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HEMANT MEHTA (AKA "THE FRIENDLY ATHEIST") INTERVIEWED BRAD WHITE ABOUT HIS RELIGIOUS VIEWS. HERE ARE HEMANT'S CONCLUSIONS ABOUT BRAD'S STATEMENTS.

HEMANT BEGINS BY RESPONDING TO BRAD'S STATEMENT:

Brad:

"Christians believe that “Marriage” is God-ordained and is DEFINED by God in the Bible as a sacred and holy act between a man and a woman."

Hemant:

Do I support what they’re trying to do? Sure… I applaud anyone who can hold a mirror up to the church so it can see itself the way most of us do.

But it’s clear that, in some cases, Brad just doesn’t get it. And if that’s true, then I don’t think he’ll get very far.

BRAD, MOST BIBLICAL HEROES WERE POLYGAMISTS. SOME LIKE SOLOMON (700 WIVES) WERE AMONG GOD'S FAVORITES AND WERE NEVER PUNISHED FOR VIOLATING THIS SUPPOSED RULE. NOR DID GOD EVER UTTER EVEN ONE WORD OF DISAPPROVAL AGAINST ANY OF THE POLYGAMIST HEROES IN THE BIBLE FOR VIOLATING THIS "RULE."

HEMANT SHOULD HAVE DISPUTED YOU ON THAT POINT.

TO SAY, THAT YOU JUST DON'T GET IT, IS A MEANINGLESS INSULT.

ALSO, I DON'T THINK HEMANT SHOULD BE TRYING TO PREDICT THE FUTURE (WON'T GET VERY FAR) BASED ON AN INSULT THAT MAY OR MAY NOT BE TRUE. FOR EXAMPLE: EVEN MOST CHRISTIANS WOULD AGREE THAT PAT ROBERTSON DOESN'T "GET IT" - BUT HE GOT PRETTY FAR.

Like the gay marriage thing. It’s really not just a matter of different definitions. “Married” couples simply have more rights than couples with just a “civil union.” All states recognize marriage, but not all of them will recognize a civil union from another state. There are tax breaks married couples get that those in civil unions do not. There are hospital visitation rights for married couples but not domestic partners.

BRAD, I DON'T THINK HEMANT UNDERTANDS THAT YOU ARE NOT AGAINST HOMOSEXUALS HAVING EQUALITY, YOU JUST DON'T THINK THEY SHOULD USE THE SAME TERM "MARRIAGE" THAT HETEROSEXUAL COUPLES USE. AM I RIGHT? OR DID HEMANT UNDERSTAND YOU BETTER THAN I?

IF I AM CORRECT, THEN HEMANT'S LIST OF CIVIL UNION SHORTCOMINGS ABOVE, WHILE UNFAIR, ARE AN INDICTMENT OF THE INEQUALITIES WITHIN OUR SOCIETY - NOT OF YOUR POSITION.

Christians don’t have dibs on the word “marriage.” If marriage is truly Christian-God-ordained, as Brad said, then I guess all non-Christians should be stripped of their right to marry, too. (Sorry, mom and dad.)

BRAD, HE COMPLETELY MISSES YOUR POINT HERE. YOU ARE NOT SAYING THAT NON-CHRISTIANS SHOULD BE STRIPPED OF THEIR RIGHT TO MARRY. BY PUTTING WORDS IN YOUR MOUTH THAT YOU NEITHER SAID, NOR INTENDED, HE HAS COMMITTED THE STRAW MAN LOGICAL FALLACY.

But. I don’t think any of this is what Brad intended to say.

BRAD, THEN WHY DID HEMANT WRITE THE PREVIOUS PARAGRAPH IMPLYING THAT YOU DID?

BECAUSE HE KNOWS YOU CAN'T "UNRING THE BELL."

I think his intention was that he’d be fine with gay couples getting equal rights under the law. As long as they refrained from the word marriage.

BRAD, I THINK HE FINALLY REPRESENTED YOUR POSITION CORRECTLY.

THAT MAKES ONE.

Again, this is a problem. I don’t care at all if some church pastor refuses to marry a gay couple. He doesn’t have to and I wouldn’t want him to. No pro-gay-marriage initiative has \*ever\* mandated that a pastor officiate a gay wedding. But the government should not be in the business of defining marriage in a Christian way. They should not be saying, “You can marry this person, but not that one.”

Gay couples (and straight allies) are fighting for equal marriage — with that term, because separate but equal isn’t truly equal — under the law. No one’s telling your church what to do or how to act.

Also, please never compare being gay to being an alcoholic. You’re never going to win any arguments with us that way.

BRAD, DID YOU CATCH ANOTHER STRAW MAN LOGICAL FALLACY?

HEMANT IS CLAIMING THAT YOU ARE COMPARING GAYS TO ALCOHOLICS, WHEN WHAT YOU REALLY DID WAS TO COMPARE THE SOURCE OF THEIR BEHAVIORS.

YOUR COMPARISON WAS VALID - HIS DISTORTION OF YOUR INTENTION ... WAS NOT.

THAT IS THE KIND OF STUNT THAT I WOULD EXPECT FROM A CREATIONIST. UNFORTUNATELY, HEMANT PROVED THAT ATHEISTS CAN ALSO SOMETIMES RESORT TO ILLOGICAL ARGUMENTS IN DEFENSE OF THEIR POSITIONS.

As for the Christians Brad “calls out”… it’s a nice start, but going after Westboro Baptist Church is like shooting fish in a barrel. Going after a pastor who may have stolen from her own church? Easy. The Catholic Church? Really? (Are any churches defending these people?) I’m not interested in Changing the Face of Christianity calling out jackasses, alleged criminal, and pedophiles. That’s easy to do. None of that takes any real courage.

THEN WHY AREN'T MANY PEOPLE DOING IT?

WHY IS WESTBORO STILL PICKETING AT THE FUNERALS OF OUR WAR HEROES? WHY AREN'T CHRISTIANS COUNTER PICKETING?

WHY IS THE CATHOLIC CHURCH STILL PROTECTING ITS PEDOPHILE PRIESTS?

HEMANT'S QUESTION "ARE ANY CHURCHES DEFENDING THESE PEOPLE" CAN BE EASILY ANSWERED BY ONE THAT HE APPARENTLY FORGOT ABOUT - THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ITSELF.

WHY IS HE CRITICIZING BRAD FOR CALLING OUT THOSE WHO SHOULD BE CALLED OUT? WHY IS HE CRITICIZING HIM FOR CALLING OUT THE WORST EXAMPLES OF CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOR?

BRAD SHOULD ONLY BE CRITICIZED FOR NOT DOING SO.

IN MY OPINION, HEMANT DESERVES CRITICISM, FOR CRITICIZING BRAD, FOR CRITICIZING THOSE, WHO DESERVE CRITICISM.

(YEAH, I KNOW. SOMETIMES I GET A LITTLE CARRIED AWAY).

What about the statement that “some radical atheists would rather see all Christians, all believers of any religion (and the lawyers, too) drowned at the bottom of the ocean (which is it’s own bit of intolerance)”?

Wow.

None of the “radical atheists” — I presume Mr. White’s referring to people like Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, and PZ Myers — have ever said we’d be better off if the religious people were dead, or anything even remotely close to it. Seriously, give me a citation for that…

BRAD, HEMANT'S ERROR IN REASONING HERE, IS AT THE BEGINNING WHERE HE "PRESUMES" YOU ARE REFERRING TO SPECIFIC FAMOUS PEOPLE. WHEN I READ IT, I MADE NO SUCH ASSUMPTION. ONCE AGAIN HE IS PUTTING WORDS IN YOUR MOUTH THAT YOU DID NOT SAY, AND IN MY OPINION, DID NOT IMPLY.

THE RADICAL ATHEISTS YOU DESCRIBE, DO IN FACT EXIST. YOU CAN FIND THEM ON THE WEB SIMPLY BY READING THE COMMENTS ON MANY BLOGS.

IF HEMANT CREATES ANY MORE STRAW MEN, HE COULD START HIS OWN CORNFIELD.

We don’t need to resort to that because logic, evidence, and all of reality is on our side.

BRAD, UNFORTUNATELY THIS INTERVIEW PROVES LOGIC IS DEFINITELY NOT ON HIS SIDE.

“Radical atheists” want to convince you you’re wrong with our arguments. (Radical followers of religion, however, have no problem killing abortion doctors or flying into buildings in the name of martyrdom.)

WELL BRAD, HE KINDA GOT YOU ON THAT ONE.

By the way, not all the “radical atheists” would get rid of religion if they were given the option, either. We don’t want to “force” people into atheism any more than we want to live in a theocracy. They have to come to that decision on their own.

BRAD, YOU NEVER IMPLIED THAT ALL RADICAL ATHEISTS WANT TO ELIMINATE RELIGION, ONLY THAT SOME DO; AND IN THAT ... YOU ARE RIGHT.

I THINK HEMANT IS STILL EQUATING 'RADICAL ATHEISTS' TO THOSE FAMOUS ONES HE LISTED EARLIER; ONES THAT YOU DID NOT CALL RADICAL ATHEISTS, BUT WHOM HEMANT ASSUMED THAT YOU DID.

That was an irresponsible thing to say, and I hope Brad understands why.

BRAD, TELL HEMANT THAT YOU DIDN'T SAY IT, SO THERE IS NO REASON TO UNDERSTAND WHY. HE IS THE ONE WHO SAID 'ALL' RADICAL ATHEISTS, NOT YOU.

Bottom line: Brad still has a lot to learn.

BRAD, I'M SORRY HEMANT SAID THAT. THAT'S PRETTY CONDESCENDING AND ARROGANT. CONSIDERING THE LEVEL OF CRITICAL THINKING DISPLAYED IN THIS INTERVIEW BY HEMANT, I WOULD SAY HE HAS A FEW THINGS TO LEARN HIMSELF.

But I sincerely think Brad seems to be open to getting educated about it.

SEE BRAD, THERE IS HOPE FOR YOU. ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS FIND A CONDESCENDING, SMUG, ARROGANT ATHEIST WHO IS ENLIGHTENED ENOUGH TO SHOW YOU THE WAY BACK HOME.

That’s a good first step.

So let’s educate him

BRAD, THAT SOUNDS GOOD TO ME. WE WILL EDUCATE YOU AND THEN MAYBE YOU'LL RETURN TO ATHEISM.

IN RETURN, WE WILL TRY TO EDUCATE HEMANT IN CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS SO THAT HE CAN, HOPEFULLY, LEARN HOW TO CONSTRUCT A COHERENT THOUGHT WITHOUT COMMITTING A LOGICAL FALLACY EVERY TIME HE OPENS HIS MOUTH ... AND MAYBE HE'LL RETURN TO JAINISM.

MY SUMMARY:

WHEN HEMANT ASKED BRAD IF HE THOUGHT BEING GAY WAS A CHOICE, HERE IS THE END OF BRAD'S ANSWER:

"So, what do I believe? If I had to take an educated best guess, I’d say that homosexuality is something you are genetically pre-disposed to and yet it’s still a choice."

JUDGING BY HEMANT'S RESPONSE, IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT HE DID NOT LIKE BRAD'S ANSWER. IF HEMANT BELIEVES THAT NO CHOICE IS INVOLVED, THEN HE IS REJECTING THE CONCEPT OF FREE WILL AND ACCEPTING THAT OF PREDESTINATION: THAT ALL OF US ARE NOTHING MORE THAN PREPROGRAMMED PUPPETS ON A STRING. THAT IS GOING TO BE ONE EXTREMELY TOUGH POSITION FOR HEMANT TO PROVE.

IF HUMANS CANNOT CHOOSE WHETHER TO BE GAY OR STRAIGHT, HOW CAN THEY THEN MAGICALLY DEVELOP FREE WILL AND CHOOSE WHICH PARTNER TO FALL IN LOVE WITH? EITHER FREE WILL EXISTS OR IT DOESN'T. IT DOESN'T JUST EXIST WHEN YOUR ARGUMENT NEEDS IT TO EXIST.

HEMANT IS OPERATING UNDER THE IMPRESSION THAT SCIENCE HAS PROVEN THAT GAYS ARE BORN THAT WAY. BRAD'S POSITION IS THAT THE EVIDENCE INDICATES THAT GAYS ARE PREDISPOSED TOWARD HOMOSEXUALITY. STUDIES INVOLVING TWINS, YOUNGER SIBLINGS, AND OTHER STUDIES ALL SUPPORT BRAD'S POSITION. NOT ONE STUDY SUPPORTS HEMANT'S POSITION (PREDESTINATION).

THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I HAVE EVER WITNESSED A CREATIONIST WIN A SCIENTIFIC ARGUMENT WITH AN ATHEIST. THANKS FOR THE BLACK EYE HEMANT.

BRAD PUT IN RIGHT IN THE TEN RING FOR HEMANT - AND HE STILL MISSED IT. OUR DNA IS A STRONG FACTOR; IT AFFECTS EVERYTHING WE DO. IT PROVIDES THE ODDS THAT WE WILL BEHAVE IN A CERTAIN MANNER. BUT, THE ODDS ARE NEVER 100% - AS THAT WOULD IMPLY PREDESTINATION. WHATEVER THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN 100%, AND THE ODDS PROVIDED TO YOU BY YOUR DNA ... THAT IS WHAT REPRESENTS YOUR FREE WILL.

IF YOUR DNA PREDISPOSES YOU TO BE A MURDERER, HEMANT'S POSITION IS THAT THERE IS NOTHING ONE CAN DO TO PREVENT IT. BRAD'S POSITION IS THAT, ALTHOUGH IT WILL BE MORE DIFFICULT FOR SUCH AN INDIVIDUAL, THE FINAL DECISION TO KILL OR NOT TO KILL WILL STILL REST WITH THE INDIVIDUAL.

AND NO, I WASN'T COMPARING GAYS TO MURDERERS. HEMANT MADE THAT REASONING ERROR EARLIER - I HOPE HE DOESN'T MAKE IT AGAIN.

BUT WHY DO GAYS NEED AN EXCUSE FOR BEING GAY? OTHER THAN RELIGIOUS NUTJOBS WHO ARE FOLLOWING THE MOST DISGUSTING MORAL CODE EVER WRITTEN, MOST PEOPLE HAVE NO ISSUE WITH GAYS. GAY PEOPLE OWE NO ONE AN EXPLANATION AS TO WHY THEY FALL IN LOVE WITH THE PERSON THAT THEY CHOOSE. FALLING IN LOVE WITH SOMEONE WHO IS WILLING AND FREE DOES NOT REQUIRE A REASON OR AN EXCUSE.

IF I WERE GAY, I WOULD PROUDLY STATE THAT I HAVE CHOSEN MY LOVER BY MY OWN FREE WILL BECAUSE THEY ARE AWESOME AND THEY FEEL THE SAME WAY ABOUT ME. I DIDN'T CHOOSE THEM BECAUSE MY DNA DICTATED THE CHOICE. I AM HUMAN, NOT A CHROMOSOMAL ROBOT.

I UNDERSTAND THAT HEMANT IS TRYING TO FIGHT FOR THE RIGHTS OF GAYS AND I RESPECT HIM FOR THAT. BUT I DO NOT THINK HE REALIZES THAT BY TAKING THE POSITION THAT BEING GAY "IS NOT THEIR FAULT," HEMANT IS ASSIGNING STIGMA WHERE THERE IS NONE. BEING GAY IS NOT A FAULT. THEY DON'T NEED AN EXCUSE FOR BEING GAY.

BRAD, REGARDING THE OTHER PARTS OF YOUR INTERVIEW THAT HEMANT DIDN'T DISCUSS, I FOUND YOUR OPINIONS TO BE VERY ENLIGHTENED AND WELL-INTENTIONED.

ATHEISTS DO NOT SEEK A WORLD WITHOUT RELIGION; WE SEEK A WORLD WHERE ALL RELIGIONS AND NONBELIEVERS CAN LIVE TOGETHER IN PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE. TO ME, YOU REPRESENT THE KIND OF CHRISTIAN WHO WOULD MAKE THIS WORLD A PLACE WORTH LIVING IN.

THIS IS ONE ATHEIST WHO WISHES YOU ... THE BEST OF LUCK.

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THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

THUNDERSTORMS CAN SHOOT BEAMS OF ANTIMATTER INTO SPACE—AND THE BEAMS ARE SO INTENSE THEY CAN BE SPOTTED BY SPACECRAFT THOUSANDS OF MILES AWAY

MOST SO-CALLED NORMAL MATTER IS MADE OF SUBATOMIC PARTICLES SUCH AS ELECTRONS AND PROTONS. ANTIMATTER, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS MADE OF PARTICLES THAT HAVE THE SAME MASSES AND SPINS AS THEIR COUNTERPARTS BUT WITH OPPOSITE CHARGES AND MAGNETIC PROPERTIES.

RECENTLY, RADIATION DETECTORS ON NASA'S FERMI GAMMA-RAY SPACE TELESCOPE LIGHTED UP FOR ABOUT 30 MILLISECONDS WITH THE DISTINCTIVE SIGNATURE OF POSITRONS, THE ANTIMATTER COUNTERPARTS OF ELECTRONS.

SCIENTISTS WERE ABLE TO TRACE THE CONCENTRATED BURST OF RADIATION TO A LIGHTNING FLASH OVER NAMIBIA, AT LEAST 3,000 MILES AWAY FROM THE EARTH-ORBITING TELESCOPE, WHICH WAS PASSING ABOVE EGYPT AT THE TIME.

THIS IS A FUNDAMENTAL NEW DISCOVERY ABOUT HOW OUR PLANET WORKS. THE IDEA THAT ANY PLANET HAS THUNDERSTORMS THAT CAN CREATE ANTIMATTER AND LAUNCH IT INTO SPACE IS SOMETHING OUT OF SCIENCE FICTION. THE FACT THAT OUR OWN PLANET IS DOING IT IS TRULY AMAZING.

SCIENTISTS ALREADY KNEW THAT THUNDERSTORMS CAN EMIT GAMMA RAYS—THE MOST ENERGETIC FORM OF LIGHT—AND THAT GAMMA RAYS IN TURN CAN CREATE POSITRONS THROUGH A PROCESS CALLED PAIR FORMATION.

WHEN A GAMMA RAY WITH THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF ENERGY INTERACTS WITH AN AIR ATOM, ENERGY FROM THE GAMMA RAY IS CONVERTED INTO MATTER, ONE ELECTRON AND ONE POSITRON. SCIENTISTS WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN SURPRISED TO SEE A FEW POSITRONS ACCOMPANYING ANY INTENSE GAMMA RAY BURST. BUT THE LIGHTNING FLASH DETECTED BY FERMI APPEARED TO HAVE PRODUCED ABOUT 100 TRILLION POSITRONS: THAT'S A LOT.

WHAT SEEMS TO HAVE HAPPENED IS THAT POSITRONS CREATED BY THE LIGHTNING WERE HERDED INTO A TIGHT BEAM BY EARTH'S MAGNETIC FIELD. THE BEAM FUNNELED POSITRONS FROM THE NAMIBIAN STORM TO THE FERMI SPACECRAFT.

A FEW MILLISECONDS AFTER HITTING THE SPACECRAFT, THE BEAM STRUCK A MORE NORTHERLY SECTION OF EARTH'S MAGNETIC FIELD. THIS CAUSED SOME OF THE POSITRONS TO BOUNCE BACK THE WAY THEY HAD COME, HITTING THE SPACECRAFT WITH A SECOND BEAM, LIKE AN ECHO.

EARTH IS CONSTANTLY BEING BOMBARDED BY RADIATION FROM THE SUN, AS WELL AS COSMIC RAYS FROM DISTANT BUT VIOLENT EVENTS, SUCH AS POWERFUL SUPERNOVAE.

CONSIDERING THE AMOUNT OF POSITRONS IN THE BEAM FERMI DETECTED, THE THUNDERSTORM WAS BRIEFLY CREATING MORE RADIATION—IN THE FORM OF POSITRONS AND GAMMA RAYS—THAN WHAT HITS EARTH'S ATMOSPHERE FROM ALL OTHER COSMIC SOURCES COMBINED. THE DANGER OF THUNDERSTORM RADIATION TO AIRLINE TRAVELERS IS EXTREMELY LOW.

NOBODY KNOWS WHY SOME THUNDERSTORMS PRODUCE GAMMA RAYS WHILE MOST DO NOT.

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FAMOUS QUOTES

THOMAS PAINE (1737–1809) 72 YEARS.

HE WAS AN AUTHOR, PAMPHLETEER, RADICAL, INVENTOR, INTELLECTUAL, REVOLUTIONARY, AND ONE OF THE FOUNDING FATHERS OF THE UNITED STATES. HE HAS BEEN CALLED "A JOURNALIST BY PROFESSION AND A PROPAGANDIST BY INCLINATION."

BORN IN ENGLAND, PAINE EMIGRATED TO THE BRITISH AMERICAN COLONIES IN 1774 IN TIME TO PARTICIPATE IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION. HIS PRINCIPAL CONTRIBUTIONS WERE THE POWERFUL, WIDELY READ PAMPHLET COMMON SENSE (1776), ADVOCATING COLONIAL AMERICA'S INDEPENDENCE FROM THE KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN, AND THE AMERICAN CRISIS (1776–1783), A PRO-REVOLUTIONARY PAMPHLET SERIES. HIS WRITING OF "COMMON SENSE" WAS SO INFLUENTIAL IN SPURRING ON THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR THAT JOHN ADAMS REPORTEDLY SAID, "WITHOUT THE PEN OF THE AUTHOR OF 'COMMON SENSE,' THE SWORD OF WASHINGTON WOULD HAVE BEEN RAISED IN VAIN.”

IN 1789 PAINE VISITED FRANCE, AND LIVED THERE FOR MUCH OF THE FOLLOWING DECADE. HE WAS DEEPLY INVOLVED IN THE EARLY STAGES OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION. HE WROTE THE RIGHTS OF MAN (1791), IN PART A DEFENCE OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AGAINST ITS CRITICS. DESPITE NOT SPEAKING FRENCH, HE WAS ELECTED TO THE FRENCH NATIONAL CONVENTION IN 1792. IN DECEMBER OF 1793, HE WAS ARRESTED AND IMPRISONED IN PARIS, THEN RELEASED IN 1794. HE BECAME NOTORIOUS BECAUSE OF THE AGE OF REASON (1793–94), HIS BOOK ADVOCATING DEISM, PROMOTING REASON AND FREETHINKING, AND ARGUING AGAINST INSTITUTIONALIZED RELIGION AND CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES. HE ALSO WROTE THE PAMPHLET AGRARIAN JUSTICE (1795), DISCUSSING THE ORIGINS OF PROPERTY, AND INTRODUCED THE CONCEPT OF A GUARANTEED MINIMUM INCOME.

IN 1802, AT PRESIDENT JEFFERSON'S INVITATION, HE RETURNED TO AMERICA WHERE HE DIED IN 1809. ONLY SIX PEOPLE ATTENDED HIS FUNERAL AS HE HAD BEEN OSTRACIZED DUE TO HIS CRITICISM AND RIDICULE OF CHRISTIANITY.

"THE STORY OF THE REDEMPTION WILL NOT STAND EXAMINATION. THAT MAN SHOULD REDEEM HIMSELF FROM THE SIN OF EATING AN APPLE BY COMMITTING A MURDER ON JESUS CHRIST, IS THE STRANGEST SYSTEM OF RELIGION EVER SET UP."

"WE HAVE NEVER SEEN, IN OUR TIME, NATURE GO OUT OF HER COURSE.

BUT WE HAVE GOOD REASON TO BELIEVE THAT MILLIONS OF LIES HAVE BEEN TOLD IN THE SAME TIME. IT IS THEREFORE AT LEAST MILLIONS TO ONE THAT THE REPORTER OF A MIRACLE TELLS A LIE."