



*Editor's note. In this Discussion Paper our search for truth and meaning takes us from the practical to the esoteric.*

## Immigrants, Multiculturalism, and the God Problem

By Jerry Storie

Human understanding is a by-product of the critical examination of a set of facts, the use of reason and logic, and open and honest communication. In life as in politics, understanding is compromised and change unlikely if we are afraid to seek the truth faithfully and diligently.

Unfortunately, as Herbert Agar, the Pulitzer Prize winning author of *The Peoples Choice*, has noted, "The truth that makes men free is for the most part the truth which men prefer not to hear." The corollary of this wisdom might be that the truth that makes men free is for the most part the truth that few willingly speak.

### What does multiculturalism entail?

Last fall, as I was preparing to teach an education foundations course to final year Bachelor of Education students, I came to realize that politicians and academics were largely ignoring a real and growing problem in Canada, and other fully democratic countries—our common understanding of multiculturalism. In discussing multiculturalism, I think Canadians must understand two issues—what being a multicultural society means and what constitutes "Canadian" values.

A casual survey of political rhetoric on the issue of multiculturalism is instructive. For many politicians the truth, particularly during elections, becomes increasingly more like Steven Colbert's "truthiness": if it sounds true, that's good enough. This is certainly the case around the issue of multiculturalism and what it means for our society.

Multiculturalism for many Canadians, it seems to me, is akin to Folklorama. It is the celebrations of the overt aspects of culture: the food, the music, the clothes, the folklore, in addition to the colour of skin and the country of origin.

### The clash of values

In the rush to be welcoming, understanding and tolerant, Canadians have convinced themselves that multiculturalism is about superficial differences and not about values—fundamental values—like those enshrined

in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, such as equality of person, religious freedom, and freedom of speech. Canadians, and particularly Canadian politicians, do not talk about values or the potential for conflicting values. As a multicultural society, it has become politically incorrect to talk honestly about the potential consequences of welcoming hundreds of thousands of new Canadians each year whose underlying cultural beliefs, particularly religious beliefs, are fundamentally at odds with our Charter of Rights and other core Canadian values.

But does being multicultural mean we ignore, tolerate, or support values and practices that are abhorrent in a free, egalitarian and democratic country? The answer to this question is being discovered in many European countries, including Great Britain where home-grown terrorists appear committed to jihad. In Canada, as Quebec rural municipal councillors recently found out, attempting to discuss what adopting Canadian values might mean for some immigrants brings instant notoriety. We may have carried our own sense of decency and tolerance too far.

Evidence of this propensity to ignore this real and growing problem is everywhere. A few weeks ago, politicians of all stripes appeared at a community event in Surrey B.C. to talk glowingly of Canada's multicultural mosaic at an event apparently sponsored and organized, in part, by a Sikh group that Canadian authorities have identified as a terrorist organization.

### Political leaders silent

Political leaders remain steadfastly silent in the face of the recent arrest of young Muslim Canadians apparently prepared to do harm to their own country and countrymen. This is a new and alarming phenomenon in Canada. This was followed by death threats against Muslim Canadians simply for arguing for more openness and dialogue in Mosques around the world. Irshad Manji's book *The Trouble With Islam* sparked a similar reaction among some Canadian Muslims. Few Muslims, and fewer non-Muslims, appear ready to examine the underlying causes of this



Jerry Storie, Brandon University

inability to openly discuss differences of religious or cultural values.

### **God not a part of Canadian values**

At the root of this apparent clash of values is God, or more specifically, the cultural manifestation of our primordial superstition that there is a God. In a 2003 Ipsos-Reid national poll a growing number of Canadians, now 24%, agreed with the statement “God is an old superstition.” Certainly for these Canadians, and perhaps for many others, because of the diversity of religious beliefs and our society’s secular trappings, religion is not considered an integral part of our culture. We are, for the most part, a staunchly secular society, at least at the public level. For most Canadians, religion is like underwear—people assume you are wearing some, but no one is so impolite as to ask.

While separation of church and state is an accepted notion for most Canadians, the idea of separating religious views from other aspects of life is patently impossible or deemed heretical for many of the 250,000 immigrants and refugees that Canada welcomes annually. For many of them, culture is inextricably linked to a set of religious beliefs that helps to define them. It speaks to who they are, what they value and what they believe.

We have become accustomed to ignoring the truth, if it is inconvenient. Al Gore has revived a career on this premise. We have our own set of inconvenient truths—one is that our society cannot afford to be indifferent to the implications of the transmission of cultural differences, which have real world consequences.

### **How much intolerance should we tolerate?**

The dilemma for politicians is: how do we address the issues of the separation of church and state, tolerance, intellectual curiosity, and rational thinking without offending someone’s sensibilities? It is a challenge worthy of Solomon.

The cover of a recent *Macleans* magazine asked the rhetorical question: Is God poison? The question is a legitimate one, and one that arises not only from ancient religious disputes between Protestants and Catholics, Shiite and Sunni, Islam and Christianity or tribal god against tribal god. It is a persistent fact of human history. It is a truth that cannot be ignored, even if we attribute all the horror to the manipulation of peoples’ fears or wishes by political or religious leaders.

Every culture has created its God or Gods. Some religious leaders can frame the idea of God in a very positive way. But more often, the myth has been used by hucksters and the crown princes of religious sects

to the disadvantage of the weak and vulnerable. Superstition and myth have often trumped reason in the affairs of men. Voltaire reminded us long ago that “those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities.” This appears to be as true today as ever. The question of the role of the God problem in the relatively modest religious-political confrontations occurring in Canada and other democratic countries cannot be dismissed.

### **Religion and state must remain separate**

The history of western civilization is replete with examples of why the church and the state must be separate. History has shown us the consequences of being held hostage to someone else’s God. The Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, and hundreds of other wars over the centuries sustained by political and religious fervour are explanation enough. As Canadian soldiers risk life and limb to support Afghanistan in its efforts to build a democratic country that respects human rights and embraces democracy, we have the spectacle of a Muslim being sentenced to death for the heresy of conversion to Christianity. How can we explain the separation of church and state to people for whom the term is an oxymoron? Western societies have several centuries of intellectual and political debate and struggle behind them when it comes to such questions. The freedoms that are enshrined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms are yet only words to many recent immigrants.

Canadians, it seems to me, should be re-examining the relationship between religion, culture and Canadian values. Certainly, those agencies and individuals responsible for Canadian immigration and citizenship, those writing curricula for our schools, and teaching our teachers should be interested in the debate.

### **Culture, religion and Canadian values**

The Manitoba curriculum documents supporting social studies classes clearly anticipate discussion of citizenship issues, including the diversity of religious beliefs. The social studies curricula have identified what most would agree are Canadian values: a belief in democracy, tolerance, religious freedom, and the genuine desire to understand and appreciate cultural differences.

The inclusion of values and a determination to talk about them is welcome and timely. The problem is that what teachers, and politicians, actually talk about are the superficial differences. What they don’t talk about is the deeply divisive issue of religious values and beliefs and how they play out in the lives of citizens.

As we open our doors to ever more immigration, we need to ask some questions: what are Canadian values and do we really expect new Canadians to adopt and come to believe in them? Can this happen if we allow or encourage private religious schools, private community centres, and the isolation of communities? Can we be silent when our values clash on issues such as freedom of religion and religious views or the equality of women?

As educators, what are we to think about intellectual curiosity, the right to question ideas and authority, including religious authorities? Are we to teach Canadian values—without apology—without fear of being labelled insensitive or worse?

### **Religion and the classroom**

How is this done in the classroom when the cultures of many of our immigrants are imbued with religious beliefs and power structures which incorporate religious dogma into their educational systems, their political systems and their approaches to a multitude of issues from human rights and marital relationships, to freedom of expression and freedom of religion? How can teachers, or Citizenship and Immigration Canada, approach a prospective Canadian and talk meaningfully about our secular values, the triumph of reason over superstition, when their very being is threatened even by its discussion?

What we cannot do is leave teachers alone in classrooms to instil Canadian values in our most recent Canadians. Politicians, community leaders, and thinking Canadians have to shoulder the burden of confronting the truth. Politicians need to shake off the temptation to ingratiate themselves with new Canadians by spouting platitudes. Citizenship is hard work, and new Canadians need to understand that it requires a personal commitment to reflection and change. They need the courage to talk about religious freedom, the individual's right to think for oneself and reject or embrace any set of ideals they so desire.

The point of both politics and education is to get people to understand what is important and what is not, and what is likely to be true and what is not, and what is real and what is not. The trick is to do this in a way that doesn't offend the listener's intelligence and undermine their willingness to hear the truth.

### **New Canadians must support Canadian values**

We have much to gain from sharing our communities and the work of building Canada with people from other parts of the world. But we need to acknowledge that immigrants flock to Canada in part because of the havoc the values in their own societies have wrought. They come in part because of their

outward appreciation for Canadian values—respect and tolerance, a secular and open democratic government, respect for human rights and the rule of law, among others things.

Immigration Canada, politicians and political parties need to define for immigrants what being Canadian means and ensure potential immigrants are prepared to embrace all Canadian values, not just the ones that give them personal and religious freedom with no ultimate responsibility for the kind of Canada we are building. We should hear more than silence from new Canadians and their leaders when Canadian values are being undermined. We also need to hear more from our own leaders about how we are going to maintain and strengthen our own commitment to Canadian values and ensure that all Canadians are singing from the same proverbial—albeit secular—hymnbook.

I am reminded that Winston Churchill once said, “Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing ever happened.” I have stumbled many times, but am trying not to hurry off so quickly this time.

The belief in God has always seemed deeply irrational to me—harder to understand even than my belief that the Toronto Maple Leafs will win the Stanley Cup again. We must not be timid about encouraging and supporting the questioning of superstitions—facets of our cultural lives that cannot be understood or explained in a rational and believable way.

In his exhaustively researched *Anacalypsis: An Inquiry into the Origins of Languages, Nations and Religions*, first published in 1833, Godfrey Higgins reviews the history of distortions, both intentional and unintentional, deception, and outright lies that underpin the religious dogma found in the world's well-known religions. Likewise, anyone who has read Emile Durkheim's seminal work *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* or Tom Harpur's *The Pagan Christ* knows a little about how and why we created such powerful myths.

Over the years our society has shed many superstitions, but we have work yet to do, if Canada is to ever enjoy the full benefits of our multicultural reality.

*Jerry Storie was appointed Dean of Education at Brandon University, Manitoba, in 2005.*

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## CUSJ Annual General Meeting (AGM) 2012

### Partnering With First Nations

This is your official notice—membership fees due.

### Saturday Night May 19th

**6:00 p.m. CUSJ dinner** at Buffet Moni Mahal, 164 Laurier West, just East of Laurier and Elgin (13.95/plate plus tax and drinks).

**8:00 p.m. Social Action Movie Night**—Alberta Room at the Westin. Our thanks to the CUC for giving us this room. **Movie: For the Next Seven Generations**—description on page 7.

### Monday May 21<sup>st</sup>

**8:30-12:30 – CUSJ AGM – Live Streamed on the Web. For the first time CUSJ will try to bring all our members together across Canada with an interactive on-line meeting.**

Please register at [www.cusj.org](http://www.cusj.org) and tell us whether you are coming in person, or via the internet. We hope those on line will be able to vote and participate in the discussion period.

**Meet in Person at the Laurier Room, 2nd Floor, Lord Elgin Hotel at the corner of Elgin St. and Laurier Ave.**

8:30 Registration and Refreshments

9:00 Chapter Reports and Discussion on Chapters

10:00 AGM – Annual General Meeting and Election of Officers

11:00 Guest Speaker: Ben Powless from the Indigenous Environmental Network

11:30 Discussion and Questions

12:15 Optional Lunch at the Lord Elgin

## In the Beginning

### Excerpted from *The Mind of God*, by Paul Davies

*“If physical reality is somehow built on the laws of physics, then these laws must have an independent existence in some sense” [i.e., they are not part of physical reality].*

*So is God the laws of physics?*

### Laws and Initial Conditions

It is important to realize that laws [of physics] do not by themselves completely describe the world. Indeed the whole purpose of our formulating laws is to connect different events. It is a simple law, for example, that a ball thrown in the air will follow a parabolic path. However, there are many different parabolas. Some are tall and thin, others low and shallow. The particular parabola followed by a particular ball will depend on the speed and angle of projection. These are referred to as “initial conditions.” The parabola law plus the initial conditions determine the path of the ball uniquely.

The laws, then, are statements about classes of phenomena. Initial conditions are statements about particular systems. In conducting his or her science, the experimental physicist will often choose, or contrive, certain initial conditions. For example, in his famous experiment on falling bodies, Galileo released unequal masses simultaneously, in order to demonstrate that they strike

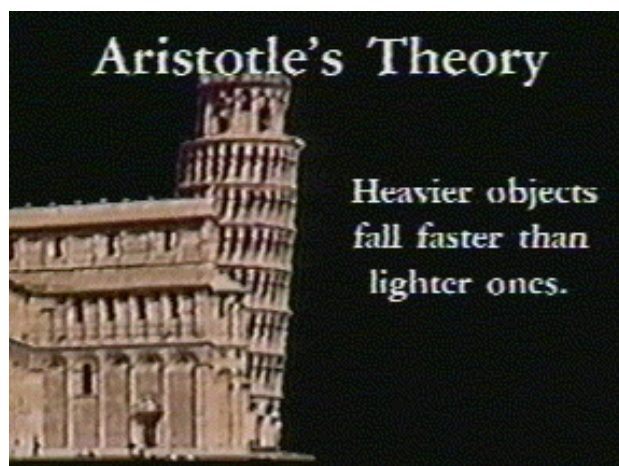


Galileo disproved Aristotle's theory.

the ground at the same moment. By contrast, the scientist cannot choose the laws; they are “God-given.” This fact imbues the laws with a much higher status than the initial conditions. The latter



are regarded as an incidental and malleable detail, whereas the former are fundamental, eternal, and absolute.



Galileo dropped two objects of different weight from the leaning tower of Pisa, and they both reached the ground at the same moment.

In the natural world, outside the realm of the experimenter's control, the initial conditions are provided for us by nature. The hailstone that strikes the ground was not dropped by Galileo in some predetermined manner, but was produced by physical processes in the upper atmosphere. Similarly, when a comet enters the solar system from without along a particular path, that path depends on physical processes of the comet's origin. In other words, the initial conditions pertaining to a system of interest can be traced to the wider environment. One can then ask about the initial conditions of that wider environment. Why did the clouds form there rather than somewhere else? And so on.

### **What were the Initial Conditions?**

It is easy to see that the web of causal interconnections spreads outward very rapidly until it encompasses the entire cosmos. What then? The question of the cosmic initial conditions leads us back to the big bang and the origin of the physical universe. Here the rules of the game change dramatically. Whereas for a particular physical system the initial conditions are just an incidental feature that can always be explained by appealing to the wider environment at an earlier moment, when it comes to the cosmic initial conditions there *is* no wider environment, and no earlier moment. The cosmic initial conditions are "given," just like the laws of physics.

Most scientists regard the cosmic initial conditions as lying outside the scope of science altogether. Like the laws, they must simply be accepted as a

brute fact. Those of a religious frame of mind appeal to God to explain them. Atheists tend to regard them as random or arbitrary. It is the job of the scientist to explain the world as far as possible without appeal to special initial conditions. If some feature of the world can be accounted for only by supposing that the universe began in a certain way, then no real explanation has been given at all. One is merely saying that the world is the way it is because it was the way it was. The temptation has therefore been to construct theories of the universe that do not depend very sensitively on the initial conditions.

### **Can Initial Conditions be Discovered?**

A clue to how this can be done is provided by thermodynamics. If I am given a cup of hot water, I know it will be cold the next day. On the other hand, if I am given a cup of cold water, I can't say whether or not it was hot the day before, or the day before that, or how hot, or whether it was ever hot at all. One might say that the details of the thermal history of the water, including its initial conditions, are erased by the thermodynamic processes that bring it into thermal equilibrium with its environment. Cosmologists have argued that similar processes could have erased the details of the cosmic initial conditions. It would then be impossible to infer, except in the broadest terms, how the universe began simply from a knowledge of what it is today.

Let me give an example. The universe is expanding today at the same rate in every direction. Does this mean that the big bang was isotropic [had uniform physical properties in all directions]? Not necessarily. It could have been the case that the universe started out expanding in a chaotic way, with different rates in different directions, and that this disorder was smoothed out by physical processes. For instance, frictional effects could act to brake the motion in the directions of rapid expansion.

Alternatively, according to the fashionable inflationary-universe scenario, the early universe underwent a phase of accelerating expansion in which all initial irregularities were stretched out of existence. The end result was a universe with a high degree of spatial uniformity and a smooth pattern of expansion.

### **Rewind to the Big Bang**

Many scientists are attracted to the idea that the state of the universe we observe today is relatively insensitive to the way it started out in the big bang. No doubt this is partly due to a reaction against religious theories of special creation, but it is also because the idea removes the need to worry about the

state of the universe in its very early stages, when the physical conditions were likely to have been extreme. On the other hand, it is clear that initial conditions can't be completely ignored. We can imagine a universe of the same age as ours but of very different form, and then envisage it being evolved backward in time in accordance with the laws of physics to a big-bang origin. Some initial state would be discovered which would then give rise to that different universe.

Whatever initial conditions gave rise to our universe, one can always ask: why those? Given the infinite variety of ways in which the universe could have started out, why did it start in the way it did? Is there something special, perhaps, about those particular initial conditions? It is tempting to suppose that the initial conditions were not arbitrary, but conformed to some deep principle. After all, it is usually accepted that the laws of physics are not arbitrary, but can be encapsulated in neat mathematical relationships. Might not there exist a neat mathematical "law of initial conditions" too?

### Laws of Initial Conditions

Such a proposal has been advanced by a number of theorists. Roger Penrose, for example, has argued



Roger Penrose

that, if the initial conditions were chosen at random, the resulting universe is overwhelmingly likely to be highly irregular, containing monster black holes rather than relatively smoothly distributed matter. A universe as smooth as ours requires some extraordinarily delicate fine-tuning at the outset, so that all regions of the universe expand in a carefully orchestrated manner. Using the metaphor of the Creator with a limitless "shopping list" of possible initial conditions, Penrose points out that the Creator would need to peruse the list very thoroughly before finding a candidate that would lead to a universe like ours. Sticking in a pin at random would be the strategy almost certain to fail. "Without wishing to denigrate the Creator's abilities in this respect," remarks Penrose, "I would insist that it is one of the duties of science to search for physical laws which explain or at least describe in some coherent way, the nature of the phenomenal accuracy that we so often observe in the

workings of the natural world... So we need a law of physics to explain the specialness of the initial state. The law proposed by Penrose is that the initial state of the universe was constrained to possess a specific type of smoothness right from the outset, without any need for inflation or other smoothing processes. The mathematical details need not concern us.



James Hartle

Another proposal has been discussed by Hartle and Hawking in the context of their quantum-cosmological theory. In this theory, there is no particular "first moment," no creation event. The problem of the cosmic initial conditions is therefore abolished by abolishing the initial



Stephen Hawking

event altogether. However, to achieve this end, the quantum state of the universe must be severely restricted, not just at the beginning, but at all times. Hartle and Hawking give a definite mathematical formulation of such a restriction, which in effect plays the role of a "law of initial conditions."

### The Proof is Production of Pudding

It is important to realize that a law of initial conditions can't be proved right or wrong, or derived from existing laws of physics. The value of any such law rests, as with all scientific proposals, in its ability to predict observable consequences. True, theorists may be attracted to a particular proposal on grounds of mathematical elegance and "naturalness," but such philosophical arguments are hard to justify. The Hartle-Hawking proposal, for example, is well adapted to the formalism of quantum gravity, and seems very plausible within that context. But had our science developed differently, the Hartle-Hawking law might have appeared highly arbitrary or contrived.

Unfortunately, pursuing the observational consequences of the Hartle-Hawking theory isn't easy. The authors claim that it predicts an inflationary phase of the universe, which accords with the latest cosmological fashion, and it might one day have something to say about the large-scale structure of the universe—the way in which galaxies tend to

cluster together, for example. But there seems to be little hope of ever selecting a unique law on observational grounds. Indeed, Hartle has argued that no such unique law exists. In any case, a given proposal to select a quantum state of the entire universe will not have very much to say about the fine level of detail, such as the existence of a particular planet, still less a particular person. The very quantum nature of the theory ensures (because of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle) that such details remain indeterminate.

### Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle

Heisenberg's idea is that if something like an electron were shot into a big box with a certain speed and in a certain direction, then it would be possible to calculate a fairly accurate idea of what its path would be like in the future. However, if the box were made smaller then we would have a more certain idea of where it was located, and because of that we would have to have a less certain idea of how it was traveling. American physicist [Brian Greene](#) gives us the image of a moth that flies placidly around in a large closet but who flies frantically back and forth and up and down when placed in a glass jar.

In the In the Hartle-Hawking scheme there is no actual moment of creation at which their law applies. Nevertheless, it is still proposed as an explanation for why the universe has the form it does. If the laws are not transcendent, one is obliged to accept as a brute fact that the universe is simply *there*, as a package, with the various features described by the laws built in. But with transcendent laws one has the beginnings of an explanation for why the universe is as it is.

### Laws and Initial Conditions Fuse

The separation into laws and initial conditions that has characterized all past attempts to analyse dynamical systems might owe more to the history of science than to any deep property of the natural world. The textbooks tell us that in a typical experiment the experimenter creates a particular physical state and then observes what happens—i.e., how the state evolves. The success of the scientific method rests on the reproducibility of the results. If the experiment is repeated, the same laws of physics apply, but the initial conditions are under the control of the experimenter. There is thus a clear functional separation between laws and initial conditions.

When it comes to cosmology, however, the situation is different. There is only one universe, so the notion of repeated experimentation is inapplicable. Moreover, we have no more control over the cosmic initial conditions than we do over the laws of physics. The sharp distinction between the laws of physics and the initial conditions therefore break down. "Is it not possible," conjectures Hartle, "that there are some more general principles in a more general framework which determine both the initial conditions and dynamics?"

### Laws Came First

I believe that these proposals about laws of initial conditions strongly support the Platonic idea that laws are "out there," transcending the physical universe. It is sometimes argued that the laws of physics came into being with the universe. If that was so, then those laws cannot explain the origin of the universe, because the laws would not exist until the universe existed. This is most forcefully obvious when it comes to a law of initial conditions, because such a law purports to explain precisely how the universe came to exist in the form that it does.

The idea of transcendent laws of physics is the modern counterpart of Plato's realm of perfect Forms which acted as blueprints for the construction of the fleeting shadow-world of our perceptions. In practice, the laws of physics are framed as mathematical relationships, so in our search for the bedrock of reality we must now turn to the nature of mathematics, and to the ancient problem of whether mathematics exists in an independent Platonic realm.



*Paul Davies is Director of the Beyond Center at Arizona State University and the best selling author of more than twenty books. He won the 1995 Templeton Prize for his work on the deeper meaning of science. His books include*

*God and the New Physics, About Time, and The Fifth Miracle. The excerpt here is from The Mind of God, the Scientific Basis for a Rational World, Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, Toronto, 1992, pp. 87-92.*

### CUSJ AGM Movie—see notice p. 4 For the Next Seven Generations

**Saturday May 19<sup>th</sup>, 8:00 p.m.**

In 2004, thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers, moved by their concern for our planet, formed an alliance: **The International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers**. This is their story, shot on location in the Amazon rainforest, the mountains of Mexico, North America, and at a private meeting with the Dalai Lama in India. These wise women share with us their visions of healing and a call for change now, before it's too late. *A collection will be taken on behalf of the Grandmothers and their work.*



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## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The CUSJ purposes are:

- to develop and maintain a vibrant network of Unitarian social action in Canada and elsewhere and to proactively represent Unitarian principles and values in matters of social justice and in particular
- to provide opportunities, including through publication of newsletters, for Unitarians and friends to apply their religious, humanistic and spiritual values to social action aimed at the relief of (1) poverty and economic injustice, (2) discrimination based on religious, racial or other grounds, (3) abuses of human rights whether of individuals or peoples, (4) abuses of democratic process, and
- to promote peace and security, environmental protection, education, and literacy in keeping with the spirit of Unitarian values

These purposes are an integral part of the Constitution of CUSJ, adopted at the CUSJ Annual Meeting in Mississauga, ON, May 19, 1999, and amended at the 2003 AGM.

I agree with the above Statement of Purpose, and wish to  
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