

CasuaLlama

not yo mamma's llama

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Brave Old World

by The Lllama - Saturday, September 17, 2011

<http://casuallama.org/brave-old-world/>

“Mic check, mic check!” a lone man in a rumpled fedora shouts to the crowd, “testing one, two!” The crowd answers back, parroting his sound check.

“I just got here in Wall Street!” The crowd camping out in front of the Federal Reserve cheers and then repeats what he says, ensuring that everyone hears the message. Megaphones are banned, forcing this ad-hoc populist sound system into existence. Line by line the crowd echos the speech as he slowly fills us in on the news from New York.

This is OccupySF, the San Francisco contingent of the Occupy Wall Street movement. This eclectic group of singers, software writers, anarchists, yoga teachers, post-modern hippies, construction workers, bagel cutters, out of work baristas, and other undesirables are here to demand a new kind of American Way. The “one-dollar, one-vote” system of governance that has evolved in United States over the last few decades is being called into question. People, not profit, they say, is where the true soul of the American Dream can be found, and unless things change soon, and radically, Americans from all walks of life will find their lives and careers in peril.

The atmosphere beneath concrete arches of the Federal Reserve building on Market is both jovial and serious as the few dozen protesters bed down for the night. The group may be small tonight, but it’s already doubled in size from the night before. People from as far away as Canada, Colorado and New York have found their way to SF to throw their hat in with this crowd.

The Bubble Bike Girl shows up at midnight and a short-lived impromptu roller disco starts up as she spins her blinking wheels and turns up the music. Laptops are quickly closed up as it begins to drizzle, but the drummers and guitarists are playing on; deep talk in huddled circles, conversations ranging from Tea Party politics to the finer points of guerrilla gardening. Oreos make the rounds and more than once comes talk of revolution.

If revolution comes, born of this movement, it will be unlike revolutions past. These aren’t hippies desperate to live off heirloom tomatoes and peyote buttons at the commune. Neither are these protesters anarchists demanding violent overthrow of the government. These are simply Americans, from all walks of life, normal in every respect but one: they’ve the unyielding belief that people — individuals, not the legal fiction of corporations — are the fundamental building block of society, and that everything should stem from that.

It may take a revolution to bring it to fruition, but it’s not a revolutionary concept. Civilization exists to benefit the lives of it’s members; what use would leaving the savannah have been if this were not the case? When society prioritizes interests beyond the health, safety and quality of life of it’s people, it ceases to perform it’s function. American society has drifted from it’s original path and now puts corporate interests (and the interests of those few wealthy enough to live on par with corporate coffers)

above and beyond the well-being of the vast majority of it's citizens. The system is broken, and that is the essential theme of these protests.

Dawn is breaking across the city and the sleeping bags are beginning to roll and shuffle. Whether the movement continues to gain momentum as the days grow colder and the nightly drizzle turns to daily rain remains to be seen, but in a sense it doesn't really matter. The genie is out of the bottle, people are beginning to feel the weight of the exploitation they are experiencing. If not this movement, then the next, or the next. The pot can only boil for so long...

Special Disinterest

by The Lllama - Wednesday, July 25, 2012

<http://casuallama.org/special-disinterest/>

“There’s no such thing as an honest politician.” The phrase “honest politician” is essentially an oxymoron, isn’t it? Why is that so? Is it purely that power corrupts? If that’s the case, then why weren’t Washington and Jefferson tyrants?

The problem isn’t simply that power corrupts. The problem is that the political system in the United States has a small but fundamental flaw that makes it mathematically next to impossible to keep an honest politician after he’s been elected after a certain length of time. Follow the logic this way and see if you don’t agree:

Money is the most vital aspect to being an “electable” politician. Not ideas. Not policies. Money buys image consultants. It buys polls. It buys teams of witty writers who can spin any situation into just about any desired result. Money doesn’t guarantee you a win, but **lack** of money is sure to lose you the election.

Taking this into account, imagine for a moment that you were in charge of a large sum of money that you were going to give to a political campaign. Your two choices are one man who is very likely to be influenced by money, and the other who is incorruptible. To which of these two men should you donate?

The math says: in every possible case, you should donate to the more easily corruptible politician. The incorruptible guy will never change his position, regardless of how much you give him. The other man, however, will be swayed towards your position by the donation. In fact, even if the incorruptible candidate is completely in favor of your position, it still makes sense to donate to the corrupt politician’s campaign... consider the implications. If the incorruptible candidate wins, she’ll be voting in your favor regardless of whether or not you’ve donated to her campaign while the corruptible candidate will **only** vote in your favor if you’ve donated. In this case donating to the honest politician is always a losing proposition. In every case, rational campaign donors will always donate to the campaigns of the most corruptible politician they can find.

The only thing that has partially saved our democracy over the past two centuries is that there weren’t that many perfectly rational actors giving donations in the past. Humans, almost by definition, are irrational beings. Corporations, although made of human aggregates, are in no way thinking, feeling beings. A corporation has no children to think of, no retirement to plan for, no loved-ones to consider. The only motivation a corporation has is to maximize short term profits at all cost. To a creature like this, there is no honor or concept of loyalty in it’s decision-making process. It will always choose the most rational course of action, it will always donate to dishonest politicians.

Corporations are not people, they have no place in our political process.

The Gods of My Daughter

by The Lllama - Monday, July 16, 2012

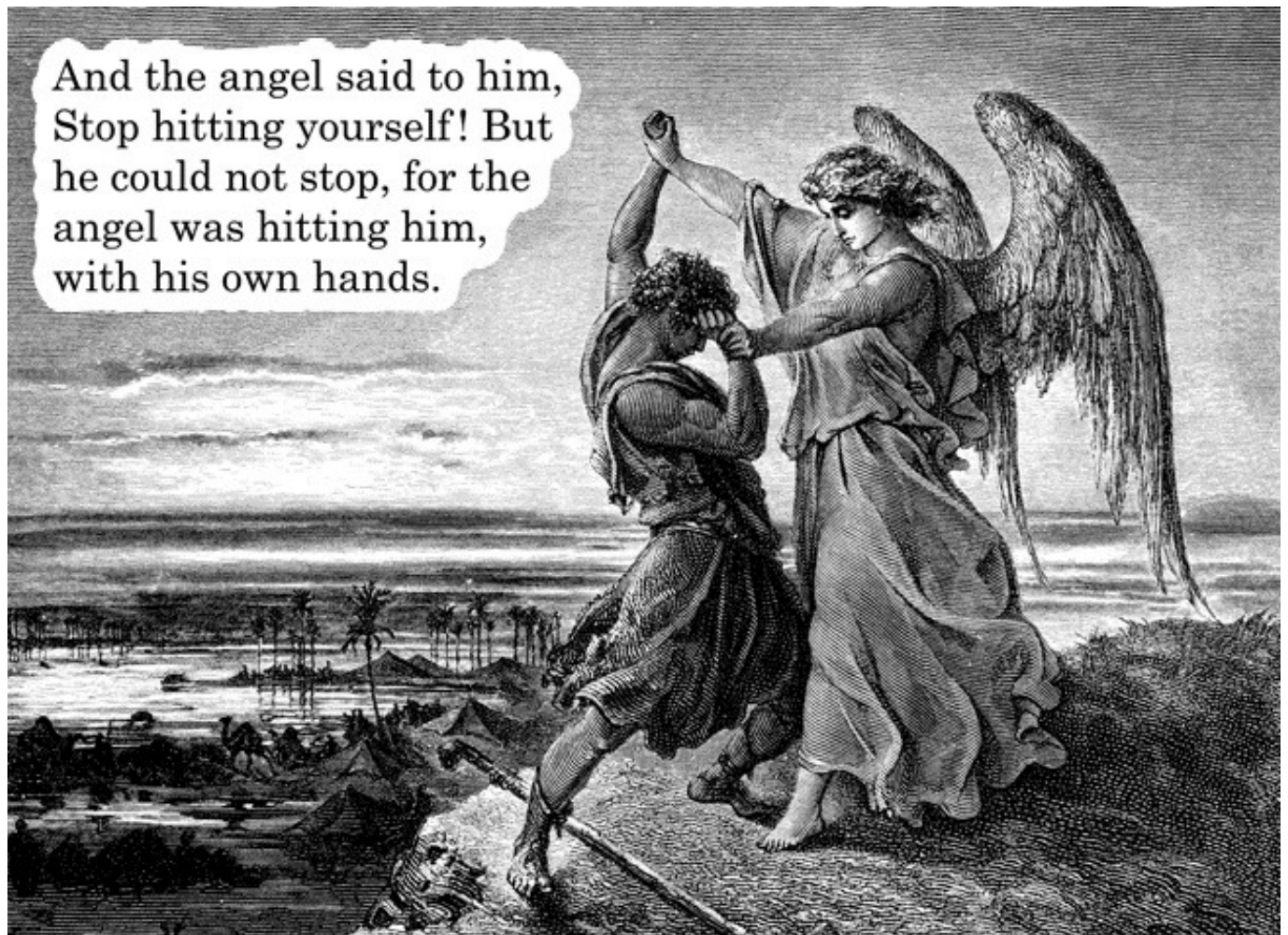
<http://casuallama.org/the-gods-of-my-daughter/>

My daughter was born a devout Christian. From the moment that she arrived she took her faith very seriously. A few months later, however, she began questioning her beliefs, and her faith was shaken. She was studying yoga at the time and experimented with Hinduism for a while which eventually led her to Buddhism, but there was still something that just didn't fit with her understanding of the world...

If the supernatural is real, or even just a natural phenomenon that (with her very limited understanding of the universe so far) she just can't quite explain, then why does she never actually see it in action? Why is she told to believe in *some* patently ridiculous things, like ancient myths of Angels and Demons, but told that other equally ridiculous things are nothing but myths, legends and cultural memes? She had a great deal of soul searching to do before she finally decided how she feels about religion, and just as she passed her tenth month of life this last week she come out as an atheist.

Does this sound a little bit absurd? Of couse it does, because it is, but *why* should that be the case? After all, she already has opinions on which food tastes best, on which toys she likes and which she's bored of, on which strange faces are funny and friendly and which are scary. So why shouldn't she have an opinion on God?

The answer, of course, is that there is no aspect of God that can be understood by an unformed mind. And that is because the entire concept of God is merely a product of the mind. When we encounter the entity that we think of as "God", we aren't encountering a real phenomenon, we are seeing an illusion created completely within the confines of our own heads.



Somebody that I Used to Know

by The Lllama - Saturday, July 14, 2012

<http://casuallama.org/somebody-that-i-used-to-know/>

Imagine you are sailing around the world on a decades-long journey. At every port you inevitably find something on the boat in disrepair that needs to be torn out, and replaced. By the time your journey ends, not a single part of your original ship remains, not even the nails holding the planks together. The only thing that remains unchanged about your ship is her name.

Now here's the question: At the end of your journey, are you sailing the same boat that you started with? Is a name alone powerful enough to hold a ship together?

That's is a question that all of face on a daily basis, though we seldom realize it, and we often answer it to ourselves in ways we might not think we do. We face that question when we meet and judge people on the people who they've been in their past. Though our personalities are constantly evolving, growing, breaking, rebuilding themselves on new ideas, incorporating new ways of thinking and most important of all, *learning* from it's own experience, we often find ourselves trapped in the belief that personalities are fixed and unchanging.

We would not want to be judged today on the actions we took as a six year old, or a pre-teen, or even as who we were as we entered young adulthood. Even the person we were a year ago, last month, maybe even yesterday. We know intuitively and through direct experience that we can and do change who we are on a perpetual basis, yet we are all almost universally unable to apply that understanding empathetically towards those whom we encounter in life. It's how we engineer our prison systems, it's the basis for our anemic social services, how we determine the worth of men.

Why is this? I've been guilty of it myself in the past, even though I have more reason to understand this than perhaps anyone I know... So why was it so hard for even someone with the checkered past as myself to open up to the idea of universal forgiveness regardless of the past. The person we are today is not who we were, nor who we will be. change will always come, that much is as inevitable as the rising sun, so why has it been so difficult to intellectually know that eventually the person who I distrusted, or who stole from me, or lied to me, or hurt me was merely a temporary incarnation yet not integrate that understanding into my behavior towards others?

I think much of it comes from our ancient past. We are civilized apes, to be sure, and we are capable of the most fantastic works and deeds that any animal could ever think to accomplish, but in the end we are still just apes, and that ancient emotional engine and core of animal instinct still lives inside us.

Despite our unmatched capacity for intellect and rational thought, we are still fiercely driven by the very same emotional feedback loops that drive our lower kin. Anger over such trivial events as feeling disrespected, displays of aggression over perceived threats to mating and territory rights, challenges for dominance and every primate behavior that we perceive in the animal kingdom still exists in the human experience.

We seldom fling feces anymore, though it's no accident that "shit" is considered incredibly offensive, even as just a word. It's no accident that perfectly intelligent and rational men can go to war and destroy one another's tranquility and very existence over access to natural resources when this planet is just so fantastically abundant that even with seven billion people there is more than enough for each and every one of us.

Humanity is unique in the animal kingdom in that it alone can determine it's own fate. The old instincts and emotions still hang around, but we are not bound to them. We can choose to redefine who we are. We can choose what emotions we allow to govern us, and can even choose to be ungoverned by anything but our own minds.

It's not the easiest undertaking at times, endeavoring to become something other than what you once were, and even harder to allow yourself to see others as fellow travelers on the same road, but it is the most fulfilling. An enlightened mind, having freed itself from the prison of itself, is the greatest work a man can ever accomplish.

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