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February 2020



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Editorial:

The 'Woke' culture



Socially acceptable behavior, a term I prefer to 'morality', is a changing landscape and it certainly doesn't come from the scriptures. There are three reasons for this contention:

1. socially acceptable behavior pre-existed the Bible and the Qur'an; it even pre-existed humanity - many animals exhibit pro-social behavior.

2. it has changed throughout history - the Bible has no word for rape because it was considered to be theft - of a man's property!

3. it continues to differ between different communities.

You know those moving walkways at the airports? That's what 'morality' is like. I've been on that conveyor belt throughout my life. As a teenager I learned that girls with short skirts were 'asking for it' and it was considered to be normal for young men to 'sow their wild oats'. Women were supposed to be the custodians of their virginity by 'keeping their legs together'!

Then there was a seismic change in the sixties thanks to the development of the contraceptive pill, which enabled females to adopt the same careless attitude towards sex as had previously only been enjoyed by men.

Broadly, in 'the West' rape has long been considered taboo and the sexual emancipation of women

more or less rendered it unnecessary because consensual sex became readily available and was revealed to be much more fun! How would you force an unwilling partner to perform fellatio, doggy-style or 'girl on top'?

Elsewhere, barbaric practices still prevail. Women are still regarded as property and treated with inhumane disregard. 'Adulterous' wives can be stoned to death and are considered to be 'unclean' when on their period. It's as if behavior was fossilized centuries ago and the airport walkway of behavioral evolution has never arrived.

So, although women are slowly being treated better globally, it depends on your geographical location and, even in enlightened societies, there are a few Luddites. These are men who seem to have got off the moving walkway and still apply out-of-date standards while the rest of society has continued to evolve and left them behind.

Meanwhile, the internet has been invented and communication has become so much easier. People can private message each other and share tearful grievances about how they were abused. Hashtags can become a bandwagon... Everything happens with so much speed many of us get left behind - even Adobestock still illustrates 'Woke'

with pictures of awakenings and, guess what, most of them feature young women! What would today's feminists have to say about that?

Men with dinosaur behavior patterns have been outed and prosecuted in a blaze of publicity. Victims have been compensated and culprits have been imprisoned. But already some women have been convicted and jailed for contempt of court through filing false accusations. The motivation to do this is tempting - allegations can attract sympathy, fame and wealth...

And, social media is a much more accessible and less painful forum than a court of law. 'Likes' can be regarded as vindication. Allegations are not judged online. It's a 'no lose' situation for a needy, attention-seeking, low self-esteem accuser; it can offer them all the medication that they think they deserve. And there's a vociferous cabal of opinionated vloggers ready to back them.

Has the pendulum swung too far as usual?

John Richards
AAI Publications
Director



President's Letter



At AAI we're always on the lookout for good campaigns. Campaigns that promote atheism worldwide, fight for our rights and help non-believers in need. This year we've nailed it. We've got campaigns dealing with all of the above along with our ongoing work.

On the legal front, we are supporting our affiliate in Greece to have religious symbols in court houses removed (see picture). It is part of the Atheists Union of Greece's plan to keep pushing toward separation of church and state. Last year they were successful in getting a ruling that the Government can no longer list the religion of a person on their high school diploma (there was no option for non-believers).

In Nigeria we continue our court case against a State Governor who wants to use public funds to build a large worship center. The first ruling went against us but after obtaining an outside a legal review, AAI Board decided to move forward with an appeal. These battles in heavily religious countries take time and resources but we feel it is important

and will continue to pay the legal fees for this court challenge.

We are extremely pleased to make a big contribution this year to helping atheists in danger. AAI is one of several groups paying the wages and costs associated with hiring a person in Turkey to assist atheist refugees there. Many non-believers fled to Turkey to apply for refugee status or asylum as their lives were in danger in their home country. Today they sit there, some having waited for 7 years with still no answer on their refugee status. They are not allowed to work but survive by finding casual or low paid employment. The person being hired will assist these atheists in finding housing, processing refugee applications and connecting them with others.

This year AAI will test pilot a safe house. Atheism is growing around the world including in many religious countries. It is not possible for all atheists in danger to leave their home country. So we are providing funds for a safe house. If this works out, then we will look to expand this program to other

countries.

AAI is also looking to sponsor a conference in an Islamic country. This would be a huge breakthrough and one we are working hard to ensure it will succeed.

All of this plus our Right To Be Secular campaign, which we are presenting to the UN in March, raising legal funds for those charged with blasphemy, supporting secular education and many other initiatives make this a challenging yet promising year.

Track our successes on our website and in social media.

Website url:
atheistalliance.org

Facebook:
[AtheistAllianceInternational](https://www.facebook.com/AtheistAllianceInternational)

Gail Miller
*President, Atheist
Alliance
International*



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How I changed my mind about: Homosexuality



I was raised as a fundamentalist Christian. Mind you, I was raised *Canadian* fundamentalist so, we tended to be less extreme overall. Nevertheless, I was taught that homosexuality was wrong; that homosexual acts were abominable. I was not taught that gay people were pedophiles as is taught in some extreme fundamentalist circles.

Largely the idea was that it was not the best way to live. That it was not in accord with 'god's plan'. Therefore you would never be as happy and healthy in a homosexual relationship as in a normal, god-ordained marriage.

People often ask about my deconversion and I never tell the same tale twice because the truth is that the journey out of faith is complex. Much of it happened while I was still a believer. Many cords had to be unwound, many chains broken before I was finally free.

As a good child I feared homosexuality. It was a sin, one god had ordered death for in the bible. Granted in the "child friendly" version of Sodom and Gomorrah the mob merely beat people, possibly to death. Also the whole "take my daughters instead" thing was conveniently skipped. But I was still told about Leviticus. And that homosexuality was evil, an affront to

god, and a choice.

When I left high school, and youth group, I started to have more contact with a variety of different people. I still attended a great deal of church, but I was an adult now and was no longer controlled in the same way. Talking with other people and being free to form my own opinion did not convince me that homosexuality was right, but it did convince me of how little I knew about the subject. It also showed me how many people had been hurt by those from my side. This is the decision I came to at the time.

"I believe homosexuality is immoral because that is what I was taught. That is not a good reason to believe it, but it is not necessarily a good reason to discard the belief either.

I myself am not gay and do not know any gay people well enough to weigh in on the very private matter of their sexuality. I should not speak too openly about this matter. If asked, I should encourage people to pray about their sexuality since god is clearly a more appropriate person to talk to than me."

I should be clear that my intention in the word 'pray' was to encourage them to talk to god and follow their convictions, not that "pray the gay away" bullshit. Even I

knew that was a recipe for misery.

Regardless, I came to the conclusion that, whatever my personal ideals, the only aspect I had the right to impose on others was that of demonstrable harm. My moral instincts were better than my religious teachings. And as Elizabeth Bennet summarized, 'who am I to dictate in what manner my friend is to be happy?'

Then I waited and watched. I was trying to be fair-minded and equitable. I realize of course that I was a long way from it. But I was doing the best I could at the time. I was still trapped by the idea that I "had to" believe homosexuality was wrong, but I couldn't justify it.

So I turned to one of the only sayings attributed to Jesus that I still have any use for. Judge the tree by its fruit.

I saw that gay people generally had moral standards in keeping with their age and social group. Sometimes better. I saw people like Portia DeRossi be horribly unhealthy, then come out, enter into a gay relationship, and find health and peace. I read about protesters at Pride parades and how gay Christians in the parade turned to face them and sang "Jesus Loves Me."

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I also saw vehement anti-gay activists exposed as hypocrites and predators. I saw them caught soliciting sex in bathrooms or from gay escorts. Many faced charges for abusing their position and soliciting sexual favours from their parishioners, often underage. I was embarrassed that these were the people I was associated with. Little by little I became more unwilling to own an anti-gay bias.

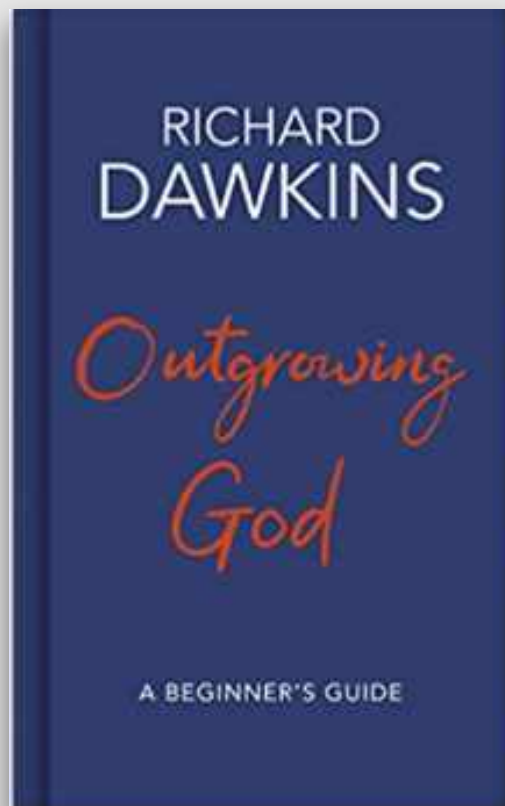
Finally I couldn't take it anymore. Homosexuality was so obviously normal and healthy and the opposition was clearly doing so much needless harm that I concluded people had misunderstood god.

I finally did something I have never done before or since. I deliberately looked for a religious justification for affirming homosexuality and determined to accept it if at all possible. This is an action I knew on a fundamental level to be dishonest. But I did it anyway. Because it was the only way I could align the belief that god was good with demonstrable reality.

Now, without the pain of cognitive dissonance I can look back and recognize how twisted my views were and I am a bit ashamed at how long it took me to change. It is not only that Love Wins but that truth wins in the end. Actions have spoken much louder to me over the years and their impact runs deeper.

Truth lived is much more powerful than truth spoken.

**Exvangelical
Lileth**
Regular
Contributor



Richard Dawkins has a new book, *Outgrowing God*, subtitled 'A beginner's guide' (Bantam Press, 2019) especially written for younger readers.

It summarizes, in a very readable way, Dawkins' main arguments as found in his 'God Delusion'. That is:

1. Humans have invented and worshiped many gods - how can one decide which, if any, are true? Especially as most children follow the religion of their parents. Children should not be categorized by their parents' religion - they have to make up their own minds... it may be pleasant, but the important question is - Is it true?

2. Not all Bible morality (e.g. support for slavery, women as inferior, homophobia, death for breaking religious rules and/or unbelief etc) can now be taken as 'good'. We have modernised morality,

based on our greater knowledge and experience. We don't need a god to be moral.

3. Natural selection can account for the growth of the rules and customs which evolved in the past, some of which have been incorporated into the various religions of the world. We can decide which of these are still useful.

4. We can look forward to employing science to solve remaining big questions, e.g. the origin of life, the apparent 'fine-tuning' of those physical constants required for supporting life on earth. Saying 'God did it' does not solve these problems, because a god is even more improbable.

Norman Bacrac
Secular World's Book
Reviewer

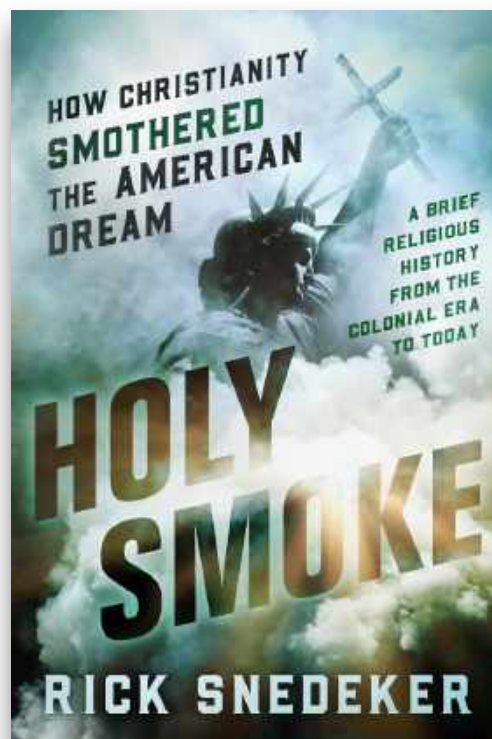


Growing up in an oil “camp” in Saudi Arabia provided lots of exotic experiences, round-the-world travel and yet, somehow, a recognizable American childhood.

On a steamy August day in 1953, Rick Snedeker, then just three years old, stepped off an Arabian American Oil Co. (Aramco) company airliner with his family into a life as different from what they left behind as sandpaper is to silk. It was to prove fabulously exotic and at the same time just like “home” in many ways.

In his charming memoir — *3,001 Arabian Days: Growing up in an American Oil Camp in Saudi Arabia (1953-1962)* — author Snedeker describes, via a series of vignettes, his fond and strange remembrances of living for nearly a decade in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.

Shift + Command and click on the pic to buy.



Thomas Walters, the newly appointed professor of natural philosophy and astronomy at Tideland College, strode confidently into the faculty lounge and scanned the room. He observed that a couple of gray-haired men had glanced in his direction, frowned and immediately returned to their reading. He was exhilarated, yet his pounding heart evidenced a touch of anxiety as well...

Marshall Moskow has written an absorbing historical drama about science, faith, and social upheaval during the period of reconstruction after the American Civil War. The reader follows the experiences of Thomas, his family; two former slaves employed by him; a professor of Latin from Germany with a secret past; and three questioning, rambunctious students.

Shift + Command and click on the pic to buy

Sartre, God and Freedom

Picture of Jean-Paul Sartre by <https://www.flickr.com/people/69061470@N05> - https://www.flickr.com/photos/government_press_office/6470403371/, CC BY 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=37461801>



The famous Russian novelist, Fyodor Dostoevsky, wrote in his novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, "If God did not exist, everything would be permitted".

For religious people and theists, this realization settles the discussion on whether morality is possible without God and whether it is good to believe in God. Theists hold the belief that a world without God is a world without guidance, without an objective moral code, and without punishment for bad deeds.

Thus, in that world, the sentence "everything would be permitted" serves as a warning against those who advocate for a world without God. A world in which everything is permitted is a world which is chaotic, immoral, and in which humans have no motivation to be good or nowhere to turn to understand what morality actually is.

According to the theist, an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, and omnipresent god, a god which describes the God of the Abrahamic religions, is the only entity that can give meaning to life, set moral rules, provide moral guidance, and keep everything in order. Without that God, everything is permitted, and morality collapses.

The theist cannot imagine any reason as to why someone would see acts such as murder or theft as

impermissible as, according to her, there is nothing that *renders* them impermissible. In fact, according to the theist, the only entity which would establish that the truth of the claim "murder is wrong" is God.

For the theist, if we want to avoid a world which is immoral and chaotic, we need God, and the theist sees Dostoevsky's famous saying as the end point.

However, the theist is too quick in interpreting Dostoevsky's saying in her favour. Jean-Paul Sartre, the French existentialist philosopher, offers a different reading of Dostoevsky's phrase - a reading which reflects his whole philosophy and which views the phrase as only the starting point for existentialism.

In one of his most famous works, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Jean-Paul Sartre, said: Dostoevsky once wrote: "If God did not exist, everything would be permitted"; and that, for existentialism, is the starting point. Everything is indeed permitted if God does not exist, and man is in consequence forlorn, for he cannot find anything to depend upon either within or outside himself. He discovers forthwith, that he is without excuse.

Sartre, in fact, agrees with Dostoevsky. Everything is, indeed, permitted without God. However,

Sartre takes Dostoevsky's phrase to be a statement, not a warning. It does not serve as a warning to humanity for the chaotic and immoral state the world would be in if there is no God. It is not a statement which serves to make us move closer to God or is trying to convince us to not abandon our religious beliefs. For Sartre, the statement "God does not exist" is a given and entails the fact that everything is permitted.

In this way, Sartre ties God's absence and everything being permissible with one of the core aspects of his philosophy: freedom. For a man who so vigorously stated that "man is condemned to be free" (*Being and Nothingness*, 1943), Sartre's radical conception of freedom stems from the fact that there is no God. According to Sartre, freedom and God are incompatible; if there is a God, humans have no freedom, and if humans have freedom, there is no God.

In God's absence, then, there is no authority which can objectively differentiate moral from immoral actions, nor a figure which can guide us through the world. Instead, God's absence gives humans the authority to be absolutely free in their lives and bear the responsibilities that this absolute freedom entails.

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Sartre, of course, does not use freedom in physical terms but in existentialist terms. Humans are existentially free in the sense that they are absolutely free to choose how they will live their lives, free from any social constraints or already established moral codes, and without being guided by any authority or blindly obeying it. An example Sartre uses which describes this conception of freedom is the following: Being imprisoned in a German camp in France during World War Two, he was discussing with other inmates whether they should kill a German guard and escape. This does not refer to their physical freedom to kill the guard (something which they were able to do) but to their freedom to talk amongst themselves, weigh the situation they were in and decide whether killing the guard would be a wise thing to do. No moral code, no authority, no God, no societal standards could dictate what the right or wrong action is in that situation. They had to choose. And that is freedom.

However, the realization that humans have absolute freedom is not well-received by them, as most follow Dostoevsky's reading of "If God does not exist, everything is permitted"; taking it to mean that chaos would follow if there is no 'father figure' who knows right from wrong and who can guide them through life. Thus, realizing that they have absolute freedom, humans are filled with Angst.

Angst, a German word meaning anxiety or fear, is used in Sartrean philosophy to describe the state humans are in when they realize the absolute freedom that they have. The fact that there are no constraints in what someone can do, fills them with Angst upon realization that the only constraints in life are those that humans choose to impose upon themselves.

Besides Angst, absolute freedom entails another basic aspect of human existence: absolute responsibility. Given their absolute freedom, humans are absolutely responsible. Human responsibility has two different meanings: responsible for their actions, and responsible for the world. Since God is absent, and humans are free to choose their path in life, they also bear the full responsibility for their actions as there is no authority to blame or hold accountable for anything that happens in their lives. In addition, as humans are part of humanity and the totality of humanity's action is comprised by the actions of its individual members (i.e humans), one is responsible for how humanity behaves. As Sartre says in his essay *Existentialism is a Humanism*, "Everything happens to every man as though the whole human race had its eyes fixed upon what he is doing and regulated its conduct accordingly."

Upon realizing that they have absolute freedom and full responsibility for their actions,

humans try to evade Angst and follow an already established moral code, authority, ideology, or societal norms. This is what Sartre calls 'bad faith'. Bad faith is when human beings deny their freedom and conform to societal standards, adopting values that have been dictated by others. In this way, they do not act authentically as they simply mirror societal expectations and standards.

Sartre invites us to not act in bad faith but to fully embrace the freedom that is given to us and to utilize it so that we are able to become authentic and unique beings who realize their potential and their responsibility to shape humanity according to collective standards which stem from individual autonomy and sovereignty.

It is true, as Dostoevsky said, that everything is permitted in God's absence. However, God's absence should not fill us with Angst or with a feeling of being disoriented or lost in life, but with the understanding that we can shape our lives in the way we want, without trying to evade our freedom and without thinking that we are less free than we actually are.

Freedom is to be embraced, not avoided.

Sub Editor
Angelos Sofocleos



The Secular World Team

I'm happy to report that we are building a very worthy team to produce *Secular World* including my new General Sub-Editor, Angelos Sofocleos. Angelos is a philosopher so he is the perfect counter balance to my science background. He comes to us with the experience of having edited *Secular Nation*. Going forward, our intention is to give SW a more positive voice by including articles on what makes us so wonderfully human - the arts and humanities.

I'm also very pleased to announce that:

Conrad Didiodata, a former English teacher in Canada, has taken on the job of editing the Poetry Page and providing us with articles on Religion and Art, London based Norman Bacrac is now our Book Reviewer and Manoj John, located in Mumbai, will be helping us with news items.

Richard Carrier and Stephen Law continue to be regular contributors.

If you would like to get involved email me here: secularworld@atheistalliance.org

Poetry Page

On the Nature of Things



*This terror, then, this darkness of the mind,
Not sunrise with its flaring spokes of light,
Nor glittering arrows of morning can disperse,
But only Nature's aspect and her law,
Which, teaching us, hath this exordium:
Nothing from nothing ever yet was born.*

*Fear holds dominion over mortality
Only because, seeing in land and sky
So much the cause whereof no wise they know,
Men think Divinities are working there.*

*Meantime, when once we know from nothing still
Nothing can be create, we shall divine
More clearly what we seek: those elements
From which alone all things created are,
And how accomplished by no tool of Gods.*

*Whilst human kind
Throughout the lands lay miserably crushed
Before all eyes beneath Religion- who
Would show her head along the region skies,*

*Glowering on mortals with her hideous face-
A Greek it was who first opposing dared
Raise mortal eyes that terror to withstand,
Whom nor the fame of Gods nor lightning's
stroke*

*Nor threatening thunder of the ominous sky
Abashed; but rather chafed to angry zest
His dauntless heart to be the first to rend
The crossbars at the gates of Nature old.*

*And thus his will and hardy wisdom won;
And forward thus he fared afar, beyond
The flaming ramparts of the world, until
He wandered the unmeasurable All.*

*Whence he to us, a conqueror, reports
What things can rise to being, what cannot,
And by what law to each its scope prescribed,
Its boundary stone that clings so deep in Time.*

*Wherefore Religion now is under foot,
And us his victory now exalts to heaven.*

Lucretius

Conrad Didiodato

Poetry Page
sub-editor



Applying Logic to the God Proposition

Last in the current series:

Argument from Superman



Every religion has its own Superman argument. Moroni, Jesus, Mohammed, Moses, Buddha, even Lao Tzu, are all claimed to have proved their religious teachings supernaturally true by miraculous demonstrations of their power.

"Our Superman exists; therefore our God exists."

All these arguments collapse the same way: when you put all the evidence back in, the Bayes Factor and Prior Odds both guarantee they are all just made up stories. And not being true, they fail as arguments.

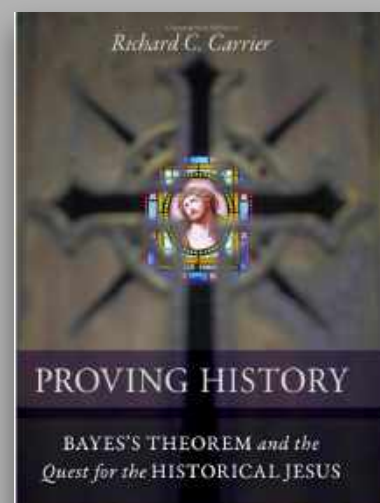
A real God would not produce stories that look just like they were made up, and then present no adequate evidence for them being true. I illustrate the Bayesian logic of this in detail for Christianity in *The Christian Delusion* ("Why the Resurrection Is Unbelievable") and even more so in *The End of Christianity* ("Christianity's Success Was Not Incredible").

Conclusion: you can see by now how any argument for God can be turned around into an argument against God by (a) including all the evidence the theist is conspicuously ignoring and then (b) showing how this entails a strong Bayes Factor against the existence of God (or, also, a strong Prior Odds against).

Theism is built on hiding evidence. Hiding the evidence of history, that makes gods the least likely explanation of anything, and then hiding the specific evidence that refutes each and every reason to believe in God.

Bayesian counter-apologetics exposes and corrects all this.

Dr. Richard Carrier
Ancient Historian



An in-depth discussion of New Testament scholarship proposing Bayes's Theorem, which deals with probabilities under conditions of uncertainty, as a solution to the problem of establishing reliable historical criteria. Shift, command and click the book pic to buy.

A poor way to engage with atheists

(from [Stephen Law's blog](#) June 25th 2018)

Many religious folk insist on presenting the debate over the existence of their very specific worship- and gratitude-worthy God as a debate about theism vs naturalism. That's a false narrative - do not accept it.

'Naturalism or theism' is a false dilemma - there are many other options on the table (for example you find non-naturalists about maths, modals, and morals who are not theists and, for example, there are also all sorts of theisms to consider other than the implausible omnipotent omnibenevolent Judeo-Christian God).

Most folks who reject religious monotheism reject it, not because they're wedded to scientism, naturalism, or some other philosophical or metaphysical -ism, but for much the same reasons they're skeptical about fairies, ghosts, and a flat earth - they think there's little evidence for, a great deal of evidence against (e.g. the evidential problem of evil, the problem of divine hiddenness).

They also think there are good grounds for being skeptical about religious (fairy/ghostly) experiences.

If this is where your atheist is coming from, refuting naturalism, scientism, etc. is unlikely to make them look much more favourably on religious theism, no more than it's

likely to make them look much more favourably on the existence of fairies and ghosts. From their perspective, in each case, arguments about the truth of naturalism and scientism are a largely irrelevant side-show.

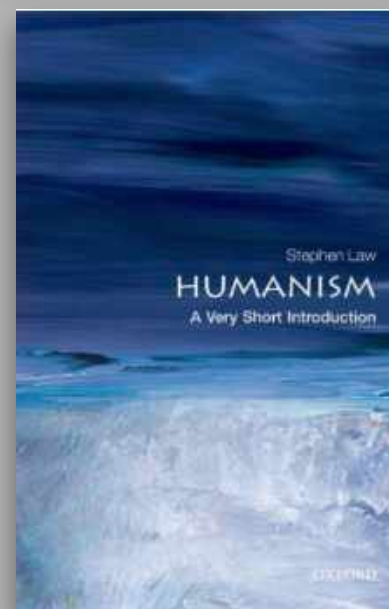
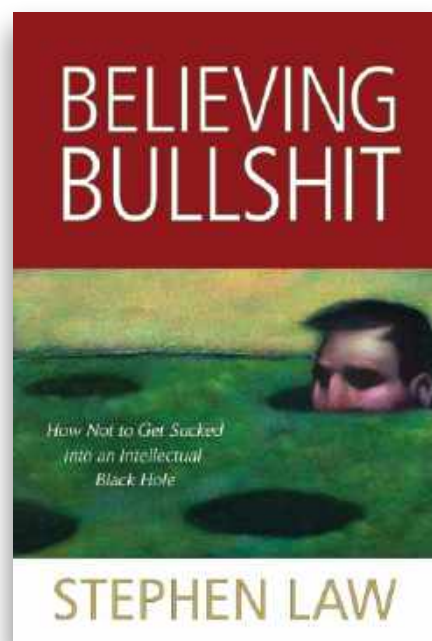
Actually, it's probably not atheists who are the main intended audience for theistic arguments targeting naturalism and scientism. The intended target is other theists, who will likely reassure themselves that their worldview can't be so unreasonable because, after all, naturalism (scientism, etc.) has been refuted, or shown to be deeply suspect.

In other words, framing the God debate in such terms is often a smokescreen device.

PS. I should add that those atheists who insist on framing the debate over the existence of a worship- and gratitude-worthy God in terms of theism vs naturalism are creating an unnecessary hostage to fortune.

Stephen Law

Reader in
Philosophy
Heythrop College
London University



These are just two of Stephen's books.

I published a three episode series of excerpts of his Introduction to Humanism in recent editions of SW.

Hover over the book pics, hold down shift and command and click to buy.

Ways Atheist Moms differ from Religious Moms



Almost daily, I get comments on my Instagram posts or replies to my tweets that I'm doing some sort of disservice to my kids for raising them without religion. I don't give two bleeps what anonymous internet users think of me, but I'd like to destroy this sentiment anyway. Some of the voodoo woo woo bullshine that religious moms feed their kids is what is truly detrimental to a growing mind.

It ought to be pointed out that I recognize not all religious moms are the same. Some (I'd even suggest most) are wonderful and accepting and genuinely do a great job with their kids. Others, well, others seem to take that book of theirs far too seriously and do or say things to their kids that no atheist mom ever would — not a single, hellbound one of us.

With that in mind, here are nine ways atheist moms differ from religious moms:

1. We would never refer to our children as sinners. Certainly not for being a normal human being. If you think it's romantic to see yourself as broken and in need of saving, that's on you, but keep it to yourself. Don't infect your kids with it. As atheist

parents, there is nothing our children could do to make us see them as sinners because we don't believe in sin. Calling a child a sinner is something only awful moms would do. It's demeaning, dehumanizing and abusive. While I recognize that not all religious moms would do this, zero atheist moms would.

2. We would never tell our children that some people will endure torture for eternity. For a child, hearing from the adults they trust about such a place is absolute terrorism. Even if they're not picturing people they love there, you're planting images of treating humans like trash. Images of extreme pain and fear, images of flesh melting away from bones are all images that will haunt them for their entire lives. An atheist mother would never tell their child that hell is a real place, where god sends real people to live in anguish for eternity.

3. We would never tell our children that if they engage in certain behaviours, that they too may end up in hell. We don't need to terrorize our children into fearing their human nature. We don't need to cripple them with the dread of making mistakes. We embrace their mistakes, we

embrace their nature, and we would never, ever use the threat of eternal torture to get the behaviour we want out of them. We might threaten to take the iPad away, but we would never threaten them with burning forever. That's just lazy parenting.

4. We would never tell our children that the wafer they are eating is the flesh of a man who died 2000 years prior. You see, some of us think cannibalism is not just a bad thing, but possibly the worst thing. Some of us want to pass down a good sense of morality, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings. Some of us want to instill a respect for life in our kids and not teach them that man-flesh is just another option to throw on the barbecue. Some of us -and this may be the biggest shock- try to teach our kids that biting is not cool. You know, every now and again, a kid loses control and takes a bite of his sister. Parents act dumbfounded. "I don't know where he got that idea!". You, ritualistic cannibal mama. He got it from you.

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5. We would never tell our kids that an invisible man who casts judgement on their behaviour is watching them at all times. Mostly because we have enough respect for our kids not to try and sell them on something so ludicrous. Also, because the idea of someone watching and judging their every move is a terrifying thing for kids. It's a great way to make your children fear trying new things or make them afraid of going to new places. It's a great way to lower their chances of growing into a well-rounded adult.

6. We would never decorate our homes with execution methods or give our children jewelry with torture devices on them. We feel extreme unease letting our kids go to places that seem to think this is okay. Hanging bloody corpses on the walls of your home makes it about as wholesome as a porno directed by Quentin Tarantino. You wouldn't put a guillotine on your wall, nor an electric chair. You wouldn't decorate with a syringe used for lethal injection or photos of firing squads. I'm reasonably sure you wouldn't erect a gallows in your backyard. So, why just this one execution method? Why is this somehow better than the rest, and perfectly fine to expose your children to daily?

7. We would never lead our children to believe that if they wish in just the right way, an all-powerful being may grant that wish, despite billions of people wanting daily for the fundamental necessities of life. No, your kid wants a remote control BB8 with sound effects. Sorry Africa, you'll have to starve another day.

8. We would never tell our kids that illnesses of any sort can be cured by a magic man, so long as you say the right prayers just enough to please

him. No, we want our kids to grow up understanding that their best chance to beat an illness is to see their doctor. Why? I guess we just want our kids to live long, healthy lives. Call us crazy.

9. We absolutely would never insist that an invisible man in the sky is more important than family. Not all religious moms are like this, but some put God before family and make no qualms telling their babies this. Nevermind that their kids are real, observable and demonstrably so, or that their kids are the ones who will bring them great joy throughout their lives or that their kids may be all they have to rely on in old age. Nevermind any of this, because they have this special book they know is true because their special book says so. Can you feel it? Can you feel the circular reasoning?

I'm inclined to believe that these things all harm children and stop them from becoming healthy, intelligent thinkers who can take care of themselves. If you still need to believe, though, that not doing any of these things to my kid means I'm doing a disservice to them, then so be it. It's not like adding one more delusion to your already lengthy list of delusions is really going to make a difference. Think of me what you wish, but I know, without these parenting techniques, I'm doing a better job than many.

Cheers to all the unbelieving moms out there teaching their kids reason and critical thought, and to all the religious moms who, in spite of their holy texts and faith in god, treat their kids with the respect they deserve.

Courtney Heard
AAI webmaster



Inside the Mind of a True Believer

We are all aware of the strength of belief in God by some people, regardless of religious affiliation, but do we know what goes on inside the mind of a True Believer? To the True believer, it's not just a belief, it's a *fact*, and it is immutable. It's like saying the sky is blue, or a horse is a horse. It's absolutely undeniable. No reasons or justifications are required.

The church makes it normal, society rewards it and the Bible explains it: they are in this world but not of it. For someone to tell them that God does not exist, makes absolutely no sense to them whatsoever. In this mindset, our life as we know it is but a temporary phase, but their 'true life' (for which there is not a shred of evidence) only begins after death. To them, this is the real deal, and anyone who disagrees is delusional.

In their minds, the subject is not up for debate, even if they do appear on debate sites, and argue the toss. This is another somewhat bizarre point and a revealing insight into the human psyche.

Jim Dorans



I love it when: Theists try to rubbish Science



This is an area where theists have a big misconception: they seem to think that we will be scared or offended by their attempts to discredit Science! Don't they know that's what scientists do every day? That's exactly how we make discoveries: by attempting to discredit claims; by testing propositions to find out whether they are false or not; by checking up on each other. Being challenged is not threatening to scientists. It's normal daily life.

I suspect they are projecting their own mindset on to scientists. They strongly desire certainty and they fear criticism and challenge because, deep down, they have doubts about the belief system they have decided to possess; and they think we are like them.

Science is, metaphorically, like the environment; it's deserts, grasslands, oceans and forests. There's no 'deeds' to any 'property'; it's a communal resource.

All scientists are doing is studying the Natural Realm and trying to make mental models that might help us to understand it. We don't own scientific information ourselves, it's not a belief system.

We don't say "I believe in Science", we say, "The evidence indicates." That's objective humility due to the fact that scientists have, maybe reluctantly, accepted the inevitability of doubt and uncertainty.

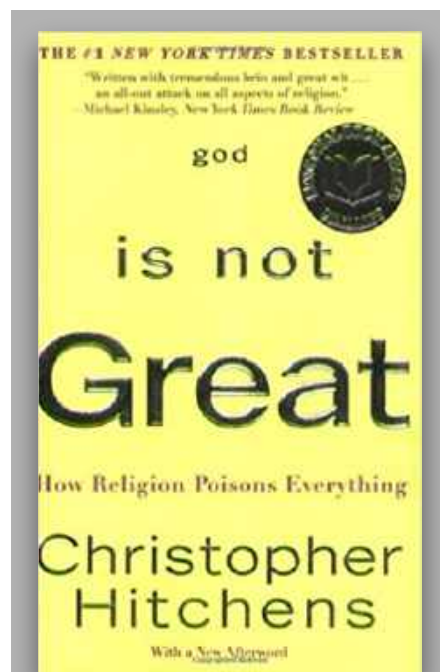
Then, what do theists use to attempt to discredit Science on? An internet connected computer or smartphone! There's no technology that better confirms Science as the only successful and reliable method of investigation and discovery! Oh, the irony!

Science, the little child of philosophy, has taken wing and eclipsed its parent like every offspring should, yet they seem to think they can use pre-Renaissance logic to trash science. They are trying to backpedal; to resist progress; to fight a rearguard action against the imminent demise of their belief system.

All they are doing is publicly revealing their own scientific ignorance and rational thinking incompetence.

(Excerpted from my soon to be published book Teach Yourself Atheism)

JR



The ultimate case against religion.

This year's convention being staged in Brighton UK April 4/5 by Anti-theism International pays homage to the late, great Christopher Hitchens. See here: atheist-convention.com Shift, command and click on the book pic to buy

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Dave Allen

Irish Comedian

At the height of his career Dave Allen was Britain's most controversial comedian, regularly provoking indignation at his frequent highlighting of political hypocrisy and disregard for religious authority. Allen's satirizing of religious ritual, especially Catholic, throughout each episode of Dave Allen at Large caused minor controversy, which – coupled with sometimes comparatively frank material – earned the show a risqué reputation. In 1977 the Irish state broadcaster RTÉ placed a de facto ban on Allen.

Routines included sketches showing the Pope (played by Allen) and his cardinals doing a striptease to music ("The Stripper") on the steps of St Peter's, aggressive priests beating their parishioners and other priests, priests who spoke like Daleks through electronic confessionals, and an extremely excitable Pope who spoke in a Chico Marxstyle accent as he ordered Allen to "getta your bum outta Roma!"

He was a religious sceptic (according to Allen, "what you might call a practising atheist", and often joked, "I'm an atheist, thank God") as a result of his deeply held objections to the rigidity of his strict Catholic schooling. Consequently, religion became an important subject for his

humor, especially the Catholic Church and the Church of England, generally mocking church customs and rituals rather than beliefs.

In 1998 he explained: "The hierarchy of everything in my life has always bothered me. I'm bothered by power. People, whoever they might be, whether it's the government, or the policeman in the uniform, or the man on the door—they still irk me a bit. From school, from the first nun that belted me—people used to think of the nice sweet little ladies—they used to knock the fuck out of you, in the most cruel way that they could. They'd find bits of your body that were vulnerable to intense pain—grabbing you by the ear, or by the nose, and lift you, and say 'Don't cry!' It's very hard not to cry. I mean, not from emotion, but pain. The priests were the same. And I sit and watch politicians with great cynicism, total cynicism." At the end of his act Allen always raised his glass and quietly toasted his audience with the words "Goodnight, thank you, and may your God go with you."

(Abridged from Wikipedia)

In a modest way, I have tried to emulate Dave in situations which could become threatening. For example, when I accepted the



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invitation to debate a Muslim at Manchester University, it followed some horrific news items about two incidents of radicalized Muslims attacking Londoners with knives and getting killed by the police.

Realizing that this could become a bad-natured encounter I started by making them laugh. I said, "Put your hands up if you believe in a god" (most hands went up) "Put your hands up if you don't believe" (one hand went up) "Now put your hand up if you don't believe but don't want to put your hand up!" They laughed and the ice was broken.

Then I put the title of the debate on screen, 'Is life without god absurd?' clicked to animate 'Yes' with the anvil effect and said, "Can I go home now?" More laughter. I felt I had made it clear that, while they might find what I was going to say challenging, I was not going to be threatening.

After the debate, when three very nice young Muslim men were driving me to my hotel, I was asked, "What was the best part of the evening for you?" I felt confident enough in their respectful company to say, "Well, I guess it was *not getting macheteed!*"

JR





Volunteer Opportunities

AAI has opportunities for volunteers in many countries.
To apply, go to: <https://www.atheistalliance.org/volunteer/>
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Do you have the write stuff?



Would you like to write for Secular World Magazine or our Website?

Send submissions to: secularworld@atheistalliance.org

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