

THE TANDEM PROJECT

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UNITED NATIONS, HUMAN RIGHTS, FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

THE NEURAL BUDDHISTS - WHEN BRAIN RESEARCH MEETS THE BIBLE

Issue: The Scientific Revolution what it may mean for Inter-religious, Inter-cultural Dialogue

For: United Nations, Governments, Religions or Beliefs, Academia, NGOs, Media, Civil Society

Review: [Neural Network - the Sensory, Motor and Associated Neurons to the brain] *The Neural Buddhists – When brain research meets the Bible*, is an Op Ed piece in the New York Times by David Brooks, 13 May 2008. David Brooks in saying the scientific revolution will have a big effect on culture says this: Researchers now spend a lot of time trying to understand **universal moral intuitions**. Genes are not merely selfish, it appears. Instead, people seem to have deep instincts for fairness, empathy and attachment...This new wave of research will not seep into the public realm in the form of militant atheism. Instead it will lead to what you might call **neural Buddhism.**”

“In their arguments with Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins, [new atheist movement] the faithful have been defending the existence of God. That was the easy debate. The **real** challenge is going to come from people who feel the **existence of the sacred**, but who think that particular religions are just cultural artifacts built on top of **universal** human traits. It’s going to come from scientists whose beliefs overlap a bit with Buddhism...In unexpected ways, science and mysticism are joining hands and reinforcing each other. That’s bound to lead to new movements that emphasize self-transcendence but put little stock in divine law or revelation.

“Orthodox believers are going to have to defend particular doctrines and particular biblical teachings. They’re going to have to defend the idea of a personal God, and explain why specific theologies are true guides for behavior day to day. I’m not qualified to take sides, believe me. I’m just trying to **anticipate** which way the debate is headed. We’re in the middle of a scientific revolution. It’s going to have big **cultural** effects.”

This illustrates the case for compliance with General Comment 22, Article 18, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, UN Human Rights Committee, 20 July 1993 (CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4): Article 18: “protects *theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief.*” Extracts from past Tandem Project Issue Statements relevant to this New York Times article follow Extracts from *The Neural Buddhists*.

Extracts from *The Neural Buddhists* begin on the third page followed by an Issue Statement

International Standards for National and Local Applications

Objective: Build understanding and support for Article 18, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights –Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion - and the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. Encourage the United Nations, Governments, Religions or Beliefs, Academia, NGOs, Media and Civil Society to use international human rights standards as essential for *long-term solutions* to conflicts based on religion or belief.

Challenge: In 1968 the United Nations deferred work on an International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Religious Intolerance, because of its apparent complexity and sensitivity. In the twenty-first

century, a dramatic increase of intolerance and discrimination on grounds of religion or belief is motivating a worldwide search to find solutions to these problems. This is a challenge calling for enhanced dialogue by States and others; including consideration of an International Convention on Freedom of Religion or Belief for protection of and accountability by all religions or beliefs. The tensions in today's world inspire a question such as:

- Should the United Nations adopt an International Convention on Freedom of Religion or Belief?

Response: Is it the appropriate moment to reinitiate the drafting of a legally binding international convention on freedom of religion or belief? Law making of this nature requires a minimum consensus and an environment that appeals to reason rather than emotions. At the same time we are on a learning curve as the various dimensions of the Declaration are being explored. Many academics have produced voluminous books on these questions but more ground has to be prepared before setting up of a UN working group on drafting a convention. In my opinion, we should not try to rush the elaboration of a Convention on Freedom of Religion or Belief, especially not in times of high tensions and unpreparedness. - *UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Asma Jahangir, Prague 25 Year Anniversary Commemoration of the 1981 UN Declaration, 25 November 2006.*

Option: After forty years this may be the time, however complex and sensitive, for the United Nations Human Rights Council to appoint an Open-ended Working Group to draft a United Nations Convention on Freedom of Religion or Belief. The mandate for an Open-ended Working Group ought to assure nothing in a draft Convention will be construed as restricting or derogating from any right defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenants on Human Rights, and the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. One writer has said; "Religion raises the stakes of human conflict much higher than tribalism, racism, or politics ever can...it casts the differences between people in terms of eternal rewards and punishments."

Concept: *Separation of Religion or Belief and State – SOROBAS.* The starting point for this concept is the First Preamble to the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights; "*Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.* It suggests States recalling their history, culture and constitution adopt fair and equal human rights protection for all religions or beliefs as described in General Comment 22 on Article 18, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, UN Human Rights Committee, 20 July 1993 (CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4):

- **Article 18:** protects *theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief.* The terms belief and religion are to be broadly construed. Article 18 is not limited in its application to traditional religions or to religions and beliefs with international characteristics or practices analogous to those of traditional religions. The Committee therefore views with concern any tendency to discriminate against any religion or belief for any reasons, including the fact that they are newly established, or represent religious minorities that may be the subject of hostility by a predominant religious community. **Article 18:** permits restrictions to manifest a religion or belief only if such limitations are prescribed by law and necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

Dialogue & Education

Dialogue: United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, at an Alliance of Civilizations Forum said; "Never in our lifetime has there been a more desperate need for constructive and committed dialogue, among individuals, among communities, among cultures, among and between nations." An author in another setting has said, "The warning signs are clear: unless we establish genuine dialogue within and among all kinds of belief, ranging from religious fundamentalism to secular dogmatism, the conflicts of the future will probably be even more deadly." There are varying degrees of cooperation, competition and conflict within and between religions or beliefs. International Human Rights Standards on Freedom of Religion or Belief is international human rights law and a code of conduct to promote cooperation, regulate competition and resolve conflicts. To include the value and use of these International Standards for world peace is genuine dialogue on freedom of religion or belief

Education: Ambassador Piet de Klerk addressing the Prague 25 Year Anniversary Commemoration of the 1981 U.N. Declaration said; “Our educational systems need to provide children with a broad orientation: from the very beginning, children should be taught that their own religion is one out of many and that it is a personal choice for everyone to adhere to the religion or belief by which he or she feels most inspired, or to adhere to no religion or belief at all.” The 1981 U.N. Declaration states; “Every child shall enjoy the right to have access to education in the matter of religion or belief in accordance with the wishes of his parents, and shall not be compelled to receive teaching on religion or belief against the wishes of his parents, the best interests of the child being the guiding principle.” Given these parameters, early childhood education is the time to begin to build tolerance, understanding and respect for freedom of religion or belief

Extracts: Extracts are presented under the Eight Articles of the 1981 U.N. Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. Examples of extracts are presented prior to an *Issue Statement* for each Review.

1. 1 *Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have a religion or whatever belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practices and teaching.*

In 1996, Tom Wolfe wrote a brilliant essay called “Sorry, but Your Soul Just Died,” in which he captured the militant materialism of some modern scientists...Wolfe understood the central assertion contained in this kind of thinking: Everything is material and “the soul is dead.” He anticipated the way the genetic and neuroscience revolutions would affect public debate. They would kick off another fundamental argument over whether God exists.

Lo and behold, over the past decade, a new group of assertive atheists has done battle with defenders of the faith. The two sides have argued about whether it is reasonable to conceive of a soul that survives the death of the body and about whether understanding the brain explains away or merely adds to our appreciation of the entity that created it.

The atheism debate is a textbook example of how a scientific revolution can change public culture. Just as “The Origin of Species” reshaped social thinking, just as Einstein’s theory of relativity affected art, so the revolution in neuroscience is having an effect on how people see the world...Any yet my guess is that the atheism debate is going to be a sideshow. The cognitive revolution is not going to end up undermining faith in God; it’s going to end up challenging faith in the Bible.

Researchers now spend a lot of time trying to understand universal moral intuitions. Genes are not merely selfish, it appears. Instead, people seem to have deep instincts for fairness, empathy and attachment...This new wave of research will not seep into the public realm in the form of militant atheism. Instead it will lead to what you might call neural Buddhism.

In their arguments with Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins, the faithful have been defending the existence of God. That was the easy debate. The real challenge is going to come from people who feel the existence of the sacred, but who think that particular religions are just cultural artifacts built on top of universal human traits. It’s going to come from scientists whose beliefs overlap a bit with Buddhism...In unexpected ways, science and mysticism are joining hands and reinforcing each other. That’s bound to lead to new movements that emphasize self-transcendence but put little stock in divine law or revelation.

Orthodox believers are going to have to defend particular doctrines and particular biblical teachings. They're going to have to defend the idea of a personal God, and explain why specific theologies are true guides for behavior day to day. I'm not qualified to take sides, believe me. I'm just trying to anticipate which way the debate is headed. We're in the middle of a scientific revolution. It's going to have big cultural effects.

Open this link to read the full New York Times article, *The Neural Buddhists – When brain research meets the Bible*.

<http://www.nytimes.com/pages/opinion/index.html>

Extracts from other Tandem Project Issue Statements that relate to this New York Times article by David Brooks:

4. 1 *All States shall take effective measures to prevent and eliminate discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief in the recognition, exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all fields of civil, economic, political, social and cultural life.*

4.1.4 & 5: *Social and Cultural Life* (academic science and religion)

For millennia the question of free will was the province of philosophers and theologians, but it actually turns on how the brain works. Only in the past decade and a half, however, has it been possible to watch the living brain in action in a way that begins to show in detail what happens while it is happening...Science is not yet threatening free will's existence: for the moment there seems little prospect of anybody being able to answer definitively the question of whether it really exists or not. But science will shrink the space in which free will can operate by slowly exposing the mechanism of decision making. - *Free to Choose?* - *London Economist: December 23-January 5, 2007.*

A bevy of experiments in recent years suggest that the conscious mind is like a monkey riding a tiger of subconscious decisions and actions in progress, frantically making up stories about being in control. As a result, physicists, neuroscientists and computer scientists have joined the heirs of Plato and Aristotle in arguing about what free will is, whether we have it, and if not, why we ever thought we did in the first place. - *Free Will: Now You Have It, Now You Don't*, by Dennis Overbye, *The New York Times, Science Times Section, Tuesday, January 2, 2007.*

These days there seem to be fewer new big concepts around, and experiments are often conducted in the expectation of particular results. But neuroscience is one area where big concepts certainly remain to be discovered. And when they are, they are likely to upend humanity's understanding of itself. – *Free to Choose?* - *London Economist: December 23-January 5, 2007.*

Free will is one of the trickiest concepts in philosophy, but also one of the most important. Without it, the idea of responsibility for one's actions flies out the window, along with much of the glue that holds a free society (and even an un-free one) together. - *Free to Choose?* - *London Economist: December 23-January 5, 2007.*

Without a belief in free will, an ideology of freedom is bizarre. Though it will not happen quickly, shrinking the space in which free will can operate could have some uncomfortable repercussions. - *Free to Choose?* - *London Economist: December 23-January 5, 2007.*

Is it an illusion? That's the question,' said Michael Silberstein, a science philosopher at Elizabethtown College in Maryland. Another question, he added, is whether talking about

this in public will fan the culture wars. - *Free Will: Now You Have It, Now You Don't*, by Dennis Overbye, *The New York Times, Science Times Section, Tuesday, January 2, 2007.*

ISSUE STATEMENT: The issue here is how to build consensus on human rights instruments that seem to be in conflict with the religious or cultural beliefs of U.N. Member States; the **morality** of one country or culture is the **immorality** of another country or culture. This is evident in the lack of consensus on the Human Rights Council between U.N. Member States of the European Union (EU) and U.N. Member States on the Human Rights Council who are also members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). See Word Document file attached (A/HRC/Res/6/37).

General Comment 22 on Article 18, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, UN Human Rights Committee, 20 July 1993 (CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4) includes three paragraphs to be observed by U.N. Member States that are sign and ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights:

Article 18: Paragraph 2: protects *theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief*. The terms belief and religion are to be broadly construed. Article 18 is not limited in its application to traditional religions or to religions and beliefs with international characteristics or practices analogous to those of traditional religions. The Committee therefore views with concern any tendency to discriminate against any religion or belief for any reasons, including the fact that they are **newly** established, or represent religious minorities that may be the subject of hostility by a predominant religious community.

Article 18: Paragraph 8: permits restrictions to manifest a religion or belief only if such limitations are prescribed by law and necessary to protect public safety, order, health or **morals**, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.

Article 18: Paragraph 8: the Committee observes that the concept of morals derives from many social, philosophical and religious traditions; consequently, limitations on the freedom to manifest a religion or belief for the purpose of protecting morals must be based on principles **not deriving** from a single tradition.

Reply: The Tandem Project Country & Community Database collects information worldwide on United Nations Human Rights Bodies. The information is used for UN Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Reviews (UPR); UN Treaty-based Reports; UN Special Procedures, Special Rapporteur Reports. Click on the link below to open the Database. Read the Instructions & Table of Contents: scroll to an Article of your choice and click to reply.

<http://www.tandemproject.com/databases/forms/card.htm>

The Tandem Project: a non-profit, non-governmental organization established in 1986 to build understanding and respect for diversity of religion or belief, and prevent discrimination in matters relating to freedom of religion or belief. The Tandem Project has sponsored multiple conferences, curricula, reference materials and programs on Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights – Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion - and the 1981 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.

The Tandem Project initiative was launched in 1986 as the result of a co-founder representing the World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA) at a 1984 United Nations Geneva Seminar, *Encouragement of Understanding, Tolerance and Respect in Matters Relating to Freedom of Religion or Belief*, called by the UN Secretariat on ways to implement the 1981 UN

Declaration. In 1986, The Tandem Project organized the first NGO International Conference on the 1981 UN Declaration.

The Tandem Project Executive Director: Michael M. Roan, mroan@tandemproject.com.

The Tandem Project is a UN NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

WORD DOCUMENT ATTACHED

THE 1981 U.N. DECLARATION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF INTOLERANCE AND OF DISCRIMINATION BASED ON RELIGION OR BELIEF

Proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations
25 November, 1981 (Resolution: 36/55)

Considering that one of the basic principles of the Charter of the United Nations is that of the dignity and equality inherent in all human beings, and that all Member States have pledged themselves to take joint and separate action in co-operation with the Organization to promote and encourage universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion,

Considering that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants on Human Rights proclaim the principles of non-discrimination and equality before the law and the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief,

Considering that the disregard and infringement of human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or whatever belief, have brought, directly or indirectly, wars and great suffering to humankind, especially where they serve as a means of foreign interference in the internal affairs of other States and amount to a kindling hatred between peoples and nations,

Considering that religion or belief, for anyone who professes either, is one of the fundamental elements in his conception of life and that freedom of religion or belief should be fully respected and guaranteed,

Considering that it is essential to promote understanding, tolerance and respect in matters relating to freedom of religion or belief and to ensure that the use of religion or belief for ends inconsistent with the Charter of the United Nations, other relevant instruments of the United Nations and the purposes and principles of the present Declaration is inadmissible,

Convinced that freedom of religion or belief should also contribute to the attainment of the goals of world peace, social justice and friendship among peoples and to the elimination of ideologies or practices of colonialism and racial discrimination,

Noting with satisfaction the adoption of several, and the coming into force of some conventions, under the aegis of the United Nations and of the specialized agencies, for the elimination of various forms of discrimination,

Concerned by manifestations of intolerance and by the existence of discrimination in matters of religion or belief still in evidence in some areas of the world,

Resolved to adopt all necessary measures for the speedy elimination of such intolerance in all its forms and manifestations and to prevent and combat discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief,

Proclaims this Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief:

ARTICLE 1: LEGAL DEFINITION

1. 1 *Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have a religion or whatever belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practices and teaching.*

1. 2. *No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have a religion or belief of his choice.*

1. 3 *Freedom to manifest one's religion or belief may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.*

ARTICLE 2: CLASSIFYING DISCRIMINATION

2. 1 *No one shall be subject to discrimination by any State, institution, group of persons or person on the grounds of religion or other beliefs.*

2. 2 *For the purposes of the present Declaration, the expression 'intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief' means any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on religion or belief and having as its purpose or as its effect nullification or impairment of the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis.*

ARTICLE 3: LINK TO OTHER RIGHTS

3. 1 *Discrimination between human beings on grounds of religion or belief constitutes an affront to human dignity and a disavowal of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and shall be condemned as a violation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and enunciated in detail in the International Covenants on Human Rights, and as an obstacle to friendly and peaceful relations between nations.*

ARTICLE 4: EFFECTIVE MEASURES

4. 1 *All States shall take effective measures to prevent and eliminate discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief in the recognition, exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all fields of civil, economic, political, social and cultural life.*

4. 2 *All States shall make all efforts to enact or rescind legislation where necessary to prohibit any such discrimination, and to take all appropriate measures to combat intolerance on the grounds of religion or other beliefs in this matter.*

ARTICLE 5: PARENTS, CHILDREN, STATE

5. 1 *The parents or, as the case may be, the legal guardians of the child have the right to organize the life within the family in accordance with their religion or belief and bearing in mind the moral education in which they believe the child should be brought up.*

5. 2 *Every child shall enjoy the right to have access to education in the matter of religion or belief in accordance with the wishes of his parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, and shall not be compelled to receive teaching on religion or belief against the wishes of his parents or legal guardians; the best interests of the child being the guiding principle.*

5. 3 *The child shall be protected from any form of discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief. He shall be brought up in a spirit of understanding, tolerance, friendship among peoples, peace and universal brotherhood, respect for the freedom of religion or belief of others and in full consciousness that his energy*

and talents should be devoted to the service of his fellow men.

5. 4 *In the case of a child who is not under the care either of his parents or of legal guardians, due account shall be taken of their expressed wishes or of any other proof of their wishes in the matter of religion or belief, the best interests of the child being the guiding principle.*

5. 5 *Practices of a religion or belief in which a child is brought up must not be injurious to his physical or mental health or to his full development, taking into account Article 1, paragraph 3, of the present Declaration.*

ARTICLE 6: NINE SPECIFIC RIGHTS

In accordance with Article 1 of the present Declaration, and subject to the provisions of Article 1, paragraph 3, the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief shall include, inter alia, the following freedoms:

6. 1 *To worship or assemble in connection with a religion or belief, and to establish and maintain places for these purposes;*

6. 2 *To establish and maintain appropriate charitable or humanitarian institutions;*

6. 3 *To make, acquire and use to an adequate extent the necessary articles and materials related to the rites and customs of a religion or belief;*

6. 4 *To write issue and disseminate relevant publications in these areas;*

6. 5 *To teach a religion or belief in places suitable for these purposes;*

6. 6 *To solicit and receive voluntary financial and other contributions from individuals and institutions;*

6. 7 *To train, appoint, elect or designate by succession appropriate leaders called for by the requirements and standards of any religion or belief;*

6. 8 *To observe days of rest and to celebrate holidays and ceremonies in accordance with the precepts of one's religion or belief;*

6. 9 *To establish and maintain communications with individuals and communities in matters of religion or belief at the national and international levels.*

ARTICLE 7: NATIONAL LEGISLATION

7. 1 *The rights and freedoms set forth in the present Declaration shall be accorded in national legislation in such a manner that everyone shall be able to avail himself of such rights and freedoms in practice.*

ARTICLE 8: EXISTING PROTECTIONS

8. 1 *Nothing in the present Declaration shall be construed as restricting or derogating from any right defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants on Human Rights.*