



# The Separationist



## Darwin Bowl CXLVII / When Majesteria Collide

a talk by Professor Rob Dillon

4PM Sunday March 19, 2006

at Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street, Charleston SC

Steven J. Gould memorably characterized science and religion as “nonoverlapping majesteria,” equally valid but utterly irreconcilable in their language, values and culture. Professor Rob Dillon (Dept. of Biology, College of Charleston) suggests adding a third majesterium to Gould's taxonomy - that of public policy. The recent renewal of the long standing contest over evolutionary science in the public school curriculum has brought scientists, politicians and persons of faith into the civic arena - one



team carrying tennis racquets, a second team carrying baseball bats, and a third team dribbling basketballs.

Professor Dillon says that his talk at the March Meeting of the SHL will “report on the score of the game at present.”

*Dr. Rob Dillon is associate professor of biology at the College of Charleston, Trustee of the CCSD Constituent District 10 School Board, and tenor in the First (Scots) Presbyterian Kirk Choir. He is President of the newly-formed South Carolinians for Science Education.*

### Two Humanist Views on Animal Rights

*This issue, we asked two SHL members with very different opinions to each write essays on the subject of animal rights. These essays appear on pages 4 and 5. We encourage you to read and think about each essay, and to share your own views either in the next Separationist or at the discussion forum on our Website.*

## **"I Believe...There Is No God"**

by Penn Jillette

*The following essay was actor/magician/comedian Penn Jillette's entry in National Public Radio's "I Believe..." series. It was aired on November 21, 2005.*

I believe that there is no God. I'm beyond atheism. Atheism is not believing in God. Not believing in God is easy -- you can't prove a negative, so there's no work to do. You can't prove that there isn't an elephant inside the trunk of my car. You sure? How about now? Maybe he was just hiding before. Check again. Did I mention that my personal heartfelt definition of the word "elephant" includes mystery, order, goodness, love and a spare tire?

So, anyone with a love for truth outside of herself has to start with no belief in God and then look for evidence of God. She needs to search for some objective evidence of a supernatural power. All the people I write e-mails to often are still stuck at this searching stage. The atheism part is easy.

But, this "This I Believe" thing seems to demand something more personal, some leap of faith that helps one see life's big picture, some rules to live by. So, I'm say-

ing, "This I believe: I believe there is no God."

Having taken that step, it informs every moment of my life. I'm not greedy. I have love, blue skies, rainbows and Hallmark cards, and that has to be enough. It has to be enough, but it's everything in the world and everything in the world is plenty for me. It seems just rude to beg the invisible for more. Just the love of my family that raised me and the family I'm raising now is enough that I don't need heaven. I won the huge genetic lottery and I get joy every day.

Believing there's no God means I can't really be forgiven except by kindness and faulty memories. That's good; it makes me want to be more thoughtful. I have to try to treat people right the first time around.

Believing there's no God stops me from being solipsistic. I can read ideas from all different people from all different cultures. Without God, we can agree on reality, and I can keep learning where I'm wrong. We can all keep adjusting, so we can really communicate. I don't travel in circles where people say,

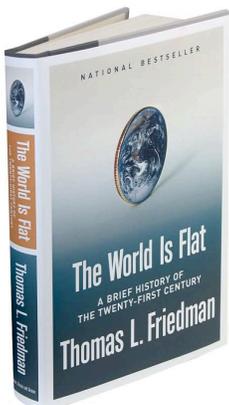
"I have faith, I believe this in my heart and nothing you can say or do can shake my faith." That's just a long-winded religious way to say, "shut up," or another two words that the FCC likes less. But all obscenity is less insulting than, "How I was brought up and my imaginary friend means more to me than anything you can ever say or do." So, believing there is no God lets me be proven wrong and that's always fun. It means I'm learning something.

Believing there is no God means the suffering I've seen in my family, and indeed all the suffering in the world, isn't caused by an omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent force that isn't bothered to help or is just testing us, but rather something we all may be able to help others with in the future. No God means the possibility of less suffering in the future.

Believing there is no God gives me more room for belief in family, people, love, truth, beauty, sex, Jell-O and all the other things I can prove and that make this life the best life I will ever have.

### **Humanist Book Discussion Group**

The Humanist Book Club will be meeting March 26th at the West Ashley Barnes and Noble from 3:00-5:00 p.m. to discuss Thomas L. Friedman's book "The World is Flat." He is not actually discussing the physical shape of the planet here. Rather, he is addressing the connectedness of humanity. It is the lowering of trade and political barriers, along with the technological achievements that have made travel and communication between even the furthest points on the globe easy, that has made the world "flat". Friedman not only knows the situation today, but tries to keep you informed of where it is going tomorrow. Said one review "He wants to tell you how exciting this new world is, but he also wants you to know you're going to be trampled by it if you don't keep up with it." Sharon Fratapietro will be facilitating the discussion and everyone is encouraged to attend and participate in the discussion regardless of whether or not they have read the book.



#### **Contact Information for the SHL:**

**Phone:** 843-577-0637

**E-Mail:** [shl@lowcountry.humanists.net](mailto:shl@lowcountry.humanists.net)

**Web:** [lowcountry.humanists.net](http://lowcountry.humanists.net)

**Mail:** P.O. Box 32256  
Charleston SC 29417

**Reminder! Our next Adopt-a-Highway litter clean-up is Saturday, March 11.**



Our stretch of adopted highway is on Harbor View Road on James Island. We will meet at the parking lot of the First Federal Bank (next to the Piggly Wiggly) at 8:50 AM. In exchange for our participation, the SHL gets a roadside sign that enhances our group's image through community involvement. It's also good exercise! Please join us. If you have any questions, contact Roger Prevost at 224-9360.

**UU Social Justice Film Series continues**

On Sunday, March 26, 6 p.m., the Unitarian Church will host a free viewing open to the public of the first half of the feature film "Contact," based on the novel by Carl Sagan. The second half will be shown at a similar meeting the following month. A discussion facilitated by SHL member Alex Kasman regarding questions of religious tolerance and understanding will follow. Those interested in engaging in a dialogue to better understand the experiences and feelings of the diverse groups making up our community are welcome to attend: Unitarian Church's Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street. Child care provided. Light refreshments. For more information, contact Don Manning at (843)237-1125 or write DonManning@sc.rr.com.

**Gilliard still clueless about Separation**

by Kaniksu Darwin

On 16 February 2006 Burke High School held an Annual Town Hall Forum declaring war on illegal drugs, and illegal guns. It started around 6pm, and ended around 8pm. The front page of the pamphlet that they handed out listed Mr. Curtis Amos, Principal, and Dr. Marie Goodloe-Johnson, Superintendent. There was an Invocation by Rev. Alma Dungee, and there was supposed to be a Benediction by Rev. Randolph Miller. Charleston City Councilman Wendell Gilliard made the closing remarks. Mr. Gilliard in his closing remark did a hardcore sales pitch on getting everyone to believe in god. He was saying stuff like god is the rock of all societies, always has been that way, and always will be that way. He then had all the ministers present (about 6 or 7) come up front, and lead in a prayer. When he asked everyone to rise for prayer that was more than I could handle. I was shocked that a City Councilman would do that sort of thing. I walked out.

Illegal drugs and illegal guns I am definitely against. I support the community in their effort to eliminate this problem. What City Councilman Gilliard did I consider to be a violation of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution regarding state and church separation. I say this for two reasons 1) The forum was held at a public school, and 2) Wendell Gilliard is a local government representative. Another thing I question concerning church, and state separation is there being an Invocation, and Benediction at a public school. There were students attending the forum. Most of them were, I believe, ROTC and it appeared as though their attendance was mandatory.

There is another situation involving City Councilman Wendell Gilliard that I have concerns about. On 14 February 2006 at the City Council Meeting Mr. Gilliard gave an order to a female to investigate the situation of the local churches in the community. It was my understanding that he is going to use tax payers' money to see what the situation is concerning churches. He seem to want to know if they were in trouble financially, or if they might need any type of assistance, and if the people support, or go to church. The female I believe is on the City Council pay roll, and her research would be done at the expense of tax payers. This I consider to be a violation of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution concerning separation of state, and church. It is also an abuse of city funds.

**Letter to Summerville Journal Scene**

Dear Editor,

In the 12/28/05 addition of the Journal Scene a letter titled "Vets vs ACLU" suggested that vets "join and infiltrate the ACLU and turn their program around." I am a vet and I have been a member of the ACLU for many years. I would encourage all vets and other citizens to pay their money and join the ACLU. This patriotic organization has been striving to maintain and advance the rights of ALL Americans. The ACLU needs all the help that it can get. The ACLU frequently is involved in defending the rights of minorities which are protected from the dictatorship of the majority by the "Bill of Rights" part of the U. S. Constitution.

The writer wants to keep the 1954 insertion "one nation under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance. He thinks that "85% or more of Americans are Christian," and that a small percentage of non-Christians are attempting to "control and destroy what we Christians hold dear." Is the idea that the government should be deeply involved in advocating religious doctrines something that Christians hold dear? You would think that most of the supposed "85%" of those that consider themselves to be Christian would want all Americans to be free to hold and profess religious beliefs that they personally think correct and not religious ideas directed or dictated by the government. I don't think that the writer would want to pledge or have his children to have to repeat a Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag that included a phrase that he did not believe, such as "one nation under NO God." The "Bill of Rights" part of the United States Constitution should prevent some governmental body placing such a religious phrase in the Pledge to the American Flag.

Bill Upshur

## An Animal Rights Nut in a Nutshell

by Billy Kelly

Sometimes I wonder if it's foolish to be a proponent of animal rights (AR). Perhaps my emotional sentimentality has gotten the better of my skeptical rationality. Maybe there's something wrong with the philosophy of AR, but I'm just too close to see it. Is it possible that I'm so inoculated against any criticism of my views on animals that I'm unable to see the fatal flaws so obvious to everyone else?

This may be the case. However, when I reflect on the facts of our treatment of animals (the myriad ways in which we use and abuse them), the fact that animals can and do suffer and die for our pleasure, and when I apply simple logic to the objections to AR, I feel validated in my decision to support AR.

So, how do we treat animals? Not well. As William Inge once put it, "We have enslaved the rest of the animal creation and have treated our distant cousins in fur and feathers so badly that beyond doubt, if they were able to formulate a religion, they would depict the Devil in human form." Here's an abridged list of things routinely done to most of the animals we sacrifice for our taste buds. (I hope it is clear that while I'm only discussing animals raised for food, this is not the only objectionable animal use industry.)

Chickens have their beaks seared off with a hot blade (similar to you ripping off a fingernail along with much of the sensitive skin underneath), are crammed into overcrowded cages (with so little space they can't even turn around or flap a wing; many become cannibalistic), and often develop hock burn and breast blisters due to accumulated ammonia from urine. Dairy cows are forced into an intense cycle of pregnancy (artificially inseminated with the industry dubbed "rape rack") and hyperlactation for most of the year, until after several years they're "spent" and are sent off to become cheap hamburgers. Male cows and pigs suffer painful castration without anesthetic. Piglets have their teeth ripped out, their tails cut off, and their ears mutilated for identification (all without painkillers). Calves are separated from their mothers shortly after birth (traumatic for both due to the strong familial bonds of cows), dehorned (which may be more painful than debeaking), and branded (a euphemism for being given a third degree burn via hot iron, which frequently engulfs the head in flames). The animals we eat are fed so much that they reach slaughter weight within weeks or months and are injected with hormones and antibiotics to keep them alive through conditions that would ordinarily kill them. Transported through all weather conditions, cows and pigs are often found frozen to the truck or so crippled that they cannot walk of their own volition and must be dragged to slaughter. Though measures are taken to stun the animals before slaughter, many are scalded alive and have their throats sliced open while completely conscious, which is inevitable given the number of animals and the speed with which they must be slaughtered.

Do we have the right to treat other sentient beings this way? If you wouldn't want this done to you, how can you justify doing it to someone else? What moral code could possibly condone such a situation? If this sort of treatment is acceptable and right, what does it mean to speak of animal cruelty? What does it take to be included in the "moral club?" Is it not enough that animals can feel pain? What's stopping us from expanding our circle of compassion to include all sentient beings, even those not like us? As Jeremy Bentham said, "The question is not, Can they reason? Nor, Can they talk? But, Can they suffer?"

If we do have the right to treat animals this way, what gives us this right? Is it that we are somehow different from animals (we're smarter, more important, more autonomous)? Do we have this right by virtue of our power and desire to use animals in any way we see fit, as resources? Perhaps we have the right because it is natural (or traditional) for us to eat animals or simply because we like the taste of meat. To me, these "reasons"

to eat meat are almost as good as the "reasons" to believe in God. Any meaningful principle of justice would condemn such blatantly self-serving rationalizations. Being different from someone doesn't give us a right to eat them; might does not make right; and morality is seldom found in nature/tradition.

Most of us would be horrified if our pets were treated as our food animals are, which led Tom Regan to say, "I think everybody has that capacity to stop and think and say, 'If I knew you, I wouldn't eat you.' And in some ways, it really is that simple."

Though I'm not able to mount an effective case for AR in less than 1000 words, I hope I've given you a few things to think about. If you're interested in more in-depth consideration of AR and its objections, please visit [www.animal-rights.com](http://www.animal-rights.com), and/or read Mark Rowlands' *Animals Like Us* or Gary Francione's *Introduction to Animal Rights: Your Child or the Dog?*

In closing, I'd like to leave you with a couple of quotes that I think are powerful stimuli for thinking outside the status quo of eating animals:

*"It is easy for us to criticize the prejudices of our grandfathers, from which our fathers freed themselves. It is more difficult to distance ourselves from our own beliefs, so that we can dispassionately search for prejudices among them. What is needed now is a willingness to follow the arguments where they lead, without a prior assumption that the issue is not worth attending to."*—Peter Singer

*"The animals of the world exist for their own reasons. They were not made for humans any more than black people were made for white, or women created for men."*—Alice Walker

**To me, these "reasons"  
to eat meat are almost  
as good as the "reasons"  
to believe in God.**

## WE ARE OMNIVORES!

by Carole Cohen

First, let us acknowledge that we are by nature omnivores, and the success of our species is due largely to our adaptation of omnivorous nutrition. Although some primates such as gorillas are herbivores, chimpanzees, our closest relatives, are omnivores. A vegan diet, therefore, is unnatural for our species and indulged in for long periods of time can be dangerous to one's health. A vegetarian diet that includes milk, its by-products, and eggs is better. However, the diet that has all of these foods along with moderate amounts of meat and fish is the default diet for our species. Accounts of the diets of Polynesian people in their pristine state confirms this.

After Herman Melville's sojourn with the Typees on Nukahiva in 1847, he wrote admiringly of the health and beauty and perfect teeth of these people, whose basic diet was vegetarian—breadfruit, bananas, etc.—augmented by not infrequent feasts of pork and fish. The so-called Mediterranean diet, which nutritionists consider a heart-healthy regimen, has this same kind of balance.

It is true that certain groups of humans have subsisted on very limited diets such as the Masai's milk and blood and the Inuits' meat and fish. (By the way, the Inuit obtained the Vitamin C that is essential to the human diet from the raw meat they ate.) These limitations were the result of special circumstances—in the case of the Inuit, being forced into inhospitable territory because of the pressure of more powerful tribes. However, humans who subsisted on such limited diets did not enjoy the longevity that many modern people consider their birthright.

A recent discovery strongly suggests that among the 10,000 taste buds on our tongues there is one that specifically responds to the taste of fat. A craving for fat is an evolutionary advantage. The body rapidly digests fat and stores it to be used when food is scarce. Yes, there is a national crisis of obesity that is due to overeating, excessive consumption of fatty foods, and a sedentary life style, but this does not negate the evidence of what is the natural diet of our species.

In *Animal Liberation*, Peter Singer ignores the question of what a natural diet is, assuring his readers that they can adjust to a vegetarian or even a vegan regimen. To him, the more critical issue is a moral one, the consideration of the rights of animals. That animals kill other animals and often very cruelly (have you seen the documentary of a gang of hyenas dismembering a still-living wildebeest or have you seen, as I have, a snake swallowing a pitifully protesting frog), is summarily dismissed. They have no choice; we do. Singer's crusade to convince people to eliminate completely the use of animals for food is simply quixotic. It won't happen, and he must know this. Perhaps his real agenda is to propose something so preposterous that he can convince enough people to settle for measures that will (mitigate) end the worst abuses.

Many of these practices such as the confinement of calves to produce fine veal and the de-beaking of chickens could be eliminated. From a completely pragmatic point of view, unless you are willing to spend a lot of money on veal, the cheaper stuff is not even worth eating. Raising chickens in the kind of free-roaming environment they used to have is certainly possible. However, the cost of chickens (which are now the best and cheapest source of animal protein) would increase considerably. The humane killing of food animals should certainly be a priority, and there are already such practices in place. For example,

Temple Grandin, an autistic woman with a Ph.D in animal science, has used her unique understanding of the differences in perception between humans and animals to devise a better way to move cows to slaughter. They move silently and contentedly in a kind of conveyor belt and are quickly killed. Domestic animals that are specifically raised to be food for humans

would not have been born except for our desire and need for their flesh. Singer has an arcane discussion of the moral complexities of this question and ends up admitting that it has no simple answer.

I have left for last the stickiest issue and the one that is hardest to refute. No decent human being can read Singer's accounts of animal experimentation without feeling revulsion. (I am assuming that the material he presents is both true and contemporary.) Even if the worst excesses of the past have been eliminated, if animals are sedated when possible, and if experimenters have the choice of not performing certain procedures, is animal experimentation still immoral? Many of us would, however, feel outraged if we learned that experiments to cure spinal injuries, diabetes, Alzheimer's, cancers, etc., were halted because the animal liberation movement had succeeded with its agenda? If it were a choice between your life and that of an animal, what would you do? If you had to watch a loved one who has ALS slowly disintegrate, would you still insist on halting animal experimentation that might unlock the secrets of this horrible ailment? We are no different from other animals in that we do everything possible to survive.

I would like to close with a few questions on some assorted issues:

If everyone in the U.S. became a vegetarian or vegan, would we have enough suitable acreage to grow all the necessary crops? How this might affect the environment?

What would we do with the leftover cows and chickens?

In the many communities plagued by the overpopulation of deer, is it moral to cull them?

It was not clear to me if *Animal Liberation* was directed at Americans only or all humans. Shouldn't it be the latter, and if so, how would Singer deal with issues such as cultures or religions for whom the eating of animal food is a sacred act?

**If it were a choice  
between your life and  
that of an animal, what  
would you do?**

**The Separationist  
Newsletter of the  
Secular Humanists  
of the Lowcountry**

**Editors:  
Laura and Alex  
Kasman**

**Secular Humanists  
of the Lowcountry  
P.O. Box 32256  
Charleston, SC 29417**

**SHL Calendar:**

**March 3 Movie Club -**  
Meets every 1st Saturday. Write  
weatherfeller@comcast.net

**March 11 Litter Pick-up**  
Harborview Rd. Federal Bank 8:50am

**March 12 Americans United for Separation of Church/State**  
Re-organizing meeting 5-6:30PM at Fellowship Hall of First Christian Church.  
Call 571-5710.

**March 13 "Why Religion?"**  
Herb Silverman speaks on Secular Humanism as part of Center for Creative Retirement series at Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, 714 Riverdale Ave, 1-3PM.

**March 19 SHL March Meeting**  
Featuring Rob Dillon at Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street, 4 PM.

**March 26 Book Discussion Group**  
West Ashley Barnes and Noble 3-5PM.

**April 1 Movie Club -**  
(see March 3)

**Join the SHL:**

The Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry (SHL) is a group of free-thinkers who believe in the humanist philosophy. Members come primarily from the Charleston, SC area. The SHL is affiliated with American Atheists, American Humanist Association, Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, Atheist Alliance, Council for Secular Humanism, and the SC Progressive Network.

Annual tax-exempt membership fees are \$24 (individual) or \$36 (couple or family); additional donations are always welcome. Members receive this newsletter and can participate in activities planned for the Lowcountry. For more information consult our Web-page at:

<http://lowcountry.humanists.net>

**Contribute**

Please contact the editors with any questions or comments about this publication. Contributions of short articles, news items, letters-to-the-editor or other information of interest to SHL members are always appreciated. Write to us at [newsletter@lowcountry.humanists.net](mailto:newsletter@lowcountry.humanists.net) or use the contact information at the bottom of page 2.