

MOSS ON THE NORTH SIDE

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COA: Having achieved the pinnacle of success available to a Canadian fan -- that is, Fan GoH at the Edmonton NonCon -- I am moving back to New York. On my last visit there (two weeks ago), I found a job as a Programmer-Analyst, starting Jan. 14; unfortunately, I couldn't find an apartment. Until this situation is remedied (I hope by the end of January), I will be reachable at my parents':

65-46 160 St., Apt. 5K
Flushing, N.Y. 11365

I expect to move there sometime around Jan. 5 -- in any case, mail to there will always reach me.

I have to tell one New York story, the scariest thing I saw while I was there: An ambulance, with its siren screaming, making its way up Sixth Avenue at 3PM. I was walking faster than it was moving.

Mailing Comments

JANE: Tell me more about sign language. Are you getting at all fluent in it? I'd love to know how thinking in sign differs from thinking in a spoken language (apropos of the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis). I know that sign has been successfully taught to chimps (whose physical makeup doesn't let them speak), which has had repercussions far beyond the field of linguistics. I've also heard rumors that Ameslan provides a fertile field for punning.

Re porn: You say you view much hard-core porn as an inducement to violence, and as a physical threat to you as a woman. I would say porn is just a branch, albeit highly specialized, of literature (or photography, or whatever), and reflects societal attitudes. There's porn that caters to every taste, and if S/M (which I take it you're alluding to), or, let's be more specific, heterosexual S/M is the largest category (I don't know that, but it doesn't sound implausible), I would take that as a reflection of people's fantasies, not a cause of them. Do you consider porn aimed at masochistic men a threat? And anyway, there is some evidence from the Scandinavian countries that letting the fantasies have free reign (through porn) reduces the actual incidence of sex crimes. The principle area that concerns me, with written porn, is availability to minors, where I can see it having a real effect on their sexual predilections, as well as giving them a grossly distorted view of reality.

(And then there was the Lampoon sex guide, assuring its male readers that penis size wasn't really important, that "even men with only 10 or 11 inches could still lead perfectly normal sex lives.")

Re your comments to Doug on those special moments -- you might find Abraham Maslow's writings on "peak experiences" interesting.

CHRISTINE (and the rest of the Gang of Four): I am not angry, but I am a little peeved at the appearance of that interview in the last MM. As I recall, I was asked once (before the interview) if you could print it; I said no. After the interview, I could have possibly been talked into giving permission if I had editing privileges, but its appearance in print was the first warning I had. There was one specific section that I would have demanded be cut out, if I had had the chance, and some minor corrections (e.g. Chase Park Plaza) that I could have made. In any case, I think I should have had the right to see the transcript before publication. Especially since the interview cost me my promised Dim Sum.

PAUL: Re "the bourgeoisie supports racism because they do profit from it" --

Are you maintaining that they really believe non-whites are equal, but are cynically exploiting the prejudices of the masses? I, frankly, don't see why David Rockefeller should be more immune from simple bigotry than Archie Bunker. I think even if racism was unprofitable it would be hard to eradicate (though if there are profits to be made from it, that would certainly compound the problem).

I truly hope you're not serious about "history" implying the exclusion of women. You might try looking up its etymology in a dictionary (it's Greek). If you are serious, then there are far more serious problems -- "mental", with its implications that women can't think; "manufacture", relegating women to jobs far removed from the means of production; that insidious attempt to increase the use of "person"; and, worst of all, that atrocious crime against women, the hysterectomy.

NANCY: You ask, somewhat rhetorically, for any other book that can do what the Bible can in the way of answering questions. I would reply, the I CHING, the TAO TE CHING, the Koran ... I think most holy books, when approached properly, can serve as relevant guidelines for living (and most, including the Bible, can be and have been used for fortune-telling). That's why I find it hard to understand why people seize on one particular set of scriptures and religious beliefs.

I consider myself religious (in the positive sense), though I don't subscribe to any formal creed. When pressed, I call myself a Taoist (if only because Taoism has a singular lack of theology); my object of worship could be called the Universe, but it wouldn't bother me to call it God. Whatever it's called, it's something that, from time to time, I can become One with, something that underlies and supports my existence, something very real that can be experienced but not adequately described to anyone who hasn't felt something similar. My one article of faith is that there is pattern in the Universe (this is impossible to prove, and, I think, also impossible to disprove; ergo it must be a matter of faith).

I'm sure, from the way you talk, that you get from your religion at least what I get from mine. I'm curious as to how you went from what must have been a very personal religious experience to a belief in a specifically Christian God and your acceptance of the Bible. Does modern Biblical scholarship make any difference to you? (The evidence of multiple authorship and layers of revisions in Genesis; the dubious circumstances under which Deuteronomy was "rediscovered"; the evidence that the Epistles were written by more than one person; etc.)

I've always had a great deal of trouble with the concept of God as some sort of conscious Being, responsible (as creator and/or manipulator) for everything. In high school, I was quite fond of the Rubaiyat, with its bitter denunciations of such a God ("O Thou who didst with pitfall and with gin/Beset the road I was to wander in/Thou wilt not with predestined evil round enmesh/And then impute my fall to sin"). It's very hard to reconcile an omnipotent and benevolent god with Nazi Germany. ("free will" merely avoids the question) However, Robert Coover, in The Universal Baseball Association, does quite a good job of showing how an omnipotent Creator, who has created not only a universe and the people in it, but also the rules by which it works, cannot break those rules, not without destroying the creation.

In any case, while I can see how one can know that God exists, through direct experience as it were, everything else strikes me as pure faith -- an almost arbitrary choice of deities from the multitudes that have been described by humanity over the ages.
