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JOSEPH HOFFMANN'S CRITIQUE OF BOOKS BY CRAIG JAMES AND DARREL RAY

Here is some practical advice to readers: When an author claims that he (or she) has a PhD, beg to discover where he acquired it.

Obviously this is not necessary if the author isn’t using his credentials to support an otherwise half-cooked hypothesis, but if the hypothesis appears to be half- cooked, it’s important to know how it passed muster: what peers reviewed it, what graduate committee passed it, or snickered behind their hands when they turned it down as a thesis. It is also useful to know if the person signing copies of his latest oeuvre on alien plant life at Borders has a PhD in Renaissance literature from Temple, or something more….germane.

I was recently and justly upbraided by a reader when I stated that Daniel Dennett and Richard Dawkins were “mediocre scholars,” and (suitably contrite) amended my comment to say “in religion.”

JOE, THE ABILITY TO ADMIT WHEN ONE IS WRONG IS TRULY ONE OF THE BEST, AND RAREST, OF HUMAN TRAITS.

I could as easily have said “have no credentials in the study of religion that would lend authority to their work.”

JOE, I DON'T SEE HOW HAVING CREDENTIALS IN THE STUDY OF FAIRY TALES LENDS CREDIBILITY TO ANYTHING.

Anymore than I would have if I developed a learned but totally flawed and useless hypothesis about evolutionary biology.

JOE, IF IT IS "LEARNED" HOW DO YOU CONCLUDE THAT IT COULD, AT THE SAME TIME, BE TOTALLY FLAWED AND USELESS?

THAT WAS A CONTRADICTION.

–Or wrote a book tantalizingly called The Religion Virus: Why We Believe in God (2010, by a systems engineer named Craig A. James) or its twin, The God Virus: How Religion Infects Our Lives and Culture (2009 by a school psychologist, Darrel Ray.)

Yes, I know these have been around for awhile. Yes, it is shameful that I’m just getting around to reading them. Finally I was suckered by the promo on Amazon.com that said those of us who were feeling peckish after the dinner provided by Dawkins, Dennett and Hitchens could find a repast in these authors. Niggardly though my esteem for the “New Atheists,” I was feeling a bit hungry. But what a bad meal.

JOE, YOU SEEM TO BE VERY CONCERNED WITH IMPRESSING THE READERS WITH YOUR VOCABULARY.

YOU'LL HAVE TO FORGIVE ME, I AM JUST A SIMPLE CAVEMAN; AND I AM AWED BY YOUR CHOICE OF WORDS AND USE OF METAPHORS.

The new genre of opportunists is proving the axiom correct: “In the beginning was the word. At the end, just the cliché.”

JOE, SO IF CHRISTIANS WRITE BOOKS - THEY ARE SPREADING THE WORD OF GOD; AND IF ATHEISTS WRITE BOOKS - THEY ARE OPPORTUNISTS?

They are also proving that there is a reason why, no matter how intellectually omnivorous a specialist in dairy science (for example) may personally feel, he shouldn’t do knee surgery.

JOE, WE ARE IN COMPLETE AGREEMENT. HOWEVER, THE INTELLECTUAL DEMANDS OF RELIGIOUS STUDY WOULDN'T EVEN TAX THE MIND OF AN AUTISTIC.

Likewise, the benefit of having grown up in a church-going family with a Bible in the top drawer of the sideboard doesn’t make an engineer or educationist a religious studies scholar.

JOE, "A RELIGIOUS STUDIES SCHOLAR." SOUNDS VERY IMPRESSIVE.

WE ARE QUITE FULL OF OURSELVES AREN'T WE?

POMPOUS LITTLE MAN WHO TAKES SUCH GREAT PRIDE IN THE FACT THAT HE IS A WORLD LEADER IN UNDERSTANDING ANCIENT FICTION.

THE WORLD'S GREATEST RELIGIOUS SCHOLAR IS INTELLECTUALLY FAR BELOW THE WORLD'S WEAKEST ENGINEER. REGARDING THEIR SPECIALTIES, ENGINEERS CAN PROVE THAT EVERYTHING THEY BELIEVE IS TRUE - YOU CAN'T PROVE THAT ANYTHING YOU BELIEVE IS TRUE.

MY GUESS IS, IF YOU COULD RESURRECT THE AUTHORS OF THE BOOKS IN THE BIBLE AND TELL THEM THAT EDUCATED, MODERN HUMANS WOULD BELIEVE EVERY WORD OF THE STORIES THEY MADE UP, THEY WOULD LAUGH THEMSELVES BACK INTO THE GRAVE.

Both James and Ray pump their books by saying that their “groundbreaking studies” (naturally) go beyond analogy. In other words, the fact that viruses make you sick and can kill you and the idea that religions can make you mentally sick or sexually dysfunctional is not a comparison but a correlation. Except, in both cases, there is no correlation; there is only analogy.

OKAY JOE, LET'S HEAR YOUR SIDE.

In the case of The Religion Virus, spread out over ten sermonic

JOE, THERE IS A REASON WHY YOU BELIEVERS ALWAYS USE RELIGIOUS WORDS TO DESCRIBE ATHEISTS: IT IS AN ATTEMPT TO REDUCE RATIONAL THINKERS DOWN TO THE LEVEL OF IRRATIONAL THINKERS (THAT WOULD BE YOU).

and loosely organized chapters that read like a sophomore research paper—the kind where the thesis is so starved for persuasive sources that it eventually dies of exertion—the writer moves freely from a discussion of the “general all-purpose God meme” which he associates with animism and some discredited research on Papua New Guinea to a discussion of seven other memes which he claims are “synergistic” and can be compared to the mutation of genes in biological evolution. These trends, he thinks, coalesce in Yahweh (never mind that no one really calls him that but scholars), the “meme that we in the western world call God.”

JOE, IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU THINK THAT CRAIG MIGHT BE FULL OF SHIT.

IF HE IS, THEN AFTER PERUSING YOUR WEB SITE, I THINK YOU GUYS MIGHT BE RELATED.

Reading the dissociated conjectures of James’s book, interrupted by dubious data, surveys, informal interviews and too many personal recollections and reminiscences (called “interludes” here) about his leaving the God-meme behind, reminds me of some of the reconstructionist history I’ve had to read over the years, the kind of thing that argues that Columbus was a Jew or (long before Dan Brown) that Jesus’ DNA survives in the bloodline established for his caliphate through Mary Magdalene.

JOE, SO YOU DIDN'T LIKE THE BOOK?

Yet another case of the facts not fitting the theory and changing the facts, except even more wildly careless about what a “fact” is and who decides.

JOE, YOU ARE A RELIGIOUS BELIEVER. YOU REALLY NEED TO REREAD THAT LAST SENTENCE BECAUSE .. YOU ARE DESCRIBING YOURSELF.

Take this evocative paragraph:

“By the time Jesus was born polytheism was still widespread but monotheism had a solid stronghold among the Jews. In spite of being a minority view the Yahweh meme had developed all of the critical features that made Yahweh into a viable monotheistic deity….

JOE, I'LL ADMIT CRAIG GOT THAT ONE WRONG. AS A BIBLICAL SCHOLAR YOURSELF, YOU ARE AWARE THAT THERE ARE MANY VERSES IN THE BIBLE THAT PROVE THAT GOD WAS NOT THE ONLY GOD. THE SECOND MEMBER OF THE FUTURE TRINITY, THE HOLY GHOST, WAS ALSO A GOD.

SO IT NEVER WAS A MONOTHEISTIC RELIGION EVEN THOUGH YOU CAN CLEVERLY PLAY AROUND WITH THE WORDING TO MAKE IT APPEAR SO. BUT CLAIMING THAT THEY ARE REALLY TWO GODS IN ONE, WHATEVER THAT MEANS, DOES NOT MAKE IT MONOTHEISTIC.

IT'S A GOOD THING THEY STOPPED ADDING GODS AFTER JESUS. A COUPLE MORE AND THEY COULD HAVE CHALLENGED OLYMPUS TO A BASKETBALL GAME.

IF YOU WANT MONOTHEISM, CONVERT TO ISLAM.

ONE BIT OF CAUTION ABOUT THAT ADVICE THOUGH: IT IS A ONE-WAY STREET - YOU DON'T GET TO COME BACK (UNLESS YOU PLAN ON CHANGING YOUR IDENTITY AND MOVING YOUR FAMILY).

Yahweh was no longer a specialist God of war. Now he could answer all prayers. Instead of merely demanding loyalty he now claimed to be the only God. He had shed his jealousy of other Gods and instead simply denied they existed. Yahweh claimed to be the only God, a much more sophisticated meme than mere jealousy. He began actively to destroy other religions. He told the Jews to vandalize or destroy their temples. Violence against other religions was a virtue not a sin.

JOE, CRAIG SHOULD HAVE RETITLED HIS BOOK "THE BEGINNINGS OF ISLAM."

He shed his regional association[s] and could be worshiped anywhere. He had changed from an earthly corporeal god to an ethereal overpowering figure whose very presence could overwhelm a human. He was no longer subject to the moral judgment of mere humans through natural philosophy and logic. And was instead transformed into the fundamental source of all morality….”

The book ranges on like this for 200 colloquial and illucid pages,

JOE, I LOOKED IN 3 DIFFERENT DICTIONARIES BUT COULDN'T FIND THAT WORD.

I WOULD EXPECT THAT FROM AN ENGINEER, BUT NOT FROM A RENOWNED SCHOLAR SUCH AS YOURSELF.

reaching its sort-of climax in the following mission statement:

“…If we step back and look at all this activity [religion] through the looking glass [sic] of cultural evolution science, that is, memetics, we see that each person and each house of worship is just one more step in the hundred-thousand-year evolution of religion viruses that infect our brains” (194).

JOE, YOU KNOW DUDE, I CAN SEE WHY YOU WROTE THIS DEVASTATING CRITIQUE.

EVEN MY INSULTS PALE BY COMPARISON TO HOW CRAIG JUST DESCRIBED YOU.

But no matter how far back I stand, I still can’t forget what I see up close. For starters: (a) Polytheism is not a precursor of monotheism and cultural historians have by and large rejected the teleological views of eighteenth century philosophy and nineteenth century anthropology that this error propagated, especially among philosophers who teethed on Hume; (b) It is internally inconsistent to his own case, and violates everything scholars know about the history of the biblical text and its development, to argue that Yahweh, having forsaken his role as a god of war then moved on to command violence against other religions and their destruction; (c) If anything, the God of Palestinian Jews becomes more isolated and regionally specific, not less, and the Hellenistic transmission of the God-idea (not meme) through Christianity fissiparates into the trinity

JOE, DIDN'T THEY HAVE ANY GRAMMAR CLASSES AT HARVARD DIVINITY SCHOOL?

FISSIPAROUS CANNOT BE MORPHED INTO FISSIPARATES.

IF YOU WERE MORE CONCERNED WITH COMMUNICATION THAN IMPRESSING EVERYONE WITH BIG WORDS THESE KINDS OF EMBARRASSMENTS WOULDN'T HAPPEN ... AS OFTEN.

to becomes less restrictive and virtually polytheistic, restoring particular specialized facets to God through a compartmentalization of his “revealed” activities. (d) The God of the Hebrew Bible was never “subject to the moral judgment of human beings through natural philosophy and logic” (what civilization is he trekking through?) and was regarded, anachronistically, as the source of right conduct (morality is not a good word in this context; wrongdoing and law-breaking are) even before the law was given on Sinai. What Exodus and Deuteronomy spell out in laws, Genesis collapses into an unmistakable poetic introduction on the price of disobedience.

For the alleged memes or memeplexes to operate in anything approaching an evolutionary way, it would be important to get the chronology right, the data right, the lines of transmission right, the cultural syncretism right, none of which are right in this book.

JOE, MAYBE IF YOU ASK CRAIG NICELY, HE'LL GIVE YOU YOUR MONEY BACK.

A “viable monotheistic deity,” you say? There is no historical or textual support for this view: But for the rise of the Christian movement, which wasn’t exactly servile to Hebrew monotheism anyway, the religion of the Jews was about an inch away from being discarded or subsumed by those “still-widespread polytheists” called Romans and it was not the tenacity of the Jewish God idea that saved it.

Politically unpopular, demographically Judaism was virtually untenable. There is nothing inherent in the nature of a “monotheistic” religion that guarantees its survival or explains its adaptation, anymore than the fact that Mediterranean and bedouin-desert cultures got more sun explains the fall of multi-god religion. Yes, that has been seriously argued.

Apparently historical fact makes no claim against a “memeplex,” especially when the architecture of the memeplex can be changed, like Playdoh, by the “scientist” to suit his private theories of how it all happened.

HEY JOE, THAT JUST REMINDED ME OF SOMETHING. FOR CENTURIES YOU GUYS USED THE BIBLE TO CLAIM THAT THE SUN ORBITED THE EARTH, AND THREATENED TO KILL ANYONE WHO DISAGREED (LIKE GALILEO); AND THEN WHEN THE PROOF BECAME SO OVERWHELMING THAT YOUR BIBLE WAS WRONG, YOU REINTERPRETED EVERYTHING SO YOU WOULDN'T LOOK SO STUPID.

LIKE PLAY-DOH.

It also shows that while writers like Mr. Ray (The God Virus) can invoke “cultural evolution science” against religion, their simplistic Evangelical understanding of history has not changed since their church-going days. It seems to me that if a meme is going to be described, you at least need to know where to find it. Ray seems to have found his in his Church of Christ heritage, and in beliefs about the Bible that originate with pastors who hadn’t read any other books.

JOE, THAT IS THE SAME OLD CRAP YOU GUYS PULL EVERY TIME YOUR ARGUMENT GETS TRAPPED BY THE FACTS:

"THAT'S NOT WHAT I BELIEVE. IT'S THOSE OTHER CHRISTIANS ON THE CORNER."

THEN WHEN WE ASK THEM, THEY SAY:

"THAT'S NOT WHAT WE BELIEVE. IT'S THOSE CHRISTIANS OVER THERE AROUND THE BLOCK."

It permits him to expound on the God-meme without taking into account the billion religious people across the globe who aren’t monotheists and hundreds of thousands more who seem to have developed an immunity to the infection. When he talks about religion, like Parson Thwackum, he means Christianity—the one he knows best and in a disquieting kind of way seems to think is a suitable paradigm for explaining other aspects of the memetic theory.

In fact, Ray’s own peculiar paradigm of Christianity could not even be used to explain Presbyterianism or Roman Catholicism. But that doesn’t prevent him talking about the “Roman Catholic virus” in pseudoscientific language derived from Richard Dawkins’ The Selfish Gene and “Viruses of the Mind,” both of which have achieved not just celebrity but canonical status among meme-believers:

JOE, YOU BELIEVE IN INVISIBLE GHOSTS, AND ... YOU TALK TO THEM.

DO YOU REALLY THINK YOU ARE IN A POSITION TO JUDGE PSEUDOSCIENCE WHEN YOUR ENTIRE BELIEF SYSTEM IS EXACTLY THAT?

“Christianity uses guilt to ensure sexual and marital fidelity as well as fidelity to the Church. Guilt is an important cause of sexual dysfunction in males and females. Sex for pleasure, from religion’s point of view, is a waste of energy, especially if it detracts from propagation of the God virus. For that reason, sexual pleasure is seen as suspect in Catholicism.”

JOE, THAT DOESN'T EXPLAIN WHY CATHOLIC GIRLS MAKE THE MOST INCREDIBLE LOVERS.

(YOU'LL JUST HAVE TO TAKE MY WORD FOR THAT ONE. BUT IN THAT AREA OF EXPERTISE, MY CREDENTIALS ARE VERY IMPRESSIVE, IF I DO SAY SO MYSELF).

No, he said staring down the passage in front of him, this is not why sexual pleasure is “suspect” in Catholicism. The Church fathers (some anyway) endorsed celibacy and prized virginity above marriage and sexual encounter because they were saturated with Plato’s notions of greater and lesser good. Human appetite being what it is, such dissuasion against pleasure was never a powerful incentive to holiness except among the monastic minority, who were notoriously slipshod about the purity-meme. By the twelfth century it–the rhetoric–had failed. Especially among the higher clergy who were not known for sexual dysfunction, or moderation, and the peasantry, who could not read. By the fifteenth century Christian art was sensuous and erotic and the church was in the marriage business for good.

JOE, I'VE SEEN THAT ART YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT. THAT IS YOUR IDEA OF SENSUOUS? THAT STUFF DIDN'T EVEN WORK WHEN I FIRST HIT PUBERTY.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC - NOW THAT GOT THE JOB DONE.

In the sixteenth, Catholicism was in an isolated position with regard to the pleasure-principle, and still is.

JOE, SO WHY DO THEY OUTBREED EVERYONE OUTSIDE OF AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST?

The hop-scotching between premises is bad enough from a logical point of view,

JOE, A "WHAT" KIND OF VIEW? LOGICAL? ARE YOU SERIOUS?

YOU ARE THE LAST PERSON WHO SHOULD BE PROMOTING LOGIC.

LOGIC, ALONG WITH FREE SPEECH, ARE RELIGION'S GREATEST ENEMIES.

but it is also deplorable in personifying “religion” as a complex of ideas interested in its own viral propagation.

JOE, THAT'S NOT DEPLORABLE - THAT'S JUST THE NATURE OF LIFE. ALL LIFE IS INTERESTED IN ITS OWN PROPAGATION. THE SAME IS TRUE OF IDEAS: OTHERWISE, WHY HAVE THEM IN THE FIRST PLACE?

IT'S THE "VIRUS" PART YOU ARE OBJECTING TO, BECAUSE IT IMPLIES DISEASE. IT IMPLIES AN ATTACK UPON ITS HOST.

FROM THE BODY'S POINT OF VIEW A VIRUS IS A DISEASE. FROM THE VIRUS'S POINT OF VIEW, IT IS MERELY A LIFE FORM TRYING TO SURVIVE: A BETTER DESCRIPTION OF RELIGION, YOU WILL NOT FIND.

I WONDER IF CRAIG AND DARREL WOULD CONSIDER ADDING THAT TO THEIR BOOKS?

Even if memes had an existence any more substantial than the reality proposed for them by Dawkins and, until 2010 by Susan Blackmore (before her very sensible recantation of her view of memes as “real replicators” and thus equatable to biological viruses), their development, adaptation, selection and exportation from culture to culture would still be fraught with inexactness.

The cultural equivalent of a genome project would not only involve what is but the multiple variants of what has been and what might have been if an opposing army had won (as in the example of Judaism above) or a particular emperor had ordered a religious genocide. The invention of an ever-more complex algebra to explain the anomalies involved in this new hieropany

JOE, I HATE TO BE PEDANTIC BUT HIEROPHANY REFERS ONLY TO RELIGION:

"physical manifestation of the holy or sacred, serving as a spiritual eidolon for emulation or worship."

THE ONLY PART OF THE DEFINITION THAT IS APPLICABLE TO YOUR STATEMENT IS THE PART ABOUT THE "PHYSICAL MANIFESTATION."

HEY, IF I REALLY WANTED TO BE PEDANTIC I WOULD ALSO POINT OUT THAT YOU MISSPELLED IT.

(ADDITIONAL COMMENT: THAT MAKES 3 WORDS NOW THAT THIS GUY HAS MISUSED IN A SINGLE ESSAY, AND 2 OF THOSE WORDS DON'T EVEN EXIST; HE JUST MADE THEM UP.

IT MAKES ME WONDER IF HE PUT THE SAME SLOPPY EFFORT INTO HIS OWN BOOKS WHEN HE PUBLISHED THEM?

HASN'T HE EVER HEARD OF "SPELL-CHECKER?").

is not impressive even when done by people who think they know what they’re doing. But when done by people who simply believe the people who think they know what they’re doing, it is simply a case of quoting the bishop, a form of scholasticism in which quibbles and variant data that would be vitally important in real science are smoothed over and discarded in the interest of a master-hypothesis.

JOE, AFTER ALL THAT VERBIAGE, I'M GOING TO HAVE TO TAKE A KNEE.

At a certain point in building a meme-complex, the variants overpower the thesis: science becomes science fiction. The memeplex is no longer an explanatory entity but a blob that swallows data for its supper.

JOE, YOU REALLY LIKE THE FOOD ANALOGIES DON'T YOU?

ODD, JUDGING BY THE PICTURE ON YOUR WEB SITE, YOU DON'T LOOK FAT.

It is a fact, for example, that grasshoppers infected with the hairworm (spinochordodes tellinnii) are more likely to jump into ponds where the hairworm propagates itself.

JOE, "GRASSHOPPERS" - WHAT AN INTERESTING CHOICE; BUT FOR YOU, AN UNFORTUNATE ONE.

BECAUSE, UNLESS YOU WANT TO DENY THE DIVINE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE, I'M PRETTY SURE THAT IN LEVITICUS, YOUR GOD SAID THAT GRASSHOPPERS HAVE 4 LEGS.

WAS THAT HERESY OR BLASPHEMY?

But it is only analogous that “all kinds of infectious memes thrive in religions, in spite of being false, such as the idea of a creator god, virgin births, the subservience of women, transubstantiation and many more”

JOE, AS A BELIEVER, HOW DO YOU FIGURE THAT THOSE IDEAS ARE FALSE?

THE CREATOR GOD IS AFFIRMED IN THE VERY FIRST VERSE IN THE BIBLE.

OTHER VERSES SUPPORT THE OTHER IDEAS YOU LISTED. IF YOU HAVE DETERMINED THEM TO BE FALSE - CONGRATULATIONS.

THAT MEANS YOU ARE PART OF THE WAY TOWARDS RATIONALITY.

and that people infected with such ideas hop into the congenial atmosphere of churches where the infectious memes thrive (Blackmore in 2002).

JOE, BLACKMORE NAILED IT (I WISH I HAD SAID THAT).

Let’s not forget war, male impotence, and the near recession of 2008.

JOE, IT'S HARD TO FORGET THINGS THAT REOCCUR.

ALTHOUGH, TO BE HONEST, I'VE ONLY EXPERIENCED 2 OF THOSE THINGS.

Let me repeat: the problem is not with theorizing about memes and memeplexes, non-existent as Dawkins’s God as they may be.

JOE, SO YOU DON'T SEE A PROBLEM WITH THEORIZING ABOUT NONEXISTENT THINGS?

I GUESS THAT EXPLAINS YOUR CAREER CHOICE.

They have a use as analogues and modes of comparison, like Jung’s archetypes (the theory they most closely resemble). It is the easy abuse to which memes can be put, like Filipino workers in the Arab world, that troubles me—the cult following that’s always the signal of bad science.

JOE, ANOTHER GREAT DESCRIPTION OF RELIGION. BUT THEN, I WOULD EXPECT NO LESS FROM A "SCHOLAR."

Atheists who profess to believe only what can be seen under a microscope or otherwise detected by observable effects have accepted the jargon and complexity of meme theory in the same way that Romans turned on to the salvation theologies of the mystery religions.

JOE, A CLASSIC MISREPRESENTATION OF ATHEISM THAT I HAVE COME TO EXPECT FROM ALL BELIEVERS, EVEN THEIR BEST SCHOLARS - AND YOU DID NOT DISAPPOINT.

ATHEISTS DO NOT PROFESS TO BELIEVE ONLY WHAT CAN BE SEEN UNDER A MICROSCOPE OR OTHERWISE DETECTED BY OBSERVABLE EFFECTS. YOU CAN FIND ATHEISTS WHO BELIEVE IN ASTROLOGY, HOMEOPATHY, AND A HOST OF OTHER NONSENSE.

ATHEISTS DO PROFESS THAT THERE EXISTS NO RELIGION WHICH HAS PRODUCED EVIDENCE THAT ANY OF ITS CLAIMS ARE TRUE.

ADVICE: SPEND MORE TIME IN THE DICTIONARY / LESS TIME IN THE BIBLE.

This is just an analogy of course: I would not suggest for a moment a correlation between ancient Romans and modern pseudoscience, as though a jargon-loving-oversimplification meme could be replicated.

(I'M SURE JOE MEANT TO SAY MODERN "SCIENCE").

Memes are not snake oil.

JOE, BUT YOUR ENTIRE LIFE AND CAREER ARE CENTERED AROUND PROMOTING EXACTLY THAT.

But they are not needed to understand the transmission, tenacity, adaptation, recombination and endurance of the symbols and practices we associate with the religious life.

THAT'S RIGHT JOE. UNDERSTAND HOW A VIRUS WORKS AND ALL THE REST FALLS NEATLY INTO PLACE.

They are probably not even the best agents for developing a “new paradigm” for understanding religion, judging from recent attempts to cut templates to fit all possible data. The greatest hazard they pose is reductivism in the assessment of religion, because science is necessarily a reduction to simplest elements and processes.

JOE, IF YOU EVER SPENT ANY TIME STUDYING RELATIVITY OR QUANTUM PHYSICS, YOU WOULD REALIZE JUST HOW IGNORANT THAT LAST STATEMENT WAS.

A true memetic theory of religion, for example would be indifferent to the effects of replication. It would be neutral, [perhaps even admiring?) of religion’s awesome adaptive abilities (which I do not believe exist).

JOE, RELIGION'S AWESOME ADAPTIVE ABILITIES ARE NOT THAT DIFFICULT TO EXPLAIN:

YOU EITHER SUBMIT, OR ....

But a true memetic theory does not exist, which is why depending on your orientation towards religion, you may see the meme as contagion or simply as adaptation. Not, however, as the cultural equivalent of HIV-AIDS or a Doomsday virus.

JOE, YOU ARE CORRECT ABOUT AIDS. GREAT PROGRESS HAS ALREADY BEEN MADE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST THAT VIRUS. BUT I THINK CRAIG AND DARREL ARE RIGHT ABOUT RELIGION.

BUT EVEN THEY DIDN'T PUT IT AS ELOQUENTLY AS YOU DID ... A DOOMSDAY VIRUS.

MY FINAL COMMENT: YES I KNOW THAT HOFFMANN IS A HUMANIST. I PURPOSELY ACCUSED HIM OF BEING A RELIGIOUS BELIEVER IN AN ATTEMPT TO GET HIM TO RESPOND; AT WHICH POINT I WAS PLANNING ON TURNING THE TABLES ON HIM BY POINTING OUT HOW HE HAD MISREPRESENTED DARREL RAY'S BACKGROUND. UNFORTUNATELY, HE DID NOT TAKE THE BAIT AND NEVER REPLIED.

I HOPE HE IS AT LEAST WORKING ON HIS GRAMMAR AND SPELLING.

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THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

NEW DEVICE MAY REVOLUTIONIZE COMPUTER MEMORY

RESEARCHERS FROM NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY HAVE DEVELOPED A NEW DEVICE THAT REPRESENTS A SIGNIFICANT ADVANCE FOR COMPUTER MEMORY, MAKING LARGE-SCALE "SERVER FARMS" MORE ENERGY EFFICIENT AND ALLOWING COMPUTERS TO START MORE QUICKLY.

TRADITIONALLY, THERE ARE TWO TYPES OF COMPUTER MEMORY DEVICES. SLOW MEMORY DEVICES ARE USED IN PERSISTENT DATA STORAGE TECHNOLOGIES SUCH AS FLASH DRIVES. THEY ALLOW US TO SAVE INFORMATION FOR EXTENDED PERIODS OF TIME, AND ARE THEREFORE CALLED NONVOLATILE DEVICES. FAST MEMORY DEVICES ALLOW OUR COMPUTERS TO OPERATE QUICKLY, BUT AREN'T ABLE TO SAVE DATA WHEN THE COMPUTERS ARE TURNED OFF. THE NECESSITY FOR A CONSTANT SOURCE OF POWER MAKES THEM VOLATILE DEVICES.

BUT NOW A RESEARCH TEAM FROM NC STATE HAS DEVELOPED A SINGLE "UNIFIED" DEVICE THAT CAN PERFORM BOTH VOLATILE AND NONVOLATILE MEMORY OPERATION AND MAY BE USED IN THE MAIN MEMORY.

THEIR DEVICE IS CALLED A DOUBLE FLOATING-GATE FIELD EFFECT TRANSISTOR (FET). EXISTING NONVOLATILE MEMORY USED IN DATA STORAGE DEVICES UTILIZES A SINGLE FLOATING GATE, WHICH STORES CHARGE IN THE FLOATING GATE TO SIGNIFY A 1 OR 0 IN THE DEVICE -- OR ONE 'BIT' OF INFORMATION. BY USING TWO FLOATING GATES, THE DEVICE CAN STORE A BIT IN A NONVOLATILE MODE, AND/OR IT CAN STORE A BIT IN A FAST, VOLATILE MODE -- LIKE THE NORMAL MAIN MEMORY ON YOUR COMPUTER.

THE DOUBLE FLOATING-GATE FET COULD HAVE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON A NUMBER OF COMPUTER PROBLEMS. FOR EXAMPLE, IT WOULD ALLOW COMPUTERS TO START IMMEDIATELY, BECAUSE THE COMPUTER WOULDN'T HAVE TO RETRIEVE START-UP DATA FROM ITS HARD DRIVE -- THE DATA COULD BE STORED IN ITS MAIN MEMORY.

THE NEW DEVICE WOULD ALSO ALLOW "POWER PROPORTIONAL COMPUTING." FOR EXAMPLE, WEB SERVER FARMS, SUCH AS THOSE USED BY GOOGLE, CONSUME AN ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF POWER -- EVEN WHEN THERE ARE LOW LEVELS OF USER ACTIVITY -- IN PART BECAUSE THE SERVER FARMS CAN'T TURN OFF THE POWER WITHOUT AFFECTING THEIR MAIN MEMORY.

THE DOUBLE FLOATING-GATE FET WOULD HELP SOLVE THIS PROBLEM, BECAUSE DATA COULD BE STORED QUICKLY IN NONVOLATILE MEMORY -- AND RETRIEVED JUST AS QUICKLY. THIS WOULD ALLOW PORTIONS OF THE SERVER MEMORY TO BE TURNED OFF DURING PERIODS OF LOW USE WITHOUT AFFECTING PERFORMANCE.

THE RESEARCH TEAM HAS INVESTIGATED QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS TECHNOLOGY'S RELIABILITY, AND THEY THINK THE DEVICE CAN HAVE A VERY LONG LIFETIME, WHEN IT COMES TO STORING DATA IN THE VOLATILE MODE.

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FAMOUS QUOTES

VICTOR HUGO (1802–1885) 83 YEARS.

HE WAS A FRENCH POET, PLAYWRIGHT, NOVELIST, ESSAYIST, VISUAL ARTIST, STATESMAN, HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST AND EXPONENT OF THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT IN FRANCE.

IN FRANCE, HUGO'S LITERARY FAME COMES FIRST FROM HIS POETRY BUT ALSO RESTS UPON HIS NOVELS AND HIS DRAMATIC ACHIEVEMENTS. HUGO IS SOMETIMES IDENTIFIED AS THE GREATEST FRENCH POET. OUTSIDE FRANCE, HIS BEST-KNOWN WORKS ARE THE NOVELS, LES MISÉRABLES AND THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME.

THOUGH A COMMITTED ROYALIST WHEN HE WAS YOUNG, HUGO'S VIEWS CHANGED AS THE DECADES PASSED; HE BECAME A PASSIONATE SUPPORTER OF REPUBLICANISM, AND HIS WORK TOUCHES UPON MOST OF THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES AND ARTISTIC TRENDS OF HIS TIME.

"THERE IS IN EVERY VILLAGE A TORCH - THE TEACHER:

AND AN EXTINGUISHER - THE CLERGYMAN."