

GNE1 101

The Ethics of Belief

Heaven's Gate

Founded in the early 1970s in San Diego

Led by Marshall Applewhite (Do) and Bonnie Nettles (Ti)

Based on a combination of 1960s sci-fi and select chapters of the Bible – mostly Revelation

Some of their beliefs

The world was coming to an end (the "Recycling")

Our bodies were only vehicles for our true forms

There was a "Next Level" beyond this world that could be reached

Do and Ti claimed that they were frequently hosts to aliens in their minds

They claimed that 3 days after they died, they would be physically resurrected

A quotation from Do

"...aliens planted the seeds of current humanity millions of years ago, and have to come to reap the harvest of their work in the form of spiritual evolved individuals who will join the ranks of flying saucer crews. Only a select few members of humanity will be chosen to advance to this transhuman state. The rest will be left to wallow in the spiritually poisoned atmosphere of a corrupt world..."

Evidence Against?

In 1975, Applewhite predicted the end of the world would occur that year

He also predicted an alien spaceship would land beforehand, and take his followers away

Neither event occurred

They started selling spaceship rides for \$433

There were no spaceship rides

In 1985, Nettles died of cancer, was not physically resurrected

In 1994, the group walked out onto a pier to await the spaceship, which again did not show up.

Hale-Bopp

March 26th, 1997

Aftermath

Two of the Heaven's Gate members who survived the mass suicide (Wayne Cooke and Chuck Humphrey) killed themselves a few years later, wearing the same outfits as the members who had died earlier

41 people died

Most of them (including Do) were completely sincere in their beliefs

They left behind families (including young children) and friends

The Ethics of Belief –

William Clifford

Wait a second...

Doesn't everyone have the right to their beliefs?

Clifford says no:

Our actions (which affect others) are directly influenced by our beliefs
A belief which doesn't affect our actions in any way isn't really much of a belief

Any unsupported belief we hold out of ignorance, habit, or fear is an offence to humankind

In Clifford's Words...

If a man, holding a belief which he was taught in childhood or persuaded of afterwards, keeps down and pushes away any doubts which arise about it in his mind, purposely avoids the reading of books and the company of men that call into question or discuss it, and regards as impious those questions which cannot easily be asked without disturbing it —the life of that man is one long sin against mankind.

To Clifford, if you don't have the time to question and interrogate your own beliefs, you don't deserve to have beliefs

Is Clifford too Harsh?

Jonestown – 918 sincere believers dead