In this issue:

Editorial .............................................................. 2
President's Letter ............................................... 3
How I Changed my Mind about: Purity .............. 4/5
Sponsored items .................................................. 6
It's all about us ................................................... 7/8

Poetry Page ....................................................... 9
From Data to Belief ............................................ 10
Islamophobia? ................................................... 11
Why is America so Religious? ......................... 12/13
I Doubt therefore I am........................................ 14
AAI's Freethinking Hero: Ricky Gervais ............ 15
Editorial
Makeover Time!

I’ve been editing Secular World for three years now and during that time AAI has grown at a rapid pace. We started from a very low position, admittedly, with the organization in some disarray but, since then, we have had a stable and committed Board of Directors At Large’ so it’s not surprising that the time has come for some changes. Those of you who receive Insider, our monthly newsletter, will already know this (subscribe here: https://tinyurl.com/15xfryh).

Our highly esteemed President, Cail Miller, decided to retire for a less hectic life and Howard Burman, who has been our Secretary UN representative, attending meetings in Switzerland, stepped up to the role. At the same time we advertised for a new Executive Director. Out of a flatteringly large field of really excellent applicants we have appointed atheist author Michael Sherlock to the post (see following article).

We are very much looking forward to working with Michael who has a long track record of atheist activism mostly based in the Far East and Australia, an area of the world where we have long needed more strength. Michael has skills in writing, public speaking and management, Richard Dawkins wrote the foreword to his third atheist book.

Meanwhile, we are holding elections for some of our current Directors whose term of office has come to completion (including myself) and for seven newly created Regional Director positions (we’ve had some excellent applicants). Ballot papers are going out very soon and the votes of our affiliates will be counted so that the new Board can be announced at our Annual General Meeting scheduled for the end of June.

Insider readers will also know that we now have a blog on Patheos! (https://tinyurl.com/yocs3zdzh) It’s quite a prestigious site, so I’m very pleased that we have been accepted. If you go to it you will see that I’ve been posting for several weeks and am hoping to get some guest posters to join in. Let me know if you would like to contribute - just email me your submission and I’ll do my editor job. My guidelines are: keep it simple, short and sweet, we are all swamped with content so have no time for wordy texts these days.

Insiders will also know that we have started video podcasting on our youtube channel, just go here to see: https://tinyurl.com/s3dz6l7. A recent upload was my six minute interview with Michael Sherlock.

Let’s face it, paper had a long run, from the introduction of printing to England by William Caxton in 1746 through to the invention of the video capable smart phone in 2009, but there’s no denying that video has become the medium for the twenty first century and AAI has some skilled producers turning out great stuff. We are making informative, educational and, possibly even mildly entertaining, atheistic videos. Vice President, Bill Flavell, and I have already made some short recorded ‘information videos’ to kick things off and we plan to go live soon which will enable you to comment and question us from the comfort of your locked down home in these Covid 19 pandemic days.

Speaking of which, the Anti-theism International Convention is one of the victims of the ban on assembling. It has had to be postponed and will now probably take place in 2021.

Keep two metres away from everyone who is not in your household to stay safe - you are important people!

This planet needs rationalists!
John Richards
Publications Director
secularworld@atheistalliance.org
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 soon, raising legal funds for those charged with blasphemy, supporting secular education and other initiatives make this a challenging yet promising year.

Track our successes on our website and in social media.
Website: atheistalliance.org
Facebook: Atheist Alliance International

Howard Burman
President, Atheist Alliance International

president@atheistalliance.org
How I changed my mind about: Purity

If there is one thing Evangelical culture is disturbingly invested in, it is sexual purity. From the minute a young person might be having thoughts or feelings that could be interpreted as maybe, possibly, being of a sexual nature they are sternly admonished to, “Keep their heart pure.” Thus, shame has its roots in the soil before the child has any idea what they are supposed to be ashamed of. Combine this with the Orwellian concept of god knowing your every thought, and the foundation of thought control is off to a fantastic start.

A good example of this is seen in the 2006 Documentary Jesus Camp. Ten year old Tory talks about her love of dance, and Christian heavy metal music. Already she has been groomed to treat secular musicians with contempt, but the most disturbing moment is when she confesses to her struggle to keep herself from “Dancing for the flesh.” She obviously has only the most innocent understanding of the phrase, but the seed is planted. It will soon have other meanings, and her mind is trained to associate any pleasure not explicitly given to god with guilt and shame.

So much of the process is unconscious for the victim that they may not realize that others do not share their indoctrination. I was perhaps fortunate that, when I fanatically attached myself to the idea of sexual purity in my early teens, my mother was willing to pull me back and discourage the more wild purity fads. Fads? Yes, fads.

Look at these:

- Gold Star virgin: One who does not kiss until their wedding day. Yes, actually.
- Platinum virgin: One who does not hold hands or “front hug” until married.

Fortunately this was after my time, but if you wish to expose yourself to actual death by cringe, go onto YouTube and look up the song “Christian Side-Hug”. You have been warned, lol.

When I was young, regrettably, Joshua Harris’ book, ‘I Kissed Dating Goodbye’, came out to great applause. If anyone did raise an eyebrow at a single, sheltered, home-school boy writing a book on relationships, they didn’t tell me! Fortunately I never read the book.

By this time, I was actually growing tired of super-hyped chastity. I was still committed to the idea but, thanks no doubt in large part to the crippling social effects of Evangelical teachings, I wasn’t dating, had no prospect of dating, and thought it might be helpful to hear about something more useful to my life then how to avoid all the sex I wasn’t having. The greatest compliment I could give to a preacher in my mid to late teens was that they had preached a sermon on abstinence that I actually liked. Of course, all that was before I had a boyfriend...

Sexual purity became a huge focus in my life. What did that mean? How far is too far? Does even asking that question mean that you are "impure". When I think of the time and energy I spent worrying about these things it drives me crazy. At a time when I should have been focused on planning the most pivotal years of my

(continued on page 5)
life, purity culture assured that I was focused on guilt for "backsliding" whenever I was physical with my boyfriend.

I don't think I can express the guilt, the shame, the constant sense of exposure to the idea that your every thought was being recorded and judged. Every moment when your true self rebelled at the endless restrictions would be paid back 100 fold in guilt and shame.

By this time I had fooled around but not gone "all the way". And for Garfunkle and Oates fans. Yes, I was a technical virgin, no that doesn't mean I had tried anal. By this point I was out of high-school and I was so, so tired of it all.

Ultimately, it wasn't an argument that changed my mind. It was my own disgust with the constant cycles of shame and fear. I was done. I looked at the tortured state of my mind and I came to a conclusion. No matter how bad a "sin" premarital sex was it wasn't as bad, wasn't as wrong, wasn't as harmful as living in these horrible chains.

I chose to have sex with my then boyfriend. The next day we walked by a fountain. As we each tossed a coin in the shimmering waters I made, not a wish, but a promise. No regrets.

Sin or no sin I was taking back my life. I wasn't going to live in fear anymore.

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**FEEL THE SPIN**

This novel, set in the 1870s, is an imaginative account of the life and difficult career of Thomas Walters, as a newly appointed teacher of Natural Philosophy and Astronomy at Tideland College, a small Christian college near Charleston, South Carolina. Thomas had brought his wife and two children from the relatively freethinking North into the recently defeated South, where Negro equality was being fiercely resisted - *didn't the Bible, God's inerrant word, take slavery for granted?* Also, weren't women supposed to be silent in church, and never to instruct men, so how could they be given the vote? Tideland College was resolutely traditional, with compulsory prayers twice daily.

All the staff, except Thomas and one other, were Ministers. All the families, except Thomas's, sang hymns on Sundays. Thomas told his son a secret: God and the Bible were just made-up stories. What would the neighbors say if they knew the Walters were freethinkers?

Professor Gray, the Head of Department, warned Thomas not to contradict Church doctrine - astronomy and natural philosophy should be taught as though they conformed to God's intentions: earthquakes could not be natural events - they were caused by God. The Walters hoped science would sweep away superstition. They read "The Truthseeker" and admired Robert Ingersoll, the famous infidel speaker.

Sara, Thomas' wife, wanted him to write to the newspapers on the women's suffrage issue, but Thomas was worried that this would jeopardise his position in the College.

The view locally was that women could not be 'professional'. Their highest calling was to be dutiful wives and mothers. Why would a good Christian woman want anything more?

The Ku Klux Klan was probably responsible for the mysterious fire which destroyed the small cottage that Thomas had provided for a Negro couple who had been friends of the Walters for many years. The husband, Joseph, was fatally wounded by the KKK during a shoot-out after an attempted lynching of some Negroes, in which Thomas and Joseph had intervened. Local white children were taught to hate the blacks.

Thomas realized that dinosaurs were evidence that the Earth was much older than the Bible says. The evils in the world proved that God was unfair - therefore there was no God, but the staff at Tideland of course would not accept the findings of science, of Darwinism, or of mankind's true origin.

Thomas was fed up with the South and decided to move his family to the North. The College would not be sorry to see him go apart from some of his students who greatly appreciated his teaching. He demonstrated his passionate interest in astronomy by showing them, using his telescope, the 'rising' of the moon and planets over the horizon in the East and their "setting" below the horizon in the West. Although one cannot directly sense the Earth's rotation, knowing intellectually that we are all on a turning sphere, we can all 'feel the spin.'

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**Norman Bacrac**

Secular World's Book Reviewer
Breaching the Founders’ “Wall of Separation”

Since the first English Christian fundamentalists arrived in the 1600s on the shores of what would become the United States, Christianity has become increasingly embedded in the nation’s social and cultural fabric. This is completely contrary to the Founding Fathers’ original vision of America; it was designed by them to be a secular democratic republic built on evidence-based Enlightenment values, emphatically not religious faith. Indeed, the Founders purposefully intended that a high, strong “wall of separation” should keep church and state apart in the new nation, while allowing individual religious freedom untrammelled by government—and vice versa. But Christians with theocratic dreams keep trying to breach the wall. Through their efforts, God is now in evidence everywhere in American public life—on our money, in our schools, even in high-level-government officials’ speeches. Freedom of—and from—religion is the American promise to all its people whatever their belief—or disbelief. This is what the Founding Fathers intended for their new nation, not the undemocratic theocracy zealous evangelicals are trying to force on American society today.

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
IT'S ALL ABOUT US
The 'otherness' of faiths

One of the most pernicious and enduring characteristics that afflicts humanity is the mentality of 'us and them.' Yuval Noah Harari wrote in 'Sapiens', that 5000 years ago in Northern Africa, humans categorized people that were not part of their own group as 'them.' That thinking kept tribes on high alert in the presence of unfamiliar faces, which was a key protective strategy during that time of regular violence, but which has less utility today.

Tribalism, as it is often known, has proceeded in many forms throughout history. Of the innumerable examples, religion is an obvious one and, second only to maybe nationalism, one of the most destructive. Beyond the context of ancient humanity, 'us and them' lends itself too regularly to destruction. Societies should strive to make it a relic of the past.

Unfortunately, in Australia, the 'us and them' mentality is at risk of being encouraged through the contentious Religious Discrimination (RD) Bill. A knee jerk reaction to the successful campaign for marriage equality, it aims to enshrine in law the ability of people to speak and act against others in ways that, under different conditions, would be discriminatory. For example, a doctor could refuse to see an unmarried patient for a standard sexually transmitted infection test because he views sex before marriage as a sin.

Projecting one's religious beliefs on those with whom they interact will lead to a fraying of the social fabric that holds Australia, and similar societies, together. It will unduly privilege religious people over non-religious people, facilitating the progress of religious agendas in a country founded on secular ideals at a time when a growing number of people categorize themselves as non-religious. Most concerning, it will reinforce the 'us and them' mentality that has significantly less value in today's world.

But this is bigger than religion. It's about what society will look like moving forward. Is it intolerance that drives societies to new levels of development? Is it partitioning groups based on one facet of their lives that promotes communal well-being? Is it allowing those with nefarious intents to get away with their comments under the guise of a religious belief? Is it the possibility for division in a society that is structured to facilitate interaction between its constituents every day? Is division truly desired in society? For those who want a world that can grow from roots of peace rather than conflict, the answer is surely 'no'.

Fortunately, the evidence demonstrates that it is not in the interest of the Australian Government or the population to be moving towards a more religious society. A recent study by Damian Ruck, Alexander Bentley & Daniel Lawson (University of Bristol and University of Tennessee) analyzed a global data-set, finding that secular-rationality and cosmopolitanism positively predicts GDP per capita, democratization and secondary education enrollment. Cosmopolitanism was linked to tolerance of marginalized groups. In other words: staying the course of secularism laid out in the constitution and maintaining our multicultural society is good for people, politics and the economy.

That, however, does not preclude religious protections from being legislated. The Ruddock Review, intended to guide the legislative response to religious protections, demonstrated a considerably more
balanced response to the issue than that contained in the RD Bill. Anti-discrimination legislation, especially those aligned with the United Nations Charter of Human Rights, should be encouraged. The crucial aspect is that the legislation applies equally and fairly to all. This is what is missed in the Australian Government’s effort, and this is what will drive societal division.

Giving privileges to religious people and groups while there is a clear downward trend in religious belief is as unreasonable as supporting a dying industry because politicians cannot face that things change and the world must adjust. Committing public capital - social, financial or otherwise - is not only wasteful, it is an abuse of the trust placed in government to run the country for the benefit of not just a few, but all. In many ways, society has developed immeasurably over the last 5000 years. But the ‘Us and them’ mentality is one characteristic that should not be encouraged to prosper.

Brendan Liveris
The Rationalist Society of Australia and other free thought groups are running a campaign against the Religious Discrimination Bill in Australia. Find out more at dontdivideus.com.au

All of our cool merchandise can be seen and purchased here: https://www.atheistalliance.org/our-shop/

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 Sofocleous. 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 am 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, Ex-evangelical Lilith and Stephen Law continue to be regular contributors.

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

God Silent

There is no recorded instance where the uplifted hand of murder has been paralyzed.

No truthful account in all the literature of the world, of the innocent being shielded by God.

Thousands of crimes are being committed every day. Men are, this moment, lying in wait for their human prey.

Wives are whipped and crushed - driven to insanity and death.

Little children are begging for mercy - lifting imploring tear-filled eyes, to the brutal faces of fathers and mothers.

Sweet girls are being deceived, lured and outraged; but God has no time to prevent these things - no time to defend the good and protect the pure.

He is too busy numbering hairs and watching sparrows.

by Robert Ingersoll

Conrad Didiodato
Poetry Page
sub-editor
From Data to Belief
assessing probable correctness

We need dedicated experts to write our histories, discover our physics, cure our ailments, build our roads, police our streets, adjudicate our laws, and so on, because none of us can be an expert at all these things, nor have the time to do all those things.

Bayesian epistemology, and Bayesian reasoning more broadly, is not that. It is, rather, a fairly simple logical model of all correct human reasoning. It’s about explaining when and why human inferences are correct or incorrect about anything.

It answers the question, “What is it that I am doing when I come to some belief or other when given certain information?” As well as the questions, “Why, or how, or when is that belief I come to, justified or warranted?”

As such it is all encompassing. Even scientists using Bayesian statistics, are also using Bayesian epistemology—whether they know it or not. Just like everyone else.

Because after they’ve done all the statistics, they still have to reach a belief, a conclusion, and infer something about the world and how likely they are to be right. And that step is always fundamentally Bayesian—and non-statistical.

At that stage, the results of any statistical models they built just becomes more data that becomes more evidence or background knowledge in further inferences that the scientist makes about what they are studying. “What we found” is given by statistics. “What that means” is given by epistemology.

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.
Islamophobia?

(from Stephen Law’s blog August 18th 2017)

It may well be that I’m just mistaken about what is and isn’t Islamophobic and I genuinely don’t want to be guilty of it so I thought I would arrange various claims according to whether I consider them Islamophobic or not, to get your feedback.

I DO consider the following claims to be Islamophobic:

All Muslims should be forcibly removed to Arab countries (e.g. from the U.S. or from Israel)

Muslims all want to take over the world (and place it under sharia)

The Muslims are secretly plotting to take over the world (and place it under sharia)

Muslims are cockroaches and rats

Muslims are a source of moral depravity

Muslims are bigots (homophobic, racist, sexist, etc.)

However, I DO NOT consider the following claims Islamophobic (that is NOT to say I agree with them all, or consider them all unobjectionable, please note!):

It would have been better had Islam never existed

Islam is a major cause of terrorist attacks and atrocities

Islam is a poisonous and destructive religion

Many Muslims are horribly bigoted against Jews, women, and gays.

There should be a boycott/sanctions against countries like Saudi Arabia that engage in such violent attacks in Yemen (and spread violent wahabist ideology).

The pro-Saudi lobby has had an undue and damaging influence on Western foreign policy.

I acknowledge many Islamophobes say similar things about Muslims. But that does not automatically make them Islamophobes.

But am I right? I am offering this as a platform for discussion. For example, many consider the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanction campaign against Israel to be intrinsically antisemitic, whereas I do not. Nor do I consider the claim that it would have been better if Islam had never existed, or that Israel had never existed, Islamophobic/antisemitic. That might surprise some of you. If you think I’m mistaken, why am I mistaken?

Stephen Law
Reader in Philosophy
Heythrop College
London University

Stephen Law has written several books - the above are just two from his collection.

They make philosophy accessible to the general reader and some are specifically for children.

See them and purchase them here: tinyurl.com/yazkkun7
Why is America such a God-enthralled land?

When I was working at a petrochemical company in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in the mid-1980s, I interacted with quite a few Brits who had traveled there on business. Many of them asked me the same incredulous question: “Why are you Americans so bloody religious?” It wasn’t a dumb question. In fact, I’d been asking myself that same question. Why, indeed?

Americans’ fervent, ubiquitous religiosity still perplexed me decades later into my early 60s (I’m now 69) — so much so that I then spent several years researching the topic and ended up writing a book about what I learned (“Holy Smoke: How Christianity Smothered the American Dream,” which published this February on Amazon and elsewhere).

The answer, it turns out, is as complicated as it is simple. It’s complicated in that understanding the phenomenon of American Christianity requires wading into a tsunami of genetic, psycho-social and historical factual realities that ultimately have led Americans to behave as Americans do in the 21st century. And it’s simple in that, considering all these determinative factors, it’s hard to see how we Yanks could have turned out differently as a distinct people.

In a fundamental sense, it all began with the Roman Emperor Constantine, who ruled as his once-monolithic and nearly all-powerful empire was slowly imploding (some historians place the end in the year 476). Most people don’t know who Constantine was, because he’s not as famous as, say, Julius Caesar or Henry VIII, but what he did more than 15 centuries ago would have enormous consequences for Americans today.

What Constantine did was sanction then-fledgling Christianity as an official religious faith throughout his empire, which ended brutal, legally authorized discrimination against Christians, who were viewed by pagan Roman at the time as dangerous, fringe cultists. This imperial nod gave Christianity critical breathing room to spread its faith far and wide in the empire and beyond.

Then, when Constantine later decreed that Christianity was the empire’s official faith, the die was cast for the religion’s ultimate iteration as the dominant temporal and spiritual power in what is now Europe in the Middle Ages. Although kings and popes jockeyed for medieval power, popes routinely seized all church-state power for a time.

And eventually, after German anti-papal firebrand Martin Luther jump-started the Protestant Reformation by tacking his 95 Theses on a church-house door in Wittenberg early in the 16th century, Protestants and Christians were subsequently at each other’s throats over the next few centuries.

Yet, despite the internecine conflict and even all-out religious warfare, ultimate European power still often resided with Christian leaders — Protestant or Catholic — and even if rule was not ecclesiastic, the faith’s spiritual power still ruled the European mind. A century or so after Columbus bumped into what is now the Caribbean island of Jamaica and later beheld the mainland of the “New World,” the first step in future American religiosity was taken as immigrants, mainly devout European Protestant Christians, stepped off their respective boats and began to colonize the new land. Catholics, now the dominant Christian sect in the U.S. (but not by much), were slower to get going in America early on, which gave Protestants a huge advantage in shaping the national ethos.
Contrary to popular notions of America as a land of religious freedom, it didn’t exactly start out that way. For example, when the first big waves of Protestant Puritans began washing ashore on the east coast of North America the 1700s, they had zero intention of being tolerant of any Christian denomination other than their own within their colonial areas. In fact, even when fellow local Puritans showed the slightest doubt or backsliding in Puritan doctrines, they were summarily banished. This trend continued for centuries, with various Christian sects colonizing different, religiously homogeneous regions, where “others” weren’t welcome. Except for a preacher named Roger Williams, who founded a colony (Rhode Island) based on the idea of complete religious freedom (of any sect) and — and this is important — separation of church and local government authority. Most everyone else thought that was crackpot at the time, but you know how it turned out in the end.

When America’s Founding Fathers — Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, et al. — began drafting the United States Constitution, they, like Williams, sought complete separation of religion — any religion — from American government. And that’s how the Constitution and the preceding Declaration of Independence (from Great Britain) were written. Not a personal, Christian God in sight in those documents, only occasionally the deist “God of nature.” After all, these were science-loving, evidence-based Enlightenment men, not clerics, and they sought to create something completely different in the world, a secular republic where all faiths were welcome and equal but kept far from government deliberations.

Unfortunately, starting soon after those seminal documents were finalized (if not before), evangelical Christians began a relentless, unceasing program to interweave their faith as deeply as possible into the fabric of American society as it developed. The faithful have never really understood or bought into the idea of church-state separation anyway. Even today, they still insist America is a “Christian nation,” and scoff at the idea of a necessary “wall of separation” (Jefferson’s phrase) between faith and state as “invented.”

So here we are in 2020. Our current U.S. president aggressively courts the Christian Right, God is exalted on the walls of our schools and our money, and our attorney general is calling for a theocracy. Almost incomprehensibly, eight American states still retain antiquated statutes — however constitutionally unenforceable — specifically prohibiting atheists from holding any public office or trust, and two of them also ban nonbelievers even from serving as witnesses in court.

How did we get to this sad place? Very, very slowly. But, had you been alive when Constantine did the momentous deed, it would soon have been very clear where Western civilization was likely heading.

Rick Snedeker is a retired American journalist and editor who lives in the rural U.S. state of South Dakota. His two books — “Holy Smoke” and “3,001 Arabian Days,” a memoir of Snedeker’s boyhood in an American oil camp in 1950s Saudi Arabia — were published in 2020 and 2018, respectively. He also writes a daily nonreligious blog, “Godzooks: The Faith in Facts Blog” on the Patheos hub.

More of our cool merchandise can be seen and purchased here: https://www.atheistalliance.org/our-shop
I Doubt Therefore I Am
(a scientist)

I’ve just watched Professor Brian Cox on the Andrew Marr show. Like many of us during lockdown, he is trying to homeschool his ten year old son and admits he is not finding it easy. Even more than most of us, children want simple, definite answers. That’s why they are such cannon fodder for priests, pastors and mullahs who claim to know.

The truth is, we don’t know the answers to the ‘big questions’. That is why, in 2011, when I finally stopped working in education, I set up a website called Doubters’ Club. The hosting company went out of business but I did print it out before it disappeared from the internet. I wanted to show that doubting is ok, good even.

Cox junior asked his dad what the Milky Way is made of. The layman’s answer would be, “Stars”, but the truth is only about 5% of a galaxy is stars, the rest is a mystery which has been given the name ‘Dark Matter’. That’s not a very satisfactory answer and is much more difficult to explain to a ten year old. Children expect their father to know everything; they cannot appreciate that daddy might be an expert in Quantum Physics and Cosmology and that good parents want to tell their kids the truth.

Brian referred to that great scientist, Richard Feynman, who wrote in a 1955 essay called The Value of Science, that the most valuable thing about science is it teaches us to embrace doubt and uncertainty.

We desperately need to normalize doubt, to point out that it’s honest, humble and honorable to admit ignorance. The only sort of ignorance that is shameful, is willful ignorance, such as putting your fingers in your ears and going “La la la” to drown out information that you don’t like.

Meanwhile, what is actually dishonorable, is pretending to know things that no-one really knows and punishing the people who challenge you or your doctrine.

That’s deception and should be a crime.

From my Patreon site
John Richards - Anti-theist

Pic of Brian Cox from Vonnare at English Wikipedia / CC BY-SA
http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/
Ricky Gervais is an atheist and a Humanist and states that he abandoned religion at the age of eight. He is also a staunch supporter of gay rights and has praised the introduction of same-sex marriage in England and Wales as "a victory for all of us" stating, "anything that promotes equality, promotes progress". He added, "You can't take equality 'too far.'"

Ricky has won numerous awards for his broadcast work, including six BAFTAs and two Golden Globes for writing, directing and starring in his TV comedy The Office. His recent stand-up tours were sell-outs and received widespread critical acclaim. Get to watch Afterlife, if you can!

In December 2010, he wrote an editorial for The Wall Street Journal defending his atheism:

"Why don't you believe in God? I get that question all the time. I always try to give a sensitive, reasoned answer. This is usually awkward, time consuming and pointless. People who believe in God don't need proof of his existence, and they certainly don't want evidence to the contrary. They are happy with their belief. They even say things like 'it's true to me' and 'it's faith.' I still give my logical answer because I feel that not being honest would be patronizing and impolite. It is ironic therefore that 'I don't believe in God because there is absolutely no scientific evidence for his existence and from what I've heard the very definition is a logical impossibility in this known universe,' comes across as both patronizing and impolite.

Ricky is an honorary associate of the UK's National Secular Society and a patron of Humanists UK, a British charity which promotes the humanist worldview and campaigns for a secular state and on human rights issues. On 3 September 2019, Gervais was awarded the 2019 Richard Dawkins Award. The award recognizes individuals who proclaim "the values of secularism and rationalism, upholding scientific truths wherever it may lead." Gervais received the award during a Center for Inquiry-sponsored award ceremony at London's Troxy Theatre. Dawkins praised Gervais for being a "witty hero of atheism and reason."

Gervais has a home in the Hampstead area of London and an apartment in the Barbizon 63 building of New York City. He has been in a relationship with producer and author Jane Fallon since 1982, and says they chose not to marry because "there's no point in us having an actual ceremony before the eyes of God because there is no God" or having children because they "didn't fancy dedicating 16 years of their lives and there are too many children, of course."

Despite not having kids of his own, Ricky has written a popular series of 'Flanimals' books for children, brilliantly illustrated by Rob Steen, that you can purchase here: https://tinyurl.com/y8nyxq8r

JR with help from Wikipedia
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