

Is it just me, or... Should TechNews screen for trolls?

By Chris Roberts
TECHNEWS WRITER

At the risk of feeding a troll, this is a response to the article “Rebuttal to Rationality vs. Faith.” I am not writing this to get into a flame war over the merits of religion, or lack thereof. TechNews has had them before; they are a tremendous waste of good ink. No, my focus is on something more troubling. I am getting rusty at distinguishing between the intentionally inflammatory writings of Internet trolls and the honest opinions of the highly ignorant.

If “Rebuttal” was not written by a troll, I am deeply worried for the state of education in this country. At minimum, it highlights the need for IIT to strengthen the Humanities department in general and English education in particular, if for no other reason than to introduce would-be writers to dictionaries. Nearly all of the author’s claims can be quashed by exposure to biology, history, and physics; all of which should be readily available at a university.

“In fact, we all hold to a set of beliefs by which we interpret the world... These beliefs are inherently religious, since we assume them to be true by faith.”

First of all, if one does not adhere to a religion, then one’s beliefs and assumptions are not religious in nature, because there is no religion to base them on. Euclid’s axioms are thought to be true without proofs. They have nothing to do with gods, holy texts, what to do on Sunday, or which sexual practices will result in one being trapped in an ever-burning lake of agony until the end of time (aka: divine justice).

Secondly, faith (unquestioning belief that does not require proof or evidence) does not directly equate religion. If the answer to the question “Do you have faith in ____?” is “I am still questioning and need more evidence,” then you do not have faith in _____. People can have faith in regard to those they love, political ideologies, justice, and, yes, religious dogma. However, one need not have religion to have faith - ask any fallen Catholic. Moving on:

“Only within a worldview based on the Judeo-Christian God can the ability to do observable, testable, and repeatable science make sense... God created the world in an orderly fashion, with natural laws, such as gravity and conservation of energy.”

Funny, looking through Genesis, I did not find anything about laws or gravity. God’s “orderly fashion” reads more like an episode of

Fairly Odd Parents, with things getting magically *POOF*-ed into existence. At least the Babylonian creation, Marduk killing Tiamat and forming the world out of her body, implies that some thought and engineering entered into it. One does not need to know how something was created in order to form a hypothesis about its attributes and behavior. You do not need to know where babies come from in order to predict that Americans will complain about paying high taxes.

“If we are truly here as a result of random evolutionary processes, why is the law of gravity universally true?”

So many falsehoods in one sentence, where to start... First of all, which law of gravity? Galileo’s? Newton’s? There are more than one and they are all flawed, thereby making none of them universally true. Secondly, evolution is not random; it is a very complicated system with many other systems affecting it. Just because it does not appear to be micromanaged by a sky-dwelling magician dressed in a toga, does not make nature or any of its workings (including evolution) random. Lastly, there is a reason why scientific disciplines are separated: they might not have anything to do with each other. The movements of planets do not require animals to evolve in any particular way, or even exist.

“Only the Judeo-Christian worldview provides us with the framework by which we can make sense out of our ability to predict discrete future events based on scientific knowledge.”

I find it odd that the author specifically chose to exclude Islam from this worldview by saying Judeo-Christian instead of Abrahamic. Apparently, according to the author, the scientific contributions of Muslims, ancient Greeks, Romans (pre-Constantine), Mayans, Chinese (the list goes on) were utterly nonsensical because they lacked the proper view of reality: that of pious Jews and Christians. Somebody call the Texas school board, they have a lot more textbooks to change: mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, biology, geography, medicine, geology, physics, engineering, metallurgy...

If, on the other hand, the author did not actually believe any of the claims made in the article and was simply trolling... That is even worse. That sort of lying and dishonesty serves only to legitimize and encourage ignoramuses who want to impose their baseless ideals upon others, while discouraging those who seek to expand and deepen human understanding.

Then again, maybe it’s just me...

Thoughts on Tucson

By Karl Rybaltowski
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Since the massacre that occurred outside a Safeway in Tucson, at an event designed to put congressional representatives in touch with the people they represent, there’s been a lot on peoples’ minds. There’s the question of gun control - how did someone who had just been thrown out of school (until able to provide proof, through an evaluation, of no mental or emotional issues) procure a firearm so easily? There’s the question of security - should top people on the Hill be the only ones receiving any sort of security detail when in public?

And then there’s the finger-pointing over who’s to blame for the event. Was it really the revolutionary, hateful, exclusionary rhetoric of the Tea Party and sympathetic politicians? Was it the left-wing agenda, rife with proto-communist policies that are pushing people to take deadly advantage of their 2nd-amendment rights? Or was it the violent tones of political discourse in general, so degraded after a kindler, gentler time of politics, that have incited regular Americans to violence against our elected representatives? The short answer is none of these (at least, not in a way that we can prove).

The motivations of a person strongly suspected of severe instabilities shouldn’t be directly linked to the present state of politics in our nation without any clear evidence. Sarah Palin, for all the embarrassment her “blood libel” brought down on her, still had one thing right - it was irresponsible of the media to be doing what it did. But her incredibly

ill-conceived (and now infamous) crosshair map, along with some of the downright hateful things spewed by the punditocracy, aren’t just driven by (respectively) a desire for fame or sagging ratings. There’s a far more insidious, and seemingly innocuous issue at play.

The problem is what I refer to (with no small amount of hyperbole) as “messianic politics.” While personality has always played a role in political races, it’s the issue of inflating the importance of a candidate’s character (until character is all we value that candidate for) that severely undermines our political system, from the electoral process to the language we use. It might seem strange that irresponsible voting or, more puzzling yet, violent political rhetoric, stem from a political mentality that focuses too strongly on people and their promises, and less on policy, but it does make sense.

One commentator on the media frenzy after the shooting may have put it best (in terms likening media figures who spin up this rhetoric as children playing games): “If you dress like a cowboy, then someone else has to be the Indian.” Simply put, treating your favorite candidate as a hero necessitates treating “the other guy” as an enemy; the more you idolize your candidate, the further vilified his opponent will be, until we reach a level of talk comparable to that of today.

So the next time you get caught up in Obamania, become a McCainiac, or hop on the Tea Party Express, remember - for every hero you follow from the gut, there might be a completely reasonable person on the other end of the aisle who ends up being demonized.



Photo courtesy of The Republican National Convention Blog

Celebrate India’s Republic Day on January 26

By Utsav Gandhi
CAMPUS EDITOR

They say you come to value something more only when you don’t have it anymore. For me, that “thing” is unquestionably my motherland. Home is where the heart is. And my heart beats along with those of 1.2 billion other people who proudly, defiantly, ostentatiously proclaim that they are glad to be part of the mesmerizing community the world calls “India.” Ask any tourist who loses his heart to the warmth of the hospitable people. Ask any native born on Indian soil who is residing abroad. Ask an urban dweller, striving to find his place and his identity among the millions who reside in the thriving metropolises. Ask the simple, contented rural inhabitants working industriously every day in the self-sustaining farms of India. The colors, the sounds, the smells, the cuisine, the attire, the religions, the traditions, the languages, the wildlife, the festivals - it is this overwhelming diversity of cultures that completely immerses you, completely consumes you.

A land that has created so many different traditions and sheltered so many different communities has been a great contributor in the history of civilization. From the time it spawned some of humankind’s earliest known societies in the Indus Valley, to today’s great metropolises on the threshold of a new era in their own little history, India has always occupied its own special place in the world. Wheth-

er it’s some of the most beautiful monuments, created by the Mongols, that mark its geography, or the game of cricket - the legacy of the British who ruled over the land for about two hundred years; whether it’s the constantly re-invented street food that can both excite your taste buds and make you feel a little sick; or the amazingly insensible yet consistently captivating Hindi films that never fail to entertain; every aspect of this amazing country leaves you touched, moved and transformed.

One surprising fact is the ease with which we let ourselves be consumed by this magic. But even more surprising are the opportunities this very experience provides you to define your identity. Among the millions who call this land their home, you never feel lost or have to struggle to find your identity, your place in the community. If you embrace the culture, the people, the land itself with all the possible warmth and friendship you can generate, you will find that in return, the people and the land will be ready to accept you with open arms, no matter what your race, religion, language or nationality. As a citizen of this amazing land, all I am required to do is to love my country patriotically and be ready to help, be ready with a simple sacrifice whenever it calls me. The values instilled in me by my life, schooling, and upbringing in India are ones that have been passed on by generations, and as a dutiful member of that community, I am expected to uphold them wherever I go and whatever circumstance I am in.

You know the drill.

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