

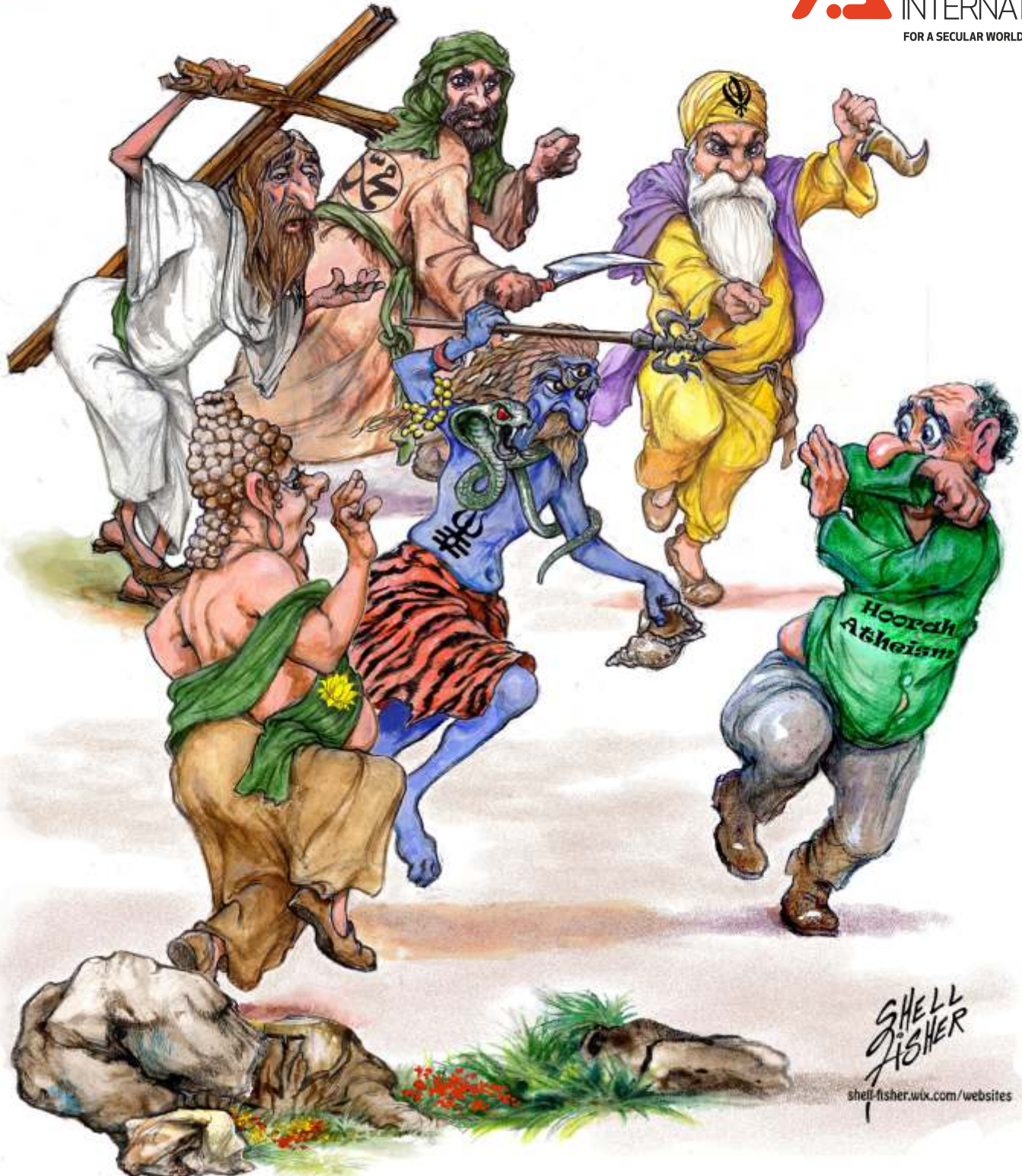
secularworld

A Positive Voice for Atheism

Second Quarter: 2016

Why do you always target MY religion only?

 ATHEIST
ALLIANCE
INTERNATIONAL
FOR A SECULAR WORLD



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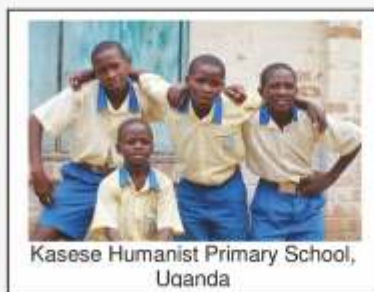


If Atheists Speak But No One Notices, Are We Making A Difference?

It's not enough to simply espouse a naturalist view based on science and reason. The **AAI Foundation**, an internal program of Atheist Alliance International, supports educational and community improvement projects - including through international exchanges - and advocates on behalf of atheists facing discrimination around the world, particularly in developing countries.

The AAI Foundation sponsors and supports a number of activities around the world:

Humanist Schools in Africa and Asia.



Kasese Humanist Primary School,
Uganda



Escuela Moderna Kerewan
Kindergarten, The Gambia



Cambodian Children's Trust
(Cambodia)

AAI has been an active sponsor of humanist and secular schools in countries where religious organizations control the majority of educational institutions. AAI and its partners provide a secular alternative to focus on critical thinking, science and reason in a naturalistic and nontheistic worldview. **Since 2009, these schools have served over 1,200 children.**

Legal assistance and family support for atheist discrimination and oppression.



Alexander Aan is an Indonesian man who was attacked by his neighbors, fired from his government job, and then arrested by the Indonesian police and convicted with a 3-year prison sentence for 'inciting religious hatred' after posting 'God does not exist' on his personal Facebook page. AAI covered Alexander's legal costs and provided family support while working with local human-rights groups to campaign for his release, for a change in Indonesian law and to fundraise to assist with his family's ongoing expenses while Alexander, the family breadwinner, languished in prison.

Relief assistance to countries and regions devastated by natural or man-made disasters.



2010 Haitian Earthquake

Since 2010, AAI has organized relief efforts with our affiliate groups and raised thousands of dollars for natural disasters that have befallen communities around the world. Per Robert Ingersoll: "Hands that help are better than hands that pray."



2013 Typhoon Haiyan

Overseas social work project sponsorships

Scholarships for the next generation of humanist leaders in indigent countries



The AAI Foundation exists to improve the quality of life for communities through the application of critical thinking, science and reason. It is through your support that this important work continues.

www.AtheistAlliance.org/Activities/AAI-Foundation

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A Positive Voice For Global Atheism

Second Quarter : 2016

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ATHEIST
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INTERNATIONAL

FOR A SECULAR WORLD

Letter from the President

CHRISTINE M. SHELLSKA

Welcome to this edition of Secular World magazine. On my mind these days is the issue of the “regressive left,” a term coined by Maajid Nawaz, a former Islamic extremist-turned-reformer who criticizes those on the political left and prioritize cultural relativism over liberal human rights values. Their strategy involves defending from “offense” groups they perceive as vulnerable, and their weapon of choice is language that paints those with whom they disagree as “racist” or “Islamophobic,” for example, in an attempt to shame and silence dissenters. While it is not surprising to find venom and vitriol in the realm of public discourse, particularly on-line; what is troublesome is that some take the issue beyond the level of discourse and attempt to stifle others' free speech by demanding censorship via institutional cooperation, and “deplatforming” those with whom they disagree. For example, in 2014, Brandeis University reversed its decision to confer upon Ayaan Hirsi Ali an honorary degree, along with her acceptance speech, branding her “Islamophobic.” Last fall, Maryam Namazie was almost banned from speaking at Warwick University out of fear that she might incite hatred amongst Muslim students, and in December, she was bullied and harassed by members of Goldsmiths University's Islamic Society during her talk.

Nawaz, himself deemed a “porch monkey” by a regressive for collaborating with Sam Harris to co-author *Islam and the Future of Tolerance: A Dialogue*, argues that the cultural relativism embraced by the regressive left leads them to see other cultures and group identities as “less civilized,” not capable of being held to the same standards those who purport to endorse liberal human rights ought to uphold. This “racism of low expectations,” he argues, leads regressives to excuse, if not justify, the most heinous of ideas, and consequently actions, wrought upon those most vulnerable. All too frequently, among the most vulnerable are secular bloggers and human rights activists who place their lives at risk to advance social justice. Nawaz, a former member of the extremist Islamist group Hizb ut-Tahrir,



works tirelessly to counter terrorism. Hirsi Ali, who lives under full-time security because of a fatwa that sentences her to death for the crime of apostasy, confronts honour violence, forced marriage, and female genital mutilation; the latter of which she herself is a victim. And Maryam Namazie is an outspoken activist and journalist who bravely and adamantly criticizes both Sharia law and cultural relativism.

These are but three important Reformers who have earned their platforms and the right to have their voices heard. Readers of this publication will also be familiar with Raif Badawi, who remains imprisoned in Saudi Arabia, and the five bloggers who were hacked to death in 2015 in Bangladesh for daring to advance secularism. But there are countless others who risk their lives by speaking out on social media, and there are those who remain unnamed and dare not voice their opinions for fear of persecution and even death. The regressive left, those who would defend the murders of the Charlie Hebdo political satirists by claiming they shouldn't have offended religious sensibilities, those who would justify the New Year's mass rapes in Cologne, Germany, by normalizing rape as a universal practice rather

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

than one pervasive within a radically religio-patriarchal culture, undermine the freedom of speech of those who represent the very groups they wish to protect. The regressive left must be stopped – not by hypocritically denying them their right to speak, but rather by uncoupling and countering their harmful narrative. It is imperative that we as global citizens invested in advancing secularism keep in mind Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

While several prominent progressives have been critical of the regressive left for some time now, others are joining in. The Rubin Report, a YouTube channel hosted by Dave Rubin, features a series of long-format interviews with guests from diverse backgrounds who share in common a commitment to challenge the regressive left's narrative, and to uphold the principle of free speech. Rubin's guest list includes Nawaz, Harris, and Hirsi Ali, along with other interesting and provocative figures.

I was profoundly reminded of the importance of the principle of free speech, and how many important voices remain silenced, when I received the following message via social media, which I reposted with permission on promise that the sender would remain anonymous:

"I wish I could add you, or at least follow you, but the country I live in could persecute me with death if anyone finds out and reports that I'm following an atheist. Sad we still have such laws and mindsets in 21st century, right?"

STAND UP FOR REASON CAMPAIGN

In Uganda, hundreds of children are marked as "witches" each year by Christian evangelists who market their exorcism services to local villages that have suffered misfortune or loss.



These children are abandoned, attacked, and maimed or even killed by their friends and family.

Those who are fortunate to survive are rendered orphans who are forced to beg and steal to survive.



**HELP US STAND UP
FOR REASON IN UGANDA.**



AtheistAlliance.org/SUFR

Nevertheless, I appreciate you and am happy to see your organization working on secularism and rationality. I hope one day, we'll be able to talk on such topics in my country too – I'm hopeful since my country is fighting the extremism well and we're finally moving towards the right direction. So kindly, save my ass and don't show my name if you happen to publish this message..."

I contemplated how such a simple gesture – sharing provocative posts on social media that attracted the attention of an atheist in a closed society signaled solidarity to the sender, who was elated by the popular response and supportive comments the posting attracted. I have occasionally heard that one's volunteer activities are best directed toward local rather than global issues, because those who claim this feel their efforts will have no impact. This is not true. Of course it is important to remain vigilant about local issues, but there are countless opportunities to defend the basic human right to freedom of opinion and expression. What may seem like a small gesture or a minor task can make a real difference in someone's life. For example, you can help lend a voice to atheists who live in dangerous or closed societies by offering your editing, translation, or web skills by joining our partner organization, Movements.org. Or you can register for the International Coalition Against Blasphemy Laws' Campaign Action List by visiting end-blasphemy-laws.org. And of course, you can support AAI's activities, including our efforts to inform asylum-seekers in danger of their options and where possible, support their transition. Sadly, for many, there simply are no options, and the best advice one can offer is to remain silent and stay safe, if they have not already been

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

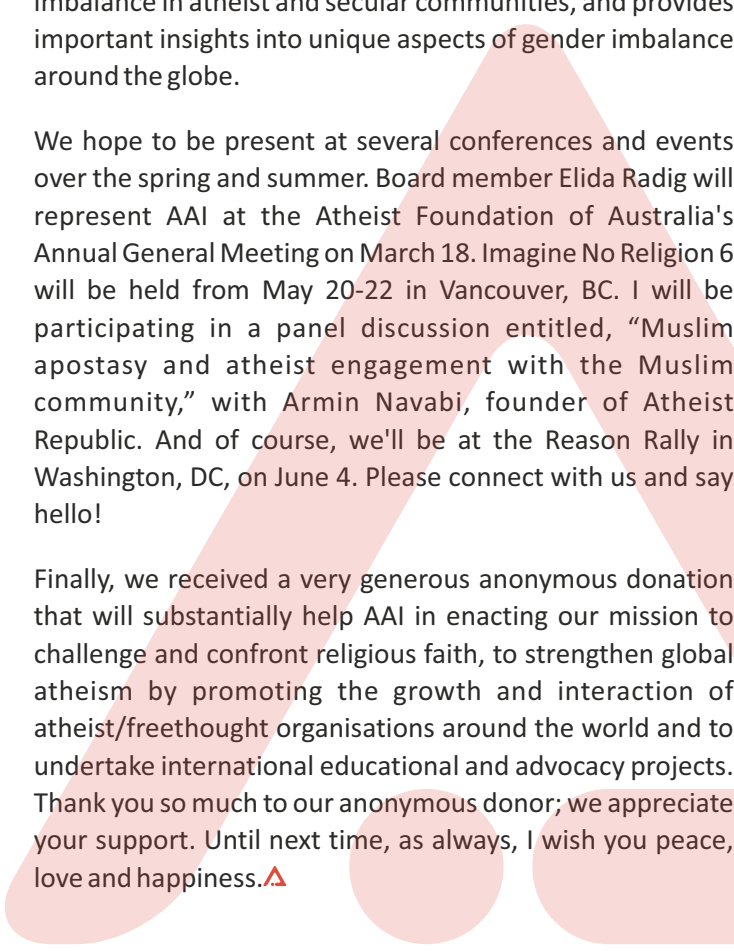
identified as atheists. I have been asked by some who are profoundly aware of their situation to make their voices heard, and I hope you will join me in that effort.

Since the last edition of Secular World magazine was published, Board Member Gail Miller resigned, but still remains active as a volunteer. We thank Gail for her service to AAI – she is an inspiration, and I'm privileged for the friendship that she and I developed during her tenure. Gail has promised to render more of her volunteer efforts to help her local organization, the British Columbia Humanist Association, assist transitioning Syrian refugees, and to support secular education in Guatemala. We welcome Onur Romano, who hails from Turkey but has recently moved to Canada to pursue postgraduate work.

The Atheist Census, hosted by AAI, indicates that approximately 73% of participants identify as male, 26% as female, and 0.5% as other, findings that are consistent with similar data collected by other atheist and secular organizations, opinion polls, and researchers. To address the issue of gender imbalance, Board Officers Carlos Diaz and John Hamill (Secretary) prepared AAI's Gender Balance Report and an accompanying position statement including recommendations. The report was based upon a questionnaire distributed to activists, parliamentarians, academics, journalists, and scientists, designed to gather their views on male over-representation within atheist and

secular organizations. The report, available on our website, contributes to the existing body of work on gender imbalance in atheist and secular communities, and provides important insights into unique aspects of gender imbalance around the globe.

We hope to be present at several conferences and events over the spring and summer. Board member Elida Radig will represent AAI at the Atheist Foundation of Australia's Annual General Meeting on March 18. Imagine No Religion 6 will be held from May 20-22 in Vancouver, BC. I will be participating in a panel discussion entitled, "Muslim apostasy and atheist engagement with the Muslim community," with Armin Navabi, founder of Atheist Republic. And of course, we'll be at the Reason Rally in Washington, DC, on June 4. Please connect with us and say hello!

Finally, we received a very generous anonymous donation that will substantially help AAI in enacting our mission to challenge and confront religious faith, to strengthen global atheism by promoting the growth and interaction of atheist/freethought organisations around the world and to undertake international educational and advocacy projects. Thank you so much to our anonymous donor; we appreciate your support. Until next time, as always, I wish you peace, love and happiness. 

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Supporting AAI means promoting naturalism, science and reason while challenging and confronting religious privilege and discrimination against atheists and religious minorities around the world.

AAI's projects include **funding new groups** and **conferences**, **school** and **social service projects**, bringing attention to **religious discrimination**, as well as **legal** and **asylum support** for those targeted by religious bigots.

AAI operates entirely through the support of our members. Even more, if you live in the US, your donation to AAI is fully tax-deductible.

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Your monthly contribution helps AAI sustain and expand our programs. Join our team and know that you are making a difference in challenging religion and expanding freethought around the world!

All members receive members-only access to the AAI website | Freethought Audio Library e-version of *Secular World* magazine(printed copy at additional charge) | *Imagine!* quarterly newsletter

Monthly memberships include a **printed copy** of *Secular World* magazine

Thanks for your support! Together, we'll create a sane and rational world!



FOR A SECULAR WORLD



atheistalliance.org

Letter from the Editor

RUSTAM SINGH

It is with deep sadness that I share the current sorry state of affairs of my country India with the readers of Secular World. I hope this acts as a thorough warning to nations that are leaning towards choosing nationalism over humanity in general, towards being apprehensive and discriminating against individuals on the basis of religion because of the actions of a few, in all its bigoted forms. I wish my opinions do not come out to be political, for it holds little to no relevance globally, but it does carry a shade of prejudice against my nation's ruling political power for its shameless propaganda and blatant Hindu supporting nationalism.

On January 17th 2016, Rohith Chakravarti Vemula, a PhD scholar at the University of Hyderabad, India hanged himself because of alleged state sponsored discrimination based on his caste. Rohith belonged to the Dalit community, a lower caste, which he claimed attracted persistent discrimination by the University authorities. He had been expelled from the hostel of Hyderabad University several months prior to the tragedy, the university had stopped his stipend of Rs. 25,000 a month and his death has now been called "institutional murder" by several political leaders since. While he may not have been the only case of Dalits being targeted systematically in the country, his case attracted massive protests across the nation because of the sheer waste of a bright talented youth's life caused by the discrimination that has been shadowed under different veils of isolation and rejections since decades. The emotionally overwhelming suicide note included lines that said, "...for some people, life itself is (a) curse. My birth is my fatal accident. The value of a man was reduced to his immediate identity and nearest possibility. To a vote. To a number. To a thing. Never was a man treated as a mind." The deeply rooted bias appealed to all sections of society and as the case is still progressing; allegations of the Human Resource Development Minister's personal involvement to the Vice



Chancellor of the University to aid his suspension have been brought under the scanner.

This isn't an isolated incident, but a part of a systematic war against free thinkers, those that express dissent against nationalism and speak against mainstream beliefs. Nationwide protests by students included unarmed students marching in a peaceful procession towards the right wing nationalist party and the ideological version of the ruling political party in power, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) political party's office in New Delhi. Not only were they beaten by policemen with the press videotaping graphic footages, but also mocked at while doing so. Those beaten included unarmed women in their early twenties being slapped, hair pulled and pushed to the ground by the police clearly protected in their brutality and excessive force by the ruling party in power.

With the scars of the slap on the student community still fresh in minds across the nation, one of the capital's most prestigious university, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) grabbed headlines with one of the most infamous cases of censorship and blatant bullying by politicians to silence the voices of dissent. On 9th february, a cultural evening was

organised by a group of students against the execution of terrorist Afzal Guru and separatist leader Maqbool Bhat, and for Kashmir's right to self-determination. The criminal case of what happened next is still in progress in the courts so I would not take sides in reporting the same, but allegedly anti-national slogans were shouted which included "War will continue till Kashmir's freedom, war will continue till India's demolition!" Those that supported the original protestors' right to speak stated that the doors of the university were open, which invited opposition political party members to dissolve as students in the crowd of the protest; some alleged non-student Kashmiri citizens also joined in the protest, while the original organizers, The Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union or JNUSU completely denied student's involvement in the protests or slogans. The President of JNUSU, Kanhaiya Kumar was quickly arrested by the Delhi police on charges of sedition and criminal conspiracy, under section 124 of the Indian Penal Code, a law dating back to 1860. The arrest soon snowballed into a major political controversy, with several leaders of opposition parties visiting the JNU campus in solidarity with the students protesting against the police crackdown. Meanwhile, Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh reiterated that while the students would not be harassed, the "guilty would not be spared". Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Kiran Rijiju said that JNU would not be allowed to become a hub for "anti-national" activities. Amnesty India said "India's sedition law contrary to international standards on freedom of expression must be repealed."

Hundreds of academics, professors and students especially from Indian communities across the globe expressed their disgust at the exaggeration and excessive attention being made to a peaceful protest, and the reaction from the Indian government consequently. The President quickly became a cult figure on social media and after a few weeks finally got his bail. He is now awaiting trial which can extend up to life imprisonment if proven guilty. Fearing an actual threat to his life, the defence lawyers of Kanhaiya were escorting him towards the court during his pre-bail captivity to ask for protection from the police during his pre-bail arrest when a bunch of lawyers beat him up knocking him to the floor, amidst a thick police cover. The defence lawyer and a few journalists were also beaten up, again, inside the court premises while the police just smiled. Kanhaiya was again beaten up the next day while going to attend an appeal to provide him special protection because he was risking death threats from inside and outside prison. The lawyers who beat him up were discovered via a sting operation by media

BECOME A SUPPORTING MEMBER OF ATHEIST ALLIANCE INTERNATIONAL!

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

personnel to show zero remorse, driven by rabid nationalism stating they had originally planned petrol bombs and aimed to deliberately get themselves arrested so that they could be in physical range of his cell, and eliminate him inside prison. They were given bail in less than two hours, while the student waited two weeks for bail or an actual hearing.

Two other student leaders who also voluntarily surrendered themselves after being on the run for almost a week are also awaiting trial facing sedition charges. One of them, Umar Khalid, has been portrayed in the media as a terrorist sympathizer because of his Muslim name and family backgrounds, further instigating hatred from hard lining Hindu fundamentalists, even though some news reports state he is actually an agnostic and has been vocal about his distance from Islamic teachings since several years. What remains is up to the legal systems of the country, but the debate between nationalism and free speech has brought attention to the extreme ill people can wish for anyone who opposes their nationalist beliefs. From death threats, to rape threats to the sisters of the students, to actual assault in courts, to a massive wave of political leaders sublimely implying they will not spare anyone that speaks against India, the anger is embedded deep inside these right-wingers.

Recently the *New York Times* reported despite India's modernity and progress, witchcraft still seems to be plaguing its illiterate and downtrodden villages. There have been reported 2000 deaths, mostly women, from witchcraft accusations since the past 15 years. In other news, the Supreme Court has agreed to discuss removing the section which criminalizes homosexuality in the final form of judicial proceeding, and has appointed a five-judge constitutional bench for an in-depth reading of the situation. All of this, while the ruling political party still has aggressively opposed the same and has called members of the LGBT community "unnatural" and refused to change their stance.

My purpose of sharing such a sorrowful state of affairs with you is to remind you of what happens when one chooses nationalism, or popular opinions over rationalism and secularisation. Nationalism should hold no special in a world where some rapper is duelling over Twitter with scientist Neil D Tryson over how he believes the world is flat in 2016, the same year we've discovered gravitational waves and come one step closer to the origin of the universe. We've successfully grown edible plants in outer space but social constructs like rabid nationalism plague our collective intelligence as a whole. It is disheartening to hear religious

KASESE HUMANIST PRIMARY SCHOOL

- A Project of the AAI Foundation -



<http://kasesehumanistschool.webs.com/>

Located in rural East Uganda, the Kasese School has been supported by AAI since 2008 and has provided a secular education based in science and reason for over 3,000 students.

90% of the schooling in Uganda is provided by religious organizations. The Kasese Humanist Primary School is unique in providing a Humanist education.

Your support allows us to underwrite the costs of schooling for rural students, including books, teachers, meals, and dorm rooms!



Thank you again for your ongoing support!



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FOR A SECULAR WORLD

idiots saying they are spiritual but not religious, or agnostics saying they believe “there's some sort of higher power beyond our understanding” but then saying they don't believe in God in the same sentence. This war between conservatives and liberals, or rationalists and spiritualists/religious takes several different forms across the globe, but essentially shares the same core battle between progress and sticking to what we are comfortable with, even if it is a redundant belief system. I have personally always strongly opposed the concept of pride coming from one's nationality, colour, creed, sexual orientation, caste or race because I believe the concept of pride can only come from things one achieves himself/herself. One can be happy to come from a certain country, sure. One can be happy that one doesn't have to face the kind of discrimination as some other countries or individuals do because of the laws in the country. But to devote self-pride over something we had no choice in – our birth – is silly. The crutch of nationalist pride can be supportive to some, but also can take the form of dangerous levels of hate, such as a politician announcing he'd build walls to keep other communities away.

As the noose tightens around outspoken rationalists, liberals and atheists in my nation, I sincerely hope if you are reading this from a country where free speech is as liberal as it gets that you utilize this freedom to the maximum extent possible. While the situation is not as bad as Saudi Arabia where atheists get killed or stoned or sent to several years in prison, or Bangladesh where secular bloggers are hacked in the streets, atheists by far have exceeded other minorities to be the one group that's hated by an alarmingly large population. Even in religiously more neutral territories, authors like Salman Rushdie still receive threats for their works and criticism.

Not a single day elapses without reading about horrific reports such as a young boy in Pakistan chopping his hand off to appease a Mullah because he misheard him calling out

those that do not love the Prophet raise their hand and was thus labelled an apostate, or an 8 year old child dying because of sexual violence on her wedding day with a man five times her age, or a scholarship program in South Africa's Uthukela municipality dedicated to women who are strictly virgin (subject to twice annual checks). Vice News also recently reported of Transsexuals in the religiously conservative country of Iran, the second largest nation in the world in carrying out sex reassignment surgery. This would sound like progressive and surprising news, but the truth is that a dangerously large number of individuals are just gay/lesbian and forced to convert because their alternative sexuality is not socially or legally acceptable, thus in order to be with someone of the same sex they have to change their entire gender identity itself, surgically. Even in America,

absurd rules for abortion clinics are designed to ensure they get shut down, and it is getting incredibly difficult for women to have access to the right over their own bodies because Bible thumping pro-life fanatics are apparently winning. The bottom line is highlighted: no matter where you live, religion and fundamentalists are going to hunt you down and try to convert you and snatch

those rights and freedoms from you that their imaginary being up the sky prohibited them to pursue themselves, in a book written thousands of years ago.

In such testing times, the surest combat would be to peacefully counter every negative, hateful and discriminatory world view (whether on social media or real life) with a positive one. Atheists should not only be content with their conviction that there is no God, but also strive to present this image of positivity and freedom associated with atheism thereafter for others to witness. Let us strive to resist the temptation of pseudoscience in testing waters in all its superstitious forms, resist bigotry for the sake of social acceptability and stand our ground on gender equality even if it means attracting attention to ourselves or being labelled with demeaning petty insults. ▲



9th World Atheist Conference Report

RUSTAM SINGH

This January 2016, I had the honour of representing Atheist Alliance International at the 9th world atheist conference once again in Vijayawada. Now the city of Vijayawada has become the capital of the state of Andhra Pradesh after a famous split into the state of Telangana. The city has transformed significantly in this insignificant time, the infrastructure is visibly improved but the simplistic city still shows a rich religious diversity as soon as you step foot into the city limits. Unfortunately, politically as well as religiously the landscape of India has taken a turn for the worse since the fundamentalist party in power, BJP, came to rule. I knew

this time the discussions would be focussed on the ride of saffronisation, mainstream rabid support for patriotism against a universal concept of secularism, and securing scientific temperament in India.

Acknowledging the efforts of brave rationalists working for free inquiry, critical thinking, scientific temper, secular outlook and atheistic & humanist way of life had its theme on the necessity of critical thinking and secular outlook. The Atheist Center, the first of its kind in India and the world (disputed), hosted the world conference which included delegates from several parts of India, and the rest of the world including Germany, Norway and the US. The collective belief was the alarming rate of decline of scientific temperament, how close the genuine threat to rationalism and secularism has reached, and possible solutions to reach for a future that allows non-believers to also share platforms as accepted as believers.

Day one began with inaugurating the photo exhibition of the Gora family and the Atheist Center's achievements throughout the years, which remains awe inspiring even on my second visit here. Basic equal human rights struggles or promotion of scientific beliefs that are taken for granted today, especially so in the modern western world, seem



almost silly to be promoted with the large scale rallies the Center has demonstrated over the years. However, given the cultural and political landscape of the Indian subcontinent, these were some of the earliest forms of defiance to state sponsored bigotry, which faced an active amount of backlash. Some of my personal favourite photographs of the evolution of their movements included:

- * Promotion of edible plants as a part of social responsibility, in public spaces as well as private gardens. The quote on a photograph read "As long as there is scarcity of food anywhere it is anti-social to use land, water, manure, time, interest or energy for growing non-edibles. From the stand point of social responsibility, the colour of tomato or the shape of the cabbage is more pleasing to the eye than non-edible salvia or pansy"

- * Promoting and practicing inter-religious, inter-caste marriages, not mentioning caste or religion in any paperwork and answering NIL in any paperwork and in the national population census, dowry free marriages

- * Peaceful unarmed protests against the pomp and lavish lifestyle by politicians financed by citizen taxes

- * Demanding the multi-millionaire Indian guru Satya Sai baba to stand test of verification of his claims of so-called miracles in a march on anti-magic

- * Way back in 1972, the first beef and pork festivals with hundreds of attendees organized by the vegan Gora couple, as a mark to show defiance to what would decades later become a crisis issue of morality. Consuming beef is considered one of the worst anti-hindu crimes by radicals today as a cow is a religiously important figure for them while pork is taboo for Muslims.

- * An extremely popular belief that pregnant women who step out and watch the sun/moon during an eclipse produce children with birth defects was opposed by a mass defiance to the superstition by dozens of pregnant women. One of the playful happy children of the Gora family was attending the conference today and needless to say, was in the prime of his health.

The inauguration note was read by Robert Rustad, a member of the Norwegian Humanist Association who stated that the perception of religion and the belief in God or creator of all life, has been in decline for many years in Europe. The most non-religious country in Europe is Sweden



Robert Rustad of the Norwegian Humanist Association, Norway cutting an inauguration ribbon

where less than 20% of the population claims to be religious. He also stated that according to the European Social Survey many of the original 15 EU member countries with the highest levels of trust in religious institutions are actually among those with the lowest levels of weekly religious service attendance. Robert further added that the development of civil societies based on humanistic values - values such as education for all, development of social welfare-schemes, economic growth and economic independence for all citizens, equality and equal rights for men and women, freedom of thought and freedom of speech was crucial. All these things have made it possible for common people to abolish religious faiths and abandon religious preachers. Asking crucial questions, he queried, "How may we help developing our societies so that all members of society may live in peace and so that men and women truly have equal rights? How do we ensure that all people have access to what they need to live happily, - and how do we ensure that everyone may think freely and feel free to speak their minds? We – all of us – have that obligation. I challenge you all in this."

The speech was followed by a welcome dance and a secular song singing. Dr G. Vijayam requested a moment of silence

for our fallen comrades, rationalist and author Narendra Dhabolkar, scholar and rationalist M. M. Kalburgi & Govind Pansare and all Bangladeshi secular bloggers and others who lost their lives for merely expressing their desire for a rational and a secular world. That moment, as an Indian, for the very first time in real life, I felt the fragility of my life and the very real threat of life reach out to me. In the conference room itself, I was surrounded by about 100 participants who shared a belief that has been so violently resisted that entire laws have been distinctly made to suppress their right to self-expression and promoting a scientific temperament.

Next, Dr. Volker Mueller, President of the Freethinker Association, Germany, spoke about the difference between the definitions of secularism in the East and the West. While priorities across the globe vary, from basic human rights of free expression and being openly atheists, against the rise of sexual repression in women, via abortion rights, promotion of sexual education over abstinence and giving rise to ancient beliefs systems of moralistic, patriotic and sexist beliefs over rationalism and secular beliefs.

Followed by Volker, an associate of Late Dr. Narendra Dhabolkar and Founder chairman of Maharashtra



Speakers at the conference

Andhshradha Nirmoolan Samithi (ANS), Pune, Mr. Avinash Patil gave his speech on his concept of secularism. Other speakers included Dr. K. Veeramani, President D.K. and Chancellor of Periyar Maniammai University, Tamil Nadu and Robert Rustad of the Norwegian Humanist Association, Norway who spoke on secularism and humanism in Europe, followed by Alfred Harald Petzold a member of the Parliament in Germany. Right before lunch, there was a celebratory release of the new edition of "We Become Atheist" by Gora and of "Positive Atheism of Gora" by Dr. D.D. Bandiste.

Dr. Vijayam gave his speech which spoke on the relevance on being an active voice for representing a positive image for atheists, especially in the sub-continent. "Globally, we are seeing spurts of increasing intolerance towards people with rational views and those who question religious hegemony and oppression," he stated. In his speech, he mentioned that India is a secular state as defined in the constitution, but lacking an official definition of the word. The circumstances after independence have posed a challenge before secularism of India a number of times. Sometimes it is also alleged that by Uniform Civil Code, the existence of minorities in India is in danger or an assault on the identity of minorities. Globally we are seeing the rise of religious

extremism, violently silencing opposition who fight for the rights and dignity of human beings. It is a matter of grave concern that the youth are lured into fighting for religions and as defenders of faith seeking unquestionable commitment. This not only bleaks the future of the generation yet to come, but also threatens the very foundation of our society which is diverse and tolerant to various views.

He mentioned that with centuries of efforts and four hundred years of crusades, humanity came to know that peace and progress is possible only when religion and politics are separated. Conclusively, he mentioned, "What we need today is not more religious indoctrination, but liberation from the tendency of annihilation in the name of religion. In this context, the promotion and preservation of secularism is the utmost necessity."

Post lunch speakers included Aron Ra from American Atheists Texas, USA, talking of how fundamentalists are getting more leverage to spread their hatred and narrow-minded beliefs across in public schools, ensuring the future generation has as little as possible exposure to secular thoughts as possible. He was followed by Balwinder Barnala & Harchand Singh Bhinder from the Tarksheel Society, Punjab who spoke on the need for change in social outlook.



Talking of how the primarily Sikh state intended to break away from stereotype ritualistic practises and irrationality, the state is now in shambles to the same pseudoscience the majority religion was established to get rid of. A thought provoking quote included that “The Holy book and the Gurudwara is washed with milk, while the homeless can’t even get water”. He was followed by Samir A. Runja, Assistant Professor, Sheth D.L. Law College, Bhuj, Kutch, Gujarat who spoke on the meaning and scope of secularism under Indian Constitution.

Next I spoke on behalf of Atheist Alliance International. Delivering a speech prepared by the President on the irony of religious fundamentalists continuing to discredit science while using science itself to promote their bigotry. I also spoke on science and secularism as the most appropriate option for states across the world because they’re not all hierarchal. Whether every concept, ruler, rule and law can be challenged is open to debate and is universal, surviving through the diversity of their communities.

As before, the interactive two sessions running simultaneously talked about 'Youth and Extremism' and 'Women and Social Change'. Moderating the debate in the first session, Vikas Gora, Rotary World Peace Fellow and co-convenor of the conference, said many youngsters who joined the support movements had borne the brunt of decades of state corruption, poor governance, repressive regimes and poor development policies. All participants suggested why youth are an easy target for brainwashing into extremist causes, while suggesting inclusive education to be the most effective solution to combat the same. When a youth is felt desired in society, in terms of job options, education is relatable and relevant, entertainment and employment opportunities presented are abundant and infrastructure is modern, the probability of extremist thoughts or action among a district's population is less. Stressing on the need for holistic economic development and psychological counseling of youth on positive and critical thinking, some youth resort to such actions because they are deliberately not shown a constructive alternative by vested interests.

Nau Gora, who facilitated the other session on 'Women and Social Change', said religion had always subdued women's capacities. “Women should be given more economic opportunities and space to voice their concerns,” she demanded. Talking on different ways to smash patriarchy, the interactive session shared opinions on how religion engulfs culture to form a sexist way of life as the standard norm, making an equal household/society look like an oddity. From all the human rights conferences I have ever

AAI LEGAL / SUPPORT FUND

- A Project of the AAI Foundation -

There are places in the world where being “out” as an atheist – or, for that matter, even expressing open doubt about the dominant religious



Alexander Aan, Indonesia

faith – makes you a target of violence and incarceration.

AAI receives pleas from atheists and skeptics every month seeking protection and asylum assistance and who have few other



Raef Badawi, Egypt

places to turn. While we collect information and report on these cases to international human rights groups, AAI also extends



Ghazi Beji, Tunisia

help as it can through its affiliate groups. Our legal support fund provides legal assistance to those



Rimsha Masih, Pakistan

arrested and asylum support to those seeking to find safer sanctuary.

The demand for such services far exceeds our resources and



Hilath Rasheed Kaashidho

relies solely on contributions from our supporters. Please consider contributing to the AAI Legal / Support Fund, a project of the AAI Foundation, to continue to provide help to those in need.



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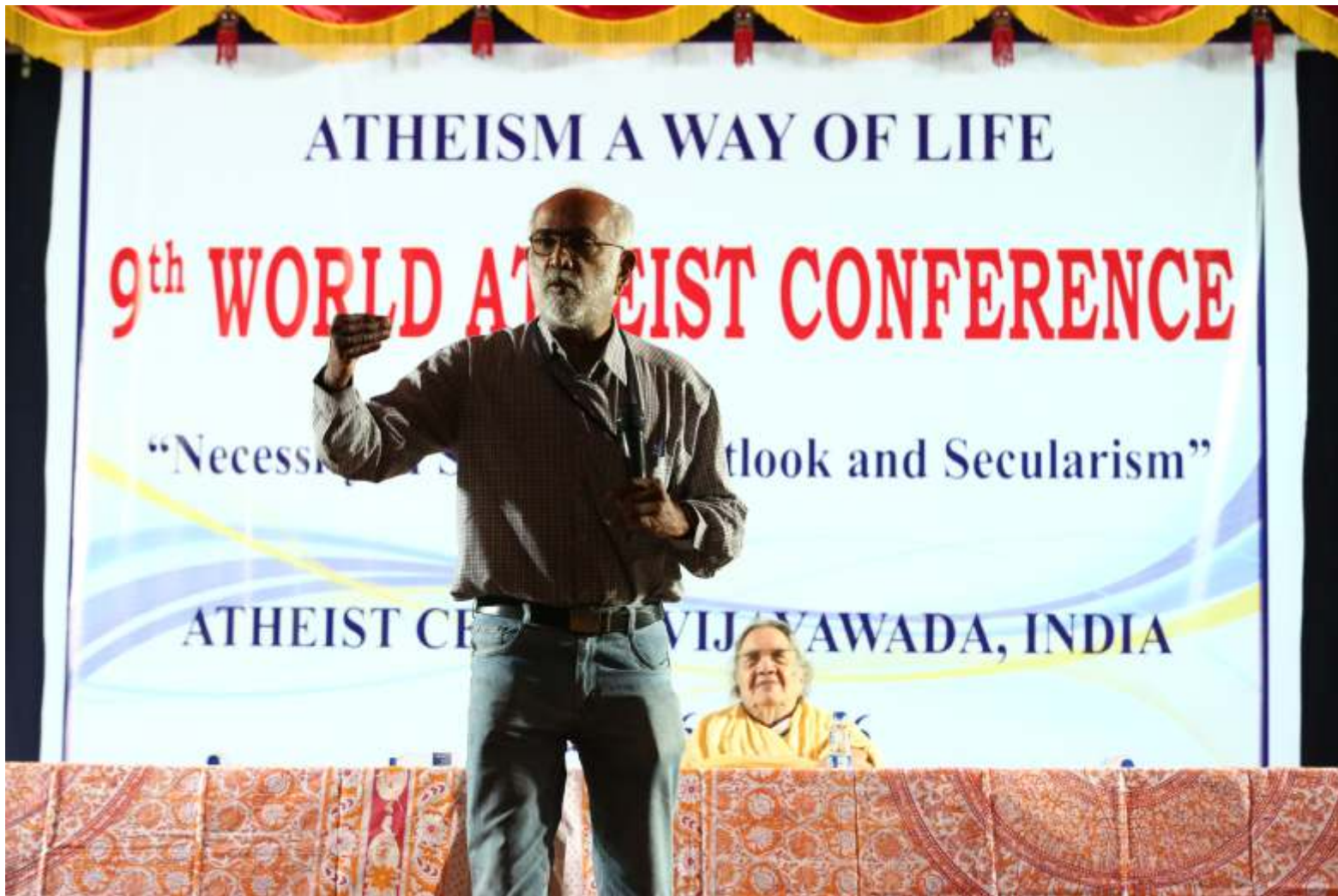
Speakers at the conference

attended, especially those related to women rights, I particularly liked how this conference had a fair representation of women.

I also had the honor of attending one of my personal favorite Indian rationalist, Dr. Narenndra Nayak's brief session on miracle busting. Since the schedule was pushed a little off track because of unavoidable delays, I sat informally with Dr. Nayak and shared my admiration for his work conducting dozens of workshops and seminars across India on exposing miracles performed by holy men, con artists claiming spiritual knowledge or extracting money for exorcism against supernatural forces. A recipient of several death threats for his vocal representation of atheism in India, the veteran rationalist has contributed much to the atheist activism field from his open defiance to be included in the "other" category in census, refusing to pledge on a holy book in court for a minor court appearance and merely announcing his abstinence from God in every opportunity presented to him. I expressed my fondness for his work and wished to see more of it in the future.

Further talks included Dr. G. Samaram, past president Indian Medical Association and a medical writer and social worker,

who talked about the fight against witchcraft and sorcery. Although the issue has almost entirely been eliminated today, superstitious beliefs have just morphed into different forms and different forms of harassment and segregation. It was crucial to remember how norms considered acceptable courtesy religion were eliminated through struggles of atheists and rationalists along with scientists. One such belief, Banamati, a belief that some members of society can harm others through supernatural powers was used as an excuse to torture and brutally murder socially, economically poor people, members of schedule castes and schedules tribes and women. This was the kind of information I was surprised to learn still existed in parts of India while we aim to portray the nation as a super power to the world. Banamati victims are tortured through fines by mobs, beaten to death, teeth plucked, cutting of tongue and ears, breaking limbs, disfiguring, social boycott, forced to vacate their homes and even burnt alive. In 1983, the total number of victims reached a staggering 7000. Reports state the horrific trend continued till 2002 where atheist activists performed magic shows to believers showing them that so called anti-witchcraft is unscientific and a plot for lynch killings of minorities.




Rationalist Narendra Nayak giving his speech on miracle busting

Other speakers included Dr. Uday Balakrishnan, Former registrar Indian institute of science and member postal service board, government of India, who talked on the role of media in nation and social integration, and Prof. Dhaneswar Sahoo, President Odisha Rationalist Association, Odisha stating the valedictory address.

One may debate over the need to have meetings and conferences over atheism, or spending valuable resources on attendance to such events which are essentially to discredit the belief in God. Dictionary definitions aside, I personally have embraced the fact that atheists have throughout history demonstrated a higher sense of social responsibility, scientific progress and promoted equality and appreciation of human rights as compared to theists. Even if the definition of atheists strictly says it is the lack of belief in God or any religion alone, the atheist community does surprisingly share a lot of common beliefs. Some attendees here stressed it is the need to mainstream an atheist political party for running elections, first district level and then state level, and who knows, national level someday. Another fact brought to my attention was that

possibly (unverified claim) a majority of body donations to hospitals post-death were by atheists and rationalists because they had no hesitation culturally or religiously, and understood rationally how effective their donation would count towards building better trained doctors in the future. Another organization here was promoting protection against lynch mobs and cultural backlash by providing shelter, lawyers and support to inter-caste/inter-religious marriages.

All these diverse individuals and diverse goals of different organizations uniting commonly under a goal towards a secular and prosperous future provided me hope in such testing times of bigotry and hatred across the world. Conferences like these help remind us that no matter what our personal struggles against religious discriminatory practises have been, we are not alone. Perhaps, if atheists maintain their unity in supporting rationalist and scientific temperament, vocalizing support for their atheist cause, the fascists of the modern world will not have the leverage they currently seem to be gaining to suppress our free thought and freedom and would just die down. Perhaps, very soon. 

The Taboo of Atheism in Egypt

HAKIM KHATIB

Acknowledging the rights of atheists doesn't mean adopting their ideas. While atheists just don't believe in one further religion in comparison to believers, everyone should be entitled to express their ideas and thoughts without intimidation. Challenging religious oppression and rusty social traditions, many Egyptians risk their lives to uphold and protect freedom and values of tolerance.

Discrimination against atheists in Egypt is primarily a product of conservative social traditions and the state's religious establishments – the Al-Azhar mosque and the Coptic Church. Laws and policies in Egypt protect religious freedom but punish those who ridicule or insult heavenly religions by speaking or writing, like insulting Buddhism or Hinduism is not punishable by the Egyptian law but insulting Islam, Christianity or Judaism is. Between 2011 and 2013, according to The Guardian, Egyptian courts convicted 27 of 42 defendants on charges of contempt for religion.

Interestingly, an Egyptian citizen is only entitled to one of the three monotheistic religions, namely Islam, Christianity and Judaism. In other words, people are allowed to believe or disbelieve in any religion for obvious reasons, but they are not allowed to have their beliefs or disbeliefs legally recognized. Therefore, on official records, all people have to be categorized as such. Diversity in this sense is systematically blinded.

According to official statistics, religious beliefs in Egypt are

as follows: 90-94% are Sunni Muslims and 6-10% are Coptic Christians. While atheism is not limited to a specific segment of the Egyptian society, credible research is still lacking on the matter. It is simply because being without religion is a taboo in Egypt. Similar to their declared wars on terrorism, corruption and neglect, political and religious state institutions have launched a new “war on atheism”.

In a 2014-report, Dar Al-Ifta Al-Misriyyah (Al-Azhar center for Islamic legal research) confirmed that the number of atheists in Egypt is no more than 866 individuals – i.e. the proportion of atheists is 0.001% of the Egyptian population. While the methods Al-Azhar “scholars” used to reach this precise figure remain unknown, discriminatory discourse against atheists is commonplace in Egypt.

This discriminatory discourse is especially accentuated by Al-Azhar mosque and the Coptic Church. Starting from 2014, both institutions have been cooperating to fight against atheism in order to “save the Egyptian society”. In the same year, the government embarked a “national campaign” to combat the spread of atheism among young people using the help of a number of psychologists, sociologists and political scientists.

Nemat Satti, chairman of the Central

Administration of the parliament and civic education at the Ministry of Youth and Sports, told the Shorouk News in 2014 that the phenomenon of atheism has become as noticeable and widespread among young people as the phenomena of harassment, rape and extremism. The comparison is pretty clear.

This discriminatory discourse against atheists can be detected in the Egyptian media as well. Egyptian media is not neutral when addressing the issue of atheists in the society. Similar to the governmental and religious campaigns, media portrays atheists as patients with mental disorders, who need treatment to get rid of the illusions they are talking about.

For instance, in 2015 in a program titled “the morning of the capital” on the Egyptian channel “the Capital TV” (Al-Asima),



an Egyptian journalist throws out an atheist guest on air for his ideas. A wrangle broke out between the Egyptian journalist Rania Mahmoud Yaseen, the host of a debate on atheism, and her atheist guest Ahmed Al-Harqan, who spoke about “the lack of historical evidence concerning the existence of the figure of the prophet Mohammad.” Rania Yasin interrupted Al-Harqan saying: “Come on! Leave! We don't need atheists or infidels. People should pay attention to the warnings against infidelity, atheism and these outrageous ideas in society.” Hence the guest left the debate. It remains to wonder why an Egyptian journalist hosts a debate about such a sensitive issue in Egypt, if she isn't willing to listen to what atheists have to say.

While the stories of persecuting atheists in Egypt are numerous, here are some cases to show how this taboo is being handled systematically. So far, there is no evidence that the change of the head of the government or the government's political orientation correlates with the number of attacks against atheists.

In 2014, Karim Ashraf Mohamed Al-Banna, 21, was jailed for three years for “insulting Islam” by simply declaring he is an atheist on Facebook. Shockingly, his own father testified against him claiming that his son “was embracing extremist ideas against Islam”.

In 2013, Egyptian clerics such as Al-Azhar professor Mahmoud Shaaban, a member of Al-Jama'a Al-Islamiyya Asem Abdelmajed and a Salafi scholar Abu Ishaq Al-Heweny issued an Islamic ruling (fatwa) against Hamed Abdel-Samad for writing a book on Islamic fascism. Abdel-Samad was accused of being heretic and was called to be killed for it. Shaaban said on Al-Hafez TV that: “after he [Abdel-Samad] has been confronted with the evidence, his killing is permitted if the [Egyptian] government doesn't do it.”

In 2012, the Egyptian blogger Alber Saber was sentenced to three years in prison for insulting Islam by posting the trailer of the YouTube video *Innocence of Muslims* on his Facebook page. While prosecution didn't find the trailer on Saber's Facebook account, they accused him of religious blasphemy after finding a short video of Saber criticizing both Islamic and Coptic religious leaders and institutions. The 2012 Report on Non-Religious Discrimination stated that after detaining Saber for religious blasphemy, “police incited the prisoners against Saber, claiming that he was an atheist and insulted the prophet Mohamed.” Consequently, one of the prisoners injured Saber with a razor blade.

According to the same report, there were similar incidents in 2012 against individuals who allegedly insulted Islam or the prophet Mohammad such as the Christian school secretary Makram Diab, who was sentenced to six years in prison, and Ayman Yusef Mansur, 24, who was sentenced to three years in prison with hard labor.

These are not the first incidents in Egypt against atheists. According to 2012 Report on Non-Religious Discrimination in 2007, the blogger Abdel Kareem Soliman was sentenced to four years in prison for insulting Islam and the president. Another blogger, Kareem Amer, was sentenced to three years in prison for “Facebook posts deemed offensive to Islam”.

While atheism in Egypt remains a taboo, systematic discrimination against atheists remains significant. Prompted by conservative traditions and state religious and political establishments, there are restrictions that deny atheists the right to engage in a serious debate about their fundamental rights. ▲



Hakim Khatib is a lecturer in journalism, intercultural communication and the politics and culture of the Middle East at Fulda University of Applied Sciences and Phillips University Marburg. He specializes in the application of religion into political life and discourse in the Middle East and is also the editor-in-chief of the Mashreq Politics and Culture (MPC Journal).

Killing With Softness? Islam, 'Noble Liberals' and The 'Guilt Trap.'

WALLACE RUNNYMEDE

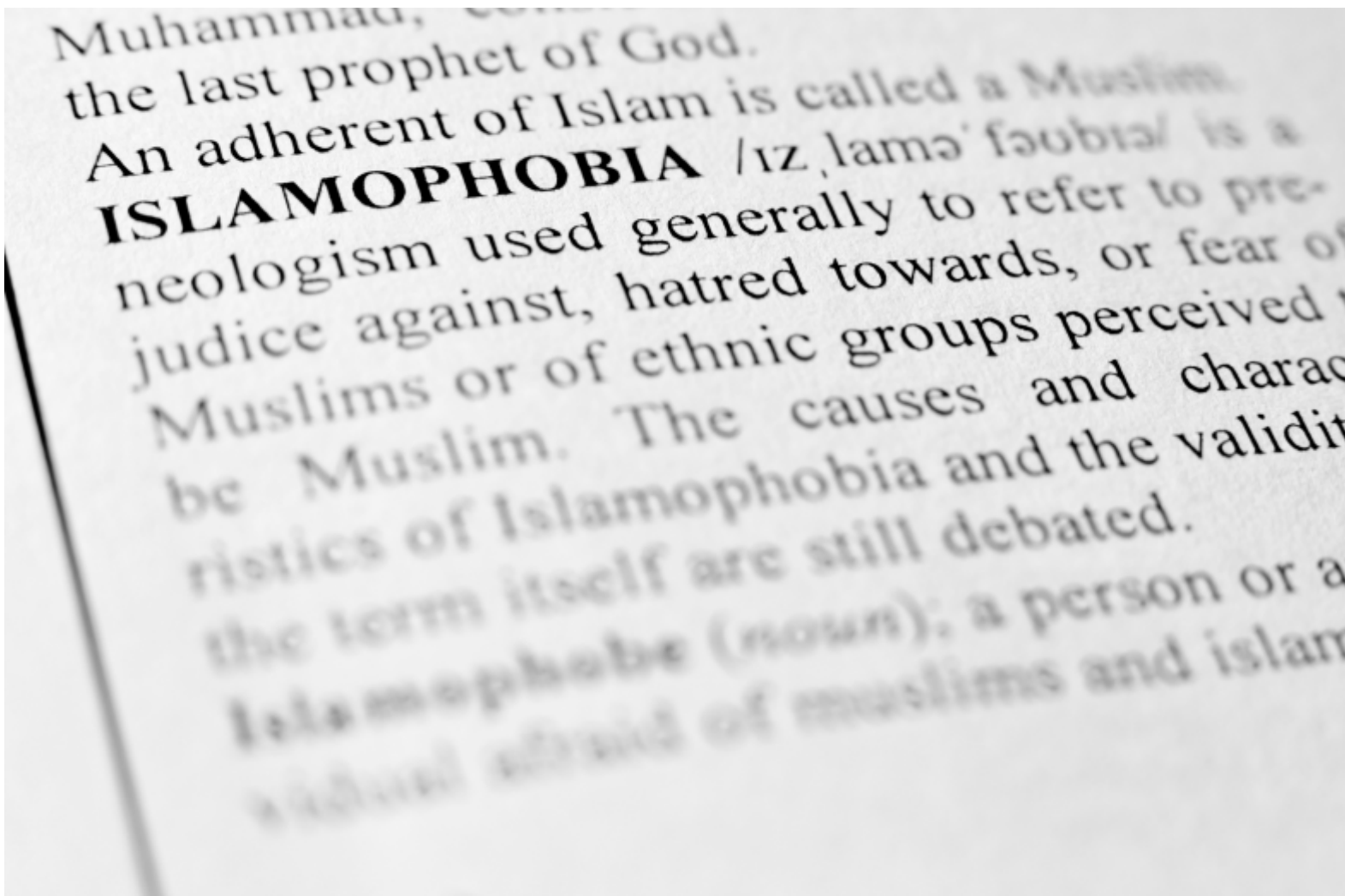
Once, Maajid Nawaz of the Quilliam Foundation [tweeted](#), "I'm a liberal Muslim. I'm not a 'Muslim representative', nor am I 'devout.' I speak from study and experience. No one's forcing you to listen to me."

Clearly, Nawaz is concerned about those who caricature him as a self-styled 'authority' among Muslims, or for Islam. But who is he addressing? Muslims or non-Muslims? Or could it be both? For me, this tweet raises the question of the 'Guilt Trap'; a pressing concern of the times.

The Guilt Trap is the problematic attitude whereby the 'Noble Liberal' feels reluctant and reticent about criticising Islam, in the context of a post-9/11 world. A world where reasonable Muslims and reasonable non-Muslims are caught in the crossfire between radical Islam and their best frenemies, the anti-Muslim bigots.

I wish to discuss the dilemma of the 'guilt trap' as I understand it. I speak as someone who once had a whimsical spiritual interest in Islam some years ago; and who then, for a short while, held rather one-sidedly critical views on Islam; and who eventually came to a more nuanced and ambivalent perspective. And it is certainly true that everyone, however right or wrong their views may be, writes from a standpoint which, for better or worse, is conditioned by their previous experience.

This mention of my trajectory towards the skeptical attitude of 'Islam-ambivalence' offers an opportunity to



acknowledge that my attitudes towards Islam have themselves developed in various broader and socially-rooted 'attitude-contexts.' There is a wide variety of perspectives on Islam, in the UK alone. And given the prevalence of vicious criticism and hostility being directed towards Muslims (both in explicitly jackbooted forms, and in more 'weasel-worded' or 'dog-whistle' forms), it is tempting to lose objectivity with regards to discussing Islam.

This lack of objectivity can lead people to hold either a one-sidedly negative or one-sidedly positive view of Islam 'as a whole,' or even with regard to certain facets or aspects of Islam as a lived historical phenomenon and experience. Islam, like all religions, is something that is at once personal to many individuals, but also greater than any one individual.

Such one-sided attitudes, as I understand it, are to be regretted; and to hold such a one-sided negative or positive attitude on Islam is surely a stance itself consummately open to criticism. And yet, another form of one-sidedness may occur when individuals, out of a perfectly reasonable desire for personal integrity and impartiality, and out of a perfectly understandable desire to avoid disproportionate critique of Islam (and of Muslims) may be tempted to treat Islam in a more patronizingly 'gentle' manner than other human-created ideologies.

Hence the 'guilt trap.' And the 'nobility' of the 'noble liberal.' However, there are many problems with this guilt trap. Here are a few potential difficulties.

1. Out of sight, out of mind: throwing free-thinkers-and-feelers under the bus

Some Muslims might feel that aspects of their religion are harmful to them, or to people they love. This can also be true of 'apostates' (sic). These individuals may end up being silenced if non-Muslims practice the guilt trap.

Susan Moller Okin's controversial essay *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?*, around which an anthology of responses later centered, says:

Establishing group rights to enable some minority cultures to preserve themselves may not be in the best interests of the girls and women of those cultures, even if it benefits the men.

While I do not accept everything in Okin's essay, a critical reading of her essay is still very useful for reasoning about 'hierarchies within hierarchies.' What happens to Muslims who don't have equal status in terms of non-religious identity features, within a religion that is itself often mischaracterised via simplistic polemics?

AAI STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP FUND

- A Project of the AAI Foundation -



Alexander Aan, Indonesia

As part of our work in defending and protecting atheists, AAI has

also established a student scholarship fund to help the disfranchised build new lives as well as to promote rationalism and science in their own communities.



The AAI Foundation awards student scholarships to atheists in impoverished or disadvantaged countries to seek education and training outside of their country: Some in order to start a life in a new country, others to allow them to return to their homeland to educate the next generation.



Please consider contributing to the AAI Student Scholarship Fund, a project of the AAI Foundation, to continue to provide help to those in need.



ATHEIST ALLIANCE INTERNATIONAL
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No doubt, courageous figures like the ex-Muslim Rumi Hasan or Maryam Namazie know they are at risk of marginalisation from guilt-tripping fundamentalists and guilt-trapping noble liberals alike...?

2. Dualism: the pressure to commit

I have just mentioned two categories of people: questioning or critical Muslims, and also ex-Muslims. However would all individuals who either question Islam as a part of their identity, or who have left it, accept this very distinction?

I have not conducted an opinion survey on this matter, but my speculation here is intended to recognize the possibility and indeed the probability of a plurality of attitudes among Muslims and ex-Muslims regarding this matter. My point is that it is rash to merely assume that the 'Muslim/non-Muslim' distinction must necessarily be equally acceptable to all Muslims and non-Muslims who are critical of Islam. If by any chance some individuals feel ambivalent on this matter, their ambivalence should be respected.

For, coercing someone to say 'are you in or out?' is a form of manipulation and of emotional violence whether the interrogation comes from a religious person or a non-religious person. The experiences of questioning Muslims and of former Muslims should be respected as individual experiences, and not as somehow assimilable to a rigid model of how they 'should' feel or think.

I would speculate that the 'guilt trap' regarding criticism of Islam does not help matters. Firstly, it is possible that some Muslims and ex-Muslims may feel their ambivalence towards Islam is heightened by an atmosphere where the boundary between 'reasonable' or 'socially acceptable' critique of Islam and 'unreasonable' and 'socially unacceptable' critique of Islam is very contentious. This is only a hunch of mine, but it would surely be worth interviewing Muslims and ex-Muslims, in order to determine whether there is any basis to my speculation.

Less tentatively, I would suggest that a free and fearless critique of Islam that is neither 'guilt-trap-ridden' nor reactionary and quasi-fascistic, could be of great service to challenging both political Islamism and explicitly reactionary forms of Islam. It may also assist in neutering the more extreme critics of Islam such as those at the 'Winds of Jihad' hate site.

When the day arrives that sceptical Muslims and ex-Muslims can freely participate in a culture of rigorous critique and debate that is free both of far-right fascism, and far-right political Islamism, then there is a great deal of hope that any individuals seeking to relieve and reconcile any tensions within their own heart and mind can find further relief and peace of spirit.



Existing to improve the quality of life for the impoverished and disadvantaged around the world, on a basis of science and reason.

“If Atheists Speak But No One Notices, Are We Making a Difference?”

The AAI Foundation sponsors good works and volunteerism to promote nontheism, science and reason around the world.

Religious privilege and superstition are strongest in countries where the populace struggle for daily survival and where education is reserved for the privileged. The AAI Foundation works to counter such forces through the sponsoring of quality-of-life projects including health care, public infrastructure, and education.

The AAI Foundation also provides opportunities for our members to participate in cultural exchanges volunteer with AAI projects around the world. AAI Members can spend anywhere from two weeks to a year with a local AAI affiliate to improve local conditions or even just to see a new country and experience a new culture.

Learn more about the AAI Foundation and our current projects, and how you can get involved, at:

<http://www.atheistalliance.org>



3. The waiting room: civilisation and its discontented?

To demand high standards of behavior from (say) Catholic, or Orthodox Christians, or the more classically-reformed Protestant Churches, while simultaneously infantilising and patronizing Muslims, is a deeply backhanded compliment to Muslims, who are thus treated as mere babes in civilization, and who are thus detained in the twilight waiting room of the falsely universal and falsely transparent 'Global Village Culture.'

In Provincializing Europe, [Dipesh Chakrabarty](#) says that John Stuart Mill's vision of history dispatched the "rude" nations to an "imaginary waiting room of history," where "some people were to arrive earlier than others."

But is there now the risk of infantilisation of Muslims not only in previously colonized and now (arguably) neocolonized nations; but also in the USA or UK (for example)?

Are religiously conservative Christians (or perhaps others too!) to be considered as though graduating from the waiting room, and walking onto the lower podium of the 'half-civilised?' Even if they are heavily criticized, the very possibility of their being criticized is itself taken as a marker of civilization!

Is the notion that Muslims 'cannot understand' the importance of feminism, LGBT rights or anti-semitism, itself part of an assimilationist 'civilizing mission' or 'mission civilisatrice,' one where Muslims do not exist; only 'the Muslim Community?'

I cannot think of a better way to illustrate this by appealing to the reflections and passionate convictions of the reformist Muslim Irshad Manji. Reading the first chapter of

The Trouble with Islam Today, Manji's frustration with some Muslims is evident. She evokes the spectre of a culture of dependency, where (in her view) many of her fellow Muslims are making excuses and refusing to take responsibility themselves for some key problems such as antisemitism.

Admittedly, there is a great risk of my taking what some may call a 'privileged' stance here.' I genuinely do not wish to be presumptuous, and opportunistically capitalise on what Manji has said about Muslims. I don't know how generalized Manji's views are. And I certainly don't believe, from reading her book, that she had the least desire to imply that all Muslims are at fault in the way she describes.

My point here is a rather different one. I wish to focus not primarily on the attitudes of Muslims, which is something I am happy to leave to Manji. I wish, rather, to focus on the attitudes of non-Muslims, including myself. Is it really correct to assume that Muslims are ignorant, benighted and indoctrinated, to the point they cannot tell right from wrong?

I certainly agree with the individuals, both Muslim and non-Muslim, who say that Islam is 'not monolithic;' insofar as there are certainly Muslims who are committed to freedom, equality, social justice, or any other valuable political and social goal. Muslims are certainly not drones, who have surrendered their conscience to a fictive higher power. And yet, even so, it is worthwhile to show authentic recognition of this 'anti-essentialist' attitude of reconciliation by combining it with a more 'cutting' or 'divisive' analytical eye. One eye directed towards the notion that when some individual Muslims do act out of bigotry, they must somehow be acting out of the 'savage' folly of the legendary 'primitive natives' of Victorian civilised folklore.

**Know of atheist discrimination?
Oppression against nontheists?
Atheist Alliance International**

The Freedom of Thought Report

A Global Report on Discrimination Against Humanists, Atheists and the Nonreligious



www.FreeThoughtReport.com

Unqualified respect, unending bondage

The problem of the guilt trap should cause concern to every person of conscience. Whether one is religious or non-religious, or; whether one considers oneself a humanist, a post-humanist, an anti-humanist or just plain misanthropic, the guilt trap is relevant to the lives of every person.

And in fairness, while the guilt trap surrounds Islam today, it may be another ideology tomorrow; religious, political, or otherwise. It is not 'abnormal' or 'perverse' to feel reticent about criticising views that other people hold dear.

How much more so, when bigoted organisations like the English Defence League are harassing Muslims; while others, more superficially respectable, use weasel words about the fabled 'Muslim Community' of uncritical, unreflective robots?

Yet, even so, pandering to highly contestable religious assumptions, regardless of the religion in question, is something that can harm everyone in a society. Hence, it is not a question of merely 'trying to save Muslims from themselves.' Avoiding the guilt trap is, at its best, a way to move away from the condescending notions of assimilationists.

Why should non-Muslims hold Muslims hostage to their own religious identity? If feminist Muslims, pro-LGBT Muslims, religiously sceptical Muslims, or other dissidents are not visible, then this is not only a problem with some of

the ideas and practical expressions of Islam. On the contrary, it is also a problem with the attitude of some of us non-Muslims.

So, can non-Muslims also ask ourselves whether the problem lies also with us? Whenever we see a controversial comment from a Muslim or ex-Muslim that stands out starkly against the 'emotional landscape' of the Guilt Trap, what do we do? Do we immediately denounce it? Do we turn the page immediately, or click on a different website? Do we feel a twinge of discomfort? And what is that twinge? Is that twinge a sign merely of anxiety? Or also of tension, of contradiction? But could it be that the knots in one's mind, heart and stomach are knots composed of threads that many of us simply lack the courage to unravel? Can we even go a little bit away towards picking away at the thread? Or shall every one of us seek the line of least resistance?

Regardless of what one's views are on religion, on humanism and on rationalism, and bearing in mind all caveats on the problematic history of the term 'human,' I say this - the guilt trap does not counteract dehumanisation. The guilt trap is itself dehumanisation. Human beings are people, and people are reasoners.

The knotty thread of the guilt trap does not lead one away from the Minotaur. It only leads one deeper into the labyrinth.

The knotted bonds of the guilt trap, if they remain firm and rigid, can imprison just as much as the iron chains of Muslim-haters and racists. ▲



Wallace Runnymede is an atheist Christian, but is impatient with foundationalist and fundamentalist views about God and about religion. His satire has been published on a number of outlets; in particular Glossy News. He also blogs at Wallace Runnymede.

Give me Freedom From Religion

STEPHEN MOONEY

Section 116 of the Constitution of Australia states that "The Commonwealth shall not make any law for establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the Commonwealth." The High Court has never ruled any law to be in contravention of Section 116. This section does not apply to individual states. In 1944 and 1988 the Federal Government held a referendum to amend the constitution so that section 116 would apply to the laws made by the individual states. The referendum failed on both occasions.

As an individual who embraces science and rationality, I consider religion to be an insult to my intelligence and an unacceptable financial burden due to religions neither being required to pay local council rates nor State or Federal Government tax. Atheists are subsidizing those who believe in the fantasy that a super-being they call god will give them a perfect eternal existence after death.

The onus is on those who believe in the existence of god to prove that god exists. The argument from design claims that it's no accident that the

universe is fit for human habitation. It could have been unfit for human habitation with different laws of physics. This begs for an explanation of the nature of these alternative laws in this alternative universe in which humans can't exist and so can't raise the spurious argument from design for the existence of god. The universe is how it is because, as far as we can know, it couldn't be any other way.

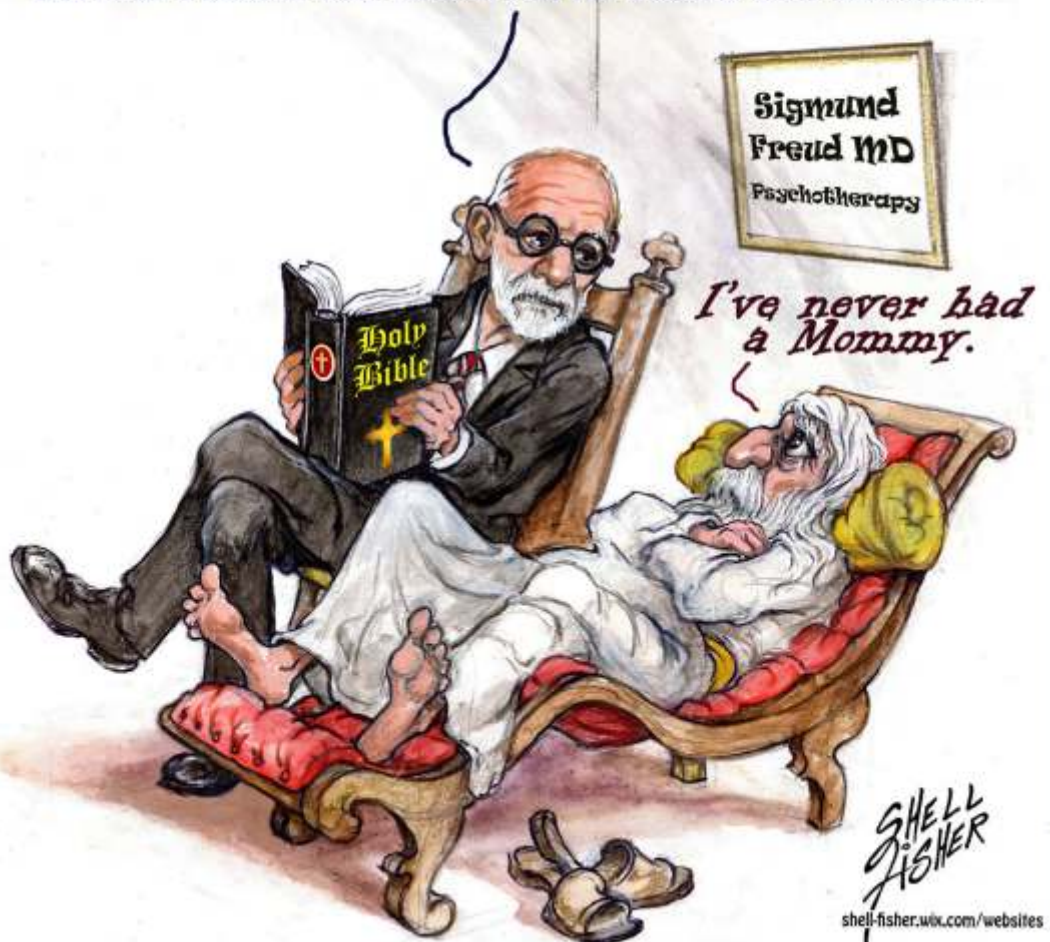
Religions are not the only organizations that don't pay rates and tax. The self-appointed Australian Tax Payers' Alliance point out that "... if you want to promote fishing, agriculture, tourism, or vineculture (sic), or even if you want to promote animal racing or sports - you are exempt

Holy Smoke

Well, Lord . . . having read your biography, my diagnosis is you have a concupiscent fetish for burning people alive.

To wit: Leviticus 20:14 21:9 10:1-2, Genesis 28:24, Joshua 7:15 24:25, Numbers 11:1 16:35, Deuteronomy 32:21-24, Psalms 21:9, Isaiah 47:13-14

Did your Mommy ever spank you for playing with matches?



from tax". They also claim that "There is nothing – NOTHING – special about promoting religion." And finally they claim that those demanding that religions pay tax are "... anti-liberty, anti-choice and are, effectively, using big government to single out and harass religious organizations in Australia."

Fishing and agriculture and tourism and viniculture and animal racing and sport do not require the belief in an all-powerful non-existent being. I'm not an anti-sportist, an anti-recreationalist, or an anti-agriculturalist. I'm an atheist and a semi-anti-theist: I don't believe in the existence of god and I only want religion to pay council rates and government tax.

Religion is based on faith, acceptance without question, the antithesis of science and rationality, and this is what makes it special. Don't just take my word for it. Ask Christians and Jews and Muslims and all the others who believe in the existence of god if they see their religion is equivalent to all other organizations that are exempt from paying rates and tax. All the religions are complicit in the unfair treatment of atheists. If they are truly fair minded, if they truly believe in my right not to subsidize their phantasy, then they will join me in demanding that all religions pay council rates and government tax.

I herewith give all religious organizations the opportunity to join me in demanding that both our State and Federal Governments immediately ensure that their constitutions uphold my right not to have to carry the financial burden of subsidizing religion in any of its forms. A failure to act in this matter will result in me having no choice but to make application to Gillian Triggs of the Australian Human Rights Commission to remedy what is clearly a case of large scale and long running financial discrimination.

A recommendation for a financial settlement in favor of all atheists is bound to be the result. If you've evolved to the point of realizing that there is no god, then you should establish that you're a bonafide atheist by registering with the Australian Human Rights Commission. In the body of a message place the words "I'm an atheist and I want compensation".

A rich man may not get into heaven, but a rich atheist can have one hell of a good time here on Earth. It's demeaning to see some of my fellow humans embracing ideas such as original sin. A non-existent couple in a non-existent garden take a non-existent apple from a non-existent tree against a directive from a non-existent being, not to do so. I understand that a non-existent snake is also involved in this non-existent event. Another religion demeans my fellow Humans by requiring that they submit and pray to the non-existence god with their heads on the ground and their bums in the air.

The charitable works of religions does not justify them for not paying council rates and government tax. These works are a choice made by the religions and the specific nature of those works is determined by the religions. Just giving things to people is not always the best assistance that you can offer. Do-gooders can do more harm than good. To compound the financial injury to atheists, those who give money to religious charities receive a reduction in the tax they have to pay.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that the number of people in Australia reporting no religious belief has risen from 0.4% in 1911 to 22% in 2011. With those claiming to be Catholic at 25% and Anglican at 17%, atheism is in a respectable second place. With the all blacks, caps, and sticks across the ditch the category of no religion has increased to 35%. Although New Zealand leads the way, England and Wales have seen an increase to 25%, Canada to 24%, with the United States lagging behind with an increase to 20%. Atheism is on the rise around the world.

In the name of all that's holy, as in holy shit, why the hell should atheists have to subsidize the phantasies of those who "can't handle the truth" that human existence is a consequence of the process of the Universe that incorporates biological evolution and the intellectual development that sees the purpose of life as the realization of the inherent constructive abilities of both individuals and the collective called humanity that does not require the involvement of a super-being of any description. Give me freedom from religion, with a cheque in the mail.♠



Stephen Mooney is an independent researcher and writer who developed the rationalist and materialist perspective of the universe that has revolutionized cosmology and rattled the physics establishment to its abstractionist foundations by pointing out that the gravitational and nuclear forces are caused by the absorption of emission and that the stability of matter is relative to the density of impacting emission and brought this to the attention of the community through an article about a vase and a painting called "On my way to the revolution" which in due course will be published by various on-line journals and magazines and which is also located at home.spin.net.au/paradigm/on.pdf: A true force of nature can never be denied.

Discordianism

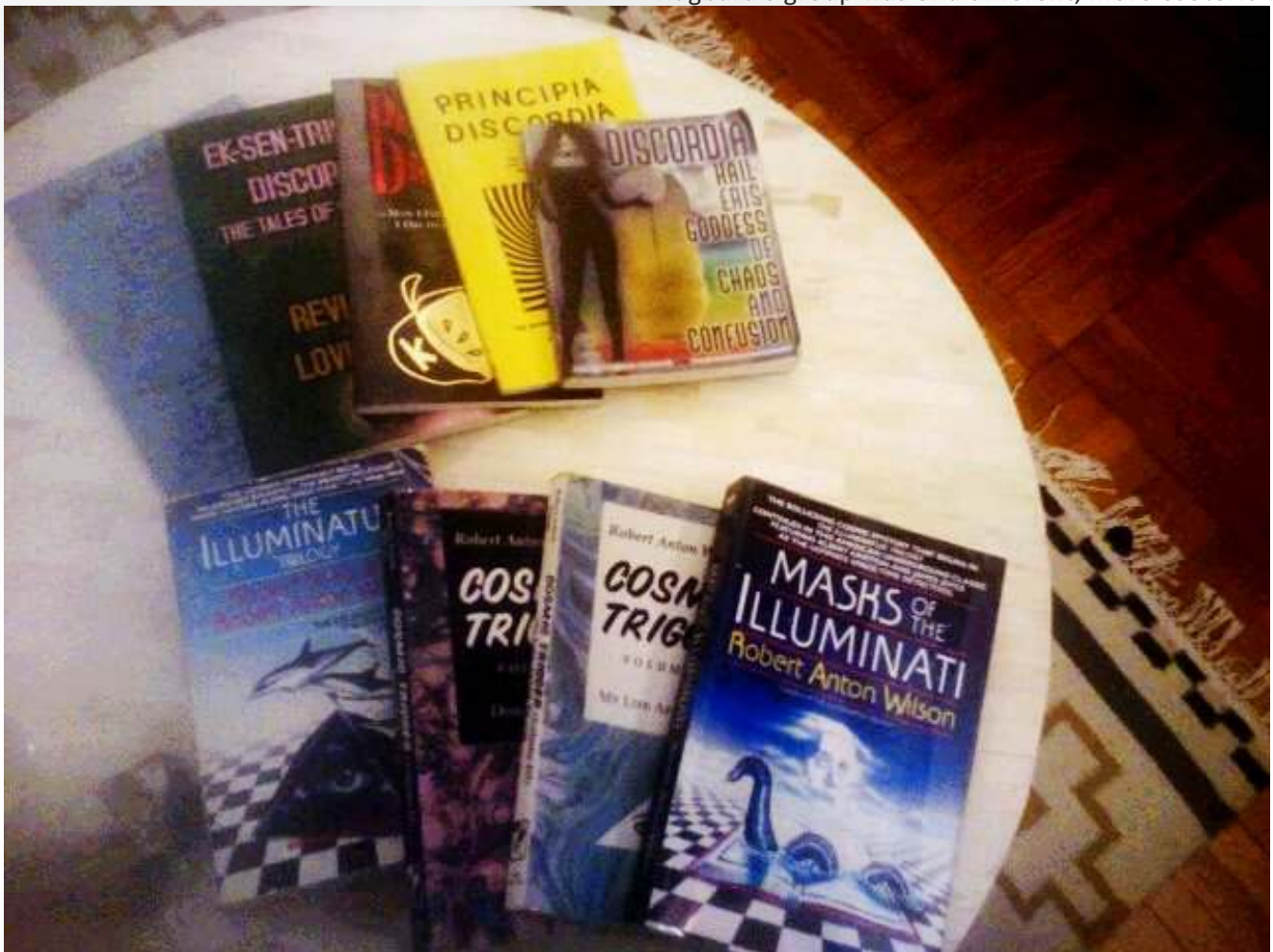
BRENTON CLUTTERBUCK

Hagbard arranges to meet me at 'the spike' on O'Connell street. More correctly called the spire, it's known colloquially as the spike in honour of Ireland's heroin problem. I'm leaning on it when Hagbard Celine comes over to me. He is nearly 50, wearing a blue jumper, a straw trilby and black glasses. We walk off to a local fast food restaurant, and grab a seat. Hagbard is difficult to understand. He speaks rapidly, excitedly, his words tripping over each other. He has a thick Irish accent that further obscures his words. "I haven't been doing it that long," he says of Discordianism. "Being married makes it difficult to get out at the moment."

He tells me to put him down as a 'failed Discordian.' "It took me 10 years to get from point A to point B. Now, I wouldn't even try to define Discordianism; I have my own beliefs." I don't blame Hagbard for not defining Discordianism. I've been travelling the world interviewing Discordians for nearly five

months and I still struggle to define it. But at a glance, Discordianism is a parody religion with a serious side. It's a celebration of chaos and disorder, and promotes radical individualism (one key idea is that every man, woman and child is a Pope of Discordia). The ideas of Discordia were developed and expanded by a collection of co-conspirators, many of whom were close personal friends, including authors Mal2 and Omar Khyam Ravenhurst, whose work *Principia Discordia* codified the key ideas, and Robert Anton Wilson and Robert Shea, authors of the madcap conspiracy fuelled *Illuminatus!* trilogy, which features the character Hagbard Celine, from whom our current Hagbard has taken his namesake.

We sit for a while and talk. At the time that I'd met him he was running one of the major three Facebook groups on Discordianism; Discordian Society 3179 (3179 being the 'Discordian year,' Discordians having their own irreverent and quirky calendar system). The oldest group 'Discordian Society' was more or less a cesspit of 4chan style toxicity; racist memes, porn and misogyny shared by a group whose understanding of 'traditional' Discordianism was minimal. A third group was run by well-known figure 'Professor Cramulus' and had a much higher calibre of content. Hagbard's group was of a different, more esoteric vibe,



A collection of Discordian books

perhaps a little closer to the tone of those early Discordian works. “The group that I started- in a way I wanted something different; I signed up and to be blunt I couldn't keep up with the speed of people. I wanted something a bit quieter.”

Hagbard first came across Discordianism through Linux's feature ddate, which displays the Discordian date—a feature best explained by the historical prevalence of Discordianism in geek circles. He enjoys working with computers. One of his jobs has been working for an Internet Service Provider, and the computer he uses back at his home was his own creation, seven years back.

“I used to look at ddate on my computer. It's a program on my Linux, and basically I would just use it every time I opened the computer. Sometimes I would just run it just to see - I didn't even know what it was. Just to see something, today is “Setting Orange” like what the hell is that? Just a picture in my mind. And other days it would say “today is—that today's actually Pungenday!”

While a few more clues appeared here and there - Hagbard stumbled across the *Illuminatus!* trilogy, from which he would later take his name - the mystery of Ddate remained. “Last year my wife contracted cancer. Halfway through treatment last year I was unemployed. I was studying, I was doing this course online but I still have a lot of time on my hands.” Hagbard decided to unravel the mystery of ddate, which led him to the *Principia Discordia* - the scrapbook-like 'key book' of Discordianism. “I was head over heels for it. I loved it. I don't think my wife was in the room when I read it. Then I went on Facebook and look for 'Discordian.’” His wife, he says happily, recovered from her cancer.

“I think my mind just stopped. That's how I started analysing the stuff with the date.” He tells me he feels like asking Eris what took her so long to find him. “But then again maybe she has her reasons. And I suspect I'll never know what that is

but anyway... I've been working on a lot of stuff like psychological conspiracy and spiritual stuff... All the little pieces that were missing started kicking into place. I'm not afraid.”

“Went to mass because the wife is still Catholic,” he tells me. “I'm not going to bash her around the head with Discordian stuff. I admire her courage. She had a life of her own. I know she's been through a helluva lot, but she came through it. We went to mass and- formally being Catholic- saying the stations of the cross and you doing this,” he motions through the stations, “and instead of a hail Mary I found it how amusing, I'm going 'Hail Eris'. I'm not afraid. I'm not afraid of religion. I overcame a fear of religion.”

Part of this overcoming of his fear of religion was another organisation he encountered towards the start of the century called Fundamentalists Anonymous. “It had five steps, basically one of those five step programs that you may have experience of. Fundamentalists Anonymous is for people who have in some form being abused by... It's not necessarily sexual abuse - though there is a lot of that going around in Ireland and Australia and everywhere else, in America - but it can even just be a-” He is gathering steam now, and I can't quite catch the last words but I'm left with the impression that the group helped him deprogram himself from the fears of his childhood experiences with religion. 'Religious addiction, that's why I was out of my head years ago, in a lot of confusion. In my family I was the scapegoat, the black sheep. That's when I realised there's no such thing as the group; we're all individuals, so I left all that behind me. The message we have to carry to people is 'there really is freedom. Show me one religion when it's freedom of spirit, when you can be yourself, be anything you like, where you can go around saying fuck the Pope, fuck this, I'm a Pope! It's complete freedom, it's just that; we're going against the grain.”

We finish eating. He shows me his lighter, with Hagbard Celine engraved in the side. He doesn't smoke any more but



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he couldn't resist the lighter when he saw it.

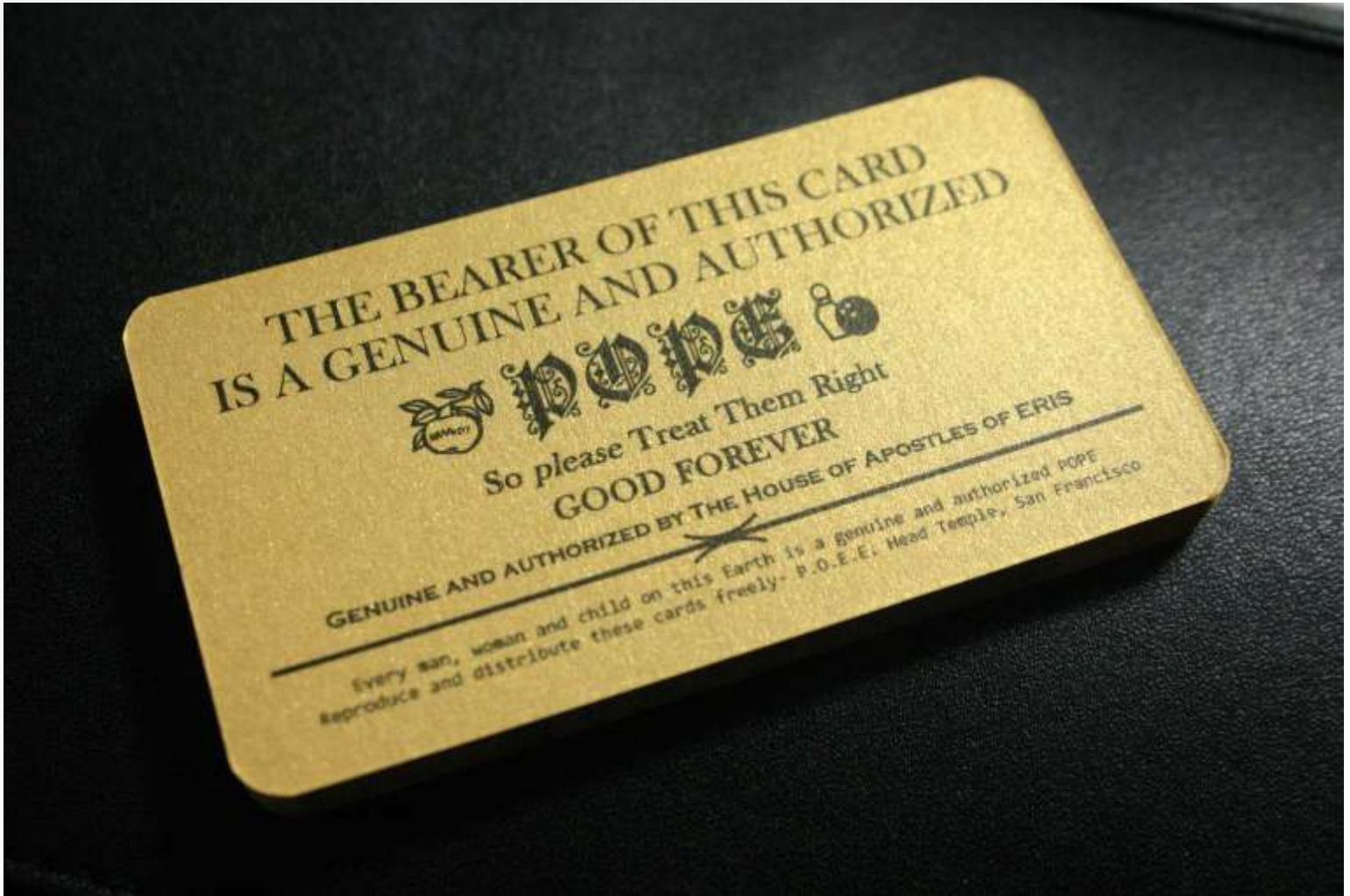
We catch a few busses and walk some distance to his house. It's a modest space. We go downstairs into a small section that serves as Hagbard's study space and he begins to show me around. On the wall is a picture of Eris, hand drawn by Discordian group member Monica King, who sells handmade Discordian crafts under the name Eristic patterns.

He also has a collection of books, including the *Principia Discordia* and copies of *Zen Without Zen Masters* by Camden

subject: termination of your contract

Dear Mr. Satan:

It is our duty to inform you that your services as deity of evil, and tormentor of souls in hell is no longer required. We at E. K. D. Inc. have been reviewing all the old contracts that we inherited when we took over the Universe from Yahweh, Jehovah, Allah, and Associates, and we feel that your services do not meet our present needs. The property known as "Hell" is to be condemned and torn down to be replaced with an amusement park. You have 30 days to vacate the premises. All the tormented souls of sinners are



Pope Card" Seems legit

Benares and *The Illuminoids* by Neil Wilgus. Robert Anton Wilson's introduction to the Robinson edition recommends these three books be read in complement with each other. He also has a copy of the *Book of Eris*, by St Verethaine, a once heavily active Discordian. He quotes to me one of his favourite parts of the Book of Eris.

MEMO

From: The office of Eris Kallisti Discordia, Goddess of the Multiverse

To: Lucifer Baalzeebub Satan, Esq.

to be reassigned to reincarnation on a case by case basis. All demons will get a two week severance package. Please do not use us as a reference.

Signed: Eris Kallisti Discordia

Hagbard describes his childhood as a cross between the Simpsons and South Park. "If that's not Discordian I don't know what is." I don't pry too far into it, but religion is the most salient theme. As he tells me about the fears of hellfire and damnation, the affection he feels for the above quote becomes a little clearer.

"We were terrified when we were kids," he tells me. "I've come across references to the painting they showed us when we were kids which is a pretty grim- I don't worry about it anymore but I did really remember it. 'This is what will happen to you if you're not good. If you're not perfect.'" He speaks so quickly at some points here that his words race over each other and I can't make them out.

"If any Discordian thinks they're perfect, I won't say they're fake, I'll just say they're not a Discordian," he chuckles loudly in his manner, throwing his face into it. "So I'm now saying I've been through a lot of stuff myself, different things, different groups, different sort of spiritual things. This; I think I've come home. It's like a homecoming for me. I'm not in a hurry. I'm not in a panic."

The main message of Discordia, for Hagbard, can be summed up in the words of his namesake in the *Illuminatus!* trilogy; "Think for yourself, Schmuck!"

"The essence of our message is, yes, in our religion ... you become your own infallible Pope." To prove the point, Hagbard even has an official Discordian Pope card saying, "This person is a POPE it says, so please treat them right."

"Religion really annoys me. Until I found Eris. Now I can have a laugh. I stress, in a good way. 'No negativity' is a keyword here. I've done things in my past that I regret and I got over them. Don't do them today. We've all grown up doing foolish things, you know. I like me today. That was before I came across Discordianism but I learned to like myself. I think as part of the mental health, from my experience, part of the mental health community for people who've been through a dysfunctional life, dysfunctional family, dysfunctional political system etc, etc. Or lack of a political, etc. I just think when you get to Discordianism it's something like - they say the greatest healing is being able to laugh."

"I have a feeling the Goddess called me now for a reason," Hagbard tells me. Lennon's voice sings 'Imagine' in the background. He tells me he loves the detachment of Eris, as

explored in a *Principia Discordia* story 'a sermon on love and ethics in which author 'Mal2' beseeches Eris for help.

"I am filled with fear and tormented with terrible visions of pain. Everywhere people are hurting one another, the planet is rampant with injustices, whole societies plunder groups of their own people, mothers imprison sons, children perish while brothers war. O, woe."

WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH THAT, IF IT IS WHAT YOU WANT TO DO?

"But nobody wants it! Everybody hates it."

OH. WELL, THEN STOP.

At which moment She turned herself into an aspirin commercial and left The Polyfather stranded alone with his species.

"Just like that, instead of the usual crap 'if you believe in me harder' or 'if you fuckin' tithe me more money' or 'if you do this things will change for you', she says 'why are you doing it? Stop it.' Then the television turns back to an aspirin advert. It's just that angle that I really feel - I use the word 'should' but we really should be getting from spirituality but we're not. We're getting into finger pointing. Finger pointing, blame and condemnation.

'As I said, I'd already overcome my fear of religion and its effect on my life. And then I found Eris, so it's a laugh, it's a philosophy, it's a way- when you've done the psychological work I've done and with others as I have done in the past, and groups and stuff like that and a lot of powerful stuff that I won't go into. I needed to - I needed something. Somebody said, the highest level of spirituality is when you learn to laugh. That's the end result. You go through all the pain, the grovelling then the tunnelling, peeling back the layers of the onion which sometimes makes you cry. I've been there, done that. I've been through the whole thing. The final thing is you laugh it off. A real good belly laugh. At the end of the day, why not?' ▲



Brenton Clutterbuck is a writer and teacher from QLD Australia who has written at length on the parody religion Discordianism with the Chasing Eris project www.chasingeris.com

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www.facebook.com/pages/AfghansAtheists-Organization/290988360929383

Australia

Atheist Foundation of

Australia

www.atheistfoundation.org.au

Progressive Atheists

www.progressiveatheists.org
Sydney Atheists Incorporated
www.SydneyAtheists.org

Canada

Libres penseurs athées

www.lpa.atheisme.ca
www.AFT.atheisme.ca

Denmark

Ateistisk Selskab (Danish
Atheist Society)

www.ateist.dk

Germany

Internationaler Bund der
Konfessionslosen und
Atheisten

www.ibka.org

Greece

Atheist Union of Greece

www.atheia.gr

Indonesia

Indonesian Atheists

www.indonesianatheists.wordpress.com

Ireland

Atheist Ireland

www.atheist.ie

Iraq

Atheist Alliance of Iraq

www.facebook.com/groups/AI.IRAQ

Israel

Hofesh – Freedom from

Religion NPO

www.Hofesh.org.il/English/Index.html

Lebanon

Freethought Lebanon

www.freethoughtlebanon.net

Netherlands

Atheistisch Verbond (Atheist
Union)

www.atheistischverbond.nl

Norway

The Heathen Society

www.hedning.no

Palestine

Palestinian Atheist-Agnostic
Movement

www.facebook.com/pages/palestinian-atheistagnostic-movement/68463

Philippines

Philippine Atheists &
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Society Inc (PATAS)

www.patasc.org

Humanist Alliance

Philippines International
www.hapihumanist.org

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Front Ateistyczny

www.facebook.com/FrontAteistyczny-497449670424725

Puerto Rico

Secular Humanists of Puerto
Rico

www.humanistaspr.org

South Africa

Free Society Institute

www.fsi.org.za

Suomi

Atheist Association of Finland

www.dlc.fi/~etkirja/Atheist.htm

Turkey

Ateizm Derneği

www.ateizmdernegi.org

Uganda

Humanist Association for
Leadership, Equity &
Accountability (HALEA)

www.haleauganda.org

United Kingdom

Atheism UK

www.atheismuk.com

United States of America

Atheist Alliance of America

www.atheistallianceamerica.org

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