

* Terms and conditions apply

Kris King – September 25th 2011

<http://www.rantinaminor.co.uk/2011/09/terms-and-conditions-apply/>

On Wednesday night, the state of Georgia committed murder in front of millions of witnesses. As if that weren't terrible enough in and of itself, it was made all the more shocking by the fact that there's every possibility that the victim was entirely innocent. In its usual, myopic pursuit to dispense "justice", the United States executed Troy Davis for the killing of police officer Mark McPhail, despite the failure to recover a murder weapon, the recanted testimonies of witnesses (some of which made allegations of police coercion), and no other real, tangible physical evidence linking Davis to the crime. In the end, though, it doesn't really matter whether Davis was guilty or not; he was still a victim of state-sanctioned execution in what we're frequently told is a civilised country, and the decision to end his life, as well as a good deal of the support for doing so, came from people for whom "thou shalt not kill" is supposed to be immutable.

The idea that some of the loudest trumpets in the brass section of the "Yay For The Death Penalty!" parade marching band are being blown by supposedly moral, religious people, shouldn't really surprise you in the slightest (unless of course this is your first visit to our planet). After all, it has been known for quite some time that there has been a distinct correlation between being religious and being a teensy-weensy bit of a hypocrite. I mean, if I were to tell you, for example, that [all five members of the Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles that decided Troy Davis' fate were christians](#), I don't imagine for an instant that you'd be all that shocked to hear it. Despite how much they may claim otherwise, despite how often they may talk about the "sanctity of life", despite how they are forever trying to impress upon us the importance of their books' commandments that say how killing is wrong, the religious have always carried with them the kind of vicious, sickening blood-lust that only a good killing can satisfy.

Taking the subject of the death penalty as an example, look at the near-pornographic obsession many christians have with the crucifixion (especially that reactionary drunken bigot Mel Gibson). Ignore for a moment the fundamental issue of how, without the death penalty, at least, there wouldn't be much of a christian faith to speak of (there would certainly be no easter and no hot cross buns), and instead ask yourself how it was that the romans having put their saviour to grim use as a kind of interactive, bi-directional road-sign didn't actually inspire them to adopt a firmly anti-death penalty stance? If anything, they've largely come out *in favour* of killing people at the behest of the so-called justice system. Look at the support for the death penalty among christians and you'll see it's only really the more liberal sects and the catholics that tend to be against it; the fundies and the evangelicals (that is, the "fire and brimstone" wing of the Jibus Party) are largely all in favour.

The first question one has to ask is how a group of people, especially one that is so consistently fond of claiming that they have been endowed by their creator (in conjunction with their astutely recognising his existence and buying his book – available in the fiction section of your local bookstore), with a keen sense of right and wrong could *ever* possibly support the notion of killing *anyone*, regardless of the reasons? And how come the more liberal churches and the catholics are against it? Well, the catholics have never come across as being anywhere near as big on Jesus as they seem to be on Mary – most of their attention is focused on young virgins after all – and, with the whole "every sperm is sacred" attitude towards life being precious, they probably (quite wisely) don't want to be seen as hypocrites by supporting the death penalty (they've got enough hypocrisy on their plate as it is). As for how all of the other sects (except the more liberal) can be in favour, well that's easy; theistic morality is utter fucking bullshit.

If you've ever wondered why there appears to be a correlation between both liberalism, secularism, and an opposition to the death penalty, and conservatism, theism, and a support for the death penalty, *there* is your answer. If you're wondering how I can simply bundle liberalism with secularism and conservatism with theism, as if to suggest there's some kind of relationship between them (or at least a casual affair), then you should probably get out more. Or maybe read more. Actually, yeah, that's it, you should read more – *everyone* should read more. Conservatism and theism are natural

bed-fellows as they're both fairly dogmatic, black or white, "thou shalt/shalt not"; similarly, liberalism and secularism go together because they're both pragmatic, shades of grey, "thou shalt maybe – it depends". Either way, the point is that theistic morality, which, by definition tends to be objective and absolute, appears, on the face of it, to be an almost entirely bankrupt concept. Scratch the surface, however, and you'll find that, underneath, it's actually a *completely* bankrupt concept.

The idea that there's some kind of objective morality, a fixed, inflexible code by which everyone can live and everything can be judged and measured is misguided at best, plain silly on average, and total bollocks at worst. Life just isn't that simple, there are too many factors to consider, too many variables sticking their noses in and confusing the issue (as those presumptuous, nosey variables are want to do). Nothing is ever so black and white that one can confidently say there is a hard and fast rule for dealing with it; there's always scope for disagreement, there's always wiggle room. To suggest otherwise is to imply that there is an area on which we can all agree, a concept which anyone with even the smallest, passing familiarity with human idiosyncrasies will tell you is monstrously ill-informed. It also implies that there must be some kind of arbiter of these rules, an external and independent adjudicator who defines and enforces them in addition to determining whether or not they have been adhered to. Yep, it's that god bloke again.

Theists are forever using their supposed morality as a stick with which to beat not just non-believers but each other too. How often do we hear the followers of one faith lambasting followers of another for their alleged moral lapses? How often do believers condemn homosexuality as abhorrent whilst simultaneously justifying suicide bombing? How often do they deplore suicide bombing whilst supporting the death penalty? One of the most common criticisms levelled at atheists by those of the imaginary friend persuasion is that, without some sort of cosmic headmaster keeping one eye on us and the other on his cane so he can whip it out quickly to thwack us on the arse when we misbehave, we can't possibly have any kind of moral code by which to live. As if the propensity for treating one another with decency and respect is strictly the preserve of people who fear getting the shit kicked out of them at some later date and in some unspecified realm?

Secular morality is, by definition, far more moral because it requires no threat/reward system to keep us in line. Non-believers who choose not to get all rapey or stabby on their next-door neighbours do so not because they fear a one-way ticket to Torture World but because we humans are a social species that is almost entirely dependent on one another in order to survive. We don't treat our fellow human beings like shit because, for the most part, we don't want to be shunned by, or separated from, the very people we rely on to grow the food we eat, generate the power we need to heat and light our homes, process our waste, keep our transport systems running, and generally ensure that we can comfortably go about our daily lives unhindered. We all form a vital part of a complex society that requires us to be good to each other lest it utterly and irrevocably fall to pieces like a psychic who's been presented with the undeniable evidence that they're a total fraud.

Ask a theist what they would do if they knew for certain that there was no god; ask them what effect it would have on their moral outlook if they knew that there was no omniscient super-being taking notes and preparing a case against them for when they eventually turn their toes up and stand before the celestial equivalent of Judge Judy. I've actually spoken to some theists who have admitted, quite freely, that they'd just go wild; stealing, raping, killing, they would do whatever the hell they wanted because, well, who's going to stop them? It's quite understandable that one could make the mistake of thinking that there are no words, in any human language, to adequately describe this immensely fucked-up sort of mentality, but in actual fact there are ... how about "sociopath"? I'll tell you now, in no uncertain terms, that I will put my trust more readily in moral decisions made by a non-believer than I ever would those of someone who says they behave because god is watching them.

I'm sure that, at some point in your life, you've met someone who seemed to only ever do good things because there was a hint that they might get something out of it. Like all those disingenuous arseholes who buy lottery tickets because the money is "going to good causes", as if the fact that their meagre, heartfelt donation of a whole £1 gets them a distant chance of winning £10 million has no bearing whatsoever on their decision to be charitable in this singularly oblique way. Do you remember thinking how they seemed like a bit of a prick whose self-interests were being masked by their gossamer-thin cover of fake altruism? Well, just scale that up a bit and you have a fairly good understanding of what people mean when they describe their laudable deed as "the christian thing to do". No it isn't, you anus, it's the *human* thing to do, and some of us are perfectly able to show compassion and decency without needing to be bribed with the promise of a VIP eternity-pass to Cloud Land.

The aspect of theistic morality most apposite to the discussion at hand here is that of how they will twist and distort it to fit their pre-existing world view. A rigid code of ethics suddenly becomes eminently malleable in the hands of those who refuse to admit that the rules they so espouse are often either a mask to hide their agendas, or the means by which they choose to advance them. Look at the hoops they will jump through in order to justify holding positions that run contrary to the morals by which they claim to live. The "selective morality" (a polite euphemism for "rampant hypocrisy") as practised by most believers is riddled with excuses, cop-outs, and a million and one other varieties of "yeah, but ..." and "well, except where ..." attempts to circumvent the rules that they themselves created and, ironically, find impossible to work to.

Given this you could understand why, to many of us, the ten commandments of the old testament could conceivably read something a bit like that home and contents insurance policy document you've got stuffed down in the darkest recesses of a file box somewhere (probably under the stairs next to the gas meter). The morals they supposedly teach have been updated with so many sub-clauses and exceptions that the authors (and others in the organisation) can drive a truck through the middle of it and absolve themselves of any responsibility or duty whatsoever. Seriously, have a look at the ten commandments for yourself; as you go down the list, put an asterisk next to each one and write a few footnotes, some small-print that specifically lists all the exceptions you can think of for that particular rule. Oh, alright then, I'll do it for you ... honestly, you people – where would you be with me to guide you, eh? Oh yeah, church 😊

I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

* Except the almighty dollar, obviously. We've got to keep that money coming in so we can spread the word of Jebus!

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, ... Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them:

* Except all the statues of the virgin mary that we make and sell, and all the Jesus tea-towels, T-shirts, mugs, and all the other tacky crap upon which we graven the occasional image or two. And, obviously, we shouldn't count the statues, carvings, stained-glass windows, or other representations of the messiah that we kneel before and bow down to every week.

Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

* Except when we hit our thumbs with a hammer, or lose our car keys. Or when we claim to speak on his behalf, obviously – we have to be able to make shit up and say it's what god wants, and we *definitely* have to be able to threaten other people in his name.

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

* Of course this doesn't apply to the people who work at the petrol stations we visit on the way to church to fill up our cars, nor the waitresses at the restaurants we have lunch at afterwards. Or the police, fire-fighters, the coastguard, the army, navy, all the armed forces, doctors, nurses, all the staff at hospitals, prison warders, people who work at power stations, the gas company, and everyone who works hard every sunday to keep people safe and alive, and to ensure the continuing integrity of our country's infrastructure.

Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

* Unless they do something that annoys the piss out of you, wherein all bets are off.

Thou shalt not kill.

* Except for muslims, jews, blacks, prisoners, atheists, homosexuals, transgender people, asians, arabs, and anyone else who either has an entirely different imaginary friend to us, or our book says god doesn't like very much.

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

* Unless you can get away with it or, if you do get caught, you can deny that doing it with a man makes you gay, you weren't taking those drugs (you just wanted to get rid of them), and you can

use the whole thing to your advantage by saying you were lead astray by satan before publicly shedding crocodile tears at how you've sinned against your lord and you beg for forgiveness.

Thou shalt not steal.

* Naturally this excludes taking money from the gullible in exchange for a bogus, or even non-existent, product, because that isn't stealing. And selling "miracle water" is not at all like extracting money by dishonest means. And taking all that valuable time from people's incredibly short lives by insisting they spend it praying and kneeling and bowing and going to a building once a week to do it all in front of other people doesn't count either. And nor does all the tax my church doesn't pay.

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

* Except when your neighbour is a muslim, a jew, black, a prisoner, an atheist, a homosexual, a transgender person, asian, an arab, a scientific rationalist, or anyone else who either has an entirely different imaginary friend to us, or our book says god doesn't like very much. In which case, you can make up anything you like against them and lie your arse off for Jesus.

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, ... nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

* Are you serious? If your neighbour has a 42" plasma TV to watch the god channel on, you need to get a 60" plasma to watch it on! If you've got money and possessions it's because god has rewarded you for your piety and hard work. You covet whatever the hell you want!

So, what is my point in all this? Well, it's that the people who made the decision to end the life of Troy Davis did so believing themselves to be moral beings. They believed they were righteous in killing another human being because they have justice on their side. And, when we say "justice", obviously we mean "god", because no definition of "justice" can include murdering someone. It doesn't matter what their crime was; one cannot claim justice has been served if the guilty has no capacity for acknowledging and recognising their crime, or no hope for making amends. Granted, one cannot truly atone for taking a life; one can only carry the full awareness of what they've done and be tormented by it for the rest of their lives – if you put them to death you *spare* them that torment. Once someone is dead, they're fucking dead; they have no ability to come to terms with what they've done, and no hope of ever serving as an example to others. And don't give me the bullshit deterrent argument – that the murder and violent crime rate is higher in countries and states with the death penalty blows it right out of the water.

Ultimately, Troy Davis was killed by a bunch of excuse-making, hand-wringing hypocrites who see murder as *negotiable*; the kind of people who hold up some dusty-book's bronze-age morality to excuse their actions and absolve themselves of any responsibility for them. The kind of people whose hypocrisy allows them to punish people for an abominable crime by committing the same abominable crime against the perpetrator, all the while justifying their actions with "yeah, but, justice". It's all cosmic small-print designed to give themselves the ultimate get-out clause, and side-step the rules they insist everyone else live by.

It's just another form of "insurance claim will not be honoured if ...", "at participating restaurants only", "offer not valid in ..."

