will generally be limited. There are those who place sex as one of four essential human needs, along with water, food and sleep.

Pre-marital sex is immoral from a self-centered viewpoint

“Pre-marital sex would not have value for me if I got a sexually transmitted disease. It would certainly be very low on my value scale if I got AIDS. But syphilis or genital herpes are no picnic either. Then I might get genital warts, gonorrhea or a number of other problems which I wouldn’t think would be a worthwhile tradeoff for a few seconds of ecstasy. What if I got pregnant and had to have an abortion. Or maybe I had the baby but that ended my chance for higher education and getting a better job. Or maybe the baby limited my chances for some potentially enriching relationships?”



--“Some think that the greatest gift a woman can give to her husband is her virginity. Might that also be true for men? But this doesn’t seem nearly as important today as it once was. It is assumed by many that being a virgin at marriage is always desired. It was a necessity in Biblical days and is still expected in some cultures. The fact is that as sex gets freer at the college level most do not think that virginity is such a gift. While it was in vogue in the 1950s, at this point in time virginity has moved down the list for most people, falling below educational achievement, physical fitness, pleasant personality traits, common interests and other such things that make for a more complete relationship. Today’s young people believe that there’s more to a marriage relationship than sex and parenthood.”



---“I’ve read in a government publication that teens who have pre-marital sex have higher suicide rates than those who do not.”



----“I read that too so I checked it out. Pre-marital sex is not listed as a cause for teen suicide. Drug use, depression and social relationship problems are the causes that researchers list. You can certainly guess that any of those factors might increase sexual activity just as they might cause overeating, inattentiveness at school or a number of other behaviors that are not the causes of suicide but rather the results of unhappiness in other areas.

“Some people think that sex should only be about having babies. Others think it is more about the physical pleasure of orgasms. Still others think that the physical closeness complements the emotional closeness in a relationship, whether the couple is married or not. It’s not just physical or parenthood. The big question is whether the sex might or did make my life less fulfilling.

“Our sex charged American teens seem to be having less sex now than in earlier days. So I guess they don’t see the value in it as much. And when they do nearly two-thirds use condoms. I would have to say that it’s the more intelligent of the teen population. I don’t know if it is the fear of disease, the realization that pregnancy can damage one’s aspirations for higher education and professional jobs, or whether it is partially the result of religious beliefs. Probably all are partially true.”(114)

Pre-marital sex is moral from a God based viewpoint



—“From a God-based point of view, pre-marital sex may not be the negative that people often believe. The Puritans in America allowed courting couples to sleep together at the girl’s house. However the sect was very strictly against adultery and homosexuality. And some religions do not consider a couple married until she is pregnant.

“Some people think that the Bible’s use of the word ‘fornication’ means pre-marital sex. But if it was correctly translated into Latin by St. Jerome the root word for fornication is ‘fornix’ which is the Latin name for ‘keystone’ which is the slanted stone that holds up a Roman arch. The word originally meant ‘prostitution’ because prostitutes sold there wares under the arches.

“In the Old Testament pre-marital sex is not explicitly forbidden unless the girl was under the protection of her father. Being a ‘used virgin’ could reduce her bride price so it would be like stealing money from her father.”

“Another thought, if the message of the Bible is love, is sex with love outside of marriage more moral than sex without love inside a marriage?”

Pre-marital sex is immoral from a God based point of view



—“Wanda I think you are reaching for rationalizations. All the major religions frown strongly on sex before marriage.”



—“That’s true father. It’s my opinion that religions have sanctified what societies have found to be valuable, and through most of history having a stable relationship to bring little farmers or herders into the world certainly made sense. But today with children not being economic assets and with marriages happening much later in life, for those who eventually marry, we have a different sort of societal situation.”



—“I don’t think that the Bible teaches us that morals are relative to the time and place. It teaches universal truths. I think that St. Paul, in First Corinthians 7, verse 1, told us that sex is not the best way to serve God. He wrote that ‘It is better for a man not to touch a woman’ although he added ‘that it is better to marry than to burn.’ We don’t know if he meant ‘burn with passion’ thereby not thinking about God, or to burn in Hell for having sex outside of marriage.

“Anything that can take the mind away from union with God or away from finding ultimate peace can be a reason in any religion for both men and women to be celibate. That’s why I’ve chosen celibacy.

“But Catholics are not alone. Most Protestants believe that premarital sex is a sin. The Hindus believe it. And Surah 23: verses 5 and 6 says, ‘Who abstain from sex, Except with those joined to them through the marriage bond.) are right there with us.’ And the Qur’an 24:33 says ‘Those who cannot afford to get married shall maintain morality until God provides for them from His grace. Those among your servants who wish to be freed in order to marry, you shall grant them their wish, once you realize that they are honest. And give them from God’s money that He has bestowed upon you.’

“Along with the Evangelicals, we have backed the virginity pledge that President Bush began. It is the only sure way to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases and it preserves sex for the sanctity of marriage.”



—“But studies have shown that those pledges don’t work. The Johns Hopkins School of Public Health surveyed teens and found that those who pledged virginity until marriage were just as likely to have sex before marriage and when they did they were close to 33% less likely to use a contraceptive.. (114a) And the University of Washington found that those who took the pledge were more likely to become teen parents, probably because they were less likely to use contraceptives. (114aa) Based on these studies it seems that the \$176 million in federal money might be better spent in other areas.”



—“But these showings don’t take into consideration the guilt feelings developed in those who indulge in pre-marital sex.”



—Any guilt feeling are not necessary appendages to sexual activity. In Scandinavia they are not a factor, but in religious America they seem to be an expected curse—at least that’s what many do-gooders claim will happen. In my case I was out of college before I had sex, but the joy of the orgasm was so great that when I weighed it against my religious beliefs, the orgasm won. And Ray, you remember that I was pretty strong in my religion. I went to Mass every Sunday. Heck, I may have been a more devout believer than you were back in high school. And I held that belief through college. I’ll admit that the danger of sexually transmitted diseases is 1000 times great now than when we were in college. Maybe that’s because sex is so much more common now—even expected. In our day we didn’t have the TV and films telling us that it was required. We were content to play kissy face and huggy bod!

Pre-marital sex is moral from a societal point of view



—“From a societal point of view it could be moral. Using responsible condom-protected sex might keep people from marrying unhappily early in their lives, when the sex may be seen as being all-important, and even mistaken for love. Later marriages could then reduce early divorce and child bearing before one is emotionally and financially ready for parenthood. People do change considerably each year from the teen years and onward. Hopefully part of that change is the developing of emotional and educational maturity. It might also allow people to realize that sex can be pretty good with just about anybody, so it shouldn’t be a reason for marriage and parenthood.

”The fact that 15,000 women a year become sterile from chlamydia can be a plus if we are trying to reduce population. We might assume that many of these cases were a result of pre-marital or extra-marital sex.

Pre-marital sex is immoral from a societal viewpoint

“I’m getting the hang of what you are getting at Wanda, so let me take a crack at looking at how premarital sex could be bad for society. Unprotected sex could cause more unwanted children as well as drastically increasing the sexually transmitted disease rate. Sexually transmitted diseases have increased in the U.S. Female chlamydia cases top a million, and gonorrhea cases are over 350,000 cases—and many people are not tested. Society should really be concerned about the number of births outside of stable relationships. It is certainly getting out of hand in some countries.



—“Good thinking Con. There has been a great increase in the number of children born to unmarried partners. What some people forget is that many people live in very stable relationships without having undergone a wedding ceremony and without paying the state a license fee. Recently the number of out of wedlock births has been 49% in Norway, 62% in Iceland, 41% in France, 42% in the UK and 32% in the U.S. But we don’t know how many babies were born into stable relationships.”



—“But then we don’t know how many are born into stable relationships when their parents are married. Haven’t you ever heard of couples having a child to save the marriage? Look at the number of divorces in which children are involved. I think we need to know how many children are born to single promiscuous women.”



—“Something many people in your country don’t understand is that many modern Europeans have had a quite different idea of the place of sex in their lives and many tend to believe that they don’t need the government’s recognition of their relationships. And you know well that it is becoming far more common in your own country. So the idea of premarital sex does not have the same connotations it has had in the past, particularly the distant past. But your country gives some legal breaks to married people that single people may not get. Some of your states have community property laws that allow a low earning spouse to share equally with the earning spouse during their married years. Then you have spousal support or alimony for a married spouse if there is a divorce. And in the area of child support a non-married father has even less chance for custody than a father who was married. But not all countries give such advantages to a married person.

“In your country the out of wedlock births have increased from 5% to over 30% in the last fifty years. Over half of mothers aged 20 to 24 were unmarried as were a quarter of those in the 25 to 30 age range. And as you might expect these women tend to be poorer and have lower educational levels. They are also more likely to require welfare payments and to remain poor throughout their lives. They also cut their prospects for marriage significantly because generally men are not interested in taking over the progeny of others. Obviously the children are more likely to be raised in a one parent household. Their educational achievement will be lower and they too will be more likely to repeat their mother’s history.

“It seems that it is the richer, better educated people who are marrying, and sometimes having children. In fact, married people with children now comprise only 1 in 4 households.

So ‘married with children’ is the exception, not the rule. The working classes and the poor are avoiding marriage, but still contribute most of the children to the society. People in developed countries are bending or ignoring the rules in social and religious traditions. But the upper class college educated women divorce less than half as much as women who are not high school graduates.

“For whites, about a third of first children are born outside of marriage, for black women it is about 75%. But it is more of a class thing than a racial thing. And it is becoming more common.”
(115)



—“We should keep statistics on the stability of the relationships that bear children rather than on whether the union was officially sanctioned. I understand that 50% of unmarried pregnancies occur to cohabiting partners. It is probably true that cohabiting couples break up more than married couples, but we don’t know. And often when pregnancy occurs to a cohabiting couple they marry, so there are a number of unanswered possibilities. Certainly the number of divorces indicates that marriage is no guarantee for success of a relationship or the stability of a parental relationship.

“Some people assume that all pregnancies in a marriage are wanted but in the U.S. 31% of pregnancies to married couples are unintended, that’s a million a year. Over 400,000 of these are aborted. And of the 600,000 born, 400,000 were not wanted when they were born. As you might expect, pregnancies are even less desired by single people. 75% of pregnancies to single women are not desired. So just being married doesn’t solve all the problems of pregnancy or of wanting the child. And certainly children generally place a strain on a marriage, particularly if they are too closely spaced.”



—“I suppose we must include cohabitation in the category of ‘pre-marital’. Norway, as the other Scandinavian countries, has been much less insistent on marriage. It keeps some statistics on the ideas we are discussing, but not enough. They have found that there are 830,000 married couples with or without children and 290,000 unmarried couples, 100,000 of the whom have at least one common child.(116) We don’t know how many marry after a pregnancy or a birth. And while we know that there are about 1.2 divorces for every 100 married women each year, we don’t know how many cohabiting couples split. There are about 23,000 marriages each year and 11,000 divorces. About half of the population has never been married but how many have lived together and for how many years? Where does all this lead us when we are only discussing government recognized versus non-government recognized cohabitation.

“In your country, which is still the most marrying country, cohabitation is making strong inroads. While surveys indicate that only about 10% of Americans cohabit, and 40% of those have children, in other Western countries the number ranges from 15 to 30%. Marriages are down in most countries.

“We do know that people who live together without being married tend to be more equalitarian and share household duties more than do married couples. Men, when married, often expect their wives to act like their mothers and take care of them and do most of the housework. This is true even if they had lived together for a few years in an equalitarian relationship.

In Norway those living together, called samboer which means ‘same living’ or ‘same abode’ are just as religious as those who are married.”



—“Should we consider cohabiting couples as married? What if their relationships are stronger than some married couples?”

CONTRACEPTION



—“As you know contraception, particularly the pill, is a major reason that population growth has slowed so much in Europe. This is a big plus for the world, but it is still opposed by leaders who want more babies born into their religions or into their nations. Nations may want more babies to provide laborers to provide for the pension and health needs of their older citizens or to harvest their natural resources to make the country richer. But as Commander Gulliver and many others have pointed out, the world already has far too many people. So while for most people using contraceptives isn’t an issue, for most religions and some countries it is a negative.”

Contraception is moral from a self-centered viewpoint



—“It’s obvious why contraceptives have value from a self-centered point of view. People may never want children but want sex. Perhaps it is a vocational choice because the required time that children demand would inhibit their ability for maximum success in their chosen field.

“Certainly our socio-economic system is a factor. People marry much later today than in the past. In earlier days 12 or 13 might have been a good age for marriage. You were strong enough to plant seeds or tend sheep. But today 18 is a minimal age for having a trade level job and the professions usually need five to ten or more extra years of education. It might not have been too difficult to abstain from sex until you were 11 or 12, but to wait until 23 or 30 before enjoying one of those things that God saw as good, might be unreasonable.

“The self centered desire to avoid pregnancy has found people dropping their religions to keep their families manageable. Brazil saw a decline of 15% of Catholics following their faith during Pope John Paul’s reign. Many people now declare themselves nonreligious, because they disagree with some religious ideas like the prohibition of contraception. The fertility rate in Brazil has dropped from 6 to 2 in the last 50 years, undoubtedly because of family planning.

“Many people find that sex and orgasms are rather pleasant pastimes, especially if the television programming is not of top caliber and you don’t have access to video games. Consequently in developing countries you are likely to have six days of sex play then one day of church. And the sex isn’t always monogamous. This leads to more babies and more sexually transmitted diseases and possibly fewer instances of eternal salvation. The realities are that in a large number of cases, probably in most cases, the body wins out over the soul. So whether we are looking at Hindu India, non-religious China, Catholic South America or Muslim Kashmir AIDS cases indicate that sexual intercourse is going on promiscuously before and during marriage.

“With HIV causing AIDS and with human papilloma virus causing cervical cancer, some people think that death is not an acceptable penalty for an orgasm, so they opt for mechanical

contraception like condoms, if they is available. We all know the joy of sex often brings the curse of the vex. With genital herpes and the range of afflictions attributed to the goddess of love—it is imperative that we try to thwart the love bugs that creep into our crotches. Nothing does that better than condoms. But not everyone realizes that female contraceptive gels, being spermicidal, are also germ killers. Since no contraceptive is 100% effective in preventing pregnancy, the condom and the gels each being 80 to 95% effective become 99 to 100% effective when used together. When you realize that there is a 1 in 35 chance of pregnancy every time you get together, and a 1 in 7 chance if it is at mid-cycle, effective contraception is a must for those who want to remain child-free. So the wise couple will use the two contraceptives to increase their contraceptive potential and reduce the transference of sexually transmitted diseases.

Contraception is immoral from a self-centered viewpoint



—“ There are certainly some self centered reasons for not using contraceptives. What if your little daughter says ‘I want a baby brother’, she would certainly be against your using contraceptives. Or if a teenager or adult wants a child they would also find that contraceptives did not have value for them. Then there is the reality that all contraceptives cost money, either for the user or the donor. Also, some contraceptives have problems for the user or the user’s partner. Condoms reduce some of the pleasurable sensations that might be felt.



—“As you mentioned, there are other possible effects of contraceptives since they do not provide the universal protection that some people believe. For example, the contraceptive pill, while highly effective in preventing pregnancy, can change the vaginal mucus so that it is more receptive to harboring some sexually transmitted diseases. At best the only contraceptives that reduce the rate of STDs are condoms and spermicides. And condoms are far more effective. But I guess that is not a self centered negative, just a self centered caution.



—“ I’ve heard boys say ‘I don’t want anything to interfere with my pleasure, so I refuse to wear a condom.’ There is also the macho desire in some to prove their masculinity by siring a child. Of course supporting those little two legged outcomes of orgasm is not high on the scale of macho-ness.”

Contraception is moral from a God based viewpoint



-- “As we continue to discover, religions are often negative to reducing reproduction. We should probably look at the possible reasons people have sex. So often it has been seen to have only one legitimately religious purpose, procreation. But today, as probably throughout most of human history, the physical delight of orgasm may have been the primary reason for humans’ intoxication and addiction to carnal pleasures. Then along the way the physical bonding of loving minds certainly became a magical magnet for increasing a couple’s closeness. But celibate monks may not have understood the pursuit of physical passion by their laity and saw only the command of Genesis to ‘multiply’ as the solitary standard for sexual behavior.

“The more liberal religions certainly allow contraception either to keep their parishioners’ happy or to help to control population. And many of the founders of the major religions were

childless, like Jesus and Paul, or they had small families. Moses had two sons, but Mohammad had six children from his two wives.

“In Islam, as with Christianity, you have those protecting the traditions of the past which will multiply more adherents for their religion, and you have those, often in the more economically advanced countries, who see overpopulation as a drawback to advancement and a perpetuator of poverty. With all the scriptural verses available it is not difficult to find a pronouncement of Allah or of a respected scholar to back up your position. In Iran, the Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khomeini has said that ‘When wisdom dictates that you do not need more children, a vasectomy is permissible.’ This is perhaps the strongest Islamic statement for contraception in our time. But he is not alone. I have heard that the Prophet Muhammad said that ‘The worst problem is to possess plenty of children with inadequate means.’ But I can’t verify it.”



—“As with other value areas, it is when a religious tradition impairs economic and social advancement that religious leaders will often redirect the traditions. In 2005, Pakistan convened a conference of Islamic scholars from 22 countries to address the problems of family planning. It was the opinion of some that Islam did not prohibit contraceptives. The Pakistan growth rate of 3.3% in 1980 had a goal of 1.3% today, in 2020. It trained clerics to teach about family planning throughout the country. Nearby Bangladesh has a similar plan.”



—“With uneducated populations, and the religious clerics not being educated in the needs of the modern world, it has often been difficult to change the people’s thinking. But as the imams are being made aware of the need for family planning, the people now accept their word. Muslim laws always have been subjects of debate. Muslims are not obliged to follow them if they did not believe that their reasoning from the Koran and the sunnah were right. The stereotype of a single, uniform or divinely revealed Islamic law is not true. However, this myth has been useful for Muslim conservatives who preach the status quo. Most Muslim lawyers agree that fertility management is permissible and that enjoying the pleasure of sex is a right for both men and women.

“In the Philippines a local fatwa on family planning was issued. A fatwa is a statement issued by Muslim religious leaders to clarify behavior for the Islamic way of life. It ruled out sterilization except when the pregnancy placed the mother in danger because her delivery would be difficult or her pregnancy would cause problems that would affect her life. This, of course, could include mental stresses. But it allowed for contraception.

“Hinduism doesn’t have a proscription against contraception. Gandhi advocated abstinence as the means. But Noel Laureate Rabinindreth Tagore advocated artificial methods.

“The Talmudic literature of the Jews has a passage that prohibits the use of any contraceptive device for use by men which would waste the “male seed”; female contraceptives may be permitted for health reasons including danger to the mother or to the potential child. This is the Orthodox belief but the Conservative and Reform Jews are very liberal. Their belief is that the rabbinical literature allows sexual pleasure between mates and their pleasure need not result in several years of changing diapers.”



—“The Eastern Orthodox Church does not mention a moral difference between artificial or natural birth control methods. Since the scriptures don’t limit sexual activity to procreation, they see that it can be an expression of love, which is, after all, the message of Jesus. Many, however, are against sterilization and abortion.”



—“Protestants are generally more permissive in using contraceptives to prevent pregnancy. Nobel Peace Prize winner Desmond Tutu, the former Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, said that ‘Planned parenthood is an obligation of those who are Christians.’ I know that Protestants once stood with the Catholics in their ideas of contraception. But in 1930 the Church of England decided that abstinence was not practical. Thirty years later most Protestant churches followed.”



—“For Catholics the only approved method of contraception is abstinence. It can be either total abstinence or abstinence during the fertile part of a woman’s menstrual cycle, the rhythm method.”



—“If abstinence is acceptable to some religions when a couple does not want children, doesn’t the abstinence go against God’s command to ‘be fruitful and multiply’? The intention is the same as using a contraceptive and the result is the same. Ethically there is no difference. And Ray, do you know what they call people who use the rhythm method?”



—“No”



—“Parents. And do you know why? With a hundred women using a rhythm method for a year, 10 to 33 will become pregnant. If they used nothing 30 to 60 would have become pregnant. But in actuality the rhythm method users have between 3 and 20 pregnancies a year.”



—“Why the wide range in the projections?”



—“The effectivity rates are based on a variety of studies and they don’t agree exactly. The figures also include both those who use the method perfectly and those who are more careless. Since various factors, like stress or sickness, can affect the body temperature or the cervical mucus, these factors may be misread. If they use a combination of methods, like cervical mucus and temperature, the effectivity rate goes way up, as long as they abstain during the 12 to 15 days a month when conception could occur. But that long wait might be too much of a strain on the spontaneity of sexual expression

“On the other hand there are so many better methods that don’t effect the spontaneity and have higher effectivity, like the IUD which is at least 99% perfect and the pill which is 95 to 99% perfect. Then there are the less effective methods like withdrawal which is 25 to 50% effective, condoms which are 85 to 96% effective, sponges, diaphragms and spermicides that are in the 75 to 95% range. Some can be used in combination to increase effectivity, like using both the mucus and the temperature rhythm methods, as I mentioned. That’s all the Pope will sanction. But as we said spermicidal and condoms give a nearly 100% contraceptive effectiveness. Or rhythm and withdrawal would be a cheap way to handle contraception in poor countries.”



—“If God is merciful does He want unwanted children born to any parents? Does He approve of children being born with HIV/AIDS and with the parents dying when they have small children? Does He approve of children being born to children? Does He approve of children being born to abusing parents? If any of these are true, contraception methods could prevent some of these situations if they were used.



—“While civil governments in developing countries often want to limit population through effective family planning, the Catholic Church is often a major hindrance. However in many places in South America and the Philippines the young priests see the need for contraception and support its use. Often it is the fear of AIDS that brings Catholics to use condoms. In predominantly Catholic countries like Honduras, Catholic family planning centers cannot hand out condoms but can tell people where to get them. While there is a commandment forbidding adultery, the macho culture tends to promote infidelity. STDs therefore increase.

Catholics in the U.S. believe and behave sexually about the same as American non-Catholics. They generally believe in contraception and abortion and the right of priests to marry. Societal mores are often more powerful motivators than religious pronouncements from priests and ministers.”

Contraception is immoral from a God based viewpoint



—“There is a relatively common concern among Western religions to limit or ban birth control. In part it is to protect the traditional idea of the sexual sanctity and the exclusivity of intimacy for marriage. This includes the proscription against pre- and extra-marital sexual relations. There is also the fear that safer sex will increase its practice and that might well interfere with people’s worship of God, along with destroying family values. Still another concern is that it will allow women to be sexual without being mothers. This could allow them to enter the workplace and the political arena and compete with the ‘superior’ men. Heaven forbid! Next thing they’ll want to be in Parliament, be heads of corporations or countries, or even be bishops. That would be the drawing the curtain on civilization and would obviously be the prelude for Armageddon.”



—“And God saw ‘that all He created was good’ in Genesis 1:31. This of course included orgasms. Isn’t that right Ray?”



---“He also told Adam to ‘go forth and multiply, and replenish the earth in Genesis 1:28. And he told Noah to do the same thing in Genesis 9:1). He did not say ‘go forth and fornicate.’ Orgasm should be a reward for helping to replenish the earth.”



—“If you want more people for your religion you shouldn’t allow contraception, should you?”



—“Good thing I know you don’t mean your constant sarcasms and put downs. You haven’t changed a bit. Luckily I have, or I’d rub your face in the dirt the way used to. I’m sure you know that the basic Biblical proscriptions against contraception are found in Genesis. God told Adam and Eve to ‘be fruitful and multiply’ and later when in Genesis 38 it relates to the sin of Onan. The Catholics see the ‘sin of Onan’ to be contraception. Remember we talked about that earlier. When Judah’s oldest son Er was killed by God because he was wicked. Judah told Onan, his second born son, to go in to his sister-in-law’s place, fulfill the levirate marriage law, and procreate with her and marry her and ‘raise up thy seed to thy brother’, but Onan, knowing that the child would be his brother’s, not his, ‘spilled his seed on the ground’ so God slew him also. While Catholics cite this as evidence of the evils of contraception because he started intercourse then withdrew then ejaculated on the ground. The Jews say it was because Onan violated the levirate marriage custom, while some conservative Protestants have said it was masturbation that was the sin. We Catholics base our anti-contraception stand to a large degree on St. Augustine’s essay “On the Morals of the Manicheans.” He was very much opposed to their practicing withdrawal or coitus interruptus, as it’s called in Latin, as a method of contraception.

“It is certainly not a new concern. Back in the 7th century there were a number of severe religious penances relative to techniques that might block the path of procreation. Using coitus interruptus, engaging in oral or anal sex, or using poisons to make oneself sterile were such offenses.”



—“Your official church position is that contraception should not be practiced, but fewer and fewer Catholics tend to agree with your church officials. Several studies have shown that Catholic women are using birth control nearly as much as are women in other religious groups.

“The Mormons also take a strong position against contraception. They quote the “be fruitful and multiply” passage also. Their practice also stems from the belief that there are souls waiting to be born and contraception would interfere with their birthright.”



—“There have been some serious discussions by top level people in the Church to allow condoms in certain circumstances to prevent HIV transference. It may soon be recognized that preventing AIDS is a greater good than preventing condom use.

“The dilemma is whether to follow traditional church doctrine or recognize the politics of the pandemic of AIDS and how to slow it. The church is experiencing its greatest growth in Africa, which has the most severe AIDS problem. It is not only seeing its members die, it must react to the crisis with charity. Many conservatives want to follow the Pope’s encyclical *Humanae Vitae* of 1968 which banned artificial contraception. But that encyclical appeared more than ten years before AIDS first struck as a very minor blip on the disease computer base.

“Of course you know we are not alone in our approach. Other Christian fundamentalists, like many evangelicals and some Anglicans are with us.”



—“I saw a major poll that showed that American Catholics, while admiring the Pope, disagreed with him in a number of issues, particularly on married priests and the use of condoms, which were approved of by 90%.

“Another thing Ray, the Catholic Church was telling people that tiny holes in condoms allowed the HIV virus through. (117) Scientific evidence shows that is wrong. The archbishop in Nigeria told the people that AIDS was increasing because of condoms. And this was in a country where 20% of the people were afflicted with it. I don’t understand the Pope’s thinking. Where does charity and compassion come into modern Catholicism? The Church even refuses to allow HIV/AIDS patients to use condoms, and will not provide condoms in its hospitals.”



—“Pope John Paul II’s pronouncements showed many ethical contradictions according to Hans Kung—a leading Catholic theologian. For example, he upheld human rights while he refused to let women become priests. And while he wanted to eliminate poverty, he was strongly against contraceptives which can reduce the overpopulation that keeps billions in poverty. And while he was abhorred by the pedophilia of many of his priests, he refused to allow them to marry—as they had been able to do during the first millennium of his church’s history. In fact the first pope and bishop of Rome, St. Peter, was married according to Matthew 8;14 and Luke 4:38.

“There is a wide-spread variation on attitudes to contraception in the Islamic faith. The Qur’an states in Suraahs 6:151 and 17;31 that: ‘You should not kill your children for fear of want.’ Critics of birth control argue that this can be extended to include a ban on all family planning methods, while advocates of birth control indicate that this passage explicitly refers to infanticide, and note that there is no prohibition against birth control in the Qur’an.

“In Ghana, Sheikh Osman Bawa, an Islamic scholar, has warned people against the use of condoms inside and outside of marriage. By following Islam’s proscription against pre- and extra-marital sex they can avoid AIDS. This same approach to the immorality of condom use is found in Zanzibar and with some religious conservatives in Pakistan, where giving birth to future jihadists is often a stated goal.”



—“The international growth rate of adherents to Islam is 3.5%. The Islamic countries account for over a half a billion children, 60% of whom won’t see their first birthday. Is this death rate something that Mohammad would have approved?

“Don’t the imams, popes and bishops know that every contraceptive method and every means of legal abortion is safer than being pregnant? Or do they care?”



—“Some people in religion are changing their ideas. When the pill first became available it was welcomed, then as sex became freer it led to what they believed was immoral, more promiscuous sex and more adultery, and less procreative sex in marriage.

Contraception is moral from a society based viewpoint

“If more people being born is bad for a society or the world, then contraceptives are necessary. If AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases are bad for a society we should use condoms as a contraceptive device. Did you know that each AIDS patient in America costs society in excess of \$600,000 during their lifetimes.”



--“Since we now need at least two planets to sustain our population, something must be done. We are using 20% more resources than the world can produce and North America is seven times the villain that Asia or Africa are. We are dumping pollutants into the air, the water and the land. The Earth can no longer absorb them.

“It seems that it is primarily the strong conservative religions, along with some business leaders who want to keep increasing the number of consumers, who fight the obvious needs of the planet and the impoverished members of the world society. For the good of the world society and for most national societies, we must allow, or even require, contraception.”



—“Wreck. I’m trying to hold my temper and turn the other cheek, as the Master did, but I’m really getting upset. We conservatives believe we are following God’s command to be fruitful and multiply and that God will provide. Then eventually Armageddon will arrive and we’ll have the second coming when He wishes—and we may be close. The signs are certainly there.”



—“Sorry Ray, but to try to get to what I think is the truth I will ruffle some feathers, just as you often do when converting people. You know I respect your beliefs, but you are not among as many friends here as you will be when we visit Muchinju, where you should be right in your element and Lee will certainly be on the defensive. I just try to be the devil’s advocate most of the time. You know I’ve always been that way.”



—“As you may know, the United Nations has sponsored several conferences on controlling population but objections came from nations with extremist religious factions, especially the Catholic and Muslim countries. They object to the recommendations for contraception and for safer abortion methods. The lack of these options keeps people in poverty and accounts for nearly one fifth of the worldwide burden of illness and premature death, and one third of the illness and death among women of reproductive age. Thank goodness that most of the world is on the bandwagon to alleviate the suffering of poverty, illness and overcrowding. In fact delegates at the conferences have agreed that reproductive health is a human right.”



—“But as we said there are no human rights unless the governments or the church leaders want to allow them. Just saying it doesn’t make it true. Often people have to take charge of their own lives in opposition to the desires of their religious and governmental leaders. Somebody has to make the case to the leaders of the rising need for contraceptives.”



—“Some countries have enacted laws to expand access for all women and men to reproductive health care and to ensure that pregnant women and adolescents are not barred from or discriminated against in school or employment. In New Guinea a wife no longer needs her husband’s consent to use a contraceptive and teenagers can buy contraceptives without parental permission. In Laos it is now possible to space children, rather than have them come as fast as nature allows. There are a number of other changes in reproductive health and education that many countries have enacted.

“The World Health Organization had the goal of having universal access to family planning methods, including contraception and abortion. This was to have happened by five years ago. It obviously missed the target. WHO recognizes the fact that poverty and overpopulation cannot be reversed without education and without the free access to the means available to accomplish the goals. But the declarations of the UN and WHO have to recognize the sovereign rights of every country to follow its values. But the fundamentalist values of some countries are dominated by religious values that prevent the implementation of anti-poverty and anti-disease interventions.

And the poverty of many eager nations requires generous donations to implement their contraceptive programs.”



—“Religion keeps holding back the merciful handling of poverty and disease and the intelligent handling of overpopulation with its handmaidens of global pollutions and unreplenishable scarcities.”



—“Are you saying that John’s sixth chapter in Revelation may be true and the four horsemen of the Apocalypse are riding rapidly toward us, led by the pale horse of death with his cavalry of famine, pestilence and war?”



—“You know that I don’t believe in religious doomsday prophesies, but I believe in the predictions of science based on the overwhelming and appalling evidence. Whether your merciful God ordained it or we humans have brought the curse on ourselves—it’s coming. The famine is here. The pestilence of pandemic diseases has arrived. The wars and terror we have now is nothing like the nuclear holocausts that will probably come as each nuclear nation unleashes its last line of defense to save itself from enemies that need not have been foes. But the hunger for economic, religious or territorial control of the leaders trumps the average person’s hope for peace and prosperity. History shows that the urge for power always blankets and smothers the blooming of intelligence and love.”



—“My gosh Lee, that’s a depressing fear for our future. Remember that our mission is to search for ways to reverse our path toward destruction. We may not be leading the lemmings yet.”



—“I’m with you on hope, but I fear that our primitive traditions will stop the advances that are scientifically and intellectually possible. They certainly continue to impede our progress. Just look at Argentina, where its poorest province is its most religious. The liberal government has approved funds for free contraceptives and for sex education, but the Catholic Church and some leading citizens prevented its passage in 2003. It was eventually passed but it kept many restrictions to women’s rights to their own bodies. Ray, I know you spout the official papal principles, but you know there are priests in poor countries who are advocating that their parishioners use contraceptives to help them out of poverty. Don’t you agree with that?”



—“I defend the Pope’s rulings, but I’m not working in those poor countries, so I would take the approach of Jesus to ‘judge not that ye be not judged.’”



—“Over and over we see the governments trying to control population and avoid the starvation and disease that comes with inadequate sanitation and water supplies. They undoubtedly agree on keeping sex confined to marriage to reduce sexually transmitted diseases and unmarried

pregnancies, but with people being people, having both freedom and sexual urges, it seems impossible to keep all sexual activities confined to the marriage bed.

“Pakistan’s government recognizes the scientific realities of a population which will have increased seven fold from 1950 to 2050. But Malthus and the ecological scientists can’t match the truth of what some imams think the Qur’an says. While it is convenient to use electricity, television and other scientific discoveries not sanctioned in the scriptures, it is inconvenient to change the tradition of having large families, especially when they may produce more jihadists protesting the wealth of the West, wealth that was often generated by family planning and education. Why bother to learn to read when clerics who have read only the scriptures tell you what they mean today, 1400 years after they were dictated and 600 years after they were eventually written down.

“The political leaders of the emerging countries usually are better educated and see the present and future needs of their societies. But few have the ability to pass restrictive laws for preventing unwanted children. The conservative religions hold the hope of the hereafter in their hands while they stampede their herds over the prospects for a pleasant present. What prospects would the presidents of religiously conservative countries have to pass a law to allow under age girls to buy contraceptive pills without seeing a doctor as they can do in Norway. And without health insurance for the villagers, it wouldn’t be possible to make insurers pay for contraceptives as many U.S. states have required. Might it be handy for the girls and women of the world to have access to a ‘morning after’ pill?”



—“Hasn’t there been a question as to whether the ‘morning after pill is a contraceptive or causes an abortion?”



—“If we use the U.S. government’s definition of pregnancy as being from the time of implantation, then the morning after pill is not aborting any fertilized cell. If we use the idea of conception as the start of life it might be an abortion of the single cell, but we never know whether an ovum has actually been fertilized. It’s strange that for centuries we thought life started sometime between 6 and 28 weeks, now some have advanced it so far that we almost define life as starting when a couple think about sex—maybe it should even move earlier, maybe to when they have their first date!”



---“It doesn’t matter what type of contraceptive you use, when they are available the abortion rate goes down. This would seem to be a big plus. Not only can couples organize their lives, financially and otherwise, they are able to choose when to have children and how many to have. And, around the world, countries in which abortion is legal and contraception is widely available tend to rank among the lowest in the rate of abortion, while those that outlaw abortion, like in Central and South America and Africa, have rates that are among the highest. “You can see the need for contraceptives if we are trying to prevent abortions. The recent drops in abortion rates in Eastern Europe are due to the improved access to contraceptives. The U.S. falls somewhere in the middle in the rate of abortion: at 21 per 1,000 women of reproductive age, it is a bit better than Nigeria with 25, a lot better than Peru’s 56 per 1000 but much worse than the Netherlands with only 9. The Dutch not only have a very low abortion rate but also a teen pregnancy rate that is among the lowest in the world at 4½ per thousand. The schools teach double protection, condoms and the pill together. They start sex education at the age of 13, and it works.

“In the U.S. people still argue about whether it is OK to have sex. The media push young people towards it while the religious ideologues pull them away. In Europe it is OK to do it so they

teach people to be careful. We really don't know whether there is more teen sex in Europe or the U.S. we just know that since American kids often have the idea that it is immoral, to be prepared to do something that is immoral is to admit their own immorality. So it is more often done on the spur of the moment without protection.

“While your country has not really outlawed contraceptives for teens the restrictive policy you have towards them and the idea that sex outside of marriage is evil has not worked.

Just look at your teen age pregnancy. Compared to the Europe, which you Americans see as a free sex zone, 50% of your under-twenty males and females have multiple sex partners. In sexy old France it is only 30% for males and 13% for females. So your negative approach to sex seems to increase sexual activity considerably. Then look at the outcomes of your teen sex. Your teen-age pregnancy rate is the highest of the developed countries. You have more than ten times the teen pregnancy as the Netherlands, which has a strong sex education program. Your teen pregnancy rate is five times higher than France and four times that of Germany, in fact it's the highest in the industrial world. Your teen abortion rate is twice that of France, five times that of the Netherlands and six times higher than Germany. And when you look at sexually transmitted infections you are higher in HIV, syphilis and gonorrhea, and your chlamydia infections are about 2000 times higher than those of France. So much for your religious idealism and abstinence!



—“When sex education programs are offered in the U.S. one dissenting parent may stop a whole class from being exposed to the subject. And when this doesn't happen the teacher usually has to send home a letter to the parents so that those opposed to the subject can opt their children out. Teenagers see it in films and on videos, they hear it in their music and if they need more information they just ask each other. All teenagers obviously know about the intricacies of the menstrual cycle, the effectivity rates of the various contraceptives, and the symptoms of chlamydia. I'm sure they know that there are eleven million new cases of syphilis yearly in the world. 140,000 in North America, 200,000 in Europe, 700,000 in Latin America and three times that many in sub-Saharan Africa and 6 million more in southern Asia. There are six times as many cases of gonorrhea. These diseases are particularly disastrous to women because they are not as readily diagnosed in females. Then there are 90 million new cases of chlamydia annually. The 5 million new cases of AIDS, adding to the 40 million existing cases is not to be taken lightly. But I guess everybody knows these facts and they know how to prevent them or how to spot their symptoms.”



--“According to the World Health Organization's estimates there are 46 million abortions yearly of which 20 million were illegal and 5 million of those are dangerous. In Europe 38 of every 100 pregnancies are aborted. In Asia, North America and South America 25% are aborted. The rate is actually higher in the developed countries where 42% of pregnancies are aborted, versus 23% in the less developed countries. Yet 64% of all legal abortions and 95% of those that are illegal occur in the developing countries where nearly 80% of the world's population lives. The highest rates in the world are in Vietnam, with Russia and some former East bloc countries, and some South American countries also having high rates.

“In the past societies did not want sex outside of marriage because of the problems of caring for children who were usually unwanted. Sexually transmitted infections were also a reason. Today contraceptives are so widely available that pregnancies are less likely, but diseases are more likely. If the pill or IUD is the chosen contraceptive, disease is likely if one is exposed. Now we find that in some places the fastest growing AIDS increase is among married women. So condoms for marrieds is not an unwise practice, especially if one is an intravenous drug user or is playing around outside the home.

“In South America, Chile has tackled the problem of contraception by allowing girls and women free contraceptives. The government had to hurdle impediments thrown in its way by the Catholic Church, and wrestle the national courts, but it finally won for the future of the people.

“Without adequate contraceptives readily available, the Philippines has over 450,000 abortions each year. Their population will double in 40 years. Adequate family planning has been suggested by the government. As usual the Catholic bishops opposed it but the Protestant bishops supported it. But with 80% of the country being Catholic and only 5% Protestant, the government had a hard sell!”



—“In the U.S., Democrats backed a measure to require health insurers to pay for contraceptives. A conservative magazine fumed that it would be ‘enabling more low-income women to have consequence-free sex.’ So obviously sex should never be enjoyed unless it can result in parenthood or disease. This certainly contradicts my idea of licensing parents.

“Even the conservative U.S. Supreme Court refused to overturn a California Supreme Court decision that required Catholic religious organizations to pay for health insurance that included contraceptives when they considered it sinful.(118)



--“As we well know, the condom also prevents diseases. Condom use is believed to be responsible for the decline in AIDS cases among youth in eight African countries. And China has had a decrease in sexually transmitted infections since they have educated sex workers on the condom’s disease preventing qualities.”



—“It seems to me that the previous notion of ‘immorality’ based on some religious teachings has become less of a deterrent to all kinds of sex because the media, the films and music, tell us we have to! So if society wants to reduce unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections with their attendant higher medical and welfare costs, allowing contraceptives seems like a ‘no brainer’. In fact it would save a lot of misery and money if they were provided free, like some governments are doing.”

Contraception is immoral from a societal viewpoint



—“Governments sometimes believe they need more people. In this case contraception would be against the good of the society. When a country needs people it may go to any lengths to get them. When my father visited the Soviet Union in 1962 he met a Frenchman from Georgia. The Frenchman and three friends had boarded a Russian freighter in 1946 to vacation in Tahiti and forget the war. They were arrested as spies and sent to Siberia until they renounced their French citizenship. Then they were allowed to work in a more enticing area of the Soviet Union. My father corresponded with him over the years and found that when he reached retirement age he was allowed to go back to France, so that France, not the USSR, would have to pay the pension benefits.

“You can understand the Soviet’s need for workers. It lost about 20 million men from the civil war and the two world wars. It brought in both German citizens and German prisoners of war from the end of the war in 1945 through 1950, then it started to let some go back home. The last Germans were repatriated in 1957. So needing more labor may require a government to spurn contraceptives while spurring slavery.”



—“Along the same lines, in the 1960s, with Romania’s population reducing, Nicolae Ceausescu outlawed contraception. This increased the number of babies being born—and those that were unwanted were abandoned. The orphanages of Romania have been recognized as horrible examples of what government child care could become. More recently the government has worked to reduce the abandonment of the unwanted children.

“Many economically advanced countries allow contraceptives while encouraging parenthood through financial incentives. But many impoverished countries, especially those heavily influenced by Catholics or Muslims, fight contraception at every step—but have no financial incentives for parenthood.

“Under President Bush, the U.S. spent hundreds of millions of dollars on promoting abstinence—primarily for his religious reasons. So he seemed to back the idea of reducing pregnancies, but he backed financially the least desirable method. And studies show that it didn’t work. Students found that the scare stories did not ring true with their non-virginous friends.

“If the dropping birthrate of the economically advanced countries is really a problem that can’t be solved in other ways, like bringing in guest workers who cannot be citizens or using robotics and computers, maybe more financial incentives can be used. But the question is whether those using the financial incentives will produce loving economically productive citizens. So far that hasn’t been the case!”

CLONING

“Let’s spend a few minutes looking at human cloning, that’s a possibility that has erupted since Dolly’s sexless introduction to the world. Ray why don’t you take a stab at this one, looking at the six possibilities.

Cloning is moral from a self centered viewpoint



—“I would assume that there are many people who would like to clone themselves. Politicians, movie stars, professional athletes and other such perfect people. Then maybe by continual cloning they could reach immortality.

Cloning is immoral from a self centered viewpoint

“It would certainly be immoral from my point of view to clone another Lee! One is more than enough! Possibly most people would want to try their luck at having their children be better than they are, so they wouldn’t see the value of cloning.

Cloning is moral from a God based viewpoint

“Did you know that some creatures even reproduce asexually, by dividing themselves into two organisms. In one species of gecko, females clone themselves so it seems that God must approve of some cloning.

“I guess it was almost like cloning when God made Eve from Adam’s rib. But that was a tricky type of clone because it was a trans-gendered clone!

Cloning is immoral from a God based viewpoint

“But we can assume that God’s command to be fruitful and multiply required the child to have a male and a female parent, since the command was given to Adam and Noah and their wives. As you know the Pope added seven new mortal sins in 2008. These were sins related to society as contrasted with the first list of deadly sins given to us by Pope Gregory the Great in the Sixth Century. Human experimentations is one of them, and I’m sure that would include human cloning.

Cloning is moral from a society based viewpoint

“I guess if there were very special people, like Einstein or da Vinci, cloning them might have been good for society. Cloning is immoral from a society based viewpoint “But can you imagine



what society would be like if we had a number of Hitlers or Stalins populating our world.”
 —“Good job Ray. A thoughtful quick overview. But maybe I should add that in 2005 the General Assembly of the United Nations passed a non-binding declaration asking the member states to ban human cloning because it was ‘incompatible with human dignity and the protection of human life.’ While I’m not sure how it protects human rights and dignity, it was passed by a majority of those present, but not a majority of all the members of the General Assembly. Now let’s look at some questions about sex and marriage.

SEX AND MARRIAGE

“Sex and marriage go together, like the old song says, ‘like a horse and carriage.’ But an age old question is whether that marriage should be monogamous, polygynous, polyandrous or communal. Most of the world seems to go with the monogamous approach. The Koran and the Old Testament allow the polygynous approach where a man can have multiple wives. An occasional poor society allows a woman more than one husband. Then there is the communal approach where sex is shared among the male and female members. Jealousy often destroys this variation of marriage. 1 Kings 11:1-3 tells us that King Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines.

“While the Qur’an limits a man to four wives, Osama bin Ladin was one of over 50 children of his father. Jews and Christians have no scriptural limitation. This allowed Joseph Smith, and many who followed him, to practice polygamy. However it was against Federal and state laws. The main Mormon Church outlawed the practice in 1890, but several sects broke away from the main church and continued to practice it. The 2008 Texas case revealed that there were about 50 men, 130 wives and 400 children mostly girls for the relatively few men. Young boys were commonly cast out of the compounds so there would be more young girls for the older men. One man was found to have 21 wives.

“The women believed that it was their God-given duty to have children. So multiple wives, or even multiple husbands, was possible. These activities break both U.S. and state law. Underage pregnant children were also found. This also breaks state law. Under state laws both parents are responsible for protecting the children in the household from abuse.

“Some see this polygyny as a way of quickly increasing the sect’s members. Some see it as a way for the older men to gain and keep power. Some see it as a way to subjugate women and not allow them to achieve satisfying lives of their own choosing. Whatever the reason, it is illegal. And while some say they have freedom to practice their religion, the Supreme Court is clear that while freedom of religion grants us the right to believe what we want, the government can regulate which practices are not allowed, like: handling rattlesnakes; withholding some medical treatment, especially from children: and, polygamous marriages.

“Societies and religions have some very definite ideas about controlling the various aspects of sex and marriage. Let’s combine some sex and marriage issues. Many people think they should be inseparable, but history gives us many cultures that separate them. Let’s start with pornography.

PORNOGRAPHY

“Pornography has been around forever. The prehistoric cave paintings in France had naked cows, the paintings and statues of Pompeii portray naked people.”



—“How do you define pornography?”



—“As with so many ideas, the working definition depends on society’s views. But the word is a combination of two Greek words porni meaning prostitute and grafi meaning writing.

But the meaning has been expanded to mean sexually arousing material presented in any manner from writing to photos and films. What some would see as erotica, an artistically treated scene, others would class as pornography—since any naked body they would consider to be pornographic. Just look at Michelangelo’s statue of David in Florence. It is an incredibly beautiful depiction of a young male body. But see a picture of it in an American high school textbook and his penis will probably be covered by a fig leaf. While David is a Biblical figure and Genesis 1:31 says that ‘And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.’ but your religious censors apparently think that the fig leaf was even better than the penis. Would God agree with them?

“Then we have the Latin word for obscene that derives from filth.

“Both porno and obscene have found their way into describing non-sexual activities. Anti-war protesters have often said that war is ‘obscene’ or ‘pornographic’ and their misuse of the words due to their limited vocabularies has even found its way into some dictionaries, but not your law books. In American law they refer only to sexual depictions or activities. While I don’t think much of your American lawyers or your legal system, some lawyers are quite effective in defining terms precisely. But we can be quite sure that if it shocks the judge, it is obscene. Of course many more ministers are shocked by a whole lot less!

“There is no question that culture plays a large part in defining pornography. I’ve seen full frontal nudity of infants, adults and senior citizens in Norwegian newspapers. And I’ve seen rear view pictures of naked men urinating in films and television commercials. That couldn’t happen in America. French lovelies took off their tops, and sometimes their bottoms at Cannes and Club Meds, but it wasn’t until fifty or more years before breasts could be seen in American films. Of course it made good sociological sense because young Americans don’t realize that breasts and penises exist until they are old enough to vote.

“Feminists in your country have reacted against pornography when it depicts children or women as mere toys for men. That traditional type of depiction de-humanizes women and children and is not socially healthy.”



—“Wanda, why do you think there is the need for pornography? It seems to always be with us.”



—“Well that is better answered by Chuck Chan whom you will meet in Singaling. But from my limited view of psychology I think that there isn’t as much healthy and wild sex as some would have us believe. Part of the fun is in orgasm. Some of it is the cuddling and the release of oxytocin that makes us feel good. And part of it is power, the power to get as much sex as we would like and to get it the way we want it. It seems that married or not, hardly anyone gets it when or how he or she wants it. It is too much or too little, too fast or too slow, too wild or too calm. So if we have lacks in our libidos, pornography may help to take up the slack. Prostitutes, both male and female and both adult and child, may fulfill our needs for power in a sexual way.”



—“Interesting observations. It reminds me of my fraternity showing a stag film when I was a freshman in college. I’d never seen one before. Within two minutes I was gone. Another ball player who went to my same church went with me. I’ve never seen another one. I don’t know whether my love of my mother had anything to do with it. Maybe it was just that I didn’t like one person being used by another. I don’t know. I just know that pornography always turned me off.”

Pornography is moral from a self-centered viewpoint



—“Well let’s look at the morality of pornography now. From a self centered point of view I would guess it could be good if you are an actor or model and can’t get a better job, it would have value to you. And if you are an exhibitionist, being seen would make you feel important. Look how Marilyn Monroe’s career started. She modeled nude for a calendar that went into every auto repair shop in the states. Somewhere a producer saw her and her movie career took off.



—“It certainly wasn’t her acting ability that guided her success! It was her body and her dumb blond look. So there is something to be said for us voyeurs. Most pornography is produced to be sold and seen. And we buy it.

“I’m sure you know that the porno film capital of the world is in my neighborhood, in the San Fernando Valley just north of LA. A friend of mine rents his house out for porno flicks all the time. He has invited me to a couple of shoots. The ambiance is like living in a cartoon. People come in the front door and identify themselves. The tech people identify themselves and the actors say ‘talent’. I laugh. How much talent does it take to play sex. The fascinating ones for me are the fluffers. They’re the ones who get the male ‘talents’ aroused. I did enjoy seeing my old brown leather sofa, a gift to my buddy when I refurnished. I thought it was the star of the show. No fluffer needed. I just laid back and enjoyed the action. I hear it’s been used lots of times. Had I known I had such a sexy sofa I would have rented it out myself.

“While I have to say that I prefer a live loving woman, when I’m between relationships I may watch or read about some sexy stuff. I prefer it tame. No Marquis de Sade crazy stuff. For me it’s more about expanding my horizons. Why do people enjoy doing it? Why do people get addicted to watching it. The truth is it is really dumb, a waste of time for the participant and the viewer.”

Pornography is immoral from a self-centered viewpoint



—“Lee that stuff sickens me. How can pornography be said to have any value to an educated man? I can certainly see the negatives from a self centered point of view.

“It wasn’t that long ago that I heard that one of the porno actors had picked up HIV. They had to shut down the porno business in the Valley for a while.

“Then you remember Jenny, she married that merchant marine officer. I guess his months away from women pushed him into the porno boat. She told me their garage was filled with porno videos. She stopped having sex with him. But they stayed married. They have a great home near you in Woodland Hills, Lee. So they stay married because of the house. Pornography didn’t help that relationship.

“Eroticism only attracts people who are deprived or curious. Those who are emotionally fulfilled have no need for the pornographic. I have heard that in the 1890s if a man saw a woman’s ankle protrude from her long dress he got excited. Then in the 1920s bathing suits and flappers exposed the female knees, and men again were eroticized. Then in the 60s the mini-skirt exposed the female thigh and again men swooned. Since the 50s Playboy magazine has exposed the naked breasts and rump. Films and other magazines went farther from just exposing the body to allowing the patron to become a voyeur to sexual activities.”



—“Well taken Ray. I agree with your analysis of erotic excitement due to the various states of undress. I have to say that I feel for the voyeur. Watching unknown people copulate cannot give one thousandth of the pleasure or joy that holding a loved one, of caressing the body, or of experiencing an orgasm fueled by love. Maybe X rated films give some people a release, especially if they masturbate while watching them. Maybe a prostitute allows you to feel some flesh while ejaculating. But the greatest erotic feeling is the feeling that springs from the minds of intimate lovers. It cannot be duplicated by pornography. It is like eating one pea instead of the whole Christmas dinner, like seeing a flashlight rather than a Hawaiian sunset, like reading ‘Dick and Jane’ rather than Hamlet. I feel so sorry for those who need pornography.”

Pornography is moral from a God-based point of view



-- “When we look back through history we find the Kama Sutra telling ancient Hindus how to enjoy sex in a variety of ways. But of course the Hindu idea was that everything is good, so everything is good. But your Western religions often seem to see sex as evil. Maybe it is because your God wants you to sacrifice to him or perhaps to think only of him, so your body is bad. If He saw that all He created was good, and I assume he created sex and orgasms, then how can they be bad? And depictions of sex might not necessarily be bad.

“If we are to use the Greek definition of pornography of ‘writing about prostitutes’ the classic case comes from Genesis 38, the same chapter that we mentioned about the sin of Onan, for not having sex with his brother’s wife. Sometime later, Onan’s father, Judah, went away to shear his sheep. Ta’mer, his daughter-in-law, went ahead and dressed as a prostitute, covering her face. Judah, not knowing who she was, accepted her favors but didn’t have money to pay her so he gave her his signet, bracelets and staff to keep until he could send her a lamb in payment for the sex. A few month’s later Ta’mer was obviously pregnant. Judah didn’t think that was right for the widow of his son so he prepared to have her killed by fire. But she brought out the things he had given her, so he recognized that he was the father. He forgave her and let her live. But God killed neither one of them. Does that mean that prostitution is not a sin, or not as much of a sin as spilling one’s seed on the ground? Some may see the story as obscene, being incestual and harlotry, but writing about the story of prostitution in Genesis was definitely pornographic.



—“Let me add a few illustrations you may or may not know about. The Old Testament certainly has some spicy stories in it. What about the story of David and Bathsheba? “In Second Samuel Chapter 11, King David saw a beautiful woman, Bathsheba, whom he found was married to a Hittite in his army. He sent for her and slept with her. Then he had her husband put in the front of his army for a battle, hoping he would be killed. He was. Bathsheba then bore David a son, Solomon. Because it was an adulterous action and he planned the death of his mistress’s husband, was it obscene? Because the action was written down, was it pornographic? Or was it the progress of a great love story? Was it both?

“Is the definitely erotic ‘Song of Solomon’ or ‘Song of Songs’ pornographic? Or is it the most romantic poem ever written. Is it a reminder of what one can experience in the depth of a deeply committed relationship? Does it make us think that there is more to life than work? Can the lust of the spirit spring from our bedraggled bodies and lift us to a heaven on earth? Shouldn’t our

lives today be excited by the eroticism of the eternal, by the passions of possibilities, by the joys of immersion into the wellspring of love? Is it, as it appears, a tribute to one of Solomon's 700 wives or 300 concubines, or is it a metaphorical story of the passion one might feel for God, as Maimonides and others have believed?

"In Joshua, Chapter 2, the story is told of Rahab the prostitute who hid two of Joshua's spies. When he attacked Jericho and killed everyone, only the harlot was spared in the ensuing attack. St. Paul refers to her faith as being stalwart and an example to all in his letter to the Hebrews. The Epistle of James 2:25 also refers to Rahab. Since the Bible has writing about a prostitute, is it pornography? She certainly didn't do any obscene things in the eyes of the Israelites. But if we look at her actions of hiding spies, it might be seen as traitorous in the eyes of the king of Jericho."



--"About ten years ago a group of young German Protestants put out a calendar showing 12 erotic scenes from the Bible. A naked Eve offering an apple to Adam, a bare breasted Delilah cutting Sampson's hair, a Rahab in stockings and garters. It was a sensation. And all who saw it marveled with God that all He had created was good! Was it pornographic?

"Islam is rather prohibitive in this sexual world, except for allowing men several wives. But in the hereafter things get better, at least in the traditions written in the Hadiths. For example, Imam Al-Tirmidhi, who lived over 200 years after Mohammad, wrote that Mohammad had said that in heaven men will find 72 virgins or 72 wives, or even 72 raisins, depending on who translates it. That's from Hadith 2,562. The Koran itself is very tame when compared to the Old Testament. But it does promise virgins to those who enter heaven in. Surah 55:56 and 74."

Pornography is immoral from a God based point of view



—"The Christians, then the Muslims, seem to often have an aversion to sex. They would therefore be against depictions of sex and of glorifying the erotic. For the Christians much of it seems to trace back to Paul and his first epistle to the Corinthians, in Chapter 7 verses 1 to 11, where he wrote that 'it is best for a man not to touch a woman' but 'it is better to marry than to burn.' He was definitely against sex outside of marriage, and seemed to be against anything that would take one's mind from prayer and adoring God. Certainly pornography would take one's mind from God. As a Greek Jew, it seems that Paul's ideas were less Jewish and more Greek in this area. So often in Greek thinking there is the recommended separation of mind and body.

"Since sex should only be undertaken to procreate, and since pornography has nothing to do with procreation, we can see how many Christians would see pornography as an abomination of the gift of God. Furthermore, viewing pornography can be habit forming, some say addictive, so it dehumanizes the viewer, making him or her a slave to the lust of the imagination."

Pornography is moral from a society centered viewpoint



—"As far as I know the human race has had sex for over two thousand years, and animals had it at least a hundred years before that. But seriously, we see statues from the earliest civilizations that show the sexual organs. We think these statues had religious meanings. When we see a vase from ancient Greece and it shows men and women apparently enjoying sex, with some men having erect penises that reach their chins, it probably was not a religious representation. Was this drawing symbolizing actual occurrences or was it merely playing to the prurient interests of the artist or the shopper? Was it art or pornography?

“When Pompeii was excavated in the 1860s the Victorian English swept away the volcanic ash that Vesuvius had belched and they uncovered frescoes of orgies and statues of boys and men with gigantic erections probably in search of a Roman romance.”



—“Maybe those erections were just decorative toga hangers.”



—“Whatever they were they shocked the Anglican archeologists who promptly hid them in a dark room in the Naples Museum. But enterprising Neapolitan guides kept enough in a secret room to entice lusty-eyed tourists to part with their lira. How could the icons of classic Rome permit such unchristian representations?”



—“Maybe because in 79 AD Christianity hadn’t yet enacted its anti-sex epistles. But when we look at pornography with today’s eyes the questions seem to be which way the see-saw will tilt when you balance increased tax revenues from legal pornography against the possible negative effects of rape, child molestation, and the dehumanizing of large segments of the population by demeaning them in pornographic films, photos, magazines and books.



—“On the plus side for pornography, there seem to be lower crime rates in Europe where pornography has been more readily available. If Sweden, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands are any indication, more pornography means fewer sex crimes. Japan, which produces a large amount of rape fantasy pornography, has the lowest reported sex crime rate in the industrialized world. This, along with the low sex crime rates in Europe, lead some to speculate that there is an inverse relationship between sex crimes and pornography. One theory is that since sex is not taboo, the real thing is more readily available.

“In Japan some speculate that a rape victim would not report it because she would lose her honor. But Japanese statistics indicate that Japan has the highest rate of arrests and convictions for reported rapes. Their other crime rates are also low, for such crimes as theft and burglary.

“Police often report that sex offenders say they were tempted to perform the sex crime because they had just seen the action in a pornographic situation. How often is this true and how often is it a rationalization or even a lie? We don’t know. But we certainly have seen crimes copying a media presentation: a Clockwork Orange duplicated rape, a vagrant doused with gasoline and burned to death, a child raped with a soda bottle. It seems true that we can be influenced for good by positive media and influenced for bad by violent media. If we are not totally controlled by our genes, our environments will help to shape our lives—toward docility or violence, towards lawful behavior or crime, towards parenthood or childlessness.”



—“In 1970, under President Nixon’s watch, the nominal Quaker launched the Presidential Commission on Obscenity and Pornography. It concluded that ‘there was insufficient evidence that exposure to explicit sexual materials played a significant role in the causation of delinquent or criminal behavior.’ It recommended that law makers ‘should not seek to interfere with the right of adults who wish to do so to read, obtain, or view explicit sexual materials.’ Then further, ‘It is inappropriate to adjust the level of adult communication to that considered suitable for children.’ The research was funded by the government. Among the findings were that college men had a decreasing interest in it and that the pornography they viewed had no lasting effect on

them. It also estimated that in 1970 about ten million dollars a year was spent on hard core pornography.

“In the United States, obscenity and pornography is generally regulated by state law. In 1973 the U.S. Supreme Court (119), in deciding a case regarding the mailing of sexually explicit material in violation of California law, ruled that obscene material is not protected under the First Amendment’s freedom of speech guarantee. The court set out standards for jurors to decide. They included: whether the average person, applying contemporary community standards would find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest, of people; whether the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law; and, whether the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value. If a state obscenity law is thus limited. Once the jury or judge has decided the case at the lowest level, based on local standards, First Amendment values are then protected by a review by the appellate court.

“Mere possession of obscene material is not a crime.(120) Nudity alone does not render material obscene.(121) The state cannot define obscenity(122) because it is a factual question that has to be determined by a judge or jury according to the Miller decision.”



—“With the courts making more material legal that might be called pornographic, it opens the doors for taxing it as it is sold in the form of books, magazines, films and internet sites. The U.S. market is now estimated at over ten billion dollars. So its value has increased a hundred to a thousand times since the 70s. It should easily be worth two hundred million to two billion tax dollars in the U.S.

“Soft porn, with no penile penetration, is widely available. Hard porn is often regulated, especially for minors, and child porn is nearly always illegal. Does it increase the chances for VD or illegitimacy? If it increases disease, the society may pay much of the costs of doctors, medicines and hospitalization. That would be a negative. Some argue that for a free society pornography should be allowed. But unless it is proven to be valuable for a society, the argument could be used to sanction burglary, robbery and murder.”

Pornography is immoral from a societal viewpoint



—“The major objections to pornography are that it portrays sex as only an egotistic activity that degrades the participants—women and children particularly, but men also. There is evidence that it may increase rape and child molestation.

“While President Nixon’s panel did not find that pornography was harmful to the American society, President Reagan, a conservative Presbyterian, announced his intention to set up a commission to study pornography, apparently with the goal of obtaining results more acceptable to his conservative supporters than the conclusions of the 1970 Commission. In 1985 he appointed Attorney General Edwin Meese to head a panel of 11 members, most of whom had reputations as anti-pornography crusaders. The report of 1986 found pornography harmful in varying degrees. Little research was funded but the findings of a workshop done with the Surgeon General were that:

Children and adolescents who participate in the production of pornography experience adverse, enduring effects,

Prolonged use of pornography increases beliefs that less common sexual practices are more common,

Pornography that portrays sexual aggression as pleasurable for the victim increases the acceptance of the use of coercion in sexual relations,

Acceptance of coercive sexuality appears to be related to sexual aggression, and In laboratory studies measuring short-term effects, exposure to violent pornography increases punitive behavior toward women.

“Surgeon General Koop’s summary was that ‘Although the evidence may be slim, we nevertheless know enough to conclude that pornography does present a clear and present danger to American public health.’”



--- “The Supreme Court has ruled that exhibiting obscene material in places where the public may go is not protected by the freedom of speech amendment.(123) It has ruled that mailing an obscene brochure is not allowed.(124) And it has ruled that totally nude dancing can be outlawed by a state (125) and that a state may decide that it is illegal to possess or view child pornography. (126)

“With the internet offering the means to produce and view every kind of pornography, it is available throughout the world, even to societies that do not allow it. Children and adults can view it. Will this increase sexual activity, sexually transmitted infections and an increase in unwanted children? Will it increase violent sex crimes? Will it increase sex crimes against children? Studies vary on the possible results of pornography and since it is possible that researchers rig their studies to get the results they want, the results may not be as valid as we might like.

“Now we have computer generated pornography. There isn’t any actual violence against living women or children here. Is it possible to prosecute someone who manufactures and markets child pornography when no child has been violated?

“If child pornography might make adults act on what they see, it certainly is a societal negative. We see the headlines often about arrests of scout leaders, camp counselors, religious leaders and youth coaches. To what degree are child pornography viewing and pedophilia linked? How many people are stimulated to act out what they see and how many have their pedophilic desires satiated by merely viewing? Arrests of viewers usually turn up people with prior criminal records for child molestation. And what about the effects on the children being filmed?

“In 2009 China made a major move to stamp out vulgarity and pornography on the internet. So a country can make strides if it wants to!”

HOMOSEXUALITY



—“Wanda let’s look at homosexuality for a while. It has been a big negative in the Western theistic religions from the beginning. But in Greece, the intellectual cradle of our civilization, it seems to have been not only tolerated, but idealized.

“Today’s Western societies, apparently influenced by the idea of the worth of every human being and an increasing tolerance for many types of beliefs and behaviors, is more accepting, Now we even see advertising specifically to homosexuals in Europe. We see men kissing in a TV ad. And the ad works.

“Remember that the average male homosexual makes \$18,000 more than the average heterosexual male and the average lesbian is \$12,000 ahead of her heterosexual counterpart. So we’re not talking about a group of homeless, we are talking about a group of financially successful people who happen to have a sexual orientation that has not been exactly mainstream.”



—“I have a problem calling them gay. When I think of the original meaning of gay, it meant happy and carefree. Some of my favorite songs and stories use the word in this way.

Undoubtedly some homosexuals are gay in this sense, but so are some heterosexuals. So I have a semantic problem with their general use of the term.

The term lesbian doesn't bother me. It makes some sense. Certainly the poet Sappho's school for young women on the island of Lesbos cultivated the ideal of love—particularly love for their future husbands. And Sappho's own life seemed to be heterosexual. She had married and had a daughter. And it was the unrequited love for a man, Phaon, that fueled her leap into the suicidal sea. (127) Still the Sixth Century muse is remembered because of her lyrical tomes to love and her ability to express her deep emotions toward both men and women. Her expressions were by pen alone, as far as researchers have been able to ascertain.

Homosexuality is moral from a self centered viewpoint



“Scientists have certainly taken a 180 degree turn in regard to much of homosexuality. Where it was first thought to be an abomination of nature, as it was depicted in the Bible, to a mental problem like a neurosis, and now it is often seen as a behavior that is biologically based. To the degree that biology directs our behavior, we must assume that the behavior has value from a self centered point of view.

“First it was found that gay men had similar responses to olfactory hormones as did heterosexual women. Now we find that lesbian women's brains react quite the opposite to sex hormones than do heterosexual women and are closer to the reactions of heterosexual men. (128)

“We may look at homosexual behavior in animals and assume that it is therefore normal.

1500 species have been observed in homosexual activities and a third of these have been studied. The traditional scientific bias was that sexual activity was inherently tied to the propagation of the species. Maybe our fur bearing friends were more Freudian than we had imagined. Homosexual behavior certainly doesn't seem to be against any laws of nature.

“It has been reported that in one species of swans a quarter of the couples are male homosexuals, one of whom will mate with a female, then when she lays the egg the pair chase her away and raise the cygnet themselves.

“We might think that the easiest or most available means to orgasm would be a major attraction. It certainly is true in prisons. Historically soldiers are often tempted. Single sex schools and colleges are often such sites. But obviously there's more. I guess the self-centered reason that 'I like it and I want to continue as a homosexual' is enough.”

Homosexuality is immoral from a self centered viewpoint



—“Some would say that the self centered negatives would sound like this: ‘I don't like my son or daughter being a homosexual. I'm embarrassed. And I'd like a grandchild related by blood.’ Or ‘I am a homosexual and don't like being looked down on by so much of society. I want help to be a heterosexual.’ Or, ‘Am I a bisexual? I like all the attention I get from either sex and I like all my orgasms. But I would like to be more in the mainstream.

Homosexuality is moral from a God based viewpoint

“A major concern of religions has been upholding traditional anti-homosexual values versus the possibility of losing membership, particularly younger members. It is principles versus politics. Some Protestant denominations have ordained homosexual ministers and bishops because the major messages of the Bible are love and mercy and we shouldn't judge if we don't want to be judged. And if we have equal souls does it matter if they are in a homosexual or a heterosexual

body? In democratic Norway there is no problem in having female or homosexual priests and bishops.

“The Sodom and Gomorra destruction story has been traditionally interpreted as being because of the homosexuality of the inhabitants. But some homosexual ministers have said that God’s punishment of the inhabitants of Sodom was because they were inhospitable to the visitors, the angels, not that it was the homosexuality that was evil.

“Conservative Jews, who uphold traditional Jewish law, but attempt to accommodate modern societal trends, have moved toward the acceptance of homosexual ordinations and gay marriages.

“There have long been Christian, Jewish and Muslim homosexual groups of people who love their religions and follow the religious traditions, except for the bans on homosexuality.

In the U.S. in 2001, a fatwa was issued against Al-Fatiha, the U.S. gay Muslim umbrella group by al-Muhajiroun, an international organization that seeks the establishment of an Islamic caliphate. Imaan is the UK’s Muslim group for gays, bisexuals, and transgendered people. Judaism and Christianity have moved on over the years and allow dialogue to take place, but sex isn’t talked about in the Islamic world. But the Qur’an says that everything that God has created is beautiful, so aren’t we all equal in Allah’s eyes?

Homosexuality is immoral from a God based viewpoint



“In Sodom it was men ‘knowing each other’ that was the sin, according to. Genesis 19:5-8. But the Bible is also clear, in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, that ‘If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.’ And while the message of Jesus is mercy, he also said to ‘sin no more.’

“In 1986 when Pope Benedict XVI was the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith he put out a letter to the church’s bishops on ‘the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons’ in which he admitted the worldwide debate, but postulated the use of reason in doing the will of God. This is more important than any scientific findings. Still it must be discussed, but not approved of because homosexuals are intrinsically disordered. While the inclination to homosexuality may not be a sin, acting on the inclination is a sin. The scriptures are clear on this, continually clear. Church tradition backs this up.

“The eventual pope continued writing that ‘What is at all costs to be avoided is the unfounded and demeaning assumption that the sexual behavior of homosexual persons is always and totally compulsive and therefore inculpable.’ But the then cardinal finished his treatise by encouraging the bishops to minister to homosexuals, but not to condone their sexual practices.”

“Beginning in Genesis, God made man and woman in His image. They reflect the inner unity of the Creator. But original sin occurred when Adam bit into the forbidden fruit. The reality of sin continued with the sin of the men of Sodom. To be a member of the chosen, one must not sin in the way mentioned in Leviticus. The New Testament affirms this. Paul is clear on all types of sexual sins, including those he called ‘effeminate’, in First Corinthians 6:9 and in Romans 1:18-32, homosexuality is clearly seen as a grave sin. Paul repeats this in First Timothy 1:10. The Bible cannot be clearer on this sin. Sex can only be good in a heterosexual marriage. Any other self-indulgent sexual inclination is disordered. It prevents one’s own fulfillment and happiness by acting contrary to the creative wisdom of God.

“Even though there is pressure from within the Church, often influenced by outside forces, to condone homosexuality these ideas are misguided in accepting a materialism that denies the God-like nature of the human person.”



---“But people do have freedom to choose.”



—“If homosexuals want to follow the true Christian or Jewish way they must not follow their sexual inclinations. They must forego their illicit carnal behavior for salvation. Look again at Paul’s admonition to the Galatians in 5: 22 and 24, that God produces in the lives of the faithful ‘love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control’ and further ‘You cannot belong to Christ unless you crucify all self-indulgent passions and desires.’



—“ But Ray, as I remember there was a great outcry against it by gay Catholics, saying that it does not reflect good science, good theology or human reality. The Church had not singled out any other group in terms of their sexuality.”



—“ The Church is saying that it’s OK to be attracted to someone of the same sex, but you can’t act on it. But Lee, just find a Biblical validation that homosexual behavior is moral and you may have a basis for argument. The homosexuals are using self centered assumptions and often society based assumptions, but we are using God based assumptions and evidence. And God trumps the others. Homosexuality is just not normal.”



—“But neither are medicines, air conditioning or guns. Does uncommon mean unnatural? Does homosexuality interfere with nature as does catching a fish, chopping a tree down, or killing a mosquito?”



—“That’s a lawyerish deflection of the truth. We’re talking about God’s word here. You talk like you’re trying to persuade a jury by deflecting the argument. Give me some Biblical quotes that are as much to the point as are the ones I pointed out. You won’t find one.”

Homosexuality is moral from a society based viewpoint



—“Then let’s look at society based assumptions and how societies have found that homosexuality is either beneficial, or at least not harmful.”



-- “Society has shifted in its view of homosexuality. First it was directed by God’s treatment of the homosexuals of Sodom. In the 20th century it saw homosexuality as an unnatural psychological behavior that Freud said was linked to a child’s early environment. In the 1970s studies began to move into the placental environment, with lesbians having been influenced by too much testosterone and male homosexuals to too few male hormones due to their mother having had stressful pregnancies. Then in the 90s family histories and twin studies came into vogue. The

search was for genetic links. Since links often followed the maternal line, the question was whether any gene might be passed from mother to son on the X chromosome. Some have hypothesized that possibly 50% of male homosexuality may be genetically influenced.”



—“A few years ago the Salvation Army in Norway removed a homosexual officer from their ranks because homosexuality was against God’s laws. But his removal went against state law. So their state subsidies could be reduced. Homosexuals and those who sympathized with them decided to discontinue their contributions to the religious group. But if the message of Sodom and Gomorrah is that the men were homosexual and that God disapproved, then the God based values should be more important, especially in a country that has a state religion that is Christian.”



—“But in a society, the democratic idea of freedom of choice is more important than the God based scriptural directives. Religion must follow the society, not the other way around.”



—“A major positive factor of homosexuality is that they don’t reproduce. In today’s world that is probably the most needed behavior. With overpopulation causing most of the world’s problems of both scarcities of natural resources and pollutions of air, water and soil, childless homosexuality should be idealized and advocated.”

Homosexuality is immoral from a society based viewpoint



---“The Diagnostic and Statistical Model of the American Psychiatric Association had earlier listed homosexuality as a neurosis. It was removed as a neurotic behavior pattern in the 1970s. The Pentagon still has it listed as a serious disorder along with mental retardation, physical disabilities, and personality disorders. So a homosexual might be discharged from the armed services for his or her sexual orientation. The Pentagon has a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy that prohibits the military from inquiring about the sex lives of service members but requires discharges of those who openly acknowledge being homosexual.

“HIV and AIDS started as a male homosexually transmitted curse. Then intravenous drug users were added, then heterosexuals were added, then transference to infants started. The amount of transference between male homosexuals is extremely high, and that between female homosexuals is extremely low. So male homosexuality may be seen as a strong negative for society due to the increased health expenses for HIV infected people. Male homosexuals also have a very high rate of transference for many sexually transmitted diseases. So maybe we should only advocate female homosexuality as ideal for society.

“The cost to society of keeping an AIDS victim alive for twenty years is about \$600,000. This is certainly a negative for society. Additionally the costs of homosexually related diseases, such as AIDS, not only include direct medical costs, but also economic costs to businesses where sick leave reduces the effectiveness of the business’s activities. All health insurance premiums are increased because of the expenses of HIV treatment. So perhaps societies should discourage male homosexuality while encouraging lesbianism.”



—“Or maybe we have to balance the negatives of the increased medical expenses for male homosexuals versus their saving the planet from more babies being born.”



—“And the unborn babies of those unborn babies!

SAME SEX MARRIAGES



—“Let’s talk about same sex marriages or partnerships. It seems to me that there are a number of real advantages. You certainly would want your best friend, whether your spouse or a person of your same sex, to make major decisions for you if you can’t do it. But if the relationship reduces the taxes paid, because of marriage tax laws, the government would suffer. Then if the government gives licensed same sex partnerships the same responsibilities as licensed heterosexual marriages you will have spousal support and child support issues when they break up. Or what if a person divorced in a heterosexual relationship and received spousal support, then he or she joined in a licensed homosexual relationship, would they lose the spousal support as they would have if they had remarried in a heterosexual relationship? Or what if they just move on to a non-licensed homosexual or heterosexual relationship? Should the spousal support be eliminated? Lots of questions!

Same sex marriages are moral from a self-centered point of view

“Wanda, let me try my hand at looking at same sex marriages from those six points of view. It would be moral from a self centered point of view if the most important person in my life is my same sex lover. I want our union recognized by my church or my government. I want us to be able to make medical decisions for each other as the heterosexual marrieds can do and I want us to have access to each other’s health insurances and to be entitled to any tax breaks that heterosexual couples have. We might also want to adopt children so we should have the same rights as heterosexual couples.

They are immoral from a self-centered viewpoint

”On the negative side, from a self-centered point of view, I don’t want my employer to have to pay more money for some homosexual’s double health insurance because it will reduce the money he has available for pay raises for me or for more benefits for me. I also think that you should not be able to adopt children because children should have a male and a female parent.”



—“The medical insurance double coverage also applies to working heterosexual couples. Maybe the whole health insurance issue should only apply to the worker, or to the worker and a stay at home parent—if the country needs more children. Why should an employer have to pay for health insurance for a family of two or five for one worker, then only pay for one person’s insurance for a single worker. If the employer has to pay for a wife or a domestic partner, why isn’t he required to pay for my aging mother who lives with me?”



—“You’re right. Employees in the same job, getting the same wages, cost the employer different amounts. Maybe it would be fairer if the employees were paid equal wages then allowed to choose whether they want to join the employer’s medical plan, dental plan or legal plan. Then they could choose whether they wanted a working or non-working spouse or domestic partner in the plan. Or maybe the government could require that the worker include non-insured partners or

children in their plans and take the expense from the worker's salary.. The 'take home' pay would certainly vary but it would be a fairer approach to financing employer paid benefits."



---"OK Wreck, but what about single parent homes. We sure have enough of those. Wouldn't a pair of same sex parents possibly be better than a single parent. If they both worked there would be more money to raise the child, and if only one worked the other could be home with the child. Either situation is better than the average single parent home."

Same sex marriages may have value, or may not have value, from a God based point of view.



---"Gotcha Lee. Good points. Now let me look at it from the God based points of view. It seems, Wanda, that the same reasons for and against homosexuality would be pertinent. It could be moral if there was love in the house and particularly if the child was brought up in a religious home. But it could be immoral because so many religions see homosexuality as immoral."



---"But the immorality might only apply to male couples. It seems that the Bible only refers to men lying with men, not women lying with women. So maybe lesbian couples are not scripturally unholy.

Same sex marriage have, or not have, value from a societal point of view.



---"Hadn't thought of that. Well let's look at the possible societal advantages and disadvantages. The most important thing is that they won't reproduce. Then if they adopt children they will be taking children who would not otherwise have good homes.



---"But what if you have a lesbian couple using artificial insemination. They will be adding another child to your overpopulated universe.



---"Oops. That's a negative. Of course there may be other complicating factors. For example a lesbian couple in Britain wanted a child. They talked a fireman friend into having sex with one of them. She conceived and had the child. Then they decided to have another. Same fireman, same result. But after the second child was born the couple split. The biological mother then sued the biological father for child support and he was forced to pay 450 pounds a month. Should the other woman have been sued for support? Is it biology or sociology that should rule here? It is true that he saw the children and bought them presents, so he was somewhat socially involved, but it wasn't his idea to have the child. He just stepped in to save them from going through the process of artificial insemination.

"I suppose another negative could be if they would push their persuasion on the kids. Or what if they sexually abused them?"



—“I saw a TV program where the kids of homosexuals were looked at and they were normal heterosexuals.”



—“But one TV program doesn’t make anything an absolute truth. The only absolute truths in this world are whatever my boss wants me to do and whatever the Supreme Court rules. Certainly a large number of states have allowed it.

“There’s another problem you might not be aware of for same sex couples. When a U.S. citizen has a partner from another country, there is no right for the partner to live in the U.S. as there is for married heterosexuals.”



—“That seems unfair in some ways, but you know that today an immigrant will often marry a citizen of the country where he or she would like to immigrate. It’s not too difficult to find or rent such a mate. But can you imagine how much easier it would be if same sex relationships were allowed to apply for permanent residency—even if they were merely friends?”



—“Some countries rescind a heterosexual married person’s right to live there if they separate or divorce. I am not aware of the various international rules for homosexual liaisons.

EXTRA-MARITAL SEX

“Let’s discuss extra-marital sex, adultery. According to the sociological studies it is rather common.”

Extra marital sex is moral from a self-centered viewpoint.



---“Let me take a crack at this one. From a self centered position, I am either not sexually satisfied at home or I have a friend that I can let my hair down with. She and I get close mentally then decide to get close physically. I know of doctors and psychologists who have advocated extra-marital sex for some of their patients for various reasons. It was needed for their sanity. Maybe their mate was impotent or frigid, for either physiological or psychological reasons. But it was driving the other one crazy, but the person would not consider divorce.

Extra marital sex is immoral from a self centered viewpoint.

“But on the negative side I get a sexually transmitted infection, maybe even HIV. No sex would be worth that. Or what if I got my girlfriend pregnant and had to support the child for the next 20 years. Or what if he or she blackmailed me? I’ve seen it in the courts where women accuse men of being the father to their child. Famous people are often the target for these charges. Rich people are too, so Con so watch your step! Thank goodness we now have DNA tests to prove or disprove the accusations.

Extra marital sex may be moral from a God based viewpoint.

“Religions are overwhelmingly against adultery. The gods generally tell society what is best for it. And adultery, like stealing and murder, are commonly considered to be societal no-nos. But the gods, and often their representatives, often find extra-marital flings as exciting.

Hindu mythology has a number of stories telling us how the gods often indulged themselves in adulterous thoughts and actions. The Kama Sutra explains how to seduce different types of women. Hindu, like Muslim, royalty often kept harems or had adulterous access to women.

“And while adultery was commonly found to be a capital crime, it may not have been an unforgivable sin. In the Gospel of John, Chapter 8 verses 3 to 11, the scribes and Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman who had been caught in adultery. The law required that she be stoned. But Jesus bent over and wrote in the sand ‘Let he who has not sinned cast the first stone’ and before he rose they had all disappeared. Then he told the woman that there was no one to accuse her, but that she should go and sin no more.

“But as a lawyer, I have always wondered about King Solomon and his 700 wives and 300 concubines. With that many women he certainly shouldn’t have been tempted by other women!”



—“It seems like 365 wives would be more than enough! Seems like most of those Old Testament kings and rich guys had concubines and more than one wife.”



—“Ya, so my question is—is it adultery to lie with concubines when you are already married? Obviously having multiple wives was fine in the Old Testament days and for present day Muslims in some countries. Was Abraham’s liasson with Hagar adulterous, even if she was a concubine or a servant?

“It seems that the gods doubly blessed some men. They got riches, royalty and women. No need for adultery! But then you had David seducing Bathsheba,

Adultery is immoral from a God based viewpoint.

“The Hindu tradition makes it clear that adultery is evil. The penalties might be death for a low caste person but result in only a fine for the upper castes. Of course when you write the laws you are much more concerned with the sins of the rabble than the similar ethical stumblings of yourself or your friends.

“For the ancient Hindu ‘offering presents to a woman, romping with her, touching her ornaments and dress, sitting with her on a bed, all these acts are considered adulterous acts. If one touches a woman in a place which ought not to be touched or allows oneself to be touched in such a spot, all such acts done with mutual consent are declared to be adulterous.(129)”



“Jesus also saw adultery as more than carnal copulation. According to Matthew 5:27 and 28, in Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount, he noted that people knew that they must not commit adultery. Then he warned the multitudes that anyone who even ‘looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.’ He continued saying that if a man divorces his wife, unless she was unfaithful, it makes her an adulteress ‘and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery’ in 5:32 and 19:9.

“Mark 10:11cites a more comprehensive approach to the definition of adultery when Jesus spoke to the Pharisees. He said ‘Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her.’ And if a woman ‘divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery,’ according to both Mark 10:12 and Luke 16:18.

”From a God based point of view I can’t think of a single instance where it could be moral, only immoral. Judaism, Christianity or Islam would all agree on that one. The Qur’an, in Surah 24:2, is clear that any man or woman guilty of adultery will be whipped 100 times, and no compassion should be shown to reduce this punishment. The 7th and 10th Commandments are excruciatingly clear on this point.”

Adultery can be moral or immoral from a societal point of view.



“From a society point of view if it kept marriages together, which it sometimes does, it might be good. If it breaks up marriages and leaves children in single parent homes it might not be good for society. If people had to go on welfare because of it, it would certainly be a societal evil.

“In France adultery seems to be the rule rather than the exception. The most recent visible example was at the funeral of the former French President François Mitterand, where his wife, longtime mistress and the children of both liaisons mourned the death of the statesman. The women even walked arm in arm at the funeral.

“The French seem to recognize the realities of human desires, while most of the world does it but denies it. And they hope that God isn’t peeking.”

PROSTITUTION



—“Thanks Lee, that covers the basics very quickly. —“I’m with you on that. I can’t understand famous athletes, celebrities and politicians paying for an hour or a night of feigned passion. Maybe it’s the idea that it is discrete.”



—“Ya, it might be cheaper to buy a friend dinner then spend the night. But then an emotional attachment and the expectation of marriage, or even blackmail, might be down the road.

“But sometimes the word gets out or the police get involved and bad publicity ensues. Look at what happened Louisiana senator David Vitter when his phone number showed up in a Washington D.C. madam’s phone book. Or look at the bad publicity for Edwin Moses, the Olympic champion hurdler, when he was picked up hustling Hollywood whores. Vitter of course apologized to God and his wife. I assume that Moses apologized to IOC president Samaranch. Since he went right to the top he didn’t have to deal with God.”



—“Wasn’t Vitter that outspoken Christian moralist who was so vocal in getting a Clinton impeachment because he thought that Clinton’s actions with Monica were draining the values from the political culture. Then there was the crime fighting anti-prostitution Governor of New York who had to resign because of his involvement with a prostitute.

Prostitution is moral from a self centered viewpoint

“I guess it’s my turn to tackle an issue. Didn’t see any evidence of prostitution on Venus. And if it were out there it would have been venereal. I guess the obvious self-centered approach is that if you want to pay for sex it is OK. Or if you want to provide sex for drugs or money it could be OK from a self centered point of view.

“I read Raquel Pacheco’s book ‘The Scorpion’s Sweet Poison’ in which she explained how she, as a middle class woman, chose prostitution to become economically independent. She didn’t

do it to provide for her children as is often the case with some prostitutes. In Polly Adler's book 'A House is not a Home' the famous madam wrote about one girl who found it the simplest way to support herself through college. But obviously many prostitutes do it to earn money for drugs. If we judge only by their desires I guess it is OK. If we think of a drug dependent life as a wasted life, it is not OK.

Prostitution is immoral from a self centered viewpoint

"On the negative side, we don't know how many hundreds of thousands of women and children are kidnapped and forced into prostitution. I was first made aware of it in old Bombay where Indian prostitutes on Falkland Road were known as the 'women in cages'. From pre-teenagers to senior citizens, women, often kidnapped, advertised their wares to the passing clientele on the street. From the cages on the street levels to the barred windows above, women of varying degrees of desirability were trapped in a lifeless life, a world of misery without end. And today they are threatened with AIDS with every penetration.

"There are a couple of other negatives. Many police frown on the practice and arrest both the prostitute and her John. Then what if you picked up a disease. Or what if you were blackmailed? Those are all pretty good negatives.

Prostitution is moral from a God based viewpoint

"On the positive side for a God based reason, I know that religious prostitution was often practiced in fertility cults when men attempted to procreate with the temple harlots as a way of influencing the fields to create more fruits. And in ancient Babylon there was a practice where every woman went to the temple of the goddess of love once a year and had sex with a foreigner as a way of welcoming him to the city.

"The cults of ancient Canaan had both male and female prostitutes. And it has been reported that there was teenage male prostitution in the Aztec religion at the time that the conquistadores conquered the New World.

"Some theologians saw prostitution as a necessary evil to prevent rape, which was worse. And, of course, we can go back to the story of Judah and the harlot, where neither was punished.

Prostitution is immoral from a God based viewpoint

"But our Western religions have, officially, been negative to prostitution. It could be seen as a negative use of one's time when you could be praying, or it could be seen as a threat to the sacredness of the marriage which was ordained by God.

The Qur'an in 24:33 says 'You shall not force your girls to commit prostitution, seeking the materials of this world, if they wish to be chaste. If anyone forces them, then GOD, seeing that they are forced, is Forgiver, Merciful.'

Prostitution is moral from a society centered viewpoint

"Society might gain from prostitution. With men historically being the major clients of prostitutes, both male and female, and males being the majority of the legislators, we might expect that prostitution might be either overlooked, or looked after, in the laws. Of course the legislators may be swayed either by strong scriptural sayings or by a democratically deduced freedom of the individual to do what he wishes. Then if it can be taxed it adds an element that politicians can seldom refuse.

"Might legal prostitution prevent rape? One person estimated that it would prevent 25,000 rapes a year. But since rape is recognized as a power crime, done in the sexual arena, would prostitution reduce the power needs of these rapists? And what if those power needs are acted out violently against the prostitutes? Have we reduced the violence?

“Among the positives for society are that more tax paying jobs would be created with legalization. Prostitutes, their medical examiners, their licensing bureaus, the media that carry their advertisements all turn a profit—and all can be taxed. Solon, Greece’s most important legislator put brothels in Athens in the Sixth Century BCE. With the earnings he built a temple to a goddess. The Netherlands, Norway, Greece, New Zealand and some counties in Nevada allow such free enterprise. Making the activities legal takes the vice squad out of the picture and allows the police to pursue crimes with unwilling victims.

“Permissive societies are not agreed. In Turkey licensed brothels are legal but street walkers are criminals. In Japan vaginal penetration prostitution is illegal, but fellatio for money is OK. Then in some countries being a prostitute is legal but it may be illegal to pay for sex. The idea seems to be that prostitutes are victims and their clients are victimizing them. And since pimps are major victimizers of prostitutes, procuring is a crime nearly everywhere.

Prostitution is immoral from a society centered viewpoint

“As with other value situations, prostitution is often outlawed for religious reasons. But other grounds exist. As slavery has become more frowned upon, and since many prostitutes are slaves, there was some pressure to stop the practice. Even when they are not slaves, if women are victimized by being prostitutes it is not good for society. And if a major reason for them prostituting themselves is to buy drugs, this is probably a negative. Prostitution can be such a negative that in some countries prostitution carries the death penalty.

“Child prostitution is generally frowned upon by legislators, still it is a growing concern. When we finally get parents licensed we will eliminate this practice won’t we Wanda?”



--“I hope we can do something about it before your licensing program comes to fruition. Here in Kino we eliminated the problem with licensing but so many of our neighbors in Southeast Asia are afflicted with the child sex trade. We penalize this very harshly”



--- “It’s not only in your area in Asia, but South American and Eastern Europe are also major players in the sex trade of both women and children. Children are either kidnapped for the sex trade or they find that their only way to survive their orphan status is by selling their bodies. Some children are orphaned by AIDS, some are sold by their parents, some are fleeing abusive homes. So the sea of poverty not only drowns the food sources, it overflows into child abuse. I read an estimate that a million children a year enter the sex trade. Three to four million women and girls are sold into the trade annually. I have seen estimates that even in the U.S. 200,000 children are involved in the sex trade. Yet only 300 cases a year are prosecuted. It makes it a relatively safe crime to commit. And with the media eroticizing children and more men feeling emasculated by their societies and by emancipated women, children become a safe area to exercise their diminished power—in a sexual way.

“Wreck, let me throw in some legalese here. The purveyors and clients of child sex are subject to both laws against prostitution and against sex with under age persons. Still sex tourism, particularly for sex with children, has become popular in Southeast Asia, particularly Thailand and Cambodia. A UN report estimated that a million Asian children are victims of the sex trade. But then some Western countries have enacted laws that punish their own citizens if they have sex with children in another country.

“Then on another note, there is no question that prostitutes, both women and children, are violated. Whether it be through kidnapping, forced prostitution, or physical violence, any rights that might be seen as human are grossly violated.”



---“Thanks Lee. But here’s another negative for societies. Prostitutes have been shown to be both victims and vectors of sexually transmitted diseases. This is particularly true where condoms are not common. There’s certainly no question that STDs are bad for any society. In the mid-1900s the UN General Assembly adopted a strong convention against prostitution, brothels and the registration of prostitutes. The U.S., along with the Netherlands and Germany did not ratify it, but 90 countries did. Doesn’t sound like the evangelicals were too organized back then or there would have been a huge outcry.

“There is still another problem for society when prostitution is legal or overlooked. Prostitutes from other countries can overrun the sex trade economy. East European prostitutes and Africans commonly come to West Europe where the money is better. Often they are then allowed free health care, even though they are replacing women who are citizens in the sex trade economy.

SUMMING UP



—“Gentlemen, we have talked about enough value questions so that the point has been made that our opinions, even those we strongly believe in, are based only our non-provable assumptions with some evidence. And much of that evidence is questionable. And as I said at the beginning, you can’t argue basic assumptions.

“Having different basic assumptions does not necessitate different outcomes. As you have seen the same outcome can be advocated from a self, God or society based point of view. It depends on the evidence used. Is the evidence from sociology, chemistry, theology, philosophy? Is the opinion that we hold tenaciously merely based on the idea that ‘we’ve never done that before’ or that ‘we’ve always believed that way.’ The question is, what belief or set of beliefs is better for the people of the world today and tomorrow.”



—“But what if that is not the major value. Is the major value getting as many people into heaven as possible before the world is destroyed by war or warming?”



—“Religious values are killing the world. Not allowing the use of available means of fertility control keeps increasing poverty. More people increase global warming, air and water pollution and reduce the store of essential natural resources, such as fresh water. I don’t know if it is the poverty and overcrowding that pushes people into the religious violence of the monotheistic religions, but I am convinced that some people in the Jewish, Christian or Muslim religions will be ready to blow up the world to save it. And you can’t argue with psychotics!

“I think our only hope to avoid Armageddon is to become humanistic agnostics or atheists or Buddhists, or maybe Hindus. History tells us that when you have THE truth, as the revealed monotheistic Mid-Eastern religions have, anything you do sits right in the eyes of your God.”



—“Lee, you seem to forget that the huge majority of monotheistic believers are peaceful. Many are tolerant and non-violent people. Look at the Quakers and the Amish. Look at the Mormons.”



—“The true believers, those who uphold the Golden Rule, those who believe in turning the other cheek, and those who believe in true charity are not the problem. Good and intelligent people of every persuasion are not the problem. It is the leaders of the monotheistic cultures who do not really believe their founders but who use their religions as a way to wield power over their world. Their world may be as small as their family or as large as the planet. But they must control it by controlling others.”

“The Buddhists, the Hindus and those who have thought their way into non-belief seem to be less interested in power over others. Their intellectual objective is power over themselves.

They want to stand up for what is right, even if they stand alone.”

TRUTH



—“We all think we know the truth. In the introduction to ‘Origin of the Species’ Darwin wrote: ‘Ignorance more frequently begets confidence than does knowledge: it is those who know little, and not those who know much, who so positively assert that this or that problem will never be solved by science.’ The real truth of what we believe to be true and whatever is absolute truth can seldom be known. Most of what was ‘known’ 1000 years ago is now known to not be true. The earth is not the center of the solar system. It is not flat. Germs cause disease. We know the speed of sound and of light. Things we couldn’t dream of are commonplace, such as mobile phones, television, and space exploration. More scientific research will make some of our present assumptions either fact or fable.”

“Maybe Thomas Hobbes was right when he wrote that everyone is content with his own amount of common sense and knowledge. We all think we are right about our knowledge and our values.

“Our values are relative—popes and ayatollahs and many others don’t want it that way. They want absolute values from the mouth of God. But they can’t agree on what they are. Each wants his own values to be universal.



—“It seems that many don’t realize that our knowledge keeps changing. At one time we thought that olive oil was a harmful oil. Then we found that monounsaturated fats were helpful so we readjusted our knowledge and ranked olive oil as our second best oil. We once thought that red meat was very healthy, then we found out about cholesterol and saturated fats. We didn’t use to fear biological terrorism. We now know that it is a real possibility. Knowledge changes. We must change with it.

“We all think we see clearly and know thoroughly and completely, but truth does not depend on a majority decision of the voters. God and one man is a majority.”



—“You are so right! But we keep being dragged into inhumane lives by the whims of the powerful. Internationally we are victims of the irrational decisions of a few—of Hitler, of bin Laden, of Bush, of Napoleon. Will people never understand that warriors lose—either immediately or in the long term. Does Italy still control Britain as it did under Caesar? Does Norway control England as it did during the Viking times? Does France still control what it did under Napoleon? Does Greece still control Iran and Turkey as it did in Alexander’s day? ‘Here today and gone

tomorrow' is the fate of the conqueror. But 'probability today and truth tomorrow' is the path traveled by the scientist. And as Einstein said 'Truth is what stands the test of experience.'"



—“I'm with you on the science rather than war idea. But we must have values, and science can't tell us what to do. The actions of so many people in religions have certainly not given us a universal moral law. I would like to say that God and one man is a majority—but where is that person who really expresses God's desires? With the history of papal doctrinal shifting, I don't think it's the Pope. With the myriad of Muslim beliefs and actions, I don't know where we would find Allah's spokesman there, in spite of each imam guaranteeing that his is the voice. With the questionable historical accuracy of Mormonism and its major shifts in its revelations, I doubt that we'll find that divine link in Salt Lake City. With God's chosen people arguing and splintering, I see no prophet there. Maybe Gandhi was the Lord's loudspeaker when he said 'Always aim at complete harmony of thought and word and deed. Always aim at purifying your thoughts and everything will be well.'”



—“Wreck, move from the general to the specific. The Golden Rule of every religion and nearly every philosophy certainly has the approval of God. The nearly universal calls for mercy and peace obviously get the approving nod or God. Right is always right, even if nobody is doing it; and wrong is always wrong even if everybody is doing it.”



—“But look at all the value questions we have just been discussing. Everyone thinks he or she has all the knowledge needed in the world. Can science help us to develop an ethical system?”



—“Only in measuring sociologically what works—not murdering, not lying, not stealing. These seem to work for most societies. But what about the values of democracy in an advanced society versus in a third world society.



—“But what can science say about speeding, drug use, abortion, equality for women, freedom of speech and freedom to discuss the ideas without violence. Can we have a 'best' ethical system? If so, based on what? Love, tolerance?”



---“Science can certainly say something about some of those issues. Speeding you car or a lack of abortion certainly will negatively affect global warming, the first by increasing gasoline usage, the second by having more people polluting the air with smoke and chemicals. Psychoactive drugs and an inequality of women in the workplace hinder a society's economic progress. So some of society's values can certainly be influenced by the findings of science. But it may be difficult to have science wipe away the people's selfish desires or their non-sensical beliefs in the Supernatural's concern for the world. But then as George Orwell wrote 'To see what is in front of one's nose needs a constant struggle.' So I'll try to be patient. I can only hope that more people will widen their horizons, study science, history and philosophy—and even religions. We need a much broader knowledge if we are to survive as humans. But strangely, in most jobs we need a greater depth of knowledge in a narrower area in the economic and technical fields. Maybe

we just have to expand our college educations—four years of liberal arts studies and four years of technical education.”



—“Maybe we’re going to have to use Plato’s ideas of full time study until you are 40 or 50 if you are going into the legislature. Maybe 30 years if you are going to be an engineer, 35 for a physician. And maybe carpenters and lawyers could leave school by 18. But seriously, we need more of a universal outlook for us humans. Confucius said over 2000 years ago that ‘Great Man being universal in his outlook, is impartial; petty man, being partial, is not universal in outlook.’ (130)

“When we honestly search for the truth no matter where it leads, we will inevitably be upset when our old beliefs are doubted or found to be false. As with Oedipus asking Tiresias about his father’s killer, the wise man answers ‘I will not bring remorse upon myself and upon you. Why do you search these matters?’ But Oedipus pressed the issue saying ‘I will not hearken—not to know the whole, break out what will, I shall not hesitate.’ The seer therefore tells him that Oedipus had murdered his own father and married his mother. Thus does Sophocles deal with the eternal questions we ask, and their answers which we shun.

“What might we know as honestly inquiring humans that might match the realities that Oedipus learned. Can we handle the ideas that women have equal potential to men, that contraception and abortion are necessary, that global warming threatens our species—and perhaps that there is no all-caring God! Dare we follow the truth wherever it leads?

“No one knows all of the truth. Is there one god, many gods or no god. If there is a god is it/he/she merciful, vengeful, omnipotent? Is the speed of light 186,000 miles per second? Does $E=MC^2$? What is good, what is evil, or is there such a distinction? What is the best way of knowing? Which epistemological position will you follow Wanda—empirical evidence, reason, the command of some authority? What is beautiful? What is ugly? How much do we know about the universe? Is it really only about 1% as the experts say?

“If all of truth about the universe were the size of a king sized bed sheet, the knowledge of any one of us would be equivalent to little more than a half a millimeter of one thread. Yet we all think we know everything.



—“There are some things in the human spirit that are beyond reason.”



—“But we had better start with reason or we’ll never get out of the muck of those senseless traditions that hold us at a truly sub-human level. The myths, traditions and behaviors we needed as primitive people to survive should be dropped from our intellectual baggage, while we furnish our minds with more verifiable facts and more appropriate social and psychological goals.”



--“Remember Wreck the poem you wrote in our philosophy class at LA High? It was about science being the best way to know.”



---“I remember. I titled it ‘Where Oh Where Can I Find Truth?’ Wanna hear it? I still remember it.”



--“Sure. Provable science has certainly been a big part of your life.”



---“Well here goes. . .

The quest for truth is often hard,
A few choice words writ by the Bard,
Or prophets see the word of God
And tell us the best way to trod.

The seers use reason to be true,
Or statements false will sure ensue,
But science gives best hope to man
If doubts can be part of our plan.

The truth is not so sure today,
For old beliefs hold truth at bay.
While certainty is prized the most,
It's ‘probability’ we toast.”

NOTES

1. Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*
2. Transparency International Rates the Countries. *Aftenposten* Nov 14, 2005
3. Institute for Studies of Religion. Baylor University survey of 1,721 Americans, fall 2005.
4. 1.1
5. See also Deut 4:21, Kings 11:9, Psalms 78:59, Jer 10:10
6. 1 Sa 9:17
7. 1 Sa 19:1-7
8. *Summa Theologica*, Vol II, Part 2, Of Heresy, Q 11, A 3
9. See: Plato, *Laws*, Book X; Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book VIII, Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Q. 2, Art. 3
10. Letter to Jefferson's nephew, Peter Carr, August 10, 1787
11. Jefferson letter to Samuel Kercheval, January 19, 1810
12. A letter to Alexander von Humboldt, dated December 6, 1813.
13. Letter to Charles Thompson, 1816
14. Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments, Section 7, 1785
15. John Adams in a letter to Charles Cushing, October 19, 1756
16. Treaty with Tripoli
17. Writings of Benjamin Franklin: London, 1757 – 1775
18. John 18:36
19. John 14:6
20. Qur'an, 2:112
21. Qur'an, 4:125
22. *Aftenposten*. Reported in *Aftenposten*, March 19, 2008.
23. Eurobarometer poll, 2005

24. by Helmuth Nyborg, Danish professor of developmental psychology at Aarhus University, (National Longitudinal Study of Youth). 2007. Reported in Jyllands-Posten
25. Paul, Gregory S. "Cross-National Correlations of Quantifiable Societal Health with Popular Religiosity and Secularism in the Prosperous Democracies: A First Look" *Journal of Religion and Society*. Vol. 7, 2005)
26. *Nature*, Vol. 394, No. 6691, p. 313 (1998) Macmillan Publishers Ltd
- 26a. Soviet Constitution 1936, Article I, Section 12.
- 26b. Marx, Kart. Critique of the Gotha Program. New York: International Publishers, 1938, p. 9: from "Part I". Critique of the Gotha Program. (1875). Marginal notes to the programme of the German Workers' Party.
27. *Miranda v. Arizona* (1966) 384 U.S. 436
28. *Gonzales v. O Centro* 546 U.S. 418 (2006)
29. *State ex rel. Swann v. Pack*, (42) 527 S.W.2d 99 (Tenn. 1975)
30. *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202 (1982)
31. Lev 24:16; Ex 21:17; Ex 31:15; Lev 20:10
32. *Staples v. United States* (1994) 511 U.S. 600
33. *Dagbladet*. Jan. 2, 2008
34. "Tax rates, tax revenues and economic growth", National Center for Policy Analysis (1991)
35. A Summary of the 2006 Annual Reports of the Social Security and Medicare Boards of Trustees
36. 1996-2006 International Labour Organization (ILO)
- 36a *Aftenposten*. Aug 14, 2010 pp 14-15
37. Hansson, A. "Limits of Tax Policy", University of Lund, Sweden
38. *Hein v. Freedom From Religion Foundation*, (2007) 551 U.S. ____ no case number yet)
39. *World Factbook*, Central Intelligence Agency, 2007
40. CBS poll Oct. 23, 2005
41. *Schoepfung und Evolution [Creation and Evolution]* Sankt Ulrich, 2007
42. *Gonzales v. O Centro* [2006] op. cit.
43. Zaehner, R. C. *Mysticism Sacred and Profane: An Inquiry into Some Varieties of Praternatural Experience*. London: Oxford University Press. 1973.
44. Curlin et al. "Religion, Conscience, and Controversial Clinical Practices," *New England J. of Medicine*. Vol. 356, No. 6, Feb. 8, 2007, pp 593-600)
45. Koran 2:219
46. Koran 24:33
47. Koran 24:2
48. Mark 16:18
49. *Baldwin v. G. A. F. Seelig, Inc.*, 294 U.S. 511, 523 (1935). See also: *Saenz v. Roe* (98-97) 526 U.S. 489 (1999) 134 F.3d 1400)
50. U.S. Const., Amendment. 14, §1)
51. Matt. 5:5
52. Matt. 5:3-48
53. Matt.5:29-30
54. Matt. 5:32
55. Matt. 5:32
56. Ps 72:13
57. We the People of the United States, in Order 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, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.)

58. The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.)

59. The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.)

60. Surah 3;168

61. Federalist Papers, October 5, 1787

62. Schenck v. United States, 249 U.S. 47 (1919)

63. Brandenburg v. Ohio, (395 U.S. 444 (1969),

64. Regina v. Hicklin,[1868] L.R.3 Q.B. 360)

65. Roth v. United States [1957] 354 U.S. 476

66. Ashcroft v. Free Speech Coalition , 535 U.S. 224 [2002])

67. John 8:35; Gal 3:28

68. Sur 2:177

69. I Tim 1:10

70. United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind, 261 U.S. 204 (1923)

71. The Times, London, Oct. 17, 2007

72. Analysis of Census data by the Federation for American Immigration

72a. Aften. July 22, 2010. p. 9

73. Elk v. Wilkins, 112 U.S. 94 [1884])

74. United States v. Wong Kim Ark, 169 U.S. 649 (1898)

75. 3 U.S. 386

76. 1 Blackstone's Commentaries 46) of the terms is clear and accurate.'

77. Article 1. section 10.

78. Federalist Number 44

78a. O'Connor v. California. (2002) Petition for Writ of Certiorari, 02-17

79. Carlisle v. U. S. (1872) 16 Wall. 147, 155; Radich v. Hutchins (1877) 95 U.S. 210 ; Wildenhuss' Case (1887) 120 U.S. 1 , 7 Sup. Ct. 385; Chae Chan Ping v. U. S . (1889) 130 U.S. 581, 603 , 604 S., 9 Sup. Ct. 623)

80. Int. Law, 31.

81. Vatt. Law Nat. bk. 1, c. 19, 212).

82. Plyler v. Doe, 457 U.S. 202 (1982)

83. quote attributed to Dr. Jerry Vlasak, MD in Los Angeles Times article by Joe Mozingo, Sept. 5, 2006

84. Masserman JH, Wechkin S. and Terris W. "Altruistic Behavior in Rhesus Monkeys," Am. J. Psychiatry, 121:Dec 1964, 584-5

85. Deut 5:12-15

86. Lundmark 2000, cited in: Wahlstrom M and Peterson, A. "Between the State and the Market", Acta Sociologica 49(4), 371)

87. Ardrey, Robert. African Genesis. Dell Pub.:NY, 1961

88. City of God. Bk 1, Ch.17-22

89. Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes, no. 27).

90. Declaration on Procured Abortion, November 18, 1974: AAS 66 (1974), pp. 730-747.)

91. Pius XII, Address to Those Attending the Congress of the International Union of Catholic Women's Leagues, September 11, 1947: AAS 39 (1947), p. 483; Address to the Italian Catholic Union of Midwives, October 29, 1951: AAS 43 (1951), pp. 835-854; Speech to the Members of the International Office of Military Medicine Documentation, October 19, 1953: AAS 45 (1953), pp. 744-754; Address to Those Taking Part in the IXth Congress of the Italian Anaesthesiological Society, February 24, 1957: AAS 49 (1957), p. 146; cf. also Address on 'Reanimation', November 24, 1957: AAS 49 (1957), pp. 1027-1033; Paul VI, Address to the Members of the United National

- Special Committee on Apartheid, May 22, 1974: AAS 66 (1974), p. 346; John Paul II: Address to the Bishops of the United States of America, October 5, 1979: AAS 71 (1979), p. 1225.)
92. Rom. 14:8; cf. Phil. 1:20).
 93. Islamic Organization of Medical Sciences, Kuwait, 1981, p.65)
 94. 1981 p.67)
 95. Recommendation 779 (1976) on the rights of the sick and dying, of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe at its XXVIIth Ordinary Session; cf. Sipeca, no. 1, March 1977, pp. 14-15; The 39th General Assembly of the World Medical Association, Madrid October 8th 1987.).
 96. 521 U.S. 702)
 97. Dartmouth Atlas of Health Care, 2008 edition
 98. Washington v. Glucksberg, 521 U.S. 702 [1997] and Vacco v. Quill, 117 S.Ct. 2293)
 99. Ex 21:24. Lev 24:20, Deut 19:21)
 100. Ex 21:23; Lev 24:17, 21; Deut 19:21
 101. Matt 26:42, 53 and John 18:4-11)
 102. Clay, aka Ali v. U.S. Government [1971] 403 U.S. 698)
 103. Aftenposten July 15, 2007
 104. Aristotle. History of Animals Bk VII, Ch 3)
 105. Summa Theologica, Question CXVIII, Art 1
 106. CXVIII. Art 2, Rep, Obj 2),
 - 107 On the Soul, Bk II, Ch 3 and 4)
 108. Bk III, Ch 3)
 109. Treatise on Man Q XC, Art 1, Obj 3)
 110. On Christian Doctrine III, Ch 18, 19)
 111. Levitt. Steven. [2004] ‘Understanding why crime fell in the 1990s.’ J. Economic Perspectives 18:1, 163-190)
 112. 18 USC 1841)
 113. 18 USC 1365)
 114. Report by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, July 13, 2007)
 - 114a Washington Post, Dec. 29, 2008
 - 114aa Journal of Adolescent Health, Apr. 2008
 115. Washington Post, March 4, 2007)
 116. Aftenposten, Nov. 20, 2006)
 117. Guardian Oct 9, 2003)
 118. Catholic Charities of Sacramento Inc. v. California, Case No. 03-1618)”
 119. Miller v. California, 413 U.S. 15 [1973
 120. Stanley v. Georgia, 394 U.S. 557[1969])
 121. Jenkins v. Georgia 418 U.S. 153 [1974])
 122. Smith v. U.S. 431 U.S. 291 [1977])
 123. Paris Adult Theater v. Slaton, 413 U.S. 49[1963])
 124. Hamling v. U.S., 418 U.S. 87 [1974
 125. Barnes v. Glen Theater, Inc., 501 U.S. 560 [1991])
 126. Osborne v. Ohio, 495 U.S. 103 [1990])
 127. Souli, Safia. Love Life of the Ancient Greeks. Toubi’s SA, Athens, 1997)
 128. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. 2006.)
 129. Manusmriti: Chapter 8:357-358)
 130. The Sayings of Confucius, Ch 2

