

This Week in Google Alerts: Home Fires

The Urth list — 130 messages, 17 voices, 09 Apr 2012

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6229>

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Gwern Branwen — 09 Apr 2012, 23:26

<http://agrumer.livejournal.com/491118.html>

About half-way through Gene Wolfe's Home Fires, I gave up. Why?

...The crazy right-wing politics. There's the North American Union, with its single currency. There's the European Union, where thieves get their hands cut off because of sharia. There's the UN, which always takes the sides of the poor nations of the world instead of the NAU.

The tech illiteracy. The setting is Earth, in a resource-poor near-future. Our protagonist has a cellphone, but nobody else seems to, and from what we see in the half of the book I read, it's just a phone. Websites exist, but there's no sign of social networking. When pirates hijack an enormous, luxurious cruise ship, the protagonists talk for a while as if there's a possibility of keeping the news under wraps, as if there wouldn't have been hundreds of people tweeting "OMG pirates!" within ten seconds of the first shots being fired. When the protagonists talk (via some kind of video-phone communication) with the authorities on shore, they argue a bit over the location of the ship, as if there's no such thing as GPS. The whole thing could've been written in the 1970s...

Not that _Home Fires_ is the first time the currency right-wing stuff shows up; I recall pointing it out elsewhere. Wonder if _Home Fires_ included _An Evil Guest_'s post-birth abortions...

gwern
<http://www.gwern.net>

Gerry Quinn — 09 Apr 2012, 23:52 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

From: Gwern Branwen

Not that _Home Fires_ is the first time the currency right-wing stuff shows up; I recall pointing it out elsewhere. Wonder if _Home Fires_ included _An Evil Guest_'s post-birth abortions...

Is a single North American currency such a right wing concept as all that? Nobody calls one a Nazi for favouring European monetary union — quite the opposite, if anything. Personally, I don't really care what currency I hold so long as it is hard and fungible.

I seem to recall a kerfuffle about some ethical philosophers promoting the concept of "post natal abortions" quite recently...

- Gerry Quinn

David Stockhoff — 10 Apr 2012, 00:42 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

On 4/9/2012 7:52 PM, Gerry Quinn wrote:
From: Gwern Branwen <<mailto:gwern0@gmail.com>>

Not that _Home Fires_ is the first time the currency right-wing stuff shows up; I recall pointing it out elsewhere. Wonder if _Home Fires_ included _An Evil Guest_'s post-birth abortions...

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In the 1990s, a NAU was a favorite bogeyman of far-rightists, so the sense is clearly that it is not a right-wing /fantasy /but a right-wing /nightmare. /

Gwern Branwen — 10 Apr 2012, 00:43 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

On Mon, Apr 9, 2012 at 7:52 PM, Gerry Quinn <gerry at bindweed.com> wrote:
Is a single North American currency such a right wing concept as all that?
Nobody calls one a Nazi for favouring European monetary union — quite the opposite, if anything. Personally, I don't really care what currency I hold so long as it is hard and fungible.

It's a right-wing concept in the same way as writing a story in which the literal Antichrist takes over the UN and uses it to prosecute his Satanic designs is right-wing. Which is to say, a caricature of it is feared and predicted by right-wing nuts to a degree far beyond the support the actual idea has in any circles, left or right (especially after the Eurozone has proved to be such a mixed blessing, the Canadians have not the slightest interest in a unified economic zone).

It is comparable to things in left-wing circles like anti-vaxxers or many conspiracy theories during the Bush administration like 9/11 Truthers or Alternet posters convinced the government was setting up concentration camps for liberals.

If I read an ostensibly apolitical novel set in 2020 in which President Romney incarcerated all employees of the DNC and major donors, mentioned in an aside as a mere background detail without extenuating circumstances like parody, I'd regard the author as a little bit unhinged, for such a detail is so mindbogglingly bad worldbuilding that it must reflect the author's own crankery.

gwern
<http://www.gwern.net>

Nick Lee — 10 Apr 2012, 01:35 · follows Gwern Branwen

"The crazy right-wing politics. There's the North American Union, with its single currency. There's the European Union, where thieves get their hands cut off because of sharia. There's the UN, which always takes the sides of the poor nations of the world instead of the NAU."

This childlike view of politics is creeping into all reviews of Wolfe now. As soon as someone learns Wolfe's political leanings (not that they know them better than the vague label "conservative"), they start reading Wolfe like he's Ayn Rand. I'm glad the reviewer put the book down. He wouldn't want to be exposed to ideas he might disagree with.

I like to point out to these people that Wolfe is 1) an environmentalist and 2) a believer in a matriarchal pre-history.

"The tech illiteracy. The setting is Earth, in a resource-poor near-future. Our protagonist has a cellphone, but nobody else seems to, and from what we see in the half of the book I read, it's just a phone. Websites exist, but there's no sign of social networking. When pirates hijack an enormous, luxurious cruise ship, the protagonists talk for a while as if there's a possibility of keeping the news under wraps, as if there wouldn't have been hundreds of people tweeting "OMG pirates!" within ten seconds of the first shots being fired. When the protagonists talk (via some kind of video-phone communication) with the authorities on shore, they argue a bit over

the location of the ship, as if there's no such thing as GPS. The whole thing could've been written in the 1970s."

And here he turns ageist. Why is everyone on board with the idea that in the future we can have more technology but never the idea we will have less? Or changes in culture. Why would we necessarily stay chained to social media in the future?

There are fewer cell phones because we're running out of helium and silver, among other things.

The implication that Wolfe is wrong about such obvious details strikes me as a hint of the reader's naivete, not Wolfe's.

Gerry Quinn wrote:

"Is a single North American currency such a right wing concept as all that? Nobody calls one a Nazi for favouring European monetary union — quite the opposite, if anything. Personally, I don't really care what currency I hold so long as it is hard and fungible."

I'm guessing the "reviewer" thinks the notion of a one-currency NAU, and the presence of such an alliance itself, is the stuff of right-wing fantasy. I don't understand what's crazy about it. Neither do I see how portraying it is itself a criticism of it.

David Stockhoff — 10 Apr 2012, 01:41 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

On 4/9/2012 8:43 PM, Gwern Branwen wrote:

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Sure, but what about an sf novel?

I took the setting as a type of alternative universe, where many things went down just a bit differently from our own---basically the entire second half of the 20th century. But the future is

different too, mostly because of the war. As a result, cultural and economic progress was stifled. There's no need to blame any of this on either "wing": I can see the damage of rampant post-soviet-style "privatization" as well as paralyzing social stratification of rich and poor. I doubt anyone planned it this way, which may be part of the point (i.e., unintended consequences).

I can also understand interpreting it as the ravings of an out-of-touch writer past his prime, in the style of Heinlein. Wolfe might indeed be a bit out of touch---it's hard to keep up, and how would one incorporate Twitter into sf anyway? And who would want to?

But Wolfe likes to play with conventions, tropes, and expectations way too much for me to believe that theory.

Marc Aramini — 10 Apr 2012, 02:30 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

I'm with Nick on this one. pigeonholing. I can definitely see technology becoming less available to the unwashed masses (especially if my totalitarian and oppressive efforts ever come to fruition - it's a glass half-empty/half-fool scenario at this point).

Matthew Knight — 10 Apr 2012, 03:21 · in reply to Marc Aramini

Most of the reaction is overblown, as Nick has pointed out.

However, I'm currently 100 pages into "Home Fires," and I must say that the "sharia law--only in the EU" line punched me in the gut. It made me start asking myself which particular pundits Wolfe has been reading. As somebody who grew up in a very monoethnic fundamentalist Christian milieu, who now has several Middle Eastern friends, I have been finding myself forced into the role of the "defender of Islam" all too often lately out of basic frustration over some of the bald-faced generalizations and lies that get peddled as fact, and Europe's Islamic future is a meme that keeps coming up in discussions. Maybe it's just personal experience making me oversensitive.

I don't want to inflame anything, as I recognize that Wolfe may indeed have a larger proportion of right-leaning fans than, say, China Mieville or Richard Morgan (or...Neil Gaiman?), and of course his writings display enormous nuance. I think Wolfe's writing is stellar enough to appeal to readers of all political stances. Still, I wonder if any literary scholar has ever undertaken a Said-influenced "Orientalist" critique of something like "Seven American Nights"?

Gwern Branwen — 10 Apr 2012, 03:37 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On Mon, Apr 9, 2012 at 9:41 PM, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:

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I don't think 'prime' has anything to do with it. This is just ordinary mind-killing politics. Since people are intent on defending Wolfe, let me give a liberal example where one could equally claim 'oh it's just all SF! or alternate history!' (but so terrible SF that chalking it up to politics is the *charitable* interpretation): the story http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Space_Traders

Fulltext: <http://www4.ncsu.edu/%7Emseth2/com417s12/readings/BellSpaceTraders.pdf>

I commented (http://www.reddit.com/r/wikipedia/comments/r2334/the_space_traders_et_offers_amazing_technology_in/c42h1ab)

It was [terribly written]. The author gets in all sorts of political gibes and doesn't even try to hide his ax to grind - the aliens are probably going to eat or enslave the blacks, the whites stand condemned forever for selling them, the Republican president & cabinet (note the oh-so-subtle description pointing that way) are scum, etc. This is just a fine example of [Politics and Awful Art](http://lesswrong.com/lw/m3/politics_and_awful_art/).

A good fable hides its beliefs: you genuinely don't know what the author thinks is right and so you have to think for yourself. For example, in [Ted Chiang](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ted_Chiang)'s [excellent](http://lesswrong.com/lw/536/open_thread_april_2011/3thd) ["Hell is the Absence of God"](<http://www.ibooksonline.com/88/Text/hell.html>), by the end you are disturbed and perplexed but you genuinely don't know what Chiang makes of the Book of Job, the theodicy, or whether the ending is good or bad.

On Mon, Apr 9, 2012 at 11:21 PM, Matthew Knight <jacobeiserman at gmail.com> wrote:

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Quoted for truth. You might also find interesting a story of sorts by SF author Dan Simmons http://www.dansimmons.com/news/message/2006_04.htm and his discussion of it http://www.dansimmons.com/news/message/2006_05.htm

gwern
<http://www.gwern.net>

David Stockhoff — 10 Apr 2012, 11:32 · in reply to Matthew Knight

On 4/9/2012 11:21 PM, Matthew Knight wrote:
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On the other hand, if a story featured people who befriend travelers on stormy nights, then sink their fangs into their necks, you wouldn't twitch. I had the same reaction initially. But a fundy-Muslim Europe sounds pretty "scary" to me. Boo!

It's easy to imagine a future Europe of declining native and growing immigrant populations.

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if any literary scholar has ever undertaken a Said-influenced "Orientalist" critique of something like "Seven American Nights"?

I'd like to see that too, although I am not sure what it would produce that is not already clear. That story takes all the familiar features of Victorian gentleman-explorers and the Orient and flips them on an SF/horror template. The Americans are furtive, dishonest, addicted, childlike, innocent, perverse, seductive, and deformed. They seem an impossible contradiction, in fact, and that's one of the features of the Orientalist Orient.

David Stockhoff — 10 Apr 2012, 11:43 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

On 4/9/2012 11:37 PM, Gwern Branwen wrote:

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What makes you think Wolfe either believes in a European sharia future or that a fear of such a future is political? I agree that the hand-amputation thing is insensitive. But every age produces and writes about its own fears.

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I am not sure what this has to do with HF. The Space Traders story sounds like SF written for TV or young adults by a non-SF writer. Its point and delivery does seem ham-handed. So what?

Marc Aramini — 10 Apr 2012, 13:35 · in reply to David Stockhoff

Now people let their leanings interfere with objective criticism, especially if the viewpoint is unpopular. As if Tristram Shandy wasn't anti-papist in its rhetoric. Yet there are many Catholics who love it. It would be a sin against art for a Catholic to dismiss Tristram Shandy's merit based on that obvious prejudice of the time and place of its composition.

This reactive "everything must be sound and free from all stereotyping/common fears relating

to a belief system so that no one may be offended" makes for some bland, boring, and uninteresting fiction.

Matthew Knight — 10 Apr 2012, 15:27 · in reply to Marc Aramini

On Tue, Apr 10, 2012 at 8:35 AM, Marc Aramini <marcaramini at yahoo.com> wrote:

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That's not my position, at least--as I said earlier, I think Wolfe is a good enough writer that you don't need to agree with his political leanings (which are generally understated, and much more complex than bald conservatism) to appreciate him. But while I often come across statements that disagree with me almost on a visceral level in my reading, this is the first time in a while that it's happened with a writer that I love and respect as much as Wolfe. And when it's something like this, which connects with my daily life, it is hard to bracket myself out of the equation. I doubt I'm the only one in this position. Whatever...I'm still enjoying the book.

Antonin Scriabin — 10 Apr 2012, 15:31 · in reply to Matthew Knight

I think critiquing the book for not having social networking is incredibly silly. Science fiction authors are in the business of going out on a limb to tell a story; they routinely break the rules, and generally are free to create their worlds however they see fit. It is petty and close-minded to begrudge the exclusion of Twitter. How can this not be a troll?

On Tue, Apr 10, 2012 at 11:27 AM, Matthew Knight <jacobeiserman at gmail.com> wrote:

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Fernando Gouvea — 10 Apr 2012, 15:34 · in reply to Marc Aramini

I'm with Marc on this one. Sure, there are elements of "right wing nightmare" to /Home Fires/. But political nightmares are all over SF, sometimes from the right, but much more often from the left. If that's going to stop you reading, there will be a lot not to read.

That said, I do understand the visceral reaction. I have such reactions to some left-wing fantasies/nightmares in SF, though my biggest problem is with what read as revenge fantasies or wish-fulfillment (my standard example is Bacigalupi's "Pump Six"). When that happens, I sometimes stop reading, but more often I grit my teeth and read on. It is good to be exposed to contrary opinions sometimes.

But the more significant observation, for me, is that in /Home Fires/ all of this is background. The main story doesn't strike me as particularly right-wing, though I can see someone making a case that it's deeply influenced by a Christian notion of what marriage should be.

Fernando

On 4/10/2012 9:35 AM, Marc Aramini wrote:

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To post, write urth at urth.net

Subscription/information: <http://www.urth.net>

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Fernando Q. Gouvea <http://www.colby.edu/~fqgouvea>
Carter Professor of Mathematics
Colby College
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Waterville, ME 04901 <http://www.maa.org/maareviews>

How to Argue Effectively, III: Use meaningless but weighty-sounding words and phrases

Memorize this list:

- * Let me put it this way
- * In terms of
- * Vis-a-vis
- * Per se
- * As it were
- * Qua
- * So to speak

You should also memorize some Latin abbreviations such as "Q.E.D.," "e.g.," and "i.e." These are all short for "I speak Latin, and you do not."
-- Dave Barry

Matthew Knight — 10 Apr 2012, 16:13 · in reply to Fernando Gouvea

On Tue, Apr 10, 2012 at 10:34 AM, Fernando Gouvea <fqgouvea@colby.edu> wrote

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Right--that's probably why the comment surprised me so much (prompting the visceral reaction); it seemed to come out of the woodwork. Certainly nothing like the "stories" that Gwern shared earlier, which are both straight up political screeds.

Thomas Bitterman — 10 Apr 2012, 20:02 · in reply to Nick Lee

On Mon, Apr 9, 2012 at 9:35 PM, Nick Lee <starwaterstrain at gmail.com> wrote:

"The crazy right-wing politics. There's the North American Union, with its single currency. There's the European Union, where thieves get their hands cut off because of sharia. There's the UN, which always takes the sides of the poor nations of the world instead of the NAU."

This childlike view of politics is creeping into all reviews of Wolfe now.

Because Wolfe keeps sneaking politics into his works. What effect did the existence of sharia law in Europe really have in the story? It was just another thing for the narrator/author avatar to grouse about. And he goes on and on about this and that, until one wishes the hijackers would just get off this guy's lawn so we could get back to the story.

I like to point out to these people that Wolfe is 1) an

environmentalist and 2) a believer in a matriarchal pre-history.

A pre-history he is glad is dead and gone.

"The tech illiteracy. The setting is Earth, in a resource-poor

near-future. Our protagonist has a cellphone, but nobody else seems to, and from what we see in the half of the book I read, it's just a phone. Websites exist, but there's no sign of social networking. When pirates hijack an enormous, luxurious cruise ship, the protagonists talk for a while as if there's a possibility of keeping the news under wraps, as if there wouldn't have been hundreds of people tweeting "OMG pirates!" within ten seconds of the first shots being fired. When the protagonists talk (via some kind of video-phone communication) with the authorities on shore, they argue a bit over the location of the ship, as if there's no such thing as GPS. The whole thing could've been written in the 1970s."

And here he turns ageist. Why is everyone on board with the idea that in the future we can have more technology but never the idea we will have less?

Perhaps because we have relativistic rocket ships fighting an interplanetary war? That would seem to indicate that GPS technology would be well within our grasp. An author writing a book set in the non-apocalyptic, non-Singularity near future (where Home Fires would appear to be set) should take pains to cover his bases when using tech. Wolfe doesn't. Even a single throw-away line to the effect of "These pirates were no amateurs - their jammers left us electronically isolated" would have been enough.

There are fewer cell phones because we're running out of helium and

silver, among other things.

We can figure out giant spaceships, but not how to make cell phones differently? Again, a single sentence ("The government used its wartime powers to severely restrict cell phones") would have done it.

I just wanted all the wars to be over so that we could spend the money on starships and Mars colonies.
- Grant Morrison

António Pedro Marques — 10 Apr 2012, 22:41 · in reply to Thomas Bitterman

No dia 10/04/2012, às 21:02, Thomas Bitterman <tom at bitterman.net> escreveu:

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Only someone who thinks sharia has no business in Europe can consider that the mention of sharia in Europe is objectionable politics. Who's the xenophobe then? One might as well ask what effect does a protagonist being black has on a story written by a white author, and leap to the conclusion that the author is a white supremacist who's subtly complaining that blacks may one day be protagonists of something.

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And since it is so simple to do, it is best left undone. The reader can do it better on their own. Otherwise, you 'cover your bases' in what concerns the latest fads and completely miss the ones arising next year.

David Stockhoff — 10 Apr 2012, 22:42 · in reply to Thomas Bitterman

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"The crazy right-wing politics. There's the North American Union, with its single currency. There's the European Union, where thieves get their hands cut off because of sharia. There's the UN, which always takes the sides of the poor nations of the world instead of the NAU."

This childlike view of politics is creeping into all reviews of Wolfe now.

Because Wolfe keeps sneaking politics into his works. What effect did the existence of sharia law in Europe really have in the story? It was just another thing for the narrator/author avatar to grouse about. And he goes on and on about this and that, until one wishes the hijackers would just get off this guy's lawn so we could get back to the story.

I took it as an explanation of why Europe was not worth looking to for help. As a comparison, /The Hunger Games/ doesn't explain why the reader can forget about expecting interference from outside North America. The answer is implied but there's still a void. Wolfe at least explains.

"The tech illiteracy. The setting is Earth, in a resource-poor near-future. Our protagonist has a cellphone, but nobody else seems to, and from what we see in the half of the book I read, it's just a phone. Websites exist, but there's no sign of social networking. When pirates hijack an enormous, luxurious cruise ship, the protagonists talk for a while as if there's a possibility of keeping the news under wraps, as if there wouldn't have been hundreds of people tweeting "OMG pirates!" within ten seconds of the first shots being fired. When the protagonists talk (via some kind of video-phone communication) with the authorities on shore, they argue a bit over the location of the ship, as if there's no such thing as GPS. The whole thing could have been written in the 1970s."

And here he turns ageist. Why is everyone on board with the idea that in the future we can have more technology but never the idea we will have less?

Perhaps because we have relativistic rocket ships fighting an interplanetary war? That would seem to indicate that GPS technology would be well within our grasp. An author writing a book set in the non-apocalyptic, non-Singularity near future (where Home Fires would appear to be set) should take pains to cover his bases when using tech. Wolfe doesn't. Even a single throw-away line to the effect of "These pirates were no amateurs - their jammers left us electronically isolated" would have been enough.

There are fewer cell phones because we're running out of helium and silver, among other things.

We can figure out giant spaceships, but not how to make cell phones differently? Again, a single sentence ("The government used its wartime powers to severely restrict cell phones") would have done it.

There's a war on and resources are short. Some high tech is available (for the rich). Much is not, including consumer electronics. I'm sympathetic to your point, but Wolfe did the same thing in *There Are Doors*. The reader is just supposed to figure out an apparent Opposite World. Why should it be our future anyway?

Matthew Knight — 11 Apr 2012, 04:15 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

2012/4/10 Ant?nio Pedro Marques <antonio at gmail.com>

Only someone who thinks sharia has no business in Europe can consider that the mention of sharia in Europe is objectionable politics. Who's the xenophobe then? One might as well ask what effect does a protagonist being black has on a story written by a white author, and leap to the conclusion that the author is a white supremacist who's subtly complaining that blacks may one day be protagonists of something.

Sorry, this doesn't ring true. Sharia isn't just "mentioned" here, but framed in a specific way. The kind of sharia we are presented with is far from the kind which has gone into effect in parts of the UK. Rather than that form, restricted to certain issues of family law and civil disputes over things like inheritance, we are presented with sharia-as-bogeyman, where theft results in severed limbs, and (probably) blasphemy of the prophet or adultery lead to death by stoning. Sharia law is about much more than violent punishment, but it's not usually presented with nuance in the West, including in this book. At least, the part I've read thus far.

Gerry Quinn — 11 Apr 2012, 11:01 · in reply to Matthew Knight

From: Matthew Knight

Sorry, this doesn't ring true. Sharia isn't just "mentioned" here, but framed in a specific way. The kind of sharia we are presented with is far from the kind which has gone into effect in parts of the UK.

It does seem more like that which has recently gone into effect in Timbuktoo.

Rather than that form, restricted to certain issues of family law and civil disputes over things like inheritance, we are presented with sharia-as-bogeyman, where theft results in severed limbs, and (probably) blasphemy of the prophet or adultery lead to death by stoning. Sharia law is about much more than violent punishment, but it's not usually presented with nuance in the West, including in this book. At least, the part I've read thus far.

Christian fundamentalism is not usually presented with nuance either.

- Gerry Quinn

António Pedro Marques — 11 Apr 2012, 11:28 · in reply to Matthew Knight

Matthew Knight wrote (11-04-2012 05:15):

2012/4/10 Ant?nio Pedro Marques <antonio at gmail.com>

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the xenophobe then? One might as well ask what effect does a protagonist being black has on a story written by a white author, and leap to the conclusion that the author is a white supremacist who's subtly complaining that blacks may one day be protagonists of something.

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You probably know better than me that there is no such thing as 'a' sharia. But we do know how it works in countries which have made a stance of basing its laws on 'sharia'. Severed limbs are by no means a 'western' fantasy. Nor are the real-world fatwas on (say) sexual themes, even by the most 'moderate' clerics. When 'traditionalists' in a country with a non-sharia-based penal code (and only a handful of muslim countries claim to base their laws on sharia specifically) demand that sharia become the basis, they're not for sure thinking of inheritance laws.

How can you call something a bogeyman which actually exists and is there for everyone to see?

I admit my opinion on islam is very unfavourable, to put it quite mildly. So much so that in my view most muslims live by much *higher* standards than those of their religion - the reverse of christians, who live by *lower* standards than their own's. But it's not a prejudice. It's an opinion based on some knowledge of the thing.

From another angle: severed limbs and stoning is what you have in Iran or Saudi Arabia, two of the few countries which claim to base their laws on sharia. Now, if iranians or saudi arabians living in Europe claim for the introduction of sharia into the european legal systems, how come is an end result of severed limbs and stonings a bogeyman?

David Stockhoff — 11 Apr 2012, 11:45 · in reply to Matthew Knight

On 4/11/2012 12:15 AM, Matthew Knight wrote:
2012/4/10 Ant?nio Pedro Marques <antonio at gmail.com
<mailto:antonio at gmail.com>>

Only someone who thinks sharia has no business in Europe can consider that the mention of sharia in Europe is objectionable politics. Who's the xenophobe then? One might as well ask what effect does a protagonist being black has on a story written by a white author, and leap to the conclusion that the author is a white supremacist who's subtly complaining that blacks may one day be protagonists of something.

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sharia-as-bogeyman, where theft results in severed limbs, and (probably) blasphemy of the prophet or adultery lead to death by stoning. Sharia law is about much more than violent punishment, but it's not usually presented with nuance in the West, including in this book. At least, the part I've read thus far.

I almost posted the same response. A tiny and backward part of sharia is used as a bogeyman, whereas 99% of the time it's as dull as dishwater. And amputation is presented not as chance or opinion, but as fact. I don't see any purpose for depicting the protagonist as a misinformed crank, even if he's as much antihero as hero, so it probably should be taken as true and as a plain extension of "today's headlines" into Tomorrow.

The question is, which headlines? Hint: There is no Wolf News channel.

David Stockhoff — 11 Apr 2012, 11:49 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

On 4/11/2012 7:28 AM, António Pedro Marques wrote:

From another angle: severed limbs and stoning is what you have in Iran or Saudi Arabia, two of the few countries which claim to base their laws on sharia. Now, if iranians or saudi arabians living in Europe claim for the introduction of sharia into the european legal systems, how come is an end result of severed limbs and stonings a bogeyman?

Because they'd probably have to stage a revolution to do so---a revolution which is not mentioned in HF. Whereas the bogeyman of today (or rather from a few years ago) is depicted as a creeping horror.

Why would people who have fled repression of any kind be so keen on recreating it in their new country?

Gerry Quinn — 11 Apr 2012, 12:16 · in reply to David Stockhoff

From: David Stockhoff

Why would people who have fled repression of any kind be so keen on recreating it in their new country?

Ask Abu Qatada.
- Gerry Quinn

Greg Bates — 11 Apr 2012, 12:23 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

Or the Pilgrims.

On Wed, Apr 11, 2012 at 8:16 AM, Gerry Quinn <gerry at bindweed.com> wrote:

From: David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net>

Why would people who have fled repression of any kind be so keen on recreating it in their new country?

Ask Abu Qatada.

- Gerry Quinn

Marc Aramini — 11 Apr 2012, 12:26 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

Futhermore, hasn't WWII taught us that even the most sophisticated, cultured, and enlightened city or country can descend into animalistic barbarism and brutality when the right ideas come into vogue? Do we really think we are that much more sophisticated on the world level than our grandfathers? What has changed? The means of destruction and the the pervasiveness of the media only.

--- On Wed, 4/11/12, Gerry Quinn <gerry at bindweed.com> wrote:

From: Gerry Quinn <gerry at bindweed.com>

Subject: Re: (urth) This Week in Google Alerts: Home Fires To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net> Date: Wednesday, April 11, 2012, 5:16 AM

From: David Stockhoff

Why would people who have fled repression of any kind be so keen on recreating it in their new country?

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- Gerry Quinn

-----Inline Attachment Follows-----

David Stockhoff — 11 Apr 2012, 12:29 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

On 4/11/2012 8:16 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

From: David Stockhoff <mailto:dstockhoff at verizon.net>

Why would people who have fled repression of any kind be so keen on recreating it in their new country?

Ask Abu Qatada.

Ask him what---how he's going to bring about a revolution when he has a couple of dozen followers? That's a damn good question.

David Stockhoff — 11 Apr 2012, 12:30 · in reply to Marc Aramini

And that's the whole point of dystopian/apocalyptic/horror SF.

On 4/11/2012 8:26 AM, Marc Aramini wrote:

Futhermore, hasn't WWII taught us that even the most sophisticated, cultured, and enlightened city or country can descend into animalistic barbarism and brutality when the right ideas come into vogue? Do we really think we are that much more sophisticated on the world level than our grandfathers? What has changed? The means of destruction and the the pervasiveness of the media only.

David Stockhoff — 11 Apr 2012, 12:32 · in reply to Greg Bates

The Pilgrims overthrew their new government to recreate the oppression they suffered at home? I don't think so.

If anything, they recreated the oppression THEY enacted at home. Bit different.

On 4/11/2012 8:23 AM, Greg Bates wrote:

Or the Pilgrims.

On Wed, Apr 11, 2012 at 8:16 AM, Gerry Quinn <gerry at bindweed.com
<mailto:gerry at bindweed.com>> wrote:

From: David Stockhoff <mailto:dstockhoff at verizon.net>

> Why would people who have fled repression of any kind be so keen on
> recreating it in their new country?

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- Gerry Quinn

Lee Berman — 11 Apr 2012, 13:02 · follows David Stockhoff

Marc Aramini: Futhermore, hasn't WWII taught us that even the most sophisticated, cultured, and enlightened city or country can descend into animalistic barbarism and brutality when the right ideas come into vogue? Do we really think we are that much more sophisticated on the world level than our grandfathers? What has changed? The means of destruction and the the pervasiveness of the media only.

Of course I agree that we haven't evolved much as a species in the past 70 years. But I actually think the (usually annoying) pervasiveness of the media has made a positive difference in terms of reducing global atrocities.

The real difference is in the nature of the media, i.e. that it is now far more visual than it was in the 40's. I find the Abu Graib torture case to be illustrative. That story came out in the news and nobody really noticed or raised much of a fuss. Then a few months later the pictures came out. Instant worldwide uproar, condemnation and major efforts to prevent a repetition. Such high quality pictures have an impact that the printed news and b/w grainy photos of WWII atrocities didn't have.

Most modern nations don't seem to be willing to risk building giant extermination camps or carpet bombing and nuking millions of civilians to face the instant global backlash as cell phone images instantly report and broadcast the results. Even brutal regimes in Iran and Syria must tread more carefully than in the past in reaction to internal rebellion. Nobody wants to be the next Saddam Hussein or Mohamar Ghadaffi.

DAVID STOCKHOFF — 11 Apr 2012, 13:35 · in reply to David Stockhoff

Backing up a bit, I should note that whatever your perspective on Islam, fundy sharia in 22nd (or whatever) century Europe is still more plausible than time travel.

And just to be clear---that's not very plausible.

On 4/11/2012 8:16 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

From: David Stockhoff <mailto:dstockhoff at verizon.net>

Why would people who have fled repression of any kind be so keen on
recreating it in their new country?

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Ask him what---how he's going to bring about a revolution when he has a couple of dozen followers? That's a damn good question.

antonio at gmail.com — 11 Apr 2012, 13:47 · in reply to David Stockhoff

No dia 11/04/2012, às 12:49, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> escreveu:

On 4/11/2012 7:28 AM, António Pedro Marques wrote:

From another angle: severed limbs and stoning is what you have in Iran or Saudi Arabia, two of the few countries which claim to base their laws on sharia. Now, if iranians or saudi arabians living in Europe claim for the introduction of sharia into the european legal systems, how come is an end result of severed limbs and stonings a bogeyman?

Because they'd probably have to stage a revolution to do so---a revolution which is not mentioned in HF.

It's them claiming there is a demographic revolution going on, not their opponents.

Whereas the bogeyman of today (or rather from a few years ago) is depicted as a creeping horror.

But it's **you** calling it an horror, it's you condemning 'sharia'. The people professing an islamic form of government cannot object to it. You're arguing as if severed limbs and stonings were not hallmarks of penal systems claiming to be based on sharia, but rather a libel. Well, they are not. The Saudis and the Iranians aren't shy about defending those penalties.

Why would people who have fled repression of any kind be so keen on recreating it in their new country?

I could say 'ask them', but the fact is that they came to europe fleeing from poverty, not from repression.

DAVID STOCKHOFF — 11 Apr 2012, 14:11 · in reply to antonio at gmail.com

António Pedro Marques — 11 Apr 2012, 15:18 · in reply to DAVID STOCKHOFF

DAVID STOCKHOFF wrote (11-04-2012 15:11):

From: "antonio at gmail.com" <antonio at gmail.com>
To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>
Sent: Wednesday, April 11, 2012 9:47 AM
Subject: Re: (urth) This Week in Google Alerts: Home Fires

No dia 11/04/2012, às 12:49, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net>
<mailto:dstockhoff at verizon.net>> escreveu:

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>

> Because they'd probably have to stage a revolution to do so---a
revolution which is not mentioned in HF.

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opponents.

---False. Their opponents DO claim that. Google something like "Europe
demographics Islam."

Look, it isn't like I haven't been following the issue for ages... I live in Europe, you know. Their opponents only began talking about the demography
echoing what the islamists had been boasting for long.

> Whereas the bogeyman of today (or rather from a few years ago) is depicted as a creeping horror.

But it's *you* calling it an horror, it's you condemning 'sharia'. The people professing an islamic form of government cannot object to it. You're arguing as if severed limbs and stonings were not hallmarks of penal systems claiming to be based on sharia, but rather a libel. Wel, they are not. The Saudis and the Iranians aren't shy about defending those penalties.

---Like most Muslims, I approve of sharia without the medieval penalties.

But what's sharia without the 'medieval' penalties, and what's about it that should meet approval as opposed to what we have in our current legal systems?

You're arguing as if all Muslims are fundamentalists like Iran and Saudi Arabia.

No, I'm saying those are the countries where it has been given legal weight. Most muslims do
not live under sharia, nor do they desire to.

> Why would people who have fled repression of any kind be so keen on recreating it in their new country?

I could say 'ask them', but the fact is that they came to europe fleeing from poverty, not from repression.

---For the most part, yes. So what? Are they then Islamic fundies fleeing anti-sharia repression so they can set up Islamic republics? You've answered the question.

They - the ones who claim for sharia - are islamic traditionalists unwilling to live and let live by the laws of the societies that they went to live in.

Marc Aramini — 11 Apr 2012, 15:29 · in reply to Lee Berman

--- On Wed, 4/11/12, Lee Berman <severiansola at hotmail.com> wrote:

Of course I agree that we haven't evolved much as a species in the past 70 years. But I actually think the (usually annoying) pervasiveness of the media has made a positive difference in terms of reducing global atrocities.

The real difference is in the nature of the media, i.e. that it is now far more visual than it was in the 40's. I find the Abu Graib torture case to be illustrative. That story came out in the news and nobody really noticed or raised much of a fuss. Then a few months later the pictures came out. Instant worldwide uproar, condemnation and major efforts to prevent a repetition. Such high quality pictures have an impact that the printed news and b/w grainy photos of WWII atrocities didn't have.

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building giant extermination
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Even brutal regimes in Iran and Syria must tread more
carefully than in the past
in reaction to internal rebellion. Nobody wants to be
the next Saddam Hussein or
Mohamar Ghadaffi. ???
????????
?????? ???

I like how these political threads on Wolfe always get a response, so I'm going to piggyback on this back to Wolfe's short fiction. (I am trying to cope with his political takes on "how the whip came back" and "hour of trust" now - ugh - not my forte) --- but no comments on the conclusions I came to about "The Changeling"?

Wasn't anybody else's mind blown by the actor Peter Palmer, who played Lil Abner, in real life being born in 1931 - the "objective" evidence of which interpretation to take for Wolfe's Changeling ("two separate families, switched at birth, Palmer born 1931 and age matches service duty" VS "one family, Palmer born in 1934-5, splitting later in 1945 into two separate ones - are the Palmieri's an outbranch of that mental creation/splitting too?")

That was so far the best interpretive work I've done on the short stories at a plot level ... no comments. :(

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 11 Apr 2012, 15:57 · in reply to Marc Aramini

I just didn't know what to say about it. I was very impressed.

On Wed, Apr 11, 2012 at 8:29 AM, Marc Aramini <marcaramini at yahoo.com> wrote:

--- On Wed, 4/11/12, Lee Berman <severiansola at hotmail.com> wrote:

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Marc Aramini — 11 Apr 2012, 16:00 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

--- On Wed, 4/11/12, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes <danldo at gmail.com> wrote:
From: Dan'l Danehy-Oakes <danldo at gmail.com>
Subject: Re: (urth) This Week in Google Alerts: Home Fires
To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>
Date: Wednesday, April 11, 2012, 8:57 AM
I just didn't know what to say about it. I _was_ very impressed.

thanks! I just thought it was super cool how there are objective markers in a Wolfe story that, at least pre-1973, mark him as a definitively modernist rather than postmodern stylist.

Thomas Bitterman — 11 Apr 2012, 18:47 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

On Tue, Apr 10, 2012 at 6:41 PM, António Pedro Marques <antonio at gmail.com> wrote:
No dia 10/04/2012, às 21:02, Thomas Bitterman <tom at bitterman.net> escreveu:

On Mon, Apr 9, 2012 at 9:35 PM, Nick Lee <starwaterstrain at gmail.com> wrote:

"The crazy right-wing politics. There's the North American Union, with its single currency. There's the European Union, where thieves get their hands cut off because of sharia. There's the UN, which always takes the sides of the poor nations of the world instead of the NAU."

This childlike view of politics is creeping into all reviews of Wolfe now.

Because Wolfe keeps sneaking politics into his works. What effect did the existence of sharia law in Europe really have in the story?

Only someone who thinks sharia has no business in Europe can consider that the mention of sharia in Europe is objectionable politics. Who's the xenophobe then?

? A quick "Search Inside" (thank you, Amazon) uncovers one use of the word sharia. In the context it is noted that the driver lost both hands for stealing and that sharia is no longer limited to just the EU. In other words, it's harsh and spreading. At this point Alex Jones deserves a cite.

One might as well ask what effect does a protagonist being black has on a story written by a white author, and leap to the conclusion that the author is a white supremacist who's subtly complaining that blacks may one day be protagonists of something.

There is a single chapter, "Guns", which reads, in outline: socialized healthcare is terrible; the burning bed defense is a crock; families don't love/help each other any more; the police and government are worthless; the developed countries are all out to get us; the third world won't even help fight an alien invasion; the narrator is the very essence of humanity, or at least Western civilization, the embodiment of law, justice and civilization; his masters would spit on him if they even remembered what those things were; and he's got guns and is going out to kill people. I did not leap to the conclusion that there was a political message here - I was pushed.

There are fewer cell phones because we're running out of helium and silver, among other things.

We can figure out giant spaceships, but not how to make cell phones differently? Again, a single sentence ("The government used its wartime powers to severely restrict cell phones") would have done it.

And since it is so simple to do, it is best left undone.

Punctuation is simple, too, but I prefer that the author inserts it himself.

The reader can do it better on their own.

Wolfe is a better author than I am. This is not a mystery to be solved. The reader should only be expected to go so far in co-authorship.

I just wanted all the wars to be over so that we could spend the money on starships and Mars colonies.
- Grant Morrison

David Stockhoff — 11 Apr 2012, 19:25 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

On 4/11/2012 11:18 AM, Ant?nio Pedro Marques wrote:
DAVID STOCKHOFF wrote (11-04-2012 15:11):

From: "antonio at gmail.com" <antonio at gmail.com>
To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Sent: Wednesday, April 11, 2012 9:47 AM

Subject: Re: (urth) This Week in Google Alerts: Home Fires

No dia 11/04/2012, ?s 12:49, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net
<mailto:dstockhoff at verizon.net>> escreveu:

On 4/11/2012 7:28 AM, Ant?nio Pedro Marques wrote:

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Because they'd probably have to stage a revolution to do so---a revolution which is not mentioned in HF.

It's them claiming there is a demographic revolution going on, not their opponents.

---False. Their opponents DO claim that. Google something like "Europe demographics Islam."

Look, it isn't like I haven't been following the issue for ages... I live in Europe, you know. Their opponents only began talking about the demography *echoing* what the islamists had been boasting for long.

I guess we're talking about different opponents, because although I know there are anti-immigrant politicians across Europe, we generally only hear about our own in the US. Here, Islamists boast of nothing. They keep quiet. But I did not contradict you on that point, but on the point of whether their opponents speak up. Here, they do nothing else.

Whereas the bogeyman of today (or rather from a few years ago) is depicted as a creeping horror.

But it's *you* calling it an horror, it's you condemning 'sharia'. The people professing an islamic form of government cannot object to it. You're arguing as if severed limbs and stonings were not hallmarks of penal systems claiming to be based on sharia, but rather a libel. Wel, they are not. The Saudis and the Iranians aren't shy about defending those penalties.

---Like most Muslims, I approve of sharia without the medieval penalties.

But what's sharia without the 'medieval' penalties, and what's about it that should meet approval as opposed to what we have in our current legal systems?

I don't think that makes sense. What would any justice system be without, say, a death penalty?

You're arguing as if all Muslims are fundamentalists like Iran and Saudi Arabia.

No, I'm saying those are the countries where it has been given legal weight. Most muslims do *not* live under sharia, nor do they desire to.

OK then.

Why would people who have fled repression of any kind be so keen on recreating it in their new country?

I could say 'ask them', but the fact is that they came to Europe fleeing from poverty, not from repression.

---For the most part, yes. So what? Are they then Islamic fundies fleeing anti-sharia repression so they can set up Islamic republics? You've answered the question.

They - the ones who claim for sharia - are Islamic traditionalists unwilling to live and let live by the laws of the societies that they went to live in.

As any believer in any system would do anywhere. I'm aware of the tension. But are they so hot on amputating right hands that they will succeed in establishing a European caliphate solely for that purpose? I'll tell you what I think---that would make a great SF story.

David Stockhoff — 11 Apr 2012, 19:27 · in reply to Marc Aramini

You're just wayyy ahead of us, that's all.

On 4/11/2012 11:29 AM, Marc Aramini wrote:

--- On Wed, 4/11/12, Lee Berman<severiansola at hotmail.com> wrote:

Of course I agree that we haven't evolved much as a species in the past 70 years. But I actually think the (usually annoying) pervasiveness of the media has made a positive difference in terms of reducing global atrocities.

The real difference is in the nature of the media, i.e. that it is now far more visual than it was in the 40's. I find the Abu Graib torture case to be illustrative. That story came out in the news and nobody really noticed or raised much of a fuss. Then a few months later the pictures came out. Instant worldwide uproar, condemnation and major efforts to prevent a repetition. Such high quality pictures have an impact that the printed news and b/w grainy photos of WWII atrocities didn't have.

Most modern nations don't seem to be willing to risk building giant extermination camps or carpet bombing and nuking millions of civilians to face the instant global backlash as cell phone images instantly report and broadcast the results. Even brutal regimes in Iran and Syria must tread more carefully than in the past in reaction to internal rebellion. Nobody wants to be

the next Saddam Hussein or
Mohamar Ghadaffi.

I like how these political threads on Wolfe always get a response, so I'm going to piggyback on this back to Wolfe's short fiction. (I am trying to cope with his political takes on "how the whip came back" and "hour of trust" now - ugh - not my forte) --- but no comments on the conclusions I came to about "The Changeling"?

Wasn't anybody else's mind blown by the actor Peter Palmer, who played Lil Abner, in real life being born in 1931 - the "objective" evidence of which interpretation to take for Wolfe's Changeling ("two separate families, switched at birth, Palmer born 1931 and age matches service duty" VS "one family, Palmer born in 1934-5, splitting later in 1945 into two separate ones - are the Palmieri's an outbranch of that mental creation/splitting too?")

That was so far the best interpretive work I've done on the short stories at a plot level ... no comments. :(

Lee Berman — 11 Apr 2012, 19:58 · follows David Stockhoff

David Stockhoff: I know there are anti-immigrant politicians across Europe, we generally only hear about our own in the US. Here, Islamists boast of nothing. They keep quiet.

There is a sociological rule of thumb stating that minority populations don't start trying to exert political power until they approach 10%. Muslim population in the USA is well below that, while Latino and African-American are at that level.

I think the desire for sharia law in Europe may be more a function of disadvantaged minority status than pure religious zealotry and belief.

I don't think that makes sense. What would any justice system be without, say, a death penalty?

Yoicks! There are 16 US states without the death penalty. Moreover 50% of all nations on earth have abolished it and only 22% actually use it significantly. You've got China and the US. Most of the rest are Muslim and/or African nations.

The data seems pretty well established that execution does not serve as a deterrent to crime. But it does serve the populace in providing a sense of justice and vengeance. In some cultures, most of the USA included, justice and vengeance are more important than crime prevention.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 11 Apr 2012, 20:11 · in reply to David Stockhoff

David Stockhoff wrote:
What would any justice system be without,
say, a death penalty?

Humane.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Antonin Scriabin — 11 Apr 2012, 20:12 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

David Stockhoff wrote:
What would any justice system be without,

say, a death penalty?

Humane.

Indeed!

On Wed, Apr 11, 2012 at 4:11 PM, Dan'I Danehy-Oakes <danldo at gmail.com> wrote:
David Stockhoff wrote:

What would any justice system be without,
say, a death penalty?

Humane.

--

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

David Stockhoff — 11 Apr 2012, 20:19 · in reply to Lee Berman

On 4/11/2012 3:58 PM, Lee Berman wrote:

David Stockhoff: I know there are anti-immigrant politicians across Europe, we generally only hear about our own in the US. Here, Islamists boast of nothing. They keep quiet.

There is a sociological rule of thumb stating that minority populations don't start trying to exert political power until they approach 10%. Muslim population in the USA is well below that, while Latino and African-American are at that level.

I think the desire for sharia law in Europe may be more a function of disadvantaged minority status than pure religious zealotry and belief.

Exactly.

I don't think that makes sense. What would any justice system be without, say, a death penalty?

Yoicks! There are 16 US states without the death penalty. Moreover 50% of all nations on earth have abolished it and only 22% actually use it significantly. You've got China and the US. Most of the rest are Muslim and/or African nations.

The data seems pretty well established that execution does not serve as a deterrent to crime. But it does serve the populace in providing a sense of justice and vengeance. In some cultures, most of the USA included, justice and vengeance are more important than crime prevention.

I did wonder if I should go back and add "As far as I can tell, a BETTER one." My point was that any legal system can happily lose its most regressive features and still retain its character.

David Stockhoff — 11 Apr 2012, 20:20 · in reply to Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

On 4/11/2012 4:11 PM, Dan'I Danehy-Oakes wrote:
David Stockhoff wrote:

What would any justice system be without,
say, a death penalty?

Humane.

Yes!

Matthew Knight — 11 Apr 2012, 23:05 · in reply to DAVID STOCKHOFF

On Wed, Apr 11, 2012 at 8:35 AM, DAVID STOCKHOFF <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:
Backing up a bit, I should note that whatever your perspective on Islam, fundy sharia in 22nd (or whatever) century Europe is still more plausible than time travel.

Is this a spoiler? :)

Matthew Knight — 11 Apr 2012, 23:25 · in reply to Thomas Bitterman

On Wed, Apr 11, 2012 at 1:47 PM, Thomas Bitterman <tom at bitterman.net> wrote:

There is a single chapter, "Guns", which reads, in outline: socialized

healthcare is terrible; the burning bed defense is a crock; families don't love/help each other any more; the police and government are worthless; the developed countries are all out to get us; the third world won't even help fight an alien invasion; the narrator is the very essence of humanity, or at least Western civilization, the embodiment of law, justice and civilization; his masters would spit on him if they even remembered what those things were; and he's got guns and is going out to kill people. I did not leap to the conclusion that there was a political message here - I was pushed.

Yes--I hadn't even reached this when I posted my reaction to the sharia bit, but that chapter descended into Author Filibuster territory for me.

Hope the rest is better. I never thought I'd be comparing Wolfe to Terry Goodkind, but at least it was 3 pages instead of 30...

David Stockhoff — 12 Apr 2012, 00:01 · in reply to Matthew Knight

On 4/11/2012 7:25 PM, Matthew Knight wrote:

On Wed, Apr 11, 2012 at 1:47 PM, Thomas Bitterman <tom at bitterman.net> wrote:

There is a single chapter, "Guns", which reads, in outline:
socialized healthcare is terrible; the burning bed defense is a crock; families don't love/help each other any more; the police and government are worthless; the developed countries are all out to get us; the third world won't even help fight an alien invasion; the narrator is the very essence of humanity, or at least Western civilization, the embodiment of law, justice and civilization; his masters would spit on him if they even remembered what those things were; and he's got guns and is going out to kill people. I did not leap to the conclusion that there was a political message here - I was pushed.

Yes--I hadn't even reached this when I posted my reaction to the sharia bit, but that chapter descended into Author Filibuster territory for me. Hope the rest is better. I never thought I'd be comparing Wolfe to Terry Goodkind, but at least it was 3 pages instead of 30...

I think that somehow that rant provides a clue to Skip's origin. But I don't know what origin that is.

Marc Aramini — 12 Apr 2012, 00:38 · in reply to Lee Berman

I am not going to get too involved here, as it will no doubt veer further and further from its Wolfe origins, but the claim that the death penalty is not a deterrent from further crime ... does that imply that other systems just pay for people for life, that there is a higher percentage of unremediable repeat offenders in the death penalty countries, or that all violent crimes are just one offs that are not repeated?

It seems very clear to me that if a person is prone to kill for some reason, that circumstance may come up more than once in their life. You have already deterred future crime by either incarcerating them or killing them. Incarceration costs money, money which we would begrudge the homeless who have not committed crimes.

I think the ultimate deterrent from repeat offenses is clearly a quick death not tied up in a too long and costly appeals system. How can that not be a crime deterrent? (Remember that some people in charge of the venue were executed for not enough seats at the Rumble in the Jungle between Ali and Foreman - wow!)

Okay, I've said my conservative "people need to be held accountable" bit, I will run back to the Wolfe short stories now.

Gwern Branwen — 12 Apr 2012, 00:52 · in reply to Marc Aramini

On Wed, Apr 11, 2012 at 8:38 PM, Marc Aramini <marcaramini at yahoo.com> wrote:

It seems very clear to me that if a person is prone to kill for some reason, that circumstance may come up more than once in their life. ?You have already deterred future crime by either incarcerating them or killing them. ?Incarceration costs money, money which we would begrudge the homeless who have not committed crimes.

What 'may' happen is irrelevant; what matters is what does happen, since you are criticizing status quos.

As has been pointed out many times because it's apparently so counterintuitive to people, especially in niches like child abuse, crimes are generally committed by people one knows. This is true for murder:

In 1990, there were 2,245 homicides in New York City. In 2010, there were 536, only 123 of which involved people who didn't already know each other. The fear, once common, that walking around city parks late at night could get you mugged or murdered has been relegated to grandmothers; random murders, with few exceptions, simply don't happen anymore.

<http://nplusonemag.com/raise-the-crime-rate>

(Isn't that shocking? If I had asked you to estimate that, would you have said 'yes, in one of the largest cities in the world with a still-notorious reputation, only 1/5th of the murderers killed a stranger'?)

Knowing someone implies that multiple murders may not be very common since how many relatives could possibly irritate one that much and how would one not learn from the first time (or the *others* learn from the first time)?

The above article covers some of the standard material on how ever going to prison cripples post-prison life and contributes to additional crime; yet, homicides have relatively low recidivism rates compared to other crimes (especially property or drug convictions). You can find a lot of this stuff just by googling the obvious terms, but here's one:

<http://www.thecrimereport.org/archive/low-recidivism-rate-reported-for-paroled-ny-murderers/>

Of 368 convicted murderers granted parole in New York between 1999 and 2003, six, or 1.6 percent, were returned to prison within three years for a new felony conviction — none of them a violent offense, says a state Parole Board study reported by the Journal News in White Plains, N.Y.

The board reported that of 1,190 convicted murderers released from 1985 to 2003 in New York state, 35, or just under 3 percent, returned to prison for a new felony conviction within three years.

"Individuals who are released on parole after serving sentences for murder consistently have the lowest recidivism rate of any offenders," said John Caher, a spokesman for the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services. A 2002 study by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics tracking 272,000 inmates released in New York and 14 other states found that 1.2 percent of those freed after serving a murder sentence were rearrested on homicide charges within three years — the lowest rate among all reported crimes by released prisoners.

Well, you didn't specify what kind of recidivism rate justified pre-emptive death penalties, so perhaps this is irrelevant to you. Interpretation of these rates can get hairy since you're trying to compare shifting groups over time which can lead to bizarre little things like http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simpson%27s_paradox

gwern
<http://www.gwern.net>

David Stockhoff — 12 Apr 2012, 01:12 · in reply to Marc Aramini

On 4/11/2012 8:38 PM, Marc Aramini wrote:

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Okay, I've said my conservative "people need to be held accountable" bit, I will run back to the Wolfe short stories now.

Since you bring it up: that argument that the death penalty is cheaper than incarceration was debunked ages ago. I once believed it too. But the long years of incarceration PLUS appeals before anyone is executed are far more expensive than simple incarceration---unless you kill them really young. And we have the Constitution ("the state shall not deprive...") to thank for that appeals system, which on balance is just as corrupt and racist as the death penalty itself but it's all the convicted have got. (We all wish the trial system could deliver on that "speedy" thing.)

Furthermore, the death penalty is almost exclusively reserved for black men, often regardless of their guilt or innocence, just as are most harsh sentences in the US (and for drug crimes, because they are commonly associated with black people).

Finally, in my opinion it is not the money spent housing the convicted or defending the accused but the money spent killing foreigners by the US military that deserves to be spent on the homeless---and in any case it's a fairly awful argument to make that we should kill criminals so we can house homeless men and women (in conditions equal to prison or worse) instead of fixing the grossly inequitable economic and social structures that led to the medical poverty, unemployment, addiction, and mental illness which caused or prolongs their homelessness in

the first place.

The "individual accountability" bit is certainly relevant to Wolfe however---there is no doubt that he contains that particular piece of moral DNA. But things are far more unjust in the US now than they were 50-60 years ago when he started writing.

David Stockhoff — 12 Apr 2012, 01:18 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

Exactly. Mob hits, drug kingpins, and serial killers make for great TV and film but do not represent crime patterns well.

And don't even get me started on the parents and grandmothers sent to prison for shaking their grandchildren because medical experts didn't know their asses from a stethoscope, but no one cared because convictions are a big win for everyone (else) in the judicial system.

On 4/11/2012 8:52 PM, Gwern Branwen wrote:

On Wed, Apr 11, 2012 at 8:38 PM, Marc Aramini<marcaramini at yahoo.com> wrote:

It seems very clear to me that if a person is prone to kill for some reason, that circumstance may come up more than once in their life. You have already deterred future crime by either incarcerating them or killing them. Incarceration costs money, money which we would begrudge the homeless who have not committed crimes.

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<http://nplusemag.com/raise-the-crime-rate>

(Isn't that shocking? If I had asked you to estimate that, would you have said 'yes, in one of the largest cities in the world with a still-notorious reputation, only 1/5th of the murderers killed a stranger'?)

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35, or just under 3 percent, returned to prison for a new felony conviction within three years.

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Well, you didn't specify what kind of recidivism rate justified pre-emptive death penalties, so perhaps this is irrelevant to you. Interpretation of these rates can get hairy since you're trying to compare shifting groups over time which can lead to bizarre little things like http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simpson%27s_paradox

Matthew Knight — 12 Apr 2012, 01:45 · in reply to Marc Aramini

On Wed, Apr 11, 2012 at 7:38 PM, Marc Aramini <marcaramini at yahoo.com> wrote:

I think the ultimate deterrent from repeat offenses is clearly a quick death not tied up in a too long and costly appeals system. How can that not be a crime deterrent? (Remember that some people in charge of the venue were executed for not enough seats at the Rumble in the Jungle between Ali and Foreman - wow!)

Okay, I've said my conservative "people need to be held accountable" bit, I will run back to the Wolfe short stories now.

OK, veering. Gwern has already addressed the likelihood of repeat offenses. But if this remains your position, for justice's sake there has to be not the slightest shred of doubt of the executee's guilt. Proving this absolutely may be marginally easier than proving that the convicted is "highly likely" to murder again, if you think probability should play a role in the math of deciding who lives and who dies.

António Pedro Marques — 12 Apr 2012, 02:11 · in reply to Marc Aramini

Marc Aramini wrote (12-04-2012 01:38):

I am not going to get too involved here, as it will no doubt veer further and further from its Wolfe origins, but the claim that the death penalty is not a deterrent from further crime ... does that imply that other systems just pay for people for life,

I'll say only this: last time I heard, the money spent with a death penalty in the US is way more than with a life sentence, due to the processual guarantees involved.

My view is that the State should not be able to take away something it can't restore. Sure, it can't restore time spent in jail either, but I'll be glad to leave the inconsistency stand. I'm also not bothered by the fact that paying for a life sentence for a criminal is an insult to taxpayers whereas paying way more to be able to carry out a death sentence may not be.

I have nothing against a death penalty for individuals who everybody knows they committed some types of crime - say, the norwegian individual. However, I know of no good legal system that has a standard by which to distinguish such individuals.

David Duffy — 12 Apr 2012, 03:23 · in reply to Matthew Knight

On Wed, 11 Apr 2012, Matthew Knight wrote:
OK, veering. Gwern has already addressed the likelihood of repeat offenses. But if this remains your position, for justice's sake there has to be not the slightest shred of doubt of the executive's guilt.

"It is better for 99 individuals to suffer unjustly than one guilty person escape his punishment." I think that's in The Space Merchants ;)

Jeff Wilson — 12 Apr 2012, 03:52 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On 4/11/2012 3:20 PM, David Stockhoff wrote:
On 4/11/2012 4:11 PM, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

David Stockhoff wrote:

What would any justice system be without,
say, a death penalty?

Humane.

Yes!

Replacing execution with lobotomy is humane?

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at clueland.com
Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana
< <http://www.tamut.edu/CIL> >

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 12 Apr 2012, 04:01 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Jeff Wilson wrote:
Replacing execution with lobotomy is humane?

What planet did that come from? (And, yes, I know it was done for a while in some places. Bad plan. Generally messing with someone's body or mind against their will is bad, even as a punishment.)

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Jeff Wilson — 12 Apr 2012, 04:23 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

On 4/11/2012 11:01 PM, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:
Jeff Wilson wrote:

Replacing execution with lobotomy is humane?

What planet did that come from?

The planet where people say any justice system without a death penalty would be humane?

I mean, damn! You guys have pretty low standards. One reform does not a liberal corrections policy make.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at clueland.com
Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana
< <http://www.tamut.edu/CIL> >

Jeff Wilson — 12 Apr 2012, 04:44 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

On 4/11/2012 11:01 PM, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:
Jeff Wilson wrote:

Replacing execution with lobotomy is humane?

What planet did that come from? (And, yes, I know it was done for a while in some places. Bad plan. Generally messing with someone's body

or mind against their will is bad, even as a punishment.)

Sorry, my fault-finding was as simplistic as I was accusing the "humane" comment of being,

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at clueland.com

Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana

< <http://www.tamut.edu/CIL> >

David Stockhoff — 12 Apr 2012, 12:12 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On 4/12/2012 12:44 AM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

On 4/11/2012 11:01 PM, Dan'I Danehy-Oakes wrote:

Jeff Wilson wrote:

Replacing execution with lobotomy is humane?

What planet did that come from? (And, yes, I know it was done for a while in some places. Bad plan. Generally messing with someone's body or mind against their will is bad, even as a punishment.)

Sorry, my fault-finding was as simplistic as I was accusing the "humane" comment of being,

I'd put lobotomies, including chemical ones, in the same indefensible class as amputations, castrations, sterilizations, and other mutilations: even /less/ defensible than execution.

Antonin Scriabin — 12 Apr 2012, 13:18 · in reply to David Duffy

"Finally, in my opinion it is not the money spent housing the convicted or defending the accused but the money spent killing foreigners by the US military that deserves to be spent on the homeless---and in any case it's a fairly awful argument to make that we should kill criminals so we can house homeless men and women (in conditions equal to prison or worse) instead of fixing the grossly inequitable economic and social structures that led to the medical poverty, unemployment, addiction, and mental illness which caused or prolongs their homelessness in the first place."

I couldn't agree more. Skipping to the sad end (questions of the death penalty, incarceration for life, etc.) without addressing the deep-rooting sociological ills of society that result in these situations is fruitless.

On Wed, Apr 11, 2012 at 11:23 PM, David Duffy <David.Duffy at qimr.edu.au>wrote:

On Wed, 11 Apr 2012, Matthew Knight wrote:

OK, veering. Gwern has already addressed the likelihood of repeat offenses. But if this remains your position, for justice's sake there has to be not the slightest shred of doubt of the executee's guilt.

"It is better for 99 individuals to suffer unjustly than one guilty person escape his punishment." I think that's in _The Space Merchants_ ;)

_____*_*_____

Lee Berman — 12 Apr 2012, 13:44 · follows Antonin Scriabin

Gwern Branwen: crimes are generally committed by people one knows. This is true for murder

Good point. We think of the prison system as monocultural but it isn't. I once had the assignment to teach a cultural anthropology course in medium security prison. On my first day I

was told that my students would be almost all murderers. This was because the typical thief or thug in medium security was too stupid to get into college courses. And the hardened criminal murderers were all in max or supermax. The students I had were all the normal guys who caught their wife with someone or something like that and snapped, but otherwise had led crime-free lives. There is a very intense caste system in operation in prison.

David Stockhoff: that argument that the death penalty is cheaper than incarceration was debunked ages ago. I once believed it too. But the long years of incarceration PLUS appeals before anyone is executed are far more expensive than simple incarceration

Ditto. The only way to make executions cost-effective is to become like China, Iran and Iraq: do it quickly, do it often and do it without the possibility of appeal.

(FWIW the prison I worked at did have an electric chair. After an execution there was a general sense of gloom among all, prisoners and staff, for a week or so)

Marc Aramini — 12 Apr 2012, 14:59 · in reply to Matthew Knight

--- On Wed, 4/11/12, Matthew Knight <jacobeiserman at gmail.com> wrote:

From: Matthew Knight <jacobeiserman at gmail.com>

Subject: Re: (urth) This Week in Google Alerts: Home Fires To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net> Date: Wednesday, April 11, 2012, 6:45 PM

On Wed, Apr 11, 2012 at 7:38 PM, Marc Aramini <marcaramini at yahoo.com> wrote:

I think the ultimate deterrent from repeat offenses is clearly a quick death not tied up in a too long and costly appeals system. "How can that not be a crime deterrent" ?(Remember that some people in charge of the venue were executed for not enough seats at the Rumble in the Jungle between Ali and Foreman - wow!)

Okay, I've said my conservative "people need to be held accountable" bit, I will run back to the Wolfe short stories now.

OK, veering. ?Gwern has already addressed the likelihood of repeat offenses. ?But if this remains your position, for justice's sake there has to be not the slightest shred of doubt of the executee's guilt. ?Proving this absolutely may be marginally easier than proving that the convicted is "highly likely" to murder again, if you think probability should play a role in the math of deciding who lives and who dies.

My politics are detestable to every human being on earth so I will bow out of the conversation with an acknowledgment that repeat offense of murder is not the norm but does occur, that the nebulous definition of "life" applied by liberals in the United States seldom extends to the unborn, that a spiritualist stripped of absolute certainty will laugh at all these humanistic ideals created by fallible man in the absence of true right and wrong - empty traditions where might may indeed seem to make right.?Why except strength of numbers should your relative values apply when there is no absolute divinity behind it? If I can get away with it there are no consequences. It is entirely predicated on the ability of a law to be enforced and punished. Take that away and there is NO reason to behave in a humanistic way - men are merely advanced apes, subject to no special rights or claims to life but must always exist at the whim of an arbitrary zeitgeist of power, an accumulation of numbers. If enough people can enforce it, it then becomes right, but there is no absolute behind it.

"What is the picture of justice to my young self?" A large, strong ignorant man bumps into my father because he is unaware of my father's existence as a smallish sort. My father checks him brutally, and when the conflict resolves the man is severely beaten by a very small but very experienced olympic level wrestler. Because my father is half his size, the case is thrown out of court. Justice is served - realistic expectations have been overthrown, might has triumphed, ignorance? of the existence of others outside the self and preconceptions are defeated.

No argument can sway me from the idea that people choose their actions, and no argument save moral absolutes divinely enforced could ever convince me that humanistic philosophy could overthrow the strong and those in power from imposing their desires and punishments on the relatively weak - the criminal is strong when he commits the crime, and weak when the power of the law descends upon him. Thus it must be.

But this is really not at all about my politics, which are reprehensible to almost everyone, so I keep them (usually) locked away in the silence of my chest. But occasionally I have to ask, how can humanistic people (especially in the United States)?care about the guilty who have made their choices and hurt others and allow the innocent children unborn to be terminated under the auspice of "choice" and a simple denial of their burgeoning humanity? It breaks my heart.

António Pedro Marques — 12 Apr 2012, 15:46 · in reply to Marc Aramini

That's all very well, Marc, but except in a very limited number of cases society can't be sure the person is really guilty, and laws aren't made for a very limited number of cases. For some, the issue may be the ethics of killing a murderer; for most, the issue is the ethics of killing a potential innocent just for the kicks of avenging blood with blood.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 12 Apr 2012, 16:09 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

I've stayed mostly out of this because I'm actually conflicted about the death penalty.

I'm against it at a gut level, but ...

What do you do with someone who is in jail for life and commits a brutal murder there? You can't exactly give him another life sentence.

2012/4/12 Ant?nio Pedro Marques <antonio at gmail.com>:

That's all very well, Marc, but except in a very limited number of cases society can't be sure the person is really guilty, and laws aren't made for a very limited number of cases. For some, the issue may be the ethics of killing a murderer; for most, the issue is the ethics of killing a potential innocent just for the kicks of avenging blood with blood.

António Pedro Marques — 12 Apr 2012, 16:23 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

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I'm against it at a gut level, but ...

What do you do with someone who is in jail for life and commits a

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There's solitary confinement.

2012/4/12 Ant?nio Pedro Marques<antonio at gmail.com>:

That's all very well, Marc, but except in a very limited number of cases society can't be sure the person is really guilty, and laws aren't made for a very limited number of cases. For some, the issue may be the ethics of killing a murderer; for most, the issue is the ethics of killing a potential innocent just for the kicks of avenging blood with blood.

Antonin Scriabin — 12 Apr 2012, 16:25 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

Solitary confinement as punishment for the first murder perhaps?

2012/4/12 Ant?nio Marques <antonio at gmail.com>

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote (12-04-2012 17:09):

I've stayed mostly out of this because I'm actually conflicted about the death penalty.

I'm against it at a gut level, but ...

What do you do with someone who is in jail for life and commits a brutal murder there? You can't exactly give him another life sentence.

There's solitary confinement.

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**

António Pedro Marques — 12 Apr 2012, 16:32 · in reply to Antonin Scriabin

Someone is serving a life sentence for whatever crime. Should they commit murder there, they'd be put in solitary confinement. I'm supposing they won't be able to commit any more crimes while in solitary confinement. I'm also considering the confinement will be permanent. Until someone finds out the individual had not committed those crimes after all.

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What do you do with someone who is in jail for life and commits a brutal murder there? You can't exactly give him another life sentence.

There's solitary confinement.

David Stockhoff — 12 Apr 2012, 16:32 · in reply to Marc Aramini

On 4/12/2012 10:59 AM, Marc Aramini wrote:

--- On *Wed, 4/11/12, Matthew Knight /<jacobeiserman at gmail.com>/* wrote:

From: Matthew Knight <jacobeiserman at gmail.com>
Subject: Re: (urth) This Week in Google Alerts: Home Fires
To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>
Date: Wednesday, April 11, 2012, 6:45 PM

On Wed, Apr 11, 2012 at 7:38 PM, Marc Aramini
<marcaramini at yahoo.com>
<[<http://us.mc1618.mail.yahoo.com/mc/compose?to=marcaramini at yahoo.com>](http://us.mc1618.mail.yahoo.com/mc/compose?to=marcaramini at yahoo.com)>>
wrote:

I think the ultimate deterrent from repeat offenses is clearly a quick death not tied up in a too long and costly appeals system. How can that not be a crime deterrent? (Remember that some people in charge of the venue were executed for not enough seats at the Rumble in the Jungle between Ali and Foreman - wow!)

Okay, I've said my conservative "people need to be held accountable" bit, I will run back to the Wolfe short stories now.

OK, veering. Gwern has already addressed the likelihood of repeat offenses. But if this remains your position, for justice's sake there has to be not the slightest shred of doubt of the executee's guilt. Proving this absolutely may be marginally easier than proving that the convicted is "highly likely" to murder again, if you think probability should play a role in the math of deciding who lives and who dies.

No argument can sway me from the idea that people choose their actions, and no argument save moral absolutes divinely enforced could ever convince me that humanistic philosophy could overthrow the strong and those in power from imposing their desires and punishments on the relatively weak - the criminal is strong when he commits the crime, and weak when the power of the law descends upon him. Thus it must be.

I can only respond that human laws must always be made in the absence of divine inspiration, direction, and enforcement. Thus it not only must be but is.

Jeff Wilson — 12 Apr 2012, 16:32 · in reply to Marc Aramini

On 4/11/2012 7:38 PM, Marc Aramini wrote:

I think the ultimate deterrent from repeat offenses is clearly a quick death not tied up in a too long and costly appeals system. How can that not be a crime deterrent?

It can lead to spree killing, like the Phillipine "amok". If you've already got the maximum punishment coming, there are no further consequences to additional crimes.

There's a similar effect where lifers w/no parole are free to mistreat (as in rape and maim) other prisoners, assault guards, etc, esp if administrative punishment like solitary is circumscribed; as long as they don't kill again, further sanction is temporary. With death already guaranteed, even killing would have no differential in punishment, unless you wanted to reinstate torture or apply sanction to family members....wonderful prospect.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at clueland.com

Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana

< <http://www.tamut.edu/CIL> >

David Stockhoff — 12 Apr 2012, 16:35 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

OTOH, who could be in prison for life and NOT brutally murder (or want to) everyone he comes in contact with? Indeed, what more could you do to destroy his humanity?

On 4/12/2012 12:09 PM, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

I've stayed mostly out of this because I'm actually conflicted about the death penalty.

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That's all very well, Marc, but except in a very limited number of cases society can't be sure the person is really guilty, and laws aren't made for a very limited number of cases. For some, the issue may be the ethics of killing a murderer; for most, the issue is the ethics of killing a potential innocent just for the kicks of avenging blood with blood.

David Stockhoff — 12 Apr 2012, 16:37 · in reply to Antonin Scriabin

No. Extended solitary confinement is cruel and unusual and a violation of international law. It creates vegetables.

What did we just discuss regarding lobotomies? It's the same thing.

On 4/12/2012 12:25 PM, Antonin Scriabin wrote:

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What do you do with someone who is in jail for life and commits a brutal murder there? You can't exactly give him another life sentence.

There's solitary confinement.

David Stockhoff — 12 Apr 2012, 16:39 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

Right. And then what? "Oops"?

Hey, we're sorry you're insane now, but here's a bunch of money.

There is no excuse for torture.

On 4/12/2012 12:32 PM, Ant?nio Pedro Marques wrote:
Someone is serving a life sentence for whatever crime. Should they commit murder there, they'd be put in solitary confinement. I'm supposing they won't be able to commit any more crimes while in solitary confinement. I'm also considering the confinement will be permanent. Until someone finds out the individual had not committed those crimes after all.

Jeff Wilson — 12 Apr 2012, 16:40 · in reply to Antonin Scriabin

On 4/12/2012 8:18 AM, Antonin Scriabin wrote:
"Finally, in my opinion it is not the money spent housing the convicted or defending the accused but the money spent killing foreigners by the US military that deserves to be spent on the homeless---and in any case it's a fairly awful argument to make that we should kill criminals so we can house homeless men and women (in conditions equal to prison or worse) instead of fixing the grossly inequitable economic and social structures that led to the medical poverty, unemployment, addiction, and mental illness which caused or prolongs their homelessness in the first place."

I couldn't agree more. Skipping to the sad end (questions of the death penalty, incarceration for life, etc.) without addressing the deep-rooting sociological ills of society that result in these situations is fruitless.

However, offense spending has proven to be a more reliable deterrent in its sphere than domestic corrections.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at clueland.com
Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana
< <http://www.tamut.edu/CIL> >

Sergei SOLOVIEV — 12 Apr 2012, 16:49 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

My impression that partly behind these discussions there is an illusion that perfection is possible in t h i s world.

No "life confinement" is truly guaranteed - how many times Charles Manson did apply

for release? His last demand was refused, but ... Similar with other members of his gang, and I am not sure that all were refused. The guy in France who got a lot of publicity because he was the first to get life confinement instead of capital punishment when it was abolished in 70es was released 2 or 3 years ago (his crime: to kidnap the child of his friends, to ask for ransom, and to continue to ask even after he killed the child - before he was captured nobody knew that he was a kidnapper). After his liberation he was quickly imprisoned again - this time he was involved in drug traffic.

regards to all

Sergei Soloviev

Ant?nio Pedro Marques wrote:

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote (12-04-2012 17:09):

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killing a murderer; for most, the issue is the ethics of killing a potential

innocent just for the kicks of avenging blood with blood.

Jeff Wilson — 12 Apr 2012, 16:49 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On 4/12/2012 11:35 AM, David Stockhoff wrote:

OTOH, who could be in prison for life and NOT brutally murder (or want to) everyone he comes in contact with? Indeed, what more could you do to destroy his humanity?

It can really depend on the conditions, and your "feed stock". The easier it is get life, the more typical people will be there, who make it less of a hell hole and are more likely to take rational stances like just wanting to be left alone, or being able to form groups for self-defense that a slightly more enlightened than just another gang.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at clueland.com

Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana
< <http://www.tamut.edu/CIL> >

Ant?nio Pedro Marques — 12 Apr 2012, 17:22 · in reply to David Stockhoff

David Stockhoff wrote (12-04-2012 17:37):

No. Extended solitary confinement is cruel and unusual and a violation of international law. It creates vegetables.

We're talking about someone who was already serving a life sentence and then committed a brutal murder. Cry me a river. If such an individual becomes a vegetable, tough luck. If it turns out they hadn't committed the crimes after all, there's still a chance they're salvageable.

What did we just discuss regarding lobotomies? It's the same thing.

On 4/12/2012 12:25 PM, Antonin Scriabin wrote:

Solitary confinement as punishment for the first murder perhaps?

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David Stockhoff — 12 Apr 2012, 17:22 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On 4/12/2012 12:49 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

On 4/12/2012 11:35 AM, David Stockhoff wrote:

OTOH, who could be in prison for life and NOT brutally murder (or want to) everyone he comes in contact with? Indeed, what more could you do to destroy his humanity?

It can really depend on the conditions, and your "feed stock". The easier it is to get life, the more typical people will be there, who make it less of a hell hole and are more likely to take rational stances like just wanting to be left alone, or being able to form groups for self-defense that a slightly more enlightened than just another gang.

Probably. But I hope you're not arguing for harsher sentences just to make prison life easier for convicts---who have been "defined down" by that same logic to include people more like you and me! Might as well be China.

Or a country engaged in a War on Petty (Drug-Related) Crimes from which it can't ever bring the troops home.

Ant?nio Pedro Marques — 12 Apr 2012, 17:23 · in reply to David Stockhoff

David Stockhoff wrote (12-04-2012 17:39):

Right. And then what? "Oops"?

Hey, we're sorry you're insane now, but here's a bunch of money.

Beats posthumous rehabilitation.

There is no excuse for torture.

On 4/12/2012 12:32 PM, António Pedro Marques wrote:

Someone is serving a life sentence for whatever crime. Should they commit murder there, they'd be put in solitary confinement. I'm supposing they won't be able to commit any more crimes while in solitary confinement. I'm also considering the confinement will be permanent. Until someone finds out the individual had not committed those crimes after all.

António Pedro Marques — 12 Apr 2012, 17:25 · in reply to Sergei SOLOVIEV

Sergei SOLOVIEV wrote (12-04-2012 17:49):

My impression that partly behind these discussions there is an illusion that perfection is possible in t h i s world.

Not on my part. That's why I think some pragmatism is in order.

Matthew Knight — 12 Apr 2012, 17:28 · in reply to Marc Aramini

Whoa, back up Marc! Even in your own tradition, many people talk about a "consistent ethic of life." There are still many theists among the liberal ranks, and most of us arrived at our positions out of our understanding of divine law (while recognizing that it is not our place to legislate morality for those who believe differently).

David Stockhoff — 12 Apr 2012, 17:35 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

What you are proposing is torture and is globally illegal. Such a person's situation is not as different from your own as you think, because if the state can torture him, it can torture you. And if it can torture you, it can torture me---and that is why I must object.

"Salvageable"! I'll just chalk that up to ignorance, because you're no more a psychologist than I am. I guess you missed the parodic quote provided by David Duffy. Do you prefer that 99% of convicted murderers of prisoners go more or less "salvagably" insane so that one does not go sane?

Or are you immune to satire as well as shame?

On 4/12/2012 1:22 PM, António Pedro Marques wrote:

David Stockhoff wrote (12-04-2012 17:37):

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We're talking about someone who was already serving a life sentence and then committed a brutal murder. Cry me a river. If such an individual becomes a vegetable, tough luck. If it turns out they hadn't committed the crimes after all, there's still a chance they're salvageable.

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the death penalty.

I'm against it at a gut level, but ...

What do you do with someone who is in jail for life and commits a
brutal murder there? You can't exactly give him another life
sentence.

There's solitary confinement.

Lee Berman — 12 Apr 2012, 17:43 · follows David Stockhoff

Marc Aramini: But this is really not at all about my politics, which are
reprehensible to almost everyone.

Not true Marc. I think your politics are pretty closely aligned with most
of mainstream America. My assessment of the problem is that most of mainstream America
only thinks about prisons and justice etc. on a part-time, casual basis. Their perceived goal is a
mash-up of punishment, justice, crime prevention and humaniatarian concerns which are not
clearly delineated.

This mash-up is not a luxury those who have the full-time duty of running a prison
can indulge in. You have to have defined goals and attempt to achieve them. If the
goal is punishment, retibution and justice then you must build a system which enables ease in
torture and executions and in reducing the number of criminals. If your goal is rehabilitation and
corrections then your efforts must be devoted to creating a safe, secure environment and
community within prison walls, even for those who will be spending their entire lives in it.

You can't do both. One goal impedes the other. So each society must choose which direction it
wants to push its justice system toward and go for it. For whatever, reason, the USA has chosen
to depart from the China-Iran model and has gone the humane route.

David Stockhoff: OTOH, who could be in prison for life and NOT brutally murder
(or want to) everyone he comes in contact with? Indeed, what more could you do to
destroy his humanity?

This isn't the case for most prisons within modern, industrialized nations. A prison is a living,
working community. Prisoners have jobs they have to go to, recreation entertainment and
educational opportunities, contact with family members, friendships and even romantic
relationships both in and outside the prison walls (some very progressive prisons are now
assigning special wards for couples). There are holidays and special events and creative outlets

and opportunity for freedom of expression. Hard as it is to fathom from the outside, prisoners have lives.

It isn't the life I would want to lead. But the people who run the prison systems are human beings. And if you spend any amount of time in prison you quickly realize that most of the prisoners are also human beings and ways must be found to treat them as such. The stereotyped dungeons with open cells made from iron bars and filthy public toilets and perpetual beatings and rapings are a thing of the past in the USA. It is simply a natural progression that must happen, assuming you aren't a sadist.

(of course a minority of prison staff do lean in that direction but efforts are always made to reduce such behavior. I've seen staff disciplined, fired and even jailed themselves for mistreating prisoners)

Lee Berman — 12 Apr 2012, 18:13 · follows Lee Berman

David Stockhoff: What you are proposing is torture and is globally illegal.

Well the idea of supemax prisons with indefinite terms of solitary confinement goes in and out of acceptance. At the end of the day the justification is safety and security, not punishment. It is used not only to house those who are murderous within prisons, but also to house infamous prisoners who would be a prime target for other prisoners seeking personal fame via a trophy killing (as happened to Jeffrey Daumer).

It is a difficult moral question- which is more important, human life or the quality of human life? I don't have the answer. I am in favor of allowing euthanasia by request, for prisoners.

António Pedro Marques — 12 Apr 2012, 18:21 · in reply to David Stockhoff

David Stockhoff wrote (12-04-2012 18:35):

What you are proposing is torture and is globally illegal.

Nonsense.

Such a person's situation is not as different from your own as you think, because if the state can torture him, it can torture you. And if it can torture you, it can torture me---and that is why I must object.

Yeah, and if it can give them life sentences, it can give you life sentences.

"Salvageable"! I'll just chalk that up to ignorance, because you're no more a psychologist than I am. I guess you missed the parodic quote provided by David Duffy. Do you prefer that 99% of convicted murderers of prisoners go more or less "salvagably" insane so that one does not go sane?

I don't care at all what happens to murderers. My only concern is for those who may have been wrongly convicted.

Or are you immune to satire as well as shame?

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2012/4/12 Ant?nio Marques <antonio at gmail.com <mailto:antonio at gmail.com>>

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I'm against it at a gut level, but ...

What do you do with someone who is in jail for life and commits a brutal murder there? You can't exactly give him another life sentence.

There's solitary confinement.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 12 Apr 2012, 18:27 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

Ant?nio Pedro Marques wrote:

I don't care at all what happens to murderers.

Do you care what happens to rapists?

Thieves?

Jaywalkers?

Where do you draw the line on where compassion is no longer required, and how do you draw it? What gives you the right to decide who is and is not inside the circle of human compassion?

My only concern is for those who may have been wrongly convicted.

That is a primary argument against the death penalty. A lot of "murderers," aren't, but it can take years (or decades) to prove it -- and it may never be proven.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

David Stockhoff — 12 Apr 2012, 18:29 · in reply to Lee Berman

On 4/12/2012 1:43 PM, Lee Berman wrote:

David Stockhoff: OTOH, who could be in prison for life and NOT brutally murder (or want to) everyone he comes in contact with? Indeed, what more could you do to destroy his humanity?

This isn't the case for most prisons within modern, industrialized nations. A prison is a living, working community. Prisoners have jobs they have to go to, recreation

entertainment and educational opportunities, contact with family members, friendships and even romantic relationships both in and outside the prison walls (some very progressive prisons are now assigning special wards for couples). There are holidays and special events and creative outlets and opportunity for freedom of expression. Hard as it is to fathom from the outside, prisoners have lives.

It isn't the life I would want to lead. But the people who run the prison systems are human beings. And if you spend any amount of time in prison you quickly realize that most of the prisoners are also human beings and ways must be found to treat them as such. The stereotyped dungeons with open cells made from iron bars and filthy public toilets and perpetual beatings and rapings are a thing of the past in the USA. It is simply a natural progression that must happen, assuming you aren't a sadist.

(of course a minority of prison staff do lean in that direction but efforts are always made to reduce such behavior. I've seen staff disciplined, fired and even jailed themselves for mistreating prisoners)

Naturally I bow to your experience. But I assumed we were all thinking of max-security or supermax facilities where murderers would find themselves, and further, with the privatization of prisons in the US much of the progress you describe is being undone.

António Pedro Marques — 12 Apr 2012, 18:31 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote (12-04-2012 19:27):

Ant?nio Pedro Marques wrote:

I don't care at all what happens to murderers.

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Thieves?

Jaywalkers?

Where do you draw the line on where compassion is no longer required, and how do you draw it?

Degree of in-principle-reversibility and extent of damage done to the victims.

What gives you the right to decide who is and is not inside the circle of human compassion?

The same things that give it to anyone else, I suppose.

My only concern is for those who may have been wrongly convicted.

That is a primary argument against the death penalty. A lot of "murderers," aren't, but it can take years (or decades) to prove it -- and it may never be proven.

Have you been reading what I've been writing?

David Stockhoff — 12 Apr 2012, 18:33 · in reply to Lee Berman

On 4/12/2012 2:13 PM, Lee Berman wrote:

David Stockhoff: What you are proposing is torture and is globally illegal.

Well the idea of supemax prisons with indefinite terms of solitary confinement goes in and out of acceptance. At the end of the day the justification is safety and security, not punishment. It is used not only to house those who are murderous within prisons, but also to house infamous prisoners who would be a

prime target for other prisoners seeking personal fame via a trophy killing (as happened to Jeffrey Daumer).

It is a difficult moral question- which is more important, human life or the quality of human life? I don't have the answer. I am in favor of allowing euthanasia by request, for prisoners.

The justification for war crimes and crimes against humanity is ALWAYS safety and security.

There are cases on record where people subjected to extended solitary confinement try to kill themselves by ramming their heads against the wall. These people would gladly accept euthanasia. That's why such treatment is almost universally acknowledged to be torture.

António Pedro Marques — 12 Apr 2012, 18:33 · in reply to David Stockhoff

David Stockhoff wrote (12-04-2012 19:29):

On 4/12/2012 1:43 PM, Lee Berman wrote:

David Stockhoff: OTOH, who could be in prison for life and NOT brutally murder
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simply a natural progression that must happen, assuming you aren't a sadist.

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Naturally I bow to your experience. But I assumed we were all thinking of max-security or supermax facilities where murderers would find themselves,

and further, with the privatization of prisons in the US much of the progress you describe is being undone.

All we know about prisons we learned from Oz.

David Stockhoff — 12 Apr 2012, 18:40 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

On 4/12/2012 2:33 PM, António Pedro Marques wrote:

All we know about prisons we learned from Oz.

That explains a lot about you, Antonio. Please excuse me from your "we," since I never saw it.

I prefer reading about scientific and legal studies of issues rather than TV shows about them. Perhaps as a result, I don't say "I don't care at all what happens to murderers."

António Pedro Marques — 12 Apr 2012, 18:47 · in reply to David Stockhoff

David Stockhoff wrote (12-04-2012 19:40):

On 4/12/2012 2:33 PM, António Pedro Marques wrote:

All we know about prisons we learned from Oz.

That explains a lot about you, Antonio. Please excuse me from your "we," since I never saw it.

If you never saw it, what can you know about what it explains or not?

I prefer reading about scientific and legal studies of issues rather than TV shows about them. Perhaps as a result, I don't say "I don't care at all what happens to murderers."

It's more fashionable not to care about innocents, n'est-ce pas? For sure it's grounded on a vast amount of science.

António Pedro Marques — 12 Apr 2012, 19:02 · in reply to Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes wrote (12-04-2012 19:27):

António Pedro Marques wrote:

My only concern is for those who may have been wrongly convicted.

That is a primary argument against the death penalty. A lot of "murderers," aren't, but it can take years (or decades) to prove it -- and it may never be proven.

(What are the odds that someone serving a life sentence for a wrong conviction will be convicted for a brutal in-prison murder?)

António Pedro Marques — 12 Apr 2012, 19:14 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

António Pedro Marques wrote (12-04-2012 19:31):

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes wrote (12-04-2012 19:27):

António Pedro Marques wrote:

I don't care at all what happens to murderers.

Do you care what happens to rapists?

Thieves?

Jaywalkers?

Where do you draw the line on where compassion is no longer required, and how do you draw it?

Degree of in-principle-reversibility and extent of damage done to the victims.

(And obviously of intent and other subjective matters - but those are implied in the words 'murderer' (as opposed to 'killer'), 'rapist' (as opposed to 'sex offender') et al.)

Lee Berman — 12 Apr 2012, 19:52 · follows António Pedro Marques

I disagree with those who find the only tragedy in the death penalty to be the execution of an innocent person. Why is freeing a lifelong thief, drunk driver and wife beater a greater positive than the execution or keeping a guilty but one-time-only murderer in prison for life who would have done positive things in their community?

Tragedy comes to people and families inside and outside the justice system. I find that greater harm comes to a society which willfully perpetrates tragedy on people in the name of justice. As I suggested to Marc, it is not a coincidence that the US States which allow the death penalty generally have higher murder rates than those which do not. True to some degree also for nations of the world.

People DO look to their government and leadership for cues on how to solve life's problems. In some ways, how a society treats its prisoners will filter down to how people treat each other in general. If the government kills to solve its problems we can assume a higher likelihood that the population will use that method more often in handling their personal problems.

David, as I said, I don't know the answer to the supermax problem. What DO you do with a prisoner who is a ticking time bomb, inevitably engaged in either killing someone in prison or being killed by another? Do you have any ideas? All I can think of is more money allocated to make humane conditions even for these lost souls. There must be some way to allow for some limited, safe human contact. Even Hannibal Lector needed someone to talk to and have a meal with....um...erm..never mind.

Antonin Scriabin — 12 Apr 2012, 19:54 · in reply to Lee Berman

"Even Hannibal Lector needed someone to talk to and have a meal with....um...erm..never mind."

[?][?][?]

On Thu, Apr 12, 2012 at 3:52 PM, Lee Berman <severiansola at hotmail.com> wrote:

I disagree with those who find the only tragedy in the death penalty to be the execution of an innocent person. Why is freeing a lifelong thief, drunk driver and wife beater a greater positive than the execution or keeping a guilty but one-time-only murderer in prison for life who would have done positive things in their community?

Tragedy comes to people and families inside and outside the justice system. I find that greater harm comes to a society which willfully perpetrates tragedy on people in the name of justice. As I suggested to Marc, it is not a coincidence that the US States which allow the death penalty

generally
have higher murder rates than those which do not. True to some degree also
for nations of the world.

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human contact. Even Hannibal Lector needed someone to talk to and have a
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with....um...erm..never mind.

António Marques — 12 Apr 2012, 20:11 · in reply to Antonin Scriabin

Why think that how a society treats its prisoners will filter down to how people treat each other
in general and not the reverse?

David Stockhoff — 12 Apr 2012, 20:11 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

On 4/12/2012 2:47 PM, António Pedro Marques wrote:
David Stockhoff wrote (12-04-2012 19:40):

On 4/12/2012 2:33 PM, António Pedro Marques wrote:

All we know about prisons we learned from Oz.

That explains a lot about you, Antonio. Please excuse me from your "we,"
since I never saw it.

If you never saw it, what can you know about what it explains or not?

This makes no sense.

I prefer reading about scientific and legal studies of issues rather
than
TV shows about them. Perhaps as a result, I don't say "I don't care at
all what happens to murderers."

It's more fashionable not to care about innocents, n'est-ce pas? For
sure it's grounded on a vast amount of science.

This makes no sense either. Did someone express such a sentiment?

Recently you asked someone if he read what you wrote. Did you read what I wrote?

David Stockhoff — 12 Apr 2012, 20:12 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

On 4/12/2012 3:02 PM, António Pedro Marques wrote:
Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote (12-04-2012 19:27):

António Pedro Marques wrote:

My only concern is for those who may have been wrongly convicted.

That is a primary argument against the death penalty. A lot of "murderers," aren't, but it can take years (or decades) to prove it -- and it may never be proven.

(What are the odds that someone serving a life sentence for a wrong conviction will be convicted for a brutal in-prison murder?)

Good point. Let's build a justice system around that.

António Marques — 12 Apr 2012, 20:15 · in reply to António Marques

António Marques wrote:

Why think that how a society treats its prisoners will filter down to how people treat each other in general and not the reverse?

(I'm ready to believe a harsh penal system will result in a more violent society, but not necessarily that a milder one will result in a less violent one.)

David Stockhoff — 12 Apr 2012, 20:16 · in reply to Lee Berman

On 4/12/2012 3:52 PM, Lee Berman wrote:

David, as I said, I don't know the answer to the supermax problem. What DO you do with a prisoner who is a ticking time bomb, inevitably engaged in either killing someone in prison or being killed by another? Do you have any ideas? All I can think of is more money allocated to make humane conditions even for these lost souls. There must be some way to allow for some limited, safe human contact. Even Hannibal Lector needed someone to talk to and have a meal with....um...erm..never mind

As long as they get out of their cells daily and have some daily contact with humans, confinement under those circumstances is not inhumane. This doesn't require unsupervised access to the community.

António Marques — 12 Apr 2012, 20:20 · in reply to David Stockhoff

David Stockhoff wrote:

On 4/12/2012 2:47 PM, António Pedro Marques wrote:

David Stockhoff wrote (12-04-2012 19:40):

On 4/12/2012 2:33 PM, António Pedro Marques wrote:

All we know about prisons we learned from Oz.

That explains a lot about you, Antonio. Please excuse me from your "we," since I never saw it.

If you never saw it, what can you know about what it explains or not?

This makes no sense.

It was you who recently asked if I was impervious to sarcasm.

I prefer reading about scientific and legal studies of issues rather than

TV shows about them. Perhaps as a result, I don't say "I don't care at all what happens to murderers."

It's more fashionable not to care about innocents, n'est-ce pas? For sure it's grounded on a vast amount of science.

This makes no sense either. Did someone express such a sentiment?

Recently you asked someone if he read what you wrote. Did you read what I wrote?

I did. I haven't seen a solution on your part. You chose to take exception with my suggestion on how to aggravate a system which I said from the start that should be pragmatic and do all it could not to take away what it couldn't restore, but I have seen no one address the problem of norwegian terrorists who face smaller sentences than would-be neighbourhood watchers who nobody will ever know for sure whether they are real murderers or not.

David Stockhoff — 12 Apr 2012, 20:25 · in reply to António Marques

On 4/12/2012 4:15 PM, Ant?nio Marques wrote:
Ant?nio Marques wrote:

Why think that how a society treats its prisoners will filter down to how people treat each other in general and not the reverse?

(I'm ready to believe a harsh penal system will result in a more violent society, but not necessarily that a milder one will result in a less violent one.)

So you see that a harsh penal system is a trap, since it can be ratcheted up but never down. Worse than harshness in its pernicious effect on society, however---and yet harshness always bubbles up in these discussions as though it were the only relevant dimension---is arbitrariness.

So it's not just a side note that black/poor men get imprisoned and executed at a higher rate in the US compared with whites and the rich, guilty and innocent alike. It's the very core of how the system /actually/ /works/. It's a failure that stains every state and every branch of government.

Fortunately, it's no longer "fashionable" to not care about that.

David Stockhoff — 12 Apr 2012, 20:27 · in reply to António Marques

On 4/12/2012 4:20 PM, Ant?nio Marques wrote:
David Stockhoff wrote:

On 4/12/2012 2:47 PM, Ant?nio Pedro Marques wrote:

David Stockhoff wrote (12-04-2012 19:40):

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If you never saw it, what can you know about what it explains or not?

This makes no sense.

It was you who recently asked if I was impervious to sarcasm.

No---it was satire and shame I asked about.

I prefer reading about scientific and legal studies of issues rather than

TV shows about them. Perhaps as a result, I don't say "I don't care at all what happens to murderers."

It's more fashionable not to care about innocents, n'est-ce pas? For sure it's grounded on a vast amount of science.

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I didn't realize this was a topic.

Lee Berman — 12 Apr 2012, 20:34 · follows David Stockhoff

Antonio Pedro Marques: > Why think that how a society treats its prisoners will filter down to how people treat each other in general and not the reverse?

I do think the reverse happens. Of course I think the people of a nation create their own government. But I think the government also has an effect on the people in a self-perpetuating cycle.

I suspect the USA's continued enjoyment of the death penalty may be related to its history of bloody revolution from England and hundreds of years of slavery. The similar nations of Canada and Australia and New Zealand did not have bloody revolutions or an entrenched culture of slavery and are decidedly more liberal and humane in prisoner treatment.

I'm ready to believe a harsh penal system will result in a more violent society, but not necessarily that a milder one will result in a less violent one.

Perhaps, as an American, I am more willing to believe in the effect of executions on willingness to murder because of the social experiment the US has provided in this regard. Not only do states with the death penalty have higher murder rates, but when a state legalizes the death penalty, the murder rate rises in the next few years. When a state outlaws the death penalty the murder rate declines for a few years.

Of course the changes aren't giant. But they are significant and consistent enough to draw certain conclusions.

Lee Berman — 12 Apr 2012, 20:40 · follows Lee Berman

David Stockhoff: As long as they get out of their cells daily and have some daily contact with humans, confinement under those circumstances is not inhumane. This doesn't require unsupervised access to the community.

Intended or not, I'll take your word "community" to be the community of prisoners and staff within a prison. I agree that it wouldn't be so terribly difficult to arrange daily safe contact with

specially trained (and protected) staff members.

As per my conversation with Antonio, I think treating even the worst of society in a humane manner is good not only for itself, but because it has a positive effect on society as a whole, outside the prison walls.

António Marques — 12 Apr 2012, 20:46 · in reply to David Stockhoff

David Stockhoff wrote:

On 4/12/2012 4:15 PM, António Marques wrote:

António Marques wrote:

Why think that how a society treats its prisoners will filter down to how people treat each other in general and not the reverse?

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So you see that a harsh penal system is a trap, since it can be ratcheted up but never down. Worse than harshness in its pernicious effect on society, however---and yet harshness always bubbles up in these discussions as though it were the only relevant dimension---is arbitrariness.

So it's not just a side note that black/poor men get imprisoned and executed at a higher rate in the US compared with whites and the rich, guilty and innocent alike.

Is it really black/white or is poor/rich enough to describe it?

It's the very core of how the system /actually/ /works/. It's a failure that stains every state and every branch of government.

How can you live in such a country?

Fortunately, it's no longer "fashionable" to not care about that.

Was it ever?

Gerry Quinn — 12 Apr 2012, 21:18 · in reply to Lee Berman

From: Lee Berman

Perhaps, as an American, I am more willing to believe in the effect of executions on willingness to murder because of the social experiment the US has provided in this regard. Not only do states with the death penalty have higher murder rates, but when a state legalizes the death penalty, the murder rate rises in the next few years. When a state outlaws the death penalty the murder rate declines for a few years.

Are all possible confounding factors (such as, for example, death penalties being likely to be legalised/outlawed during periods when murder rates are rising/falling respectively for unrelated reasons) eliminated?

I don't have any axe to grind here; perhaps the death penalty somehow does have a positive effect on the murder rate. But scientific research in such fields is often highly agenda-driven, and agenda driven science is prone to miss explanations that are inimical to the agenda.

- Gerry Quinn

David Stockhoff — 12 Apr 2012, 21:21 · in reply to Lee Berman

You read that correctly, Lee.

But humane treatment of all humans is not just good for its effects. It's also good because of the effects of treating humans inhumanely.

On 4/12/2012 4:40 PM, Lee Berman wrote:

David Stockhoff: As long as they get out of their cells daily and have some daily contact with humans, confinement under those circumstances is not inhumane. This doesn't require unsupervised access to the community.

Intended or not, I'll take your word "community" to be the community of prisoners and staff within a prison. I agree that it wouldn't be so terribly difficult to arrange daily safe contact with specially trained (and protected) staff members.

As per my conversation with Antonio, I think treating even the worst of society in a humane manner is good not only for itself, but because it has a positive effect on society as a whole, outside the prison walls.

David Stockhoff — 12 Apr 2012, 21:23 · in reply to António Marques

On 4/12/2012 4:46 PM, António Marques wrote:

David Stockhoff wrote:

On 4/12/2012 4:15 PM, António Marques wrote:

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So it's not just a side note that black/poor men get imprisoned and executed at a higher rate in the US compared with whites and the rich, guilty and innocent alike.

Is it really black/white or is poor/rich enough to describe it?

No, it's not.

It's the very core of how the system /actually/ /works/. It's a failure that stains every state and every branch of government.

How can you live in such a country?

It's quite difficult sometimes.

Fortunately, it's no longer "fashionable" to not care about that.

Was it ever?

Yes, obviously. Black slavery functioned well into the 1930s in the state of Georgia. Lynchings occurred throughout the US until the 1970s.

David Duffy — 12 Apr 2012, 22:47 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On Thu, 12 Apr 2012, David Stockhoff wrote:

I'd put lobotomies, including chemical ones, in the same indefensible class as amputations, castrations, sterilizations, and other mutilations: even /less/ defensible than execution.

Reading this, I wondered: does neurosurgery appear more often in Gene Wolfe's work than that of other writers of the era? I have recently reread Bernard Wolfe's *_Limbo_*, where (not really a spoiler) the inhabitants of Tapioca Island practiced trepanation and then lobotomy (with the protagonist's help) as the cure of antisocial behaviour for 1-2 centuries. But I don't see it in SF of the 50-60s, or in other fiction - *_One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest_* is an exception.

Cheers, David Duffy.

PS I don't think *_Dr Island_* is an allusion to the Bernard Wolfe ;)

Marc Aramini — 13 Apr 2012, 00:15 · in reply to Matthew Knight

--- On Thu, 4/12/12, Matthew Knight <jacobeiserman at gmail.com> wrote:

Whoa, back up Marc! ?Even in your own tradition, many people talk about a "consistent ethic of life." ?There are still many theists among the liberal ranks, and most of us arrived at our positions out of our understanding of divine law (while recognizing that it is not our place to legislate morality for those who believe differently).

That is the difference between a theist and an absolutist. I wrote a very long response but determined that it was too ugly to post for public purview, so I will pass with some brief statements before I abandon the field (this time for real)

I never said our death row was cheaper than life imprisonment - our death row IS life imprisonment with the costly appeals. That expenditure and the expenditure for the humane treatment of people who have for all intents and purposes broken the social contract is entirely wasted.

(And remember there is a correlation between violent offenders and genetic abnormalities such as an extra Y chromosome... for those who claim the system is entirely unjust in its unequal demographic distribution. Perhaps the naturalists were right, and there never was any choice at all, ever.)

Life means less than nothing without a divine absolute behind it - simply material dross subject to the same chance made accidents that make one man born beautiful and another ugly, one sound of body and one?sickly all the meager days of his life, one being conceived as a groundhog and another as a Roman Emperor. What good is kindness and humane treatment in such an arbitrary existence?

If you do not agree on first principles, you can never come to mutual understanding. And thus it will always be, for those who are simply unable to grasp the humane treatment of those who do not treat others humanely and never will see any value in it beyond Divine Law.

António Pedro Marques — 13 Apr 2012, 00:32 · in reply to Marc Aramini

But Marc, what about the conviction of innocents? Let's hope God compensates them? What if they aren't otherwise pleasing to God, but innocent nonetheless?

In the view of many theists, Man should not take away that which only God can give.

You said you were done, but the question I'm asking is a different one. Not about treating guilty

individuals kindly, but about carrying out irreversible sentences on innocents. Guilt, in legal terms, means that which has been proven in court. That's very different from what guilt means morally. Moral guilt is absolute. Judicial guilt can never be.

Jeff Wilson — 13 Apr 2012, 03:58 · in reply to David Duffy

On 4/12/2012 5:47 PM, David Duffy wrote:

On Thu, 12 Apr 2012, David Stockhoff wrote:

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BELL JAR, THE, 1963

PLANET OF THE APES (film), 1968

SUDDENLY LAST SUMMER (film), 1959

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at clueland.com

Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana

< <http://www.tamut.edu/CIL> >

Marc Aramini — 13 Apr 2012, 13:11 · in reply to David Stockhoff

--- On Thu, 4/12/12, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:

From: David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net>

Subject: Re: (urth) This Week in Google Alerts: Home Fires

To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>

Date: Thursday, April 12, 2012, 1:11 PM

On 4/12/2012 2:47 PM, Ant?nio Pedro

Marques wrote:

David Stockhoff wrote (12-04-2012 19:40):

On 4/12/2012 2:33 PM, Ant?nio Pedro Marques wrote:

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That explains a lot about you, Antonio. Please excuse me from your "we,"
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It's more fashionable not to care about innocents, n'est-ce pas? For sure it's grounded on a vast amount of science.

This makes no sense either. Did someone express such a sentiment?

Recently you asked someone if he read what you wrote. Did you read what I wrote?

I just think caring about those who are boorish and guilty is a waste of effort - their punishment is to be shunted off - to hang out with their own kind. It is the criminal who makes a hell of jail and incarceration for other criminals.

The system is emasculated. When I was 4 years old we lived in a non-english speaking country where a blond American boy was a target of violence. Once I was beaten by a group, my head left severely lacerated. I saw them make geese smoke cigarettes. The cruelty of humanity is real and it needs to be deterred with VIOLENCE.

Perhaps 10 times in my life I have been walking by somewhere and heard "faggot" under someone's breath. EVERY time, I turn and look them in the eye and start a confrontation. "Say it again." Only once have they not backed down and squirmend and had fear in their eyes, and I am a very small man. It is the look of sheer and utter hatred they see in my eye - they know that violence is going to be the immediate and swift consequence of their nonsense, and they repent.

The violent mentality is fascinating - there is no greater joy than being hit by a man and knowing that he cannot hurt you. That is power. Power and its enforcement or some absolute moral code are the only thing that can keep these kind of men in line. Have you never seen the leer, the wicked smile, on the face of Roberto Duran? I know why he's smiling, and so do these violent criminals. An emasculated justice system can never truly cope with those who are still feral at heart, and nothing on earth can change them if they do not want to change. It is only fear that will keep them behaving, and swift pain that they cannot endure.

Lee Berman — 13 Apr 2012, 13:22 · follows Marc Aramini

Antonio Pedro Marques: How can you live in such a country?

The prisons in France are similarly filled with Muslims and the rest of Europe isn't so different. Americans and Europeans live under such conditions because: 1. It makes the majority feel safer. 2. Minority males are, for many reasons, more prone to committing crimes.

Gerry Quinn: Are all possible confounding factors (such as, for example, death penalties being likely to be legalised/outlawed during periods when murder rates are rising/falling respectively for unrelated reasons) eliminated? ...scientific research in such fields is often highly agenda-driven.

I agree about agenda-driven science. But if that were behind these statistics we'd see counter-evidence from death penalty advocates showing a drop in the murder rate with the advent of the death penalty. We do not see such counter-evidence.

Nor do we see concern about rising murder rates among death penalty advocates. Even in discussion here. The main goal is not crime prevention but justice and retribution. When you speak to death penalty advocates they talk in terms of the killer deserving death, not having sympathy for them, not letting them get away with it and "what about the victim and their families? Don't they deserve justice?" Based on many, many conversations. People simply have different views on life and death. I'm okay with that, as long as I know where I stand.

DAVID STOCKHOFF — 13 Apr 2012, 13:57 · in reply to Marc Aramini

Lee Berman — 13 Apr 2012, 15:08 · follows DAVID STOCKHOFF

Marc Aramini: An emasculated justice system can never truly cope with those who are still feral at heart, and nothing on earth can change them if they do not want to change. It is only fear that will keep them behaving, and swift pain that they cannot endure.

Thanks for the heartfelt and sincere post, Marc. I too have found in life that the threat of violent retribution or actual fighting is a very effective deterrent against bullying behavior.

Where I disagree is that what you describe is a person-to-person conflict. Should our justice system try to duplicate this sort of conflict with its own citizens? Is government a "person"?

I suppose it is the crux of the difference between liberal and conservative thinking about government, at least in the USA, that liberals think of government as taking a parental role while this is generally abhorrent to conservatives.

Perhaps it can be understood that there is a difference between a person making efforts to fend off a bully and a parent who is trying to help their own child, who is a bully. Is it an effective strategy for a loving parent to correct their own child's behavior with the threat or use of violence?

The evidence strongly suggests that parents who use violence to control their children gain short term results. But at the expense of complete failure over time. Beat your child and they will fear you. But they will run wild and rampant as soon as they lose their fear and are old enough to do so.

If the government uses torture to put fear in the hearts of criminals, it may last for a while. But not for long. They will soon lose their fear after being released. If we go the route of creating torture chamber prisons we might as well, as you suggest, go the China/Iran route and just start executing criminals with impunity. Punishment and fear barely work with children and they certainly don't work with adults. Without attempts to rehabilitate prisoners via creating a pro-social environment in prison, we might as well just kill them all.

I am a realist, not a bleeding heart liberal or a gentle "what would Jesus do" Christian. Killing all incorrigible criminals is a social scenario I am willing to at least consider. But I am able to extrapolate this scenario to the hellish nightmare it would create. We don't seem to be ready for such a brutal, cold, unforgiving society at this time. I guess the death penalty is America's way of recognizing the significant portion of our society that does lean in that direction.

Marc Aramini — 13 Apr 2012, 15:34 · in reply to Lee Berman

--- On Fri, 4/13/12, Lee Berman <severiansola at hotmail.com> wrote:
From: Lee Berman <severiansola at hotmail.com>
Subject: (urth) This Week in Google Alerts: Home Fires
To: urth at lists.urth.net
Date: Friday, April 13, 2012, 8:08 AM

Marc Aramini: An emasculated justice system can never truly cope with those who are still feral at heart, and nothing on earth can change them if they do not want to change. It is only fear that will keep them behaving, and swift pain that they cannot endure.

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Good points Lee. I am going to stop posting in this thread and get back to Wolfe short stories! I do acknowledge the different perceptions between parental vs. "equal" treatment between adults who must take immediate responsibility for their own behavior.

If all inmates followed the golden rule, love one another, treat others as you want to be treated, then jail would not be a bad place at all - like the picture of hell where a sumptuous feast is laid

out and the utensils are too long to reach the peoples' mouths, so everyone is miserable. Heaven was exactly the same, except the people there were feeding each other across the table with their long utensils. But we know jail is misery because of the types of people that are incarcerated there. Okay back to Wolfe!!

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 13 Apr 2012, 16:04 · in reply to Marc Aramini

Marc wrote:

If all inmates followed the golden rule, love one another, treat others
as you want to be treated, then jail would not be a bad place at all - like ...

Well, like the Secret of the Inhumani...

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Matthew Knight — 13 Apr 2012, 16:14 · in reply to Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

On Fri, Apr 13, 2012 at 11:04 AM, Dan'I Danehy-Oakes <danldo at gmail.com> wrote:

Marc wrote:

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as you want to be treated, then jail would not be a bad place at all -
like ...

Well, like the Secret of the Inhumani...

Well done.

Sergei SOLOVIEV — 13 Apr 2012, 17:49 · in reply to DAVID STOCKHOFF

To me it seems also that the discussion is distorted by forgetting the simple fact that the choice is not between death and life without end, but between different kinds of death (natural or violent). If we believe in the immortality of the soul - then again the choice is not between death and life.

Regards -

Sergei Soloviev

DAVID STOCKHOFF wrote:

From: Marc Aramini <marcaramini at yahoo.com>
To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>
Sent: Friday, April 13, 2012 9:11 AM
Subject: Re: (urth) This Week in Google Alerts: Home Fires

I just think caring about those who are boorish and guilty is a waste of effort - their punishment is to be shunted off - to hang out with their own kind. It is the criminal who makes a hell of jail and incarceration for other criminals.

The system is emasculated. When I was 4 years old we lived in a non-english speaking country where a blond American boy was a target of violence. Once I was beaten by a group, my head left severely lacerated. I saw them make geese smoke cigarettes. The cruelty of humanity is real and it needs to be deterred with VIOLENCE.

Perhaps 10 times in my life I have been walking by somewhere and heard "faggot" under someone's breath. EVERY time, I turn and look them in the eye and start a confrontation. "Say it again." Only once have they not backed down and squirmend and had fear in their eyes, and I am a very small man. It is the look of sheer and utter hatred they see in my eye - they know that violence is going to be the immediate and swift consequence of their nonsense, and they repent.

The violent mentality is fascinating - there is no greater joy than being hit by a man and knowing that he cannot hurt you. That is power. Power and its enforcement or some absolute moral code are the only thing that can keep these kind of men in line. Have you never seen the leer, the wicked smile, on the face of Roberto Duran? I know why he's smiling, and so do these violent criminals. An emasculated justice system can never truly cope with those who are still feral at heart, and nothing on earth can change them if they do not want to change. It is only fear that will keep them behaving, and swift pain that they cannot endure.

---I think the proportion of people for whom this---and only this---works is miniscule. On the one hand you have people who can be reached other ways if they are treated with some degree of dignity. On the other you have an even tinier minority of people who cannot be reached at all by any degree of violence.

No one actually does care about such people as this, so I'm not sure why that point always must be made. It's irrelevant to my point: that state violence can itself break the social contract. When the state murders, it loses its legitimacy and ceases to be a state. When the state inflicts arbitrary violence on some, it asserts the right to arbitrarily inflict it on others.

I am perpetually baffled as to why Americans are so willing to set aside these basic lessons that inform their national constitution.

Jeff Wilson — 13 Apr 2012, 18:22 · in reply to Marc Aramini

On 4/13/2012 8:11 AM, Marc Aramini wrote:

It is the criminal who makes a hell of jail and incarceration for other criminals.

This can be true, but not all of the criminals are residents, some are among the custodians and occasionally the warden. Strother Martin said, "What we've got here is, failure to communicate," just as Lord Acton said, "Absolute power corrupts absolutely."

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at clueland.com

Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana

< <http://www.tamut.edu/CIL> >

Matthew Malthouse — 13 Apr 2012, 22:47 · in reply to Marc Aramini

On 12/04/2012 01:38, Marc Aramini wrote:

I am not going to get too involved here, as it will no doubt veer further and further from its Wolfe origins, but the claim that the death penalty is not a deterrent from further crime ... does that imply that other systems just pay for people for life, that there is a higher percentage of unremediable repeat offenders in the death penalty countries, or that all violent crimes are just one offs that are

not repeated?

It seems very clear to me that if a person is prone to kill for some reason, that circumstance may come up more than once in their life. You have already deterred future crime by either incarcerating them or killing them. Incarceration costs money, money which we would begrudge the homeless who have not committed crimes.

I think the ultimate deterrent from repeat offenses is clearly a quick death not tied up in a too long and costly appeals system. How can that not be a crime deterrent? (Remember that some people in charge of the venue were executed for not enough seats at the Rumble in the Jungle between Ali and Foreman - wow!)

Deterrence is *the* big claim for capital punishment.

But the statistics don't support that. US homicide rates have dropped from approximately 9.5 per 100,000 population per year in 1990 to 5.4 in 2009. But they dropped more or less equally in death penalty States and non death penalty States. Moreover the 14 non death penalty States started with and consistently retained a lower murder rate throughout being at or below the national average.

All sorts of reasons that capital punishment might be deemed beneficial but deterrence is not one of them.

Matthew

Marc Aramini — 14 Apr 2012, 01:03 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

--- On Thu, 4/12/12, António Pedro Marques <antonio at gmail.com> wrote:

From: António Pedro Marques <antonio at gmail.com>

Subject: Re: (urth) This Week in Google Alerts: Home Fires

To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>

Date: Thursday, April 12, 2012, 5:32 PM

But Marc, what about the conviction

of innocents? Let's hope God compensates them? What if they

aren't otherwise pleasing to God, but innocent nonetheless?

In the view of many theists, Man should not take away that which only God can give.

You said you were done, but the question I'm asking is a

different one. Not about treating guilty individuals kindly,

but about carrying out irreversible sentences on innocents.

Guilt, in legal terms, means that which has been proven in

court. That's very different from what guilt means morally.

Moral guilt is absolute. Judicial guilt can never be.

Okay, since you asked for one more elaboration.

Innocents are the exception rather than the rule with all these appeals currently in place (in the US, anyway). No justice system is perfect.

There are two parts of me you are talking to - the merciful theist who believes that God will in the final analysis, in this world or the next, allow justice.

Then there is the other side, if you convince me there are no absolutes and no cosmic eternal justice - that mankind is simply an accident. Accidents happen. Heart surgery occasionally results in patient fatality; the legal system is no more perfect than that.

In the United States I feel like those who are completely blameless are very rarely incarcerated unjustly, unless it be for "he said, she said" cases of rape/molestation. It is a straw man argument in some sense to justify treating dangerous and repeat offenders with kid gloves. I am not an administrator of justice, because I would always err on the side of mercy, but I think it is a weakness in my character, where I would fail to live up to what should be done. I would

want a more stern administrator of justice than myself.

There are innocent casualties in every battle, but sometimes the end justifies the means, or all those who gave their lives for something did it for naught. Justice is much the same, though it lacks the nobility of World War II.

antonio at gmail.com — 14 Apr 2012, 15:16 · in reply to Marc Aramini

Ok, Marc, this is where we part ways for a number of reasons:

- I have much less confidence than you in the inerrancy of the judicial system.
- You seemed to be considering the processual guarantees for the defendants as exaggerated, and a system with less guarantees would be likely to yield more wrong convictions.
- I see sentences primarily as a mechanism for deterrence and incapacitation - incarceration being the prototype -, not retribution. That is not rooted in compassion - 'I don't care at all what happens to murderers' - but pragmatism.
- The injustice of a wrong conviction, for me, is of such degree that it trumps everything else. Since it is more or less unavoidable, I'll rather have any number of murderers die of natural causes in jail than one innocent hang. Apply that, mutatis mutandis, to any other irreversible penalty.

So I guess it comes down to different views of what the role of a judicial system should be. Nothing to do with compassion or science.

David Stockhoff — 14 Apr 2012, 15:40 · in reply to Marc Aramini

On 4/13/2012 9:03 PM, Marc Aramini wrote:

In the United States I feel like those who are completely blameless are very rarely incarcerated unjustly, unless it be for "he said, she said" cases of rape/molestation. It is a straw man argument in some sense to justify treating dangerous and repeat offenders with kid gloves. I am not an administrator of justice, because I would always err on the side of mercy, but I think it is a weakness in my character, where I would fail to live up to what should be done. I would want a more stern administrator of justice than myself.

And I know you would want that administrator to be more impartial than you as well. Unfortunately, the American justice system is blind to its own racism. The situation is far worse than you think. Blacks are always robbed of the benefit of any doubt, and but that same benefit is always awarded to whites. I could accurately rewrite your statement as follows:

In the United States ... those who are *white *are very rarely incarcerated unjustly, unless it be for "he said, she said" cases of rape/molestation. It is a straw man argument in some sense to justify treating *black *offenders with kid gloves.

And so on.

There are innocent casualties in every battle, but sometimes the end justifies the means, or all those who gave their lives for something did it for naught. Justice is much the same, though it lacks the nobility of World War II.

I'm just glad our republic (such as it is) was not founded on these theocratic principles. Rarely enough does it live up to its standards as it is.

António Pedro Marques — 15 Apr 2012, 01:27 · in reply to David Stockhoff

No dia 14/04/2012, ?s 16:40, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> escreveu:

Unfortunately, the American justice system is blind to its own racism. The situation is far worse than you think. Blacks are always robbed of the benefit of any doubt, and but that same benefit is always

awarded to whites.

E.g., if we are to believe the reports in a recent mediator case, the unarmed black who was killed was tested for drugs, but not the armed white who admitted to the killing.

Marc Aramini — 15 Apr 2012, 01:50 · in reply to David Stockhoff

Oddly enough, short story 18, how the whip came back, deals with what to do with prisoners! The prisons in that story really do sound like hell, and Wolfe's concerns that when religious sentiment and charity fail and lose the faith of the people in favor of belief in the government, only power politics will remain, seems to me to be belied by the tone of our discourses in this thread. Good timing, It actually fits perfectly.

--- On Sat, 4/14/12, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:

From: David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net>

Subject: Re: (urth) This Week in Google Alerts: Home Fires

To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>

Date: Saturday, April 14, 2012, 8:40 AM

On 4/13/2012 9:03 PM, Marc Aramini wrote:

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