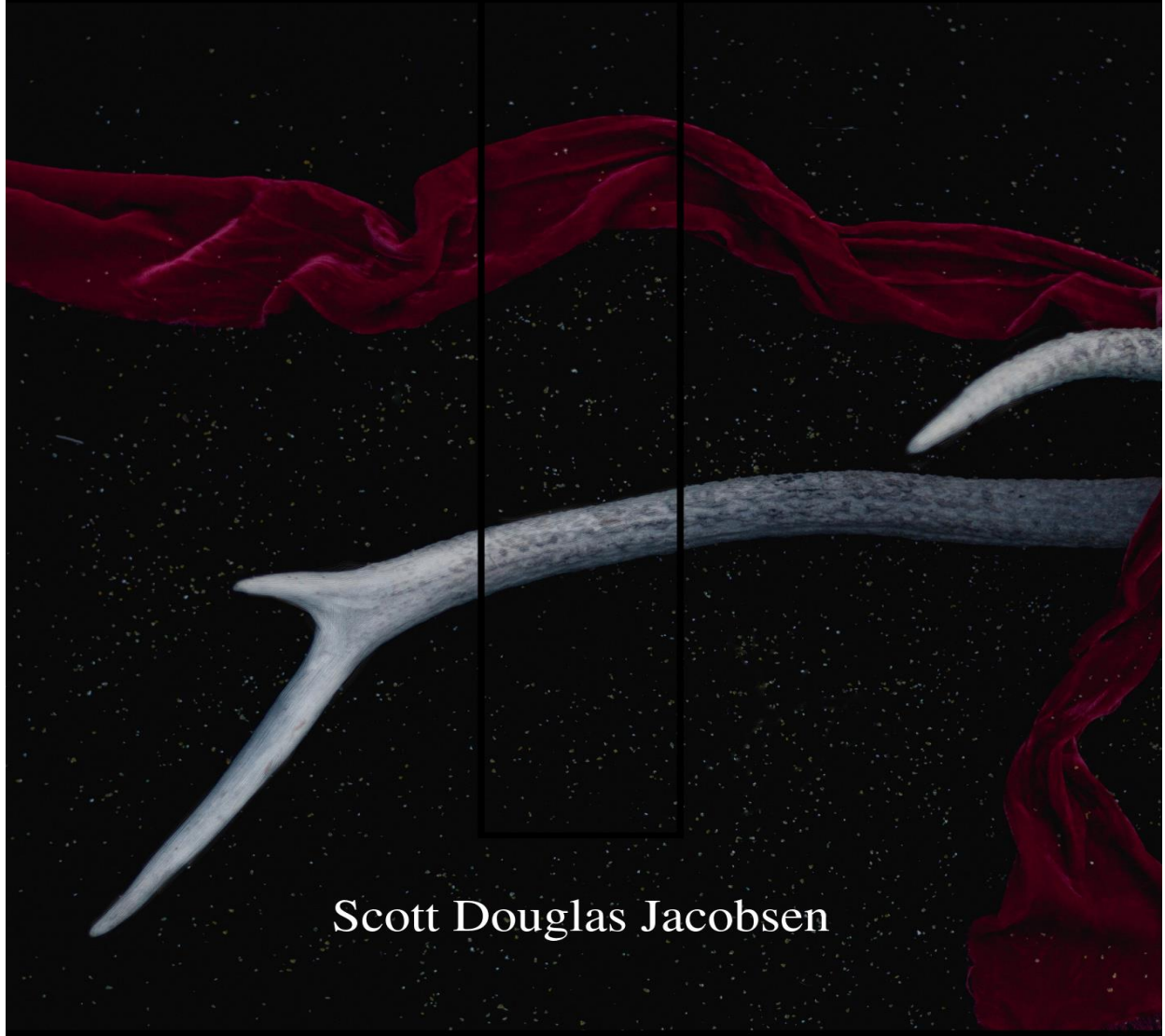


# NEWS INTERVENTION: ASSEMBLAGE 1



Scott Douglas Jacobsen

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**Scott**

# Einstein's Pantheism: The Mind of God in Structure, Form, and Mathematics, Not in Superstition, Revelation, and Narrative

December 25, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

*\*Full letter at the bottom. [\[1\]](#)*

Einstein's recent letter to hit some of the popular press headlines references "God" in addition to the *Bible* (BBC News, 2018a). At the age of 74, Einstein wrote a 1.5 page "note" or letter to Eric Gutkind, a German philosopher of the time (Ibid.).

Often, it is titled the "God Letter" (Barron, 2018). At times, Einstein identified with the term "agnostic" while rejecting atheism (Rense, 2018). Some interpret this as an open rejection of religion as a whole by Einstein, not necessarily true (Osborne, 2018).

Indeed, flat wrong, Einstein, two months after the letter to Gutkind, stated the personal sensibility of a deeply religious non-believer (Christie's, 2018). In youth, though, Einstein "manifested... a sudden but passionate zeal for Judaism, a short but memorable phase that reached its conclusion with Einstein's exposure to science at around the age of 10" (Ibid.).

Einstein, as written years later, through the reading of popular science textbooks and upon reflection of the contents of the texts comprising the *Bible*, stated the "impression that youth is intentionally being deceived by the state through lies; it was a crushing impression" (Ibid.).

The letter, in a New York-based auction, acquired a worth of 2.9-million-pound-sterling (or GBP), equivalent to about \$4 million Canadian dollars (CAD) (Sherwood, 2018). The common interpretation of the letter, given the clarity of time and new generations, remains a rejection of traditional conceptualizations of a God and the standard interpretations – literal and metaphorical – of the *Bible* (Willingham, 2018).

Einstein did not adhere to an atheistic viewpoint of the universe, as many of you know. Interestingly, the letter was written in response to a book written by Gutkind entitled *Choose Life: The Biblical Call to Revolt* (Johnson, 2018).

Letters from other individuals from Einstein garner similar renowned and monetary valuation, not including one to a young female scientist while, certainly, another to the late Theodore Roosevelt with the one to Roosevelt's worth estimated between \$1.2 to \$0.8 million (USD), approximately \$1.63 to \$1.09 million (CAD) (BBC News, 2018b; Christie's, 2002).

To claim Einstein as a traditional religious individual would disserve Einstein's intellectual legacy, even cheapen the worldview, some labelled the Einsteinian, rather direct, stance expressed in the letter a "diatribe" (Robinson, 2018).

Peter Klarnet, senior specialist in books and manuscripts at Christie's auction house, argued, "...one of the definitive statements in the Religion vs. Science debate" (Willingham, 2018). A

note from the auction house stated, “This remarkably candid, private letter was written a year before Einstein’s death and remains the most fully articulated expression of his religious and philosophical views” (BBC News, 2018a).

Important to note, since the letter was written one year prior to Einstein’s death, this may, indeed, reflect the antiquated cosmologist’s advanced age religious and theological views as stone tablet (Willingham, 2018). That is to say, Christie’s, though seemingly bold in the declaration, seems correct in the assessment.

One dissenting voice was noted by Gillespie (2018) on the definitude of the religious and theological views of Einstein, which was the biographer of Einstein, Walter Isaacson – who is prominent and respected.

Richard Dawkins stated, “This letter was about something very important to Einstein, I suspect” (Sherwood, 2018). Something of which Einstein thought about in a critical manner since the age of 13, saying he had “abandoned his uncritical religious fervour, feeling he had been deceived into believing lies” (Ibid.).

Atheists and theists alike partake of name-dropping in history to bolster positions for themselves. Willingham (2018) touched on the vein here. The notion of an authority figure of world renowned representative, in some frame, of one’s own views and, therefore, the famous smart person reflective of a similar level of intelligence or respectability of oneself.

The more accurate view about Einstein’s worldview reflected the mathematical harmony and apparent beauty in the simplicity of the principles of nature, of its logical parsimony and precision. One found in Baruch de Spinoza, a Jewish-Dutch 17<sup>th</sup>-century philosopher, known for a pantheistic view of the universe without magic or miracles.

Some characterize the non-interventionist God of Einstein as either a Deity or a Pantheism. Simply Nature or the laws thereof, God does not care about individual human beings’ lives in this idea of God. Such an important question, thinker, and answer, to so many, the auction went for 4-minutes (Gillespie, 2018). Intriguingly, but, perhaps, not surprisingly, the Gutkind family owned the letter until 2008 prior to a former auction of the letter in a Bloomsbury Auctions in London (Ibid.; CTV News, 2018).

Einstein, born in Germany and with Jewish heritage, went straight to the point in the letter, as elderly men have things to do and things to think about, e.g., a Theory of Everything. He did not have time to read the full book by Gutkind, though he read most of it (Letters of Note, 2009). Gutkind disagreed with Einstein on free will and the role of God in an individual’s life (Mejia, 2018).

Because Einstein’s famous metaphorical words about God not playing dice with the universe represented an image of absolute truth in the world glued to determinism without an intervening God and, therefore, no movement for freedom of the will or a role of God in the life of each person for all time (The Week, 2018; Christie’s, 2018).

Einstein in the letter reflects on the lack of “ego-oriented desires” as an “un-American attitude” aligning the sentiments of Gutkind and Einstein, i.e., Einstein started on a non-confrontational point of view after reading “a great deal” of Gutkind’s text (Letters of Note, 2009).

Alas, Einstein set the word “God” as a derivation of human frailties and the *Bible* as “a collection of honorable, but still purely primitive, legends which are nevertheless pretty childish,” where no

interpretation can alter this conception and “the Jewish religion like all other religions is an incarnation of the most childish superstition” (Ibid.).

In the latter case, narratives and superstitions intended for children; in the former case, not hostile inasmuch as descriptive of the limited organisms, in time and in space, grasping at what little light the rules of nature will permit of themselves, principles of existence glimpsed through an evolved and bounded mind with proportional limits in ability to know the cosmos.

Taking on the stance of humanity writ species, Einstein understood the Jewish peoples as simply another group, rather than “chosen,” and no better than the others and, in fact, “are protected from the worst cancers by a lack of power” and not some divine decree or selection (Ibid.). Although, other early life written sources represent more racist views (Roos, 2018). He may have recanted personal opinions over time.

In the concluding half of the letter, Einstein leaves the boxing gloves at home to gather chalk dust flaking off the equation-filled board and then offers an olive branch. At first, he states:

*In general I find it painful that you claim a privileged position and try to defend it by two walls of pride, an external one as a man and an internal one as a Jew. As a man you claim, so to speak, a dispensation from causality otherwise accepted, as a Jew the privilege of monotheism. But a limited causality is no longer a causality at all, as our wonderful Spinoza recognized with all incision, probably as the first one. And the animistic interpretations of the religions of nature are in principle not annulled by monopolization. With such walls we can only attain a certain self-deception, but our moral efforts are not furthered by them. On the contrary.* (Letters of Note, 2009)

In this reference to Spinoza as a solution to the faux superiority posited by Gutkind, we find echoes to a consistent view of the universe as a mathematical harmony without a wink lost over human affairs and parochial belief systems, or claims to racial superiority. He then stated:

*Now that I have quite openly stated our differences in intellectual convictions it is still clear to me that we are quite close to each other in essential things, i.e; in our evaluations of human behavior. What separates us are only intellectual “props” and “rationalization” in Freud’s language. Therefore I think that we would understand each other quite well if we talked about concrete things.* (Ibid.)

In this, we can see a distinct split between the intellectual and emotional common sentiment.

On a rather thoughtful, though not entirely unbiased but probably mostly true, note, Christian thinktank Theos senior fellow, Nick Spencer, stated, “Einstein offers scant consolation to either party in this debate. His cosmic religion and distant deistic God fits neither the agenda of religious believers or that of tribal atheists... As so often during his life, he refused and disturbed the accepted categories. We do the great physicist a disservice when we go to him to legitimise our belief in God, or in his absence” (Sherwood, 2018).

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## Endnote

[1] *The word God is a product of human weakness* (2009) in full states:

*Dear Mr Gutkind,*

*Inspired by Brouwer's repeated suggestion, I read a great deal in your book, and thank you very much for lending it to me. What struck me was this: with regard to the factual attitude to life and to the human community we have a great deal in common. Your personal ideal with its striving for freedom from ego-oriented desires, for making life beautiful and noble, with an emphasis on the purely human element. This unites us as having an "unAmerican attitude."*

*Still, without Brouwer's suggestion I would never have gotten myself to engage intensively with your book because it is written in a language inaccessible to me. The word God is for me nothing more than the expression and product of human weakness, the Bible a collection of honorable, but still purely primitive, legends which are nevertheless pretty childish. No interpretation, no matter how subtle, can change this for me. For me the Jewish religion like all other religions is an incarnation of the most childish superstition. And the Jewish people to whom I gladly belong, and whose thinking I have a deep affinity for, have no different quality for me than all other people. As far as my experience goes, they are also no better than other human groups, although they are protected from the worst cancers by a lack of power. Otherwise I cannot see anything "chosen" about them.*

*In general I find it painful that you claim a privileged position and try to defend it by two walls of pride, an external one as a man and an internal one as a Jew. As a man you claim, so to speak, a dispensation from causality otherwise accepted, as a Jew the privilege of monotheism. But a limited causality is no longer a causality at all, as our wonderful Spinoza recognized with all incision, probably as the first one. And the animistic interpretations of the religions of nature are in principle not annulled by monopolization. With such walls we can only attain a certain self-deception, but our moral efforts are not furthered by them. On the contrary.*

*Now that I have quite openly stated our differences in intellectual convictions it is still clear to me that we are quite close to each other in essential things, i.e; in our evaluations of human behavior. What separates us are only intellectual "props" and "rationalization" in Freud's language. Therefore I think that we would understand each other quite well if we talked about concrete things.*

*With friendly thanks and best wishes,*

*Yours,*

*A. Einstein*

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## A Secular Women's History Moment

December 25, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Rev. Gretta Vosper of West Hill United Church in Scarborough, Ontario, went through an approximately 3-year ordeal – almost 4 in fact – in the uncertainty of station in the Christian denomination The United Church of Canada, arguably the most progressive sect in the nation and much of the world (not my opinion alone).

Take, for example, the fact of the matter as the first church to permit the ordination of women, circa 1936 with Lydia Guey-Mook (University of Toronto, 2017; BC Conference of the United Church of Canada, 2018).

Also, we can take Vosper stating that The United Church of Canada is the “most progressive denomination in the world, as far as I’m concerned” in a podcast with Ryan Bell (Garrison, 2016).

In a conclusion-of-the-ordeal article, following the first article a couple years prior, Garrison (2018) notes, “Vosper hopes to create resources for the development of secular communities that have these multilayered social connections within them.”

A community was the point the entire time. Vosper remains a person oriented around the construction of community. She has also been labeled a “brave woman,” and rightly so (Thomas, 2018). The reason, as noted by Thomas, “... her situation grabbed headlines when she wrote a letter to the church’s spiritual leader after the January 2015 terrorist massacre at the Charlie Hebdo newspaper office in Paris. Her point: Belief in God can motivate bad things” (Ibid.).

More pointedly, Vosper denounced the belief in a supernatural “being whose purposes can be divined and which, once interpreted and without mercy, must be brought about within the human community in the name of that being” (Longhurst, 2018).

This was, in part, a basis for Vosper, personally, to be unable and unwilling to reaffirm the original vows during ordination in The United Church of Canada. There was supposed to be a hearing for Vosper, and then delays in the hearing occurred for some time – until recently.

As reported by Longhurst, “...before that hearing took place, the Toronto Conference and Vosper reached a settlement on Nov. 7 to let her keep her job” (2018). However, the church released another statement in reaffirmation of some beliefs following the announcement of the reaching of a settlement (The United Church of Canada, 2018a).

“In a brief joint statement, the Toronto Conference, Vosper and West Hill Church said the parties had ‘settled all outstanding issues between them,’” as reported by Longhurst (Longhurst, 2018; The United Church of Canada, 2018b).

The articles, since the November 7 press statement, continue to come out, even more than one month later (Stonestreet, J. & Morris, 2018; Bean, 2018). According to Vosper’s lawyer, Juliana Falconer, there was a rational calculation on the costs and benefits of a continuation of the disagreement, for all parties (Ibid.).

Douglas Todd, a long-time religion and belief commentator, lamented the lack of open reasoning for the decision by The United Church of Canada (Todd, 2018).

Todd argues The United Church of Canada is the main source of “worm theology,” which amounts to engagement in identity politics and followers who “perceive themselves as fundamentally flawed, guilty and unworthy” (Ibid.).

While also considering the prior statement of The United Church of Canada, we can see the earlier tone, as declared:

*The Committee read the submissions and listened very carefully to determine whether Ms. Vosper’s beliefs are in essential agreement with the statement of doctrine of the United Church. This is a crucial question asked of all potential ordinands to determine whether they are suitable for ministry within The United Church of Canada.*

*We have concluded that if Gretta Vosper were before us today, seeking to be ordained, the Toronto Conference Interview Committee would not recommend her. In our opinion, she is not suitable to continue in ordained ministry because she does not believe in God, Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit. Ms. Vosper does not recognize the primacy of scripture, she will not conduct the sacraments, and she is no longer in essential agreement with the statement of doctrine of The United Church of Canada. (Henderson, 2016)*

But with some cultural knowledge or research into the belief of clergy in congregations around North America, there is a long history of doubting leaders alongside the larger disbelieving laity, who may simply suspect but not explicitly know about one another.

One such project was set forth by Tufts University Professor Daniel C. Dennett and Independent Qualitative Research Consultant Linda LaScola, called The Clergy Project (The Clergy Project, 2018). (If you look close at the banner collage image at the top of the main webpage of the website, you can see Vosper’s photo.)

Vosper simply becomes another in a long line of brave individuals, as noted by Thomas (2018), working to expand the landscape of Christian and other spirituality in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. A woman freethought pioneer within the tradition of The United Church of Canada.

The conclusion of the ordeal for Vosper has left some letters to the editor with laments, including the following from Steve Thorkildsen, “What will be next? School principals who don’t believe in the value of educating children? Doctors who don’t believe the natural progression of diseases should be interrupted? Engineers who spurn precision and believe that approximations are close enough? Our new Age of Reason doesn’t seem so reasonable to me” (Hamilton Spectator, 2018).

But even within The United Church of Canada, the head of the denomination is happy to keep Vosper (Stonestreet & Morris, 2018). Discomfort from some on the outside and resolute comfort, even happiness, on the inside.

One commentary, by Antonio Gualteri (2018), openly opined, “Now I wonder if the terms of the settlement between the two parties were based more on labour law than theology, though we may never know given the condition of confidentiality.”

In a nuanced view, he considers the critical issue not the atheism of Vosper but the approach to the *Bible*. While, at the same time, Vosper has spoken to these subtler concerns in prior writing, as cited in the article by Gualteri (2018).

That is to say, she (Vosper) states, directly, the problematic contents of the texts comprising the *Bible* with the “obscure,” “irrelevant,” and “dangerously prone to misguiding” contents of it (Gualteri, 2018; Vosper, 2016).

Perhaps, in other words, the issue remains not Vosper’s approach to the *Bible*, but, rather, with the applicability of the purported holy text to much of modern secular life and spirituality in standard interpretations, in contradistinction to the noteworthy but, likely, wrongly – inversely so – placed concerns of Gualteri (2018).

Vosper, in response to a question about “atheist minister” being, supposedly, an oxymoron, stated, “Not if you understand the history of biblical and theological study. For well over 100 years, we’ve questioned the authority of the Bible and recognized it was written by humans. When you do that, everything is up for grabs, including the idea of a supernatural God.”

She seems correct, in part, but this tradition of questioning of the *Bible* by prominent and intelligent women exists much farther into the historical record, including back to some of the earliest women geniuses in the Western philosophical tradition (Adler, 2018).

I speak, of course, of one of the few great women polymaths permitted to flourish, for a time, in the ancient world: Hypatia of Alexandria. She had a number of distinct statements about fables, myths, miracles, superstitions, and religions:

*Fables should be taught as fables, myths as myths, and miracles as poetic fancies. To teach superstitions as truths is a most terrible thing. The child mind accepts and believes them, and only through great pain and perhaps tragedy can he be in after years relieved of them. In fact, men will fight for a superstition quite as quickly as for a living truth — often more so, since a superstition is so intangible you cannot get at it to refute it, but truth is a point of view, and so is changeable.*

*All formal dogmatic religions are fallacious and must never be accepted by self-respecting persons as final.*

Taking the historical account and comparing to the current, we can see, at a minimum perhaps, an amicable solution, as per the joint statement, to the updated (a-)theological stances of Vosper within the “most progressive denomination in the world” and another woman, Hypatia, outside of the church in the ancient world, i.e., cut to pieces and mutilated to death by a Christian mob.

Both “brave” but, certainly, different contexts. In a sense, for the church and the Western critical tradition, and the popular reactionaries to freethinking women, this is, certainly, progress, of a kind, once more – and within a suitable Western tradition and Christian denomination.

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## Suffering's Stewards

December 25, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

The Roman Catholic Christian Church Pope Francis – the guy who thinks he is the only Pope should look into the Discordians, adjacent to the Church of the SubGenius and its SubGenii – remarked on the problems with drug abuse or, less moralistically, substance misuse in the context of Duterte (Romero, 2018).

But this requires some context on Christian conceptualizations of suffering through time right into the present, which will, in due course, include commentary on Christian ideas of suffering, substance misuse, drugs, and the brain, and harm reduction in the Philippines and global context.

The image of pain, suffering, and misery sits at the Cross of the Roman Catholic Christians and other Christians, with the assumption of the redemptive work in a sacrifice of God made flesh, where the *Salvifici Doloris* states the meaning of suffering “illuminated by the Word of God” and reflected in the words of “Saint Paul” (John Paul II, 1984).

In this Christian context, of the largest sect and others, the meaning of suffering and pain, the purported mystery of suffering evokes “compassion,” “respect,” and intimidation and retains its plumbed linkages to a “*need of the heart*” and the “*deep imperative of faith*” (Ibid.).

Within this framework of the world, the alleviation of suffering is seen as only through Christ at the Cross and through no other, as this, simply put, is an emotional need and an imperative of religious faith and, therefore, an inexplicable and mandatory part of faith in Christ for a true Christianity.

Christianity, and its representatives in the largest sect and its highest offices to the supposed Vicar of Christ on Earth become guardians of this suffering, because without such sacrament of suffering and pain the redemptive power of Christ in a fallen world, so-called, would remain unneeded; the Roman Catholic Christian Church would become outmoded and irrelevant to the concerns of a mature and critical-minded, empirically informed, and logically coherent person of the future.

Intimations of this can be seen within the advanced industrial economies of the world which, historically speaking, were predominantly Christian and serious in their faith but, over time, they began to lose hold and slipped in their adherence to the faith, in degree and raw numbers. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we witnessed a historic rise of the non-religious, of the individuals without the need or even basic want for a traditional religious life.

In this, we also, at least in North America, developed the post-WWII Healing Revival Movement with a wide range of people preaching the Gospel with renewed vigor and proclamations of the end times and purification of the world for the benefit of the Good and Christian – synonyms within the framework propounded for centuries, hence the sociocultural assumption of nonbelievers as amoral if not, worse, inherently immoral – including Rev. Billy Graham, Oral

Roberts – who some during the higher heights of faith in Sigmund Freud labeled “Anal Roberts,” William Marion Branham, Jack Coe, Jack Moore, A. A. Allen, T. L. Osborn, Gordon Lindsay, F. F. Bosworth, Ern Baxter, Paul Cain, Kenneth Hagin, and O.L. Jagers (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018).

All lunatics, charlatans, or ignoramuses in their own rights. The fourth option, of course, is knowledgeable; however, these individuals did not know much about the world but had, as per the statement by Hawking, neither ignorance nor knowledge but the illusion of knowledge, which, in the end, analysis, is far viler and the enemy of real knowledge about the reality abounding around us. To quote the late cosmologist once more, religion is based on authority. Science is based on evidence. Approximately, one can apply the same categorization sweep in the analysis of prominent creationists in history including Ken Ham, Kent Hovind, Immanuel Velikovsky, Duane Gish, and others. A lesson in life, learn to detect pseudoscience and nonsense and then move on, which saves time.

Famously, even the within-the-faith beloved supposed Saint Mother Theresa of Calcutta, also known as Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu, the writings of the late purported saint remain littered with commentary on suffering and the importance of pain and suffering, as this retains a sense of the redemption of Christ.

Bojaxhiu states, “Suffering, if it is accepted together, borne together, is joy. Remember that the Passion of Christ ends always in the joy of the Resurrection of Christ, so when you feel in your own heart the suffering of Christ, remember the Resurrection has to come—the joy of Easter has to dawn. Never let anything so fill you with sorrow as to make you forget the joy of the Risen Christ” (Lau, n.d.).

Suffering shall be accepted as a joy; a joy as the “Risen Christ” (Ibid.). The nature of the framework represents an assumption of a resurrection from the dead, i.e., the death, burial, and three days later resurrection of Christ in so-called defiance of death.

The only crux, so to speak, of the issue of suffering from Christian theology, remains with the supposed resurrection and in the power of the sacrifice of a God-man, of God made flesh, on a Cross, through a form of Roman capital punishment.

Without veracity to these claims of a resurrection and to its panacea power for the supernatural moral blights of sin for all time – past, present, and future, the notion of Christian alleviation of suffering, or need for recognition of suffering as joy in realization of its reflection in Jesus’s or Yeshua Ben Yosef’s murder, becomes nothing.

It’s true, then, the Roman Catholic Christians did it: *ex nihilo*. They created something from nothing, more suffering than necessary through its enshrinement and as guardianship for access to the joy of Christ’s self-sacrifice at the Cross. Unnecessary suffering within a secular referent frame becomes immoral because of the tacit premise of a supernatural moral realm; whereas, to the Roman Catholic Christian Church, the secularly seen unnecessary suffering becomes necessary suffering via reflective qualities with the penultimate sacrifice of Christ for the so-called sins of humankind. That is to say, the well-being moral matrix of humanism stands opposed to the meta-physicalistic ethic of Christianity; although, if one takes the words of the Utilitarian ethicist and political philosopher John Stuart Mill seriously in *Utilitarianism*, the foundation of the ethics of wellbeing writ broad and deep with a *eudaemonistic* view of human life and their relations with one another becomes the moral nature of the Nazarene:



*I must again repeat, what the assailants of utilitarianism seldom have the justice to acknowledge, that the happiness which forms the utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct, is not the agent's own happiness, but that of all concerned. As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator. In the golden rule of Jesus of Nazareth, we read the complete spirit of the ethics of utility. To do as you would be done by, and to love your neighbour as yourself, constitute the ideal perfection of utilitarian morality. As the means of making the nearest approach to this ideal, utility would enjoin, first, that laws and social arrangements should place the happiness, or (as speaking practically it may be called) the interest, of every individual, as nearly as possible in harmony with the interest of the whole; and secondly, that education and opinion, which have so vast a power over human character, should so use that power as to establish in the mind of every individual an indissoluble association between his own happiness and the good of the whole; especially between his own happiness and the practice of such modes of conduct, negative and positive, as regard for the universal happiness prescribes; so that not only he may be unable to conceive the possibility of happiness to himself, consistently with conduct opposed to the general good, but also that a direct impulse to promote the general good may be in every individual one of the habitual motives of action, and the sentiments connected therewith may fill a large and prominent place in every human being's sentient existence.* (Mill, 1863)

This could lead into commentary on the ongoing and overwhelming sexual abuse of children and nuns entering into the news cycle at a rapid pace; however, this will not be the focus of this article (Dancel, 2018; Gomes, 2018; Pierce, 2018; Regencia, 2018; Macdonald, 2018; Long, 2018). Mill took a naturalistic frame of the Nazarene reflective of the morals of Utilitarianism, where the Roman Catholic Christian Church holds fast to the notion of supernatural lessons and an ethical gradient within this meta-material world of grace to sin.

Of the many foci within the categorization of pain, misery, and suffering of the Roman Catholic Christian Church, we can, also, come to the realization of the ongoing and international problem with the pain and death created through the substance misuse crisis around the world (WHO, 2018a; WHO, 2018b).

If we look at the deaths associated with the drug epidemic around the world, we can find approximately 70,000 to 100,000 people dying from opioid-related overdoses, alone, per annum, and as many as 99,000 to 253,000 deaths from to illicit drug use, circa 2010 (UNODC/WHO, 2013).

The main deaths from these substances are men (NIH, 2018a; NIH, 2018b). These statistics from the National Institutes of Health in the United States replicate to other parts of the world. This does not seem like a spiritual problem, as in some spiritual-moral realm corrupted and influencing the men to become addicted in the short- and long-term. One which damages families and communities, and leaving men to die alone.

The basics of addiction, rather than a spiritual-moral framework in years past filled with theological arguments and references to revelation, comes from a functional comprehension of the architecture of the mind, of the brain as an organic sense input receiver and information processor, as we are evolved organisms with imperfectly coordinated but good enough consciousnesses; where these systems can be hijacked by the substances, the neural networks can

be, without context, activated based on the ability of the addictive substances to cross the blood-brain barrier and remain active and suitable for locking into neurotransmitter sites at gap junctions. It is well-known as the “biology of addiction” (NIH News in Health, 2015). One common and among the most lethal substances, and which is legal in several nations around the world, remain alcohol, which makes for a good example.

Dr. George Koob, the Director of the NIH’s National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, stated, “A common misperception is that addiction is a choice or moral problem, and all you have to do is stop. But nothing could be further from the truth... The brain actually changes with addiction, and it takes a good deal of work to get it back to its normal state. The more drugs or alcohol you’ve taken, the more disruptive it is to the brain” (Ibid.).

The Director of the NIH’s National Institute on Drug Abuse, Dr. Nora Volkow, notes the decreased activity in the frontal cortex in individuals who harbor addictive tendencies or outright addictions, whether to alcohol or other substances; they take the substance in spite of the costs of losing “custody of their children” or real threats of a potential rightful entrance into a penitentiary (Ibid.).

These experts in the functional neurological and behavioral aspects of addiction do not mention the spiritual world or spiritual problems, or alternate and inexplicable dimensions apart from the ordinary, but these medical professionals and research directors at the highest level in the world direct attention to organized matter, a brain, and its malfunctions, e.g., the poor functional capacity of the frontal lobes and, in particular, the frontal cortex of the unfortunates suffering with or through addiction.

As Professor Adele Diamond of The University of British Columbia explains with regards to the Dorsolateral Prefrontal Cortex, the poor functioning of the DPfC, in particular, or the PfC, in general, can impair function in most important areas of personal and professional life, and associated with many mental disorders, including attention and conduct disorders, depression and obsessive-compulsive disorders, even schizophrenia, and can impact physical health with poor health habits in either exercise or diet, reading and writing achievement, dependability, violent and emotional outburst events and degrees of said moments, retaining of a job let alone a career, levels of productivity, and success and harmony in work or marital life, and so on (Diamond, 2012).

A material, physical, or natural structure with impairments expresses widespread life problems, i.e., not a spiritual-moral issue by necessity and, by the principle of parsimony or Occam’s Razor, far more probable as a neurological impairment issue. This leads to some implications in the legal and social, and law enforcement, aspects of substance misuse epidemics. There has been a wide range of calls for the decriminalization of drugs to deal with this international problem, as would be a humanistic orientation based on evidence of the reduction in harms to the general public at all levels. That is to say, compassion- and science-based solution to this international problem. [Ed. I have written on this before and reference common knowledge within the international community on this subject matter, as well as prior references from other articles.]

The calls have been from the UN General Assembly Session on the Approach to the World Drug Problem (UNGASS) in its 2016 unanimous conclusion, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, through drug policy and the Sustainable Development Goals, and others (UNODC, 2018; Yakupitiyage, 2017; UNODC, 2015; Sustainable Development Goals, n.d.).

The United Nations and the World Health Organization issued a joint statement calling for decriminalization of all drugs in 2017 (WHO, 2017). The Former Portuguese Prime Minister and Secretary-General of the United Nations António Guterres called for the decriminalization of all drugs while the Prime Minister of Portugal; same while the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the prior Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon did the same (Secretariat to the Governing Bodies UNODC, 2018).

Some nations made continuous calls for decriminalization. They enacted the changes, including the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, and Portugal, and other countries (Travis, 2014; Vastag, 2009). The questions about this issue of drugs or substances with deadly or addictive potentials around the world remains the ways in which the substances are dealt with via the criminal justice system, the system of jurisprudence, and the assumptions floating within the public consciousness influencing the conscience of the general populace of a nation, including the Philippines.

If we look at the situation with the nation for me, Canadian society, in other words, we can note the ways in which the punitive approach to substance misuse has been an utter failure, even worse in the nation south of our border, i.e., the United States of America.

The punishment of the misusers, in fact, based on the firm and robust evidence showing the increase of the use, the severity of the outcomes, and how this punishment methodology simply leaves more people without support and possibly addicted/deceased, and the prison population filled more than before within the nation-state, based on the implementation of policies set forth with a punitive approach.

Most often, the poor and minorities within a state are the majority of the victims here; thus, if poor, male, and a minority within a nation, then the greater the likelihood of falling victim to injury, addiction, or death via illicit substance intake, whether orally, anally, or injections (Fellner, 2009; NIH, 2018a; NIH, 2018b). In general, this is counter-complemented by an evidence-based methodology towards the issues of substance misuse: harm reduction, which amounts to both a philosophy and a methodology (Harm Reduction International, 2018).

Much akin to the humanistic approach, as noted, harm reduction provides a basis for the implementation in societies around the world with a reason, science, and compassion foundation in the management of substance misuse as a human issue and a social health problem primarily, and secondarily as an issue of law enforcement. For example, if decriminalized, the black market in this sector becomes nullified.

The alternative to mostly punishment is harm reduction (Harm Reduction International, 2018). One major aspect of compassion would be the implementation of decriminalization, as per the national and international calls, and compassion oriented policies, programmes, and initiatives in order to alleviate the suffering of those at the bottom of society.

These methodologies can be as simple as needle exchange programs or safe injections sites. Others, if the population of young postsecondary students, can be an emphasis on naloxone kits on campus, which blocks the opioid receptors of the body and stalls overdoses for time to return the young person to the hospital. These remain solutions bound to a realistic view of a free country, likely, harboring illicit substances or licit substances that will be misused, and then the role of the government should be to protect and help the public in the most evidence-based way

possible, which means the harm reduction approaches, while also respecting the bodily autonomy and choices of the Filipino/Filipina.

More than 1,000 Canadian citizens died in the province of British Columbia alone, which prompted an emergency task force to examine the issue and the evidence. This led to the proposals for more extensive harm reduction approaches, not less, where this mirrors the situation with Portugal under Guterres.

Humanistic approaches do not imply for all time or inherent completeness of philosophical foundation, in a symmetry with the logical findings of Kurt Godel about the incompleteness of any standard mathematical system proclaiming consistency or the inconsistency of any mathematical system proclaiming completeness, because the fundamental basis in science – process, discoveries, and substantiated empirical theories – amounts to a philosophy of discovery about the natural world and, therefore, an ethic, by implication incorporating it, becomes one of a wondrous continual searching, probing, retaining, integrating, and refining of inherent compassionate sentiments of the human heart reflected in the Golden Rule to the advanced scientific and technological landscape of the world today.

This brings us back into the subject matter of suffering and the context of Christianity, the Pope, Duterte, and harm reduction. As the Roman Catholic Christian Church from the previous Pope to a saint noted on the Christian conceptualization of suffering, as they live in a worldview of the teleological bound within this notion of God as a Logos or the source of absolute truth without room for deviancy – the Logos way or the highway (to hell, even paved with good intentions, presumably), the suffering in the world must have some God-given purpose.

Suffering comes from a fallen world but is extant due to some ultimate teleological purpose with God's divine plan, even while the standard position of the Roman Catholic Christian Church is acceptance of Theistic Evolution with, in many eyes, humanity as the crowning achievement of creation. From an evolutionary viewpoint without teleology, a naturalistic worldview, the pain, suffering, and misery remain products of evolution carved via natural selective processes from natural disasters to reciprocal altruism to mate selection to kin selection to punctuated equilibrium and so on, without teleology. Kropotkin noted the factor of mutual aid in evolution at any rate.

The pain and suffering are seen as necessary and, potentially, needing encouragement or even praise as reflective of the joy identified with the notion of a crucified Christ, i.e., the ultimate in suffering and sacrifice then victory over the death of the mortal coil.

However, lacking the evidence or firm evidentiary basis for the claims in the narratives of a Christ who died and rose from the dead *a la* Lazarus, or the biological evidence to show natural means by which death has ever been forestalled indefinitely and even reversed then or now, the teleological view of suffering becomes less cosmic, more parochial, and akin to the Evolution by Natural Selection posited by Darwin in 1859 (*On the Origin of Species*) without a teleological lens on the development, adaptation, and speciation of species.

Suffering becomes another unavoidable aspect of the evolved organisms of Earth useful for long-term species survival while also, given the aforementioned sentiments and inquiring ethical discovery linked to science, becoming something human beings can alleviate, not only in themselves but in others as per the Golden Rule.

Some individuals seem to have less of this. Duterte, in particular, admitted to extrajudicial killings, stated, “What is my sin? Did I steal even one peso? Did I prosecute somebody who I ordered jailed? My sin is extrajudicial killings” (Human Rights Watch, 2018a).

In the anti-drug fervor of the nation, of the Philippines, more than 12,000 people have been killed, including men, women, and children (Ibid.), based on conservative estimates from “the nongovernmental groups Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates and the International Drug Policy Consortium, as well as media outlets including the Sydney Morning Herald” (Ibid.).

There has been, also, the efforts to push an independent investigation via the UN into the killings associated with this so-called War on Drugs, which amounts to the punitive or punished oriented approach, in contradistinction to the harm reduction approach, mentioned before (Human Rights Watch, 2018b). This harsh tone and tough talk are not new from Duterte.

In a May 2015 election campaign rally, he, in a strong suggestion of a punitive approach to drugs, exclaimed, “If I became president, you [alleged criminals] should hide. I would kill all of you who make the lives of Filipinos miserable. I will definitely kill you. I do not want to commit this crime. But if by chance per chance God will place me there, stay on guard because that 1,000 [killed in Davao City] will become 100,000” (Rappler.com, 2015).

Golez quoted the Roman Catholic Christian Pope spokesperson, Salvador Panelo, stating, “This is precisely the rationale behind the President’s war on illegal drugs in the Philippines: to save the young and future generations of Filipinos from the drug scourge... Laudable developments have been achieved by the current administration in this regard, notwithstanding the noise coming from the loud minority composed of his detractors and critics here and abroad” (Golez, 2018; Romero, 2018).

In short, Duterte and the Pope speak in different tones but support the same social and law enforcement right-wing ideological perspective, which, in accordance with all evidence available to us, will not only maintain the terrible conditions but make them worse or exacerbate them for individuals and society.

As per the calls for decriminalization and the empirical robust support for harm reduction methodologies, the Pope and Duterte should take a complete about-face in their commitment, as they currently rely on an anti-science conservative agenda that harms the public and has resulted in, potentially 12,000 or more killings when a perfectly functional and evidence-based approach sits before them with support from the international community from the United Nations to the World Health Organization.

The implications of more suffering and then working to stamp this out does not sit apart from the work of mostly male world leaders working to maintain a tough-guy image and in the Christian conceptualization of human suffering as a derivation of a good reflective of the redemptive self-sacrifice of Christ at the Cross; but for God’s sake, the evidence and the naturalistic ethics bound to the sciences of the mind better suit the modern world and will, in fact, do what the purported holy figure and strongman want in their triumphal declarations: reduce the drug abuse or substance misuse problem – so, stop being the guardians of unnecessary suffering and death, and misery, and pain.

Then, maybe, we can thank heaven, literally or metaphorically.

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## Banal Defenses: Crux in Lay Apologetics

January 7, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

*Andrew Sullivan, prominent and long-time essayist, declared every person has a religion. By implication, this would include atheists, as most see themselves, likely, as a-religious within the referent frame of a-theism.*

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Andrew Sullivan, prominent and long-time essayist, declared every person has a religion. By implication, this would include atheists, as most see themselves, likely, as a-religious within the referent frame of a-theism. This seems more wrong than right, and also appears to miss the basic nature of religion: handed down answers, or, rather, assertions bequeathed with dogma; where with a-religiosity, values become discovered, obviously confined within the cognitive-emotional bounds of living as a human being. Thus, the first-answer as to why everyone leans towards common values and the Golden Rule, within constraints.

He has written and published hundreds of articles in a variety of publications. In the view of Sullivan, the modern atheists take on the garb of a quasi-religion through their “attenuated form of religion,” as this is a “practice not a theory” view of religion (Sullivan, 2018).

He views the denial of God as absolute as others’ faith in God, but, in fact, he contradicts himself with the denial of God as views while the religions of those who believe in God amount to actions. This retains the similar tactical flavor of prominent evangelists of everything becoming referred back, in some manner or other, to Christianity or God.

He points to the values individuals live by in the world, including daily rituals, meditation, and prayer. He even points to secular people with Buddhist practices as part of their view of the world. Atheism does not imply Buddhism or Buddhist practices; it implies a non-belief in God. That’s it.

Sullivan stated, “In his highly entertaining book, *The Seven Types of Atheism*, released in October in the U.S., philosopher John Gray puts it this way: ‘Religion is an attempt to find meaning in events, not a theory that tries to explain the universe’” (Sullivan, 2018).

Religion becomes Confirmation Bias writ worldview. Sullivan argues for this as part of a self-knowledge of every individual member of the human species of their own individual demise, of absolute finality.

Thus, the reconciliation with the world comes in the form of the assertion of “meaning in events” and not as an attempt to “explain the universe” (Sullivan, 2018). He, quoting Gray, in essence argues for a why rather than a functional-how of the universe, of which religion provides the explanatory filler and, presumably, the evolved necessity of a search for meaning gives the cognitive filter.

He asserts, “This is why science cannot replace it. Science does not tell you how to live, or what life is about; it can provide hypotheses and tentative explanations, but no ultimate meaning”

(Sullivan, 2018). Take the temporality of the claims of science, this, to him, likely implies lack of ultimate meaning in time; take the spatial limits of the human body, this implicates a void in ultimate meaning in space; examine the limitations in mentation of all human beings, this derives eventual emptiness to meaning from the self and imaginary inventiveness of human beings.

The gap between the infinite, absolute, or ultimate meaning and any finite temporal or spatial meaning leads to a conclusion that religion gives ultimate meaning. However, when we look closer on the assertion of science not being capable of replacing religion, we can see the finite explanations of religion, in its practices – as Sullivan argues religion is actions.

Meaning does not exist as a constituent element of the universe, but, rather, in the relation of consciousnesses to the universe. Meaning remains derived rather than fundamental in this sense and, ultimately, constructed and finite, as this comes from the fundamental substructure of a mind's transactional relationship with the cosmos (and other minds).

But even in the theories propounded by some sects of religions as natural world truths, they contradict the knowledge of the natural world provided via science, which remains the largest reliable set of epistemologies to derive better functional explanations of the cosmos. In this, religion becomes non-ultimate too; indeed, its assertions of the ultimate in meaning amount to assertions, of which non-religious people make commitments.

But back to the how of the universe, science works on the level of engineering to a significant extent, to the hows of the universe, but not on the whys. Art, literature, music, and religion comprise – not always practice – but sets of expression of the internal landscape of consciousness and perception in such a way as to have others see the world and feel about the world as the artist or writer sees and feels reality. None of this seems ultimate, including religion and its by-products.

The claims to the ultimate often are wrong as well. An ultimate meaning to the universe with the resurrection of the dead following the forgiveness of sins starting with the Fall in the Garden of Eden and the virgin birth of the Son of God, and then the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ as the Saviour of Humankind.

To this assertion of ultimate meaning in avoidance of an extrapolated heat death of the universe in an immensely deep time into the future, or the ultimate meaning in the transcendence of death via atonement of Original Sin to this, we can ask a question, “What direct empirical evidence for the Garden of Eden?” (Sullivan, 2018) Answer: none. Whence Original Sin?

Outside of literary import, akin to Shakespeare or European folktales and legends, e.g., King Arthur and Merlin and so on, the purported ultimate meaning provided within the, for example, Roman Catholic Christian Church tradition of Sullivan becomes non-evidenced and, thus, probabilistic, at best, and, by implication, non-ultimate, i.e., no ultimate meaning in it.

The sensibility of the transcendent and ultimate in meaning becomes a placeholder for chauvinism in specific religions and particular theological assertions within the faith: “Our faith, our religion, harbors ultimate meaning in theology, in practices, in scriptures, and in community living, unlike the non-religious or, even especially, the irreligious” (Sullivan, 2018).

It simply amounts to arrogance and chauvinism cloaked in another guise of the religious, in this case, Sullivan. Temporal and spatial, and cognitive, limits bound the nature of the discussions, discourses, and dialogues possible for human beings, and then claims to ultimate and

transcendent simply tend to mean parochial religious assertions and limits of understanding, and reaffirmations of traditional religious practice.

Characteristic of the fearmongering of equality for others while still the dominant faith demographic *by a long shot* in much of the West, especially where Sullivan is housed in America. A slight loss in prominence breeds a reactionary tone in addition to the regular unfolding of epithets.

Sullivan states, “Seduced by scientism, distracted by materialism, insulated, like no humans before us, from the vicissitudes of sickness and the ubiquity of early death, the post-Christian West believes instead in something we have called progress — a gradual ascent of mankind toward reason, peace, and prosperity — as a substitute in many ways for our previous monotheism” (Sullivan, 2018).

Secularism becomes post-Christian, which implies theocratic-leaning as more Christian or the reduction in the reliance on faith-based initiatives for health and secular means by which to achieve better material and wellness conditions becomes post-Christian, even with most of the nation adherent to a Christian narrative, as in America.

Even besides these concerns, Catholics may want to work less on demonizing others as a distraction of the horrific sexual scandals and abuses of nuns, of children, and others, and more on the asking of forgiveness of their victims, the national potentials they’ve destroyed through denial of contraceptives and family planning, the women who they have denied livelihoods in their opposition to safe, legal, and equitable abortion – as the Guttmacher Institute shows legalization lowers the rates of abortions (true pro-life, thus, should become pro-choice), imposition of theocratic rule in constitutions, and illegitimate abuse of religious privilege in societies to maintain political power, *und so weiter* (Guttmacher Institute, 2018).

Non-religion becomes “scientism” and “materialism.” On “scientism,” this term is a covert epithet of the non-religious and started with Friedrich von Hayek in 1943. Materialism relates to the outcomes of public relations and the industry devoted to the fabrication of wants, where I agree with him.

The campaigns to get kids to nag parents for unnecessary junk or to get pregnant women to smoke are evils, and a result of deliberate materialistic advertising and marketing campaigns to delude the public – and vulnerable sectors to boot.

As Sullivan correctly notes, “We have leveraged science for our own health and comfort” (Sullivan, 2018). Indeed, one big impediment to the reproductive health rights and technology of women has been the Roman Catholic Christian Church. Rather than focus on his own backyard, Sullivan, instead, aims at prominent writers and then criticizes abstracts including “reason.”

As has been said by others, perhaps, we need pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will, but we should remain wary or chary of the obvious moral goods being ignored in the real manifestations of their consequences in the directly implicated deaths and injuries of millions of women through simple rejection of contraceptives, abortifacients, family planning and associated educational provisions, safe and legal abortion, sexual education including consent, and so on.

Sullivan argues humans are religious creatures. This seems, in part, true, but, probably, more reliant on superstition and ignorance and myths as we remain an evolved and cognitively flawed species. He also argues humans seek meaning as part of our nature. This, once more, seems to identify a bug in what we may view as a benefit or a plus.

It depends on the orientation of the meaning sought by the individual or the group. As well, he draws attention to some non-religious individuals with too much emphasis on reason. This begs the question as to what reliance on emotionalism can derive for the truths about the world outside of the social relations.

In fact, this Vulcanization of the opposition – the non-religious – seems like another stereotype and asserted with thin evidence, except within the general derogatory statements about and odd opposition to the fundamental premises of rationalism with “reason.”

But this leads back into the notion of religion as actions or practice, mainly; however, Gray and Sullivan seem flat wrong here. Religion, in most contexts, amounts to beliefs plus suggested practices, where core *a priori* beliefs necessitate the faith and suggested practices can be adhered to varying degrees of seriousness: Jesus rose from the dead (core belief) and can perform miracles with enough serious and sincere prayer (suggested practice). Muhammed is the last Prophet of the one true God, Allah, (core belief) and the *Hajj* is an incredibly important Pillar of Islam to partake in the life of a sincere Muslim believer (suggested practice).

Someone without these, in either case, simply lacks traditional religion. Otherwise, what defines the boundaries of religions, exactly? If nothing, then religion simply becomes moot as a concept. But we tend to realize the distinctions and, intrinsically, understand religion as real phenomena and the contents of it, and practices from it. The common phrase or description of these actions is the moving of the goal posts.

One can see this angle from prominent pastors and theologians in North America who see the negative implications of the term “religion” and then work to distance their particular denomination from it: “That’s not Christianity. That’s religion.”

Giving the game away, of course, religion is seen as bad by the public more and more, based on well-documented evidence in history and evidence right into the present, and then garners a bad public persona. Christianity then, must, get separated from it. Same for other traditional religions.

Another methodology is simply to denude the term “religion” of context by moving the goal posts to such an extent as to leave anything with long-term adherence as a religion: materialistic pursuits, practicing meditation in a secular context even, or utilization of the tools of science and medicine for the improvement of human wellbeing defined in modern and secular terms.

Selectively quoting some prominent non-believers in history, Sullivan tries to mount the argument with appeals of various forms, including emotional. Without formal religious institutions or, in some modern lines of thought, old Disney films and European folk tales to give structure, order, and meaning, what will become of the world and the nature of being? Are these attacks on traditionalism? Are these assaults on the fundamental substructure of the world, of being itself?

The same as has happened in proportion to the reduction of religious fundamentalism, more freedom of thought and story-making, and meaning-making, and focus on secular notions of well-being: societies become better. Some may point to the United States of America as a high standard of living nation while also retaining high religiosity; we can simply extend the examination internal to the nation.

As it turns out, the most religious states in America have the worst health and wellness outcomes, in general, compared to the more secular ones. Thus, the benefits come with the

secular offerings and technological advancements as applied to the standard secular concerns for human wellbeing, e.g., vaccinations, healthcare, better food, easier lives, cleaner working conditions, maternal and infant care, reproductive health technologies, and so on.

This comes, in fact, from a rejection of the non-answers or excuses for the problems of the real world before us, often provided in the form of religious orthodoxy. The argument cropping or popping up more and more is the notion of atheists or non-religious people generally practicing a Christian metaphysics in spite of their protestations to the contrary.

That is to say, from these chauvinists' views, to behave in a decent and honorable manner, you must be acting in a way reflecting Christianity; therefore, you owe a debt of gratitude to Christianity for behaving well and, in fact, only behave well since you act in a purportedly Christian way.

This is simply a way of saying even 'atheists' aren't atheists because they are Christians or 'atheists' who are truly Christians acting out a Christian metaphysics who claim that they aren't Christian. Assumption: if you act in a good way, then you are Christian; if you act bad, then you are a non-believer. Even if you are a purported or self-proclaimed non-believer, you act as a non-believer with a Christian metaphysics. The chauvinism is "anything Christian good" – presumably, even that chauvinism, though "pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" – and "anything bad is not Christian" (The Bible: King James Version, 2018).

No one should play by the rules set out here because a) they're false as our values predate the mythology of Christianity and b) it's a simple dishonest Sophist tactic. Ethics is apart from religion. It can be incorporated into the moral systems, myths as guides, and stipulations of the faith, but hundreds of millions of people act well without religion and build better, more functional, and healthier societies with less religion as a heuristic – based on decades of evidence, thus not a hunch but not an axiom either.

There's a joke among some Westerners with Indian heritage that their parents claim everything came from India. You point to some discovery in scientific or technological marvel, then the punchline is the parent claiming that this came from India.

One can also hear the notion, by analogy, that – quite astonishingly with a straight face said – separation of church and state came from Christianity, as a 'miracle,' seen in the statement, purportedly, by Jesus, "*Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's,*" which is from Matthew 22:21 (2018).

This one takes tremendous amounts of gumption and myopia on the part of the speaker, ignorance – if believed – on the part of the listener, and complicity in the gumption, myopia, and ignorance if journalists or others repeating it, at least uncritically.

Following the foundation of Christianity, we find one of the largest theocracies ever founded in the history of the world with the conversion of Emperor Constantine to Christianity. The same idea can be seen in the analogy. The claim would be this is not true Christianity or real Christianity; that is to say in the former context, everyone behaving good acts in a Christian metaphysics.

Anyone not acting in such a way isn't a Christian and, therefore, we come to the fallacy known as No True Scotsman. The sloppiness of the arguments is tiresome and the presentation of individuals making these arguments as our public intellectuals and best minds is both a travesty and a shame.

But even taking the issue of homosexuality, one which remains controversial for the hierarchs of the Roman Catholic Christian Church. Not in my words, the church's own doctrine and positions, richly endowed statements on it, too.

As stated by the Vatican, the proper beliefs are "Sacred Scripture" placing homosexuality and homosexual acts as "acts of grave depravity," "intrinsically disordered" or "objectively disordered," "contrary to natural law," "do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity," where "homosexual persons are called to chastity" and "under no circumstances can they be approved" (The Vatican, n.d.).

Thus, the hard beliefs behind the firmly suggested practices are chaste sexual lives of homosexuals: men and women. Presumably, anyone engaging in this, within the tradition of Sullivan, become non-Christian; hence, sexually active homosexual (Roman Catholic) Christians becomes an impossibility, especially troublesome as the Good, to some, marks a Christian metaphysics – noted earlier.

Then Sullivan with the banal notions of religion as necessary for human beings states, "Liberalism is a set of procedures, with an empty center, not a manifestation of truth, let alone a reconciliation to mortality. But, critically, it has long been complemented and supported in America by a religion distinctly separate from politics, a tamed Christianity that rests, in Jesus' formulation, on a distinction between God and Caesar. And this separation is vital for liberalism, because if your ultimate meaning is derived from religion, you have less need of deriving it from politics or ideology or trusting entirely in a single, secular leader. It's only when your meaning has been secured that you can allow politics to be merely procedural" (Sullivan, 2018).

One need merely look, briefly, at the crypto-theocrats within the midst of the United States creating havoc and suffering in the lives of millions of women through blockades to fundamental human rights, as per a statement by Human Rights Watch, of equitable and safe access to abortion. Women get them anyway. However, in the rather desperate and clandestine process, women die and acquire varieties of injuries from unsafe abortions due to restrictions on the "equitable and safe access to abortion."

To Sullivan's (2018) question in his soliloquy, "So what happens when this religious rampart of the entire system is removed?" He asserts illiberal politics. In fact, the affirmation of fundamentalist Christianity has been an impediment to the liberal politics for a long time, straight into the current moment.

Christianity as illiberal in this interpretation, not in some abstracted and idealized notion but in the illiberal implementation of adherents since its foundation, whether now or with the majority of the German populace as Christian decades ago. That's not "anchored in and tamed by Christianity"; that's fanned flames of illiberalism by Christianity, from its origins (Sullivan, 2018).

Secular and humanistic frameworks have been the taming force on Christianity. The impotence of Christians' love, rather than the simple love, has been a force by which the liberalism has flourished; whereas, when they could, Christians were burning people at the stake or imposing their religion as the state religion, including many who wish to impose Christianity as the state religion in the US and elsewhere – to save souls.

Christianity and Christian mythology formed an early cult in recorded history. Now, the more direct attacks on its supremacy are met with some spurious, but not all, arguments posited by Sullivan and others.

Some decent observations by Sullivan come from the idea of “tribalized... religion explicitly built by Jesus as anti-tribal. They have turned to idols — including their blasphemous belief in America as God’s chosen country” (Sullivan, 2018).

He seems correct here. Sullivan takes the stance of reduction in Christianity leading to the Trump Administration and others, or Christian truths. Then he uses this to equate or place on the same platform social justice activists, say a Martin Luther King, Jr., with President Trump.

Plentiful important moral work has been done by individual Christians and mass mobilizations by Christian ethical visionaries, but also in a secular social justice framework as well. The issue here is an ascendance not of social justice but, rather, of the obvious, of which the analogs are not many: Christian theocratic hopes tied to negative nationalism or populism. To link this to social justice activists, it amounts to poor journalism as a false equivalency characteristic of simply not seeing past the prejudices of the time.

One prior example of a Christian theocracy was mentioned, Constantinian Christianity is seen in the Roman Empire with the conversion of Emperor Constantine. Another can be seen in fundamentalist Evangelical Christians within the US.

The Bible is steeped in supernaturalism and with political acts and even concluding on a political execution. It is an ancient cult built over centuries. As a political tract and supernatural mythological, and quasi-historical, text, the orientation of Christianity has been political with the “kingdom of God” not necessarily as an other-worldly spatial location, but as a physical location and “kingdom” of the time as some kingdoms were around at the time, including the Roman.

Christianity never truly saw a split between politics and religion in this sense. Hence, the theocratic impulses seen throughout Christian history is the rule and not the exception.

He, once more, asserts, “It is Christianity that came to champion the individual conscience against the collective, which paved the way for individual rights. It is in Christianity that the seeds of Western religious toleration were first sown. Christianity is the only monotheism that seeks no sway over Caesar, that is content with the ultimate truth over the immediate satisfaction of power. It was Christianity that gave us successive social movements, which enabled more people to be included in the liberal project, thus renewing it” (Sullivan, 2018).

The liberal movements, such as the Enlightenment, were a reaction to the superstition and bigotry of Christianity. The liberalism is anti-Christian in this sense. Now, to the modern fundamental claim of the individual or the purported ‘divine’ individual, or the individual conscience, as bound to the Christian faith, this assertion tends to come from individuals spewing epithets and complaining about identity politics and virtue signaling.

But if we take a moment to reflect, we can note some of the original identity politics in religious identification and virtue signaling prayers and other religious practices. This seems ironic. The Christian identity is one of a group, of a collective in the Body of Christ.

The idea of the social and moral worth of the individual started, in part, with democratic norms and institutions, but, as one can glean from the ideals imagined in *Kallipolis* by Plato or in the opinions of women by Aristotle, only for a select group of people – most often men.

Plato would be considered progressive for the time; Aristotle would be seen in some of the worst sexist terms today. In Christianity, the focus isn't on the individual as an idea, but on an individual, Christ, and the collective as an idea, the Body of Christ.

Then the response pivot to this may be a divine spark or soul in each person. But this also predates Christianity, including Egyptians and the Chinese with the conceptualization of a dual-soul and in Aristotle, once more, with a tripartite soul. Epicureans saw the soul as tied to the material body. Platonists saw the soul as an immaterial substance. Duly note, each predating or co-existing with Christianity and having a notion of ensoulment of each individual human being.

The fundamental distinction is in the selection of values and ideas: to the non-religious, they're chosen; to the religious believer, they're pre-selected by authority and then given in advance. Sullivan *et al* simply miss this, often to the detriment of modernity based on their primitivity.

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# UK May Be OK: Medical Assistance in Dying Law

March 6, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Humanists UK has been pushing for what they have been terming a compassionate assisted dying law, in which there is a law set forth in support of a “compassionate, humane, assisted dying law.”

This movement comes with a wide variety of terms. One of the important aspects of all of this is the public support for it. The Royal College of Physicians is opposed to a humane right to die law.

However, if we look into the public support, it is overwhelming at 80%. 4 out of 5 citizens support the law for this most important of choices about the end of the journey—likely—for human life.

The recent survey can be important for the advancement of medical assistance in dying, in a prominent nation. Humanists UK formed the Assisted Dying Coalition.

With the cooperation and coordination with other organizations, this can be an important move for the empowerment of those who truly want to plan and make the choice for their final days.

UK citizens may be forced to travel to another country for an assisted death. If most of the nation wants it, and if this can be passed to democratically support what the nations wants, then this can be an important democratic advancement and, in fact, a compassionate one too.

# Canadian Free Speech Warriors: Rights 101, Get Your Terms Right

March 7, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

To start some movement, whether of a religious or secular, political or social, nature, there should be a clarification of terms and appropriate utilization of the terminology.

If we look into the general work of the free speech advocates who label others with the epithet social justice warriors, the appropriate terminology for them, thus, becomes free speech warriors.

For the free speech warriors, in Canadian society, there seems to be a consistent confusion of terminology and rights. There is a discussion around the right to free speech in Canadian environments, as if this is the proper terminology, right, and replicates or maps identically onto the Canadian landscape.

With even a single Google search or a trip to the local library, the most base research can represent the incorrect stipulations amongst the free speech warriors.

As the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in Canada states, “The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees the rights and freedoms set out in it subject only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.”

This doesn’t require research. It simply needs reading. That’s it. This appears to not have been done, at all, amongst an entire modern ideological movement.

When we look further into the *Charter*, we can see the respect for the rights and freedoms in Canadian society for the acknowledgment, respect, and maintenance of the free and democratic society of modern Canada.

This leads to some further analysis, though. If the phrase is “free speech” or “freedom of speech” amongst the free speech warriors, the, obvious, contextualization is where does this terminology come from, as noted the terms come from the United States of America and then get exported to the cold place in the North.

Reading the First Amendment to the U.S Constitution, it, in full, states:

*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.*

The abridgement of “freedom of speech” is prohibited here. In other words, the right is not to freedom of expression but, in actual fact, the freedom of speech or “free speech.” Thus, the only true free speech warriors are from America in this interpretation.

But also, we can read further in the Canadian *Charter*. It, clearly, states in Article 2:

*2. Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms:*

*(a) freedom of conscience and religion;*

*(b) freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication;*

*(c) freedom of peaceful assembly; and*

*(d) freedom of association.*

Here we come to the crux and comparison of the issue, it is not complicated, easily read, and simply overlooked. David Millard Haskell gets the terminology correct. That's praiseworthy.

However, others simply fail to notice this. The free speech warriors miss the stipulation—because they didn't read the *Charter* and may have simply wanted to be a part of an ideological movement—about freedom of expression.

This is unassailable in the terminology. In America, the right is specific to freedom of speech. In Canada, the right is to freedom of expression. The question to the free speech warriors is if they want to have a coherent movement and activism in order to protect the correct rights within the appropriate bounded geography within which the rights and responsibilities are bound as well.

If not, it will continue, as it has for years, to remain incoherent, overgeneralization, and wrongly using rights in different contexts in which they do not apply.

# Compassion & Choices Annual Fund 2019

March 8, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

There is a need to support the compassionate ending of life. For some, there simply is nothing but pain until they die. Setup in an ethical society would permit the compassionate ending of life.

It would be something in which the individual living through this would make a cognizant choice or could pass the choice to another individual in order to live a healthier life.

The 2019 Annual Fund is important in the ability to pursue this, as Compassion & Choice is one such organization working to help with this level of autonomy at the end of life.

If you have some funds to donate to this enterprise, it would be greatly appreciated, as this would benefit the general welfare of multiple people who may not have the option otherwise—as we move into the future.

In the end, it is about values. Does one value the autonomy of the individual at the end of life, or not? If so, then this may not be a simple issue, but does become a compassionate and individual choice issue.

Moving into 2018, we can see the end of life freedom advancing, slowly. One important advancement was Our Care, Our Choice Act in Hawai'i. If finances are donated to the fund, then the goals for 2019 can be important for guiding the years forward.

Compassion & Choices wants to advance a 10-year goal of the procurement of medical aid in dying for, at least, half of the country. They also want to protect the current gains and increases that have been won so far.

The shift in the conversation is important too. We can find the ways in which Barbara Coombs Lee's work has been important for the provision of personal stories and advice around and on the issue of end-of-life care and medical assistance in dying.

All of this is important in a multipronged approach to the advancement of end-of-life care. Please donate if you can.

# Do Not Disappear Into That Dear Night, Dear, We Need You

March 9, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

*The Independent* reported on some of the outspoken feminism and empowerment of girls and women of Annie Lennox, former member of Eurythmics. She acknowledged the truism is the vast majority of older women simply becoming forgotten, but affirmed that this does not necessarily have to be the case. That older women do not simply have to become “invisible.”

This seems like the right orientation tome. She has continued to support important initiatives including Amnesty International and Greenpeace. Lennox is serious about feminisms and about the inculcation of the values and the term, likely, into the public sphere more and more.

Annie Lennox has spoken about the importance of empowering girls and women through feminism, expressing her belief that women her age should not have to feel as though they’ve become “invisible”.

The reportage stated, “‘My current focus is to bring the term ‘Global Feminism’ into the zeitgeist,’ Lennox tells *Good Housekeeping*. ‘I’m so happy we can use the ‘F’ word now and talk comfortably about being feminists!’”

For a long time, the term was something uncomfortable and not seen as worth mentioning. But, at the present moment, we are seeing a resurgence of consideration for the rights and responsibilities of women. Bearing in mind, the equality of women simply was not on the agenda for centuries and this continues to be fought against—in a red and tooth and claw manner.

As she—Lennox—has noted, it is criticizing men. It is critiquing negative behaviors that are damaging to men, women, and society that are being criticized. However, this is misrepresented as criticizing all masculinities, all men, and simply being a purported witch hunt. Not the case in most or all cases, insofar as I can tell, once one looks by the media extravaganza and hyperbole.

Now 64-years-old, Lennox is work to establish a renewed culture of interest in and public acceptance of older women, to fight against the stigma and the disappearing from public consciousness of women.

Lennox said, “At the end of the day, Global Feminism is about the fundamental human rights of girls and women—why should we continue to tolerate disrespect, abuse and disempowerment?”

“Dressing up for this photoshoot was really fun and trying on all these clothes for the pictures was enjoyable,” Lennox continued, “I want people to realise that women of my age don’t have to become invisible.”

# Sex With a Side of Humanism, in the City

March 10, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Female roles in Hollywood and women in the movie and television industry continue to make further strides due, mostly, to their own efforts and activism for recognition, respect, and equal treatment with the men in the industries and on the screen.

Sarah Jessica Parker spoke on feminism and humanism. In the call for better roles for women, she remarked how this is not simply a feminist issue but, in actual fact, a humanist issue, broadly speaking.

Part of this may be due to the stigmatizing of the term “feminist.” Another part may be due to the universalist nature of the implications, in terms of direct representations, of the term “humanist.”

Of course, the terminology of feminism, in its traditionalist meaning, is universalist, as in women and men recognized as social and legal equals. Humanist simply moves this out into the level of the species.

“The actor reiterated this sentiment in a recent interview, explaining that she believes the LGBT+ community must be included when discussing better representation in film,” the *Independent* reported, “When questioned over whether or not female actors are being offered higher calibre roles than they have done in the past, the actor stated that she doesn’t feel as though she’s ‘equipped to speak to the quality across the board.’”

Parker’s hope is for the quality parts in movies and television will be part of the industry, not simply as a “call-to-arms” for feminists but, in fact, a general movement for the furtherance of humanism.

A humanist is someone who does not identify with the supernatural—not necessarily the rejection of the metaphysical but the supernatural—and emphasizes human reason, compassion, and science, in addition to their inherent limitations as evolved organisms.

Both respect the human rights of men and women. In that, there is a wide overlap in their outlooks.

“People of colour, gays, lesbians, and transgenders who are carving out this space. I’m not spitting in the face or being lazy about what still needs to be done—but I don’t think it’s just women anymore,” Parker said in 2015, in *Cosmopolitan*.

She further explained how the movement within the television and movie industry could be even more powerful if this was identified with the humanist movement. Others have proclaimed this as, in essence, an evasion tactic with the aforementioned demonization of the term feminist.

While, at the same time, these can both be true positions; the shift into humanist language may be more powerful than the limitations, currently, of the plurality of feminisms on offer.

But this could also lead to a similar problem with a wide range of humanisms on offer as well. As there is a wide range of humanisms, indeed, these can range from the deistic humanists to the atheistic humanists, and never the two meeting.

The world is complicated; people similarly so. Meryl Streep was also on record as identifying as humanist because of being for “nice easy balance,” which does reflect the casual style and flavor of thinking of the actress.

In addition, Susan Sarandon described her view of humanism too. It is not simply about the distinction but more about the overlap and then the appropriateness of the term to social context.

But certainly, these identifications as humanist by prominent women is an important aspect of the work to modernize the views of the humanist world and, as importantly, getting the title out into the mainstream sphere through prominent and respectable actresses.

# **Ladies and Gentlemen, We Bring You, Once More, the Trojan Horse, “Controversial Issues”**

**March 10, 2019**

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen**

A resolution in South Dakota was brought to the legislature that was urging for the adoption of an ethics code that would be for the public school teachers.

The NCSE reported on the resolution and considered this as potentially adversely affecting the state of science education.

As reported, “House Concurrent Resolution 1002 (PDF), filed on January 25, 2019, by fifteen legislators (all Republicans) and referred to the House Education Committee, is aimed primarily at preventing what it describes as ‘political or ideological indoctrination.’”

While, at the same time, there would be a provision within the proposal, the code, for the prohibition for educators from teaching “any issue that is part of a political party platform at the national, state, or local level.”

Glenn Branch, of the NCSE, stated that it is common for state political parties to take individual stands on evolution and purported other options in the development and speciation of life.

Indeed, this can happen with climate change as well. With the imposition of the possible bill, then the teachers would be prevented from teaching evolution and, in fact, pressure into teaching anti-evolution stances and climate change denialist positions.

The reportage concluded, “A similar resolution, House Joint Resolution 684, is under consideration in Virginia, and a similar bill, House Bill 2002, is under consideration in Arizona.”



## **Breaking: UNDRIP, Alive**

**March 10, 2019**

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen**

The government of British Columbia will be introducing legislation in order to implement an international document relating to the Indigenous rights of the Indigenous peoples of Canada.

The document is a declaration entitled the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP). This was announced in a recent throne speech.

This would make British Columbia the first province in the country to legislate the endorsement of Canada of the UNDRIP. British Columbia Premier John Horgan stated that he remains unsure as to what this may look like but the legislative councils are working on solutions.

“I know it will be more than symbolic,” Horgan said, “We need to address reconciliation in British Columbia, not just for social justice... but for economic equality for all citizens, Indigenous and non-Indigenous.”

During the campaign trail for Horgan, there was a promise to respect, recognize, and implement the 46 articles of the UNDRIP. Those recognized as human rights for Indigenous peoples around the world. One of which is the right to self-determination. Other peoples have it. Therefore, Indigenous peoples should have it. That’s elementary.

The UN Member States with Indigenous peoples and questions surrounding land and territory should acquire free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) in order to ensure the rights of Indigenous peoples are respected in these areas.

Horgan’s NDP campaigned on a promise to implement UNDRIP, which includes 46 articles meant to recognize the basic human rights of Indigenous Peoples’ along with their rights to self-determination.

Horgan stated, “For too long uncertainty on the land base has led to investment decisions being foregone, and I believe that that hurts Indigenous people and it hurts other British Columbians.”

# Did Someone Say, “Controversial Issues”? Because I Heard, “Trojan Horse.”

March 11, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

The struggle continues onward with the reindeer hit mainly by the plane in Maine, but also with the latest “controversial issues” measure. This is a new tactic and a common one.

The proper move, politically and legally, is an identification of the move and then steadfast work against it. The tactics tend to stay the same. The titles and names tend to be different.

There is a bill within the Maine legislature that would, in fact, require the public school teachers to follow a code of conduct. That’s not bad, in fact. But the content is the questionable part of it.

There is a background context. The NCSE reported on the fifth measure of its type in 2019 alone. There are “South Dakota’s House Concurrent Resolution 1002 and House Bill 1113, Virginia’s House Joint Resolution 684, and Arizona’s House Bill 2002.”

The Maine Legislative Document 589 (House Paper 433), prefiled in the Maine House of Representatives, could require the state board of education to adopt an ethics code—again, ethics are good—but the code would prevent public school teachers from engaging in “political or ideological indoctrination.”

This would make the topics appearing on platforms of a state political party subject to open questioning and, thus, creating a basis for questioning scientific truths via questioning of party platforms. The big issue is the fact that a large number of the party platforms, at the state level, mention evolution via natural selection and anthropogenic climate change.

# NGSS: Getting the Advanced Frontiers in Science Education to the Young

March 15, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Amongst the noblest pursuits of the human species appears to be the education of the young, in which there is a proper and responsible passing onto the next generations the acquired knowledge of the prior ones.

One effort in the United States in the Next Generation Science Standard intended for school districts and accredited nonpublic schools. Iowa, for example, adopted the NGSS in 2015.

However, House File 61 is an interesting recent proposal that would prevent this from coming into full effect in Iowa, preventing NGSS from becoming the norm and expectation within the education system.

As reported, “The bill, introduced on January 23, 2019, and referred to the House Education Committee, is sponsored by Skyler Wheeler (R-District 4). In a 2016 interview with the Caffeinated Thoughts blog (April 19, 2016), Wheeler declared, ‘I also oppose NGSS as it pushes climate change ... NGSS also pushes evolution even more.’”

The denial of standard and mainstream scientific findings is an important issue. Denial of evolution simply leaves medical and biological sciences professionals less likely to come out of Iowa.

But also, there is the issue of anthropogenic climate change denial. This is an issue threatening species survival and requires immediate action as this is an urgent issue.

“In 2017, Wheeler cosponsored House File 140, which contained the same provision about the NGSS, as well as House File 480,” the NCSE stated, “which would have required teachers in Iowa’s public schools to include ‘opposing points of view or beliefs’ to accompany any instruction relating to evolution, the origins of life, global warming, or human cloning. Both bills died in committee.”

There is nothing new here. Indeed, the educators see through the ploy and the Iowa Association of School Boards has already made an open declaration of opposition to the House File 61.

# Sincere Belief: On Behalf of the Unborn in Alabama

March 16, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Time Magazine reported on a man from Alabama who is, in fact, filing a lawsuit against a reproductive health center for an unborn fetus.

This is stated as, potentially, one of the first cases of this. A lawsuit based on the purported rights of an aborted fetus.

Obviously, the Alabaman has sincere beliefs as to the rights and privileges—legal and otherwise—of the fetus. The question is truly if this fits into a standard human rights framework or only in the minds of a minority of the American public aligning themselves within the perspective of the man from Alabama.

“Ryan Magers, who says his ex-girlfriend had an abortion against his wishes, filed a lawsuit against the Women’s Center for Reproductive Alternatives in Madison County, local CBS affiliate WHNT News 19 reported Tuesday,” *Time Magazine* stated.

In the papers filed to the court for the lawsuit, Magers stated that the ex-girlfriend took a pill to terminate or end the pregnancy on February 12, 2017, in spite of the pleas of keeping the baby, by Magers.

Of course, this implies, if taking the testimony of Magers, a strong difference of opinion on the eventual birthing as a child after the fetus sufficiently developed or the actual termination of the fetus—not a baby.

*Time Magazine* said, “This week, an Alabama probate judge granted Magers’ petition to represent the estate of the fetus, which the suit calls “Baby Roe.” But according to WHNT, the court papers do not make it clear that “Baby Roe” was an aborted fetus.”

A jury trial is being sought, purportedly, by Magers, where Brent Helms will be the attorney for Magers. Helms is claiming the case breaks legal ground, as a Baby Roe case—so to speak. This appears as if an explicit attempt to build off the success of the *Roe v Wade* decision of 1973 in the United States.

This is, for a Canadian audience, akin to the *Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1968*—1969 superseded and expanded, in a sense, by the *R v Morgentaler* Supreme Court of Canada decision from 1988.

The name “Roe” is a reflection of “John Doe” for the everyman but for the everywoman, “Jane Roe.” It is intended as a general law. The current context is, in this sense, for the “Baby Roe” to mirror this. Ironically, the traditionalist strain wants to have the women and children take the man’s name.

But, in this case, the every-child, or, rather, the every-fetus, takes on the name of the mother, the everywoman Jane Roe.

Helms said, “This is the first estate that I’m aware of that has ever been opened for an aborted baby.”

Alabama stated that the unborn fetuses have identical rights as an individual born in an amendment from last November. It has been marked a victory by some.

It is part of the growing movement called the “Personhood Movement.” Their sole goal is the constitutional rights of personhood being granted to a fertilized egg—a single cell. In this, we can see the influence of traditional religious ideological stances about the moment of conception.

“The same legislation also says that the Alabama constitution does not protect a woman’s right to an abortion—language added in the event of Wade getting overturned,” *Time Magazine* described, “The Supreme Court’s landmark 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision granted women in the U.S. the legal right to abortions. The addition of conservative justice Brett Kavanaugh on the bench has raised concerns among pro-choice activists that women’s right to abortion in the U.S. may come under threat.”

Pro-choice activists are beginning to talk more about this and view this as a scary development for some of them.

# Getting Warmer: Climate Change Literacy Bills in Washington

March 17, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

The issue of climate change is often misreported. It should be reported consistently and affirmatively as anthropogenic climate change or human-induced global warming in which the human industrial activity is a major factor in the problem in climate change.

One major aspect of the work is climate science literacy in order to combat the problem here. Washington has two identical bills now, which are aimed at climate science literacy.

These are for the Washington state legislature. One is called House Bill 1496. Another is entitled Senate Bill 5576. These are intended to establish a comprehensive program for more learning opportunities and education on climate science. It is meant to increase knowledge about climate science.

One facet for the media would be the introduction of the terminology as “anthropogenic climate change or “human-induced global warming” as a start.

There is an affirmation, in the pair of bills, for the increase in the skills and knowledge about climate science. It is only within Washington but this is a start, especially in a huge advanced industrial economy such as the United States.

The point is to introduce a greater skill and knowledge base amongst the young there. It will have information and opportunities for climate literacy and environmental education.

There is a reference to environmental and sustainability standards in one section of the Washington state code listing that is required as areas of education through the public schools.

This, according to the NCSE reportage, is simply an introduction of a new emphasis on sustainability.

As reported, it affirmed, “...critical knowledge and innovative strategies for effectively teaching climate science can be strengthened by qualified community-based organizations.”

One intriguing proposal is the foundation of a grant program through a nonprofit of the community for educational purposes via the Next Generation Science Standards. It's not indoctrination; it's minimal standards of a modernized educational on the environment.

The reportage concluded, “House Bill 1496 was introduced on January 23, 2019, and referred to the House Committee on Education; Senate Bill 5576 was introduced on January 24, 2019, and referred to the Senate Committee on Early Learning & K-12 Education.”

# A Trans-Setting Star Exhibits Her Craft: The Transgender Community and the Starcraft II Professional Video Gamers

March 18, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

In the modern history of the sport, the world had great difficulty in the acceptance of what has now been termed mental sports, including chess and other non-contact, mostly non-physical competitive activities.

People devote their entire lives to these competitions out of sheer love of it. Some of the chess world came to a head with the long-time world champion Garry Kasparov competing against the supercomputer—super for the time at least—named Deep Blue.

Since this time, the interest in what may best be termed, for now, mental sports have simply grown a lot. This is particularly true for the number of those who have entered into the competitive gaming realm earning—and no word of exaggeration—hundreds of thousands of dollars (USD) in their professional careers, akin to professional skateboarders who you can appreciate in the artistry of their excellence in their chosen craft.

Akin to other sports worlds, some of the interesting aspects of the world of this new domain of sports gone mental-digital is the, yes, often well-known and substantiated instances of open misogyny within some sectors and amongst some members of the video gaming or gamer community.

But there may also be other facets to this dialogue not entirely covered. One is the win for the transgender community, likely, with the inclusion and non-controversy in the inclusion of a trans individual in the ranks of one of the more prominent and long-time famous real-time strategy or RTS games: *Starcraft II*.

Sasha Hostyn, born in December of 1993, is a professional *Starcraft II* player amongst the highest ranking in the world in addition to playing Dota 2 to some degree. The questions here relate to the ways in which a Canadian gamer is anything new.

It's not.

What is newer, especially given some of the regressive aspects of some of the community some (in-)famous incidents over the years in the world of professional video gaming, Hostyn, or "Scarlett," has been the only woman to win an international *Starcraft II* tournament.

More significantly, she is known as the queen of *Starcraft II* and, potentially, one of the most accomplished women video gamers in the land today, as well as being a trans woman.

What has been especially noteworthy in the world of professional video gaming here, Scarlett's gender identity is a non-issue within the community of announcers, gamers, and, as far as I can tell, the wider community of professional *Starcraft II* video gamers, which sets a tone and timbre on the world of professional video gaming different than before—not simply symbolically but in a display of recognized excellence in performance based on rankings and winnings.

That's trend-setting.

# Rahaf al-Qunun: Differentials in Common Problems

March 19, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

*The Metro* reported on Rahaf Mohammed al-Qunun from Saudi Arabia, who has been granted asylum to Canada, recently. She fled to Kuwait from alleged abuse and then landed in Bangkok. Following this, she began to seek asylum.

With the surprising effectiveness of the work by al-Qunun and others, and similar social media social justice campaigns including #MeToo, Twitter became a catalytic platform for the improved efficacy of the calls for social justice for Rahaf Mohammed al-Qunun.

As some may note, the socio-political left and the socio-political right tend to disagree on what should be the emphasis of the social justice in most instances, and utilize epithets against the opposition in the cases of that which they disagree.

But the possibility of further abuse of a girl and the killing of an ex-Muslim united the internet for social good, a social justice activist effort. Many Canadian voices were in favor of the work there.

The unifying story was the abuse and the context in which men and women live in the culture. Men and women are grossly unequal in Saudi society.

One interesting story is relayed within the article about the way this works for gay men too. The former Muslim man, who left, had to disengage with family, because of the disagreements in belief.

The author described a sympathy, in common experiences, with leaving religion in an area of the world at this time that takes the violent approach to those who leave. One can see this environment with Christian in the centuries past.

Those who leave in these coerced-into-religion contexts become difficult, dangerous, and even life-threatening. The man felt as though—as a gay Muslim man—he had let down the creator and sustainer of the universe.

As opined, “I know of Christians who have left their faith and converted to Islam who talk of pressures from their families, and where some have had their immediate family stop all communication, sometimes for decades. However, what is troubling is that the levels of pressure and intimidation against ex-Muslims rumbles on and that time and time again,”

To attribute this to innate tendencies is wrong, as if one group is a separate species, while, at the same time, to deny this happening disproportionately in Muslim communities is also wrong, it is happening at a higher rate, insofar as a large number of ex-Muslim communities are showing u—and the subsequent stories coming out connected to them.

The author of the opinion piece explained, “I heard from those I interviewed they feared to leave Islam and when they did, they felt scared all of this, it is important to mention that it is not faith or religions themselves that are the problem. Yes, there are difficult elements of texts, but it is how they are interpreted and how families and individuals implement them in their families. For many of the people I interviewed, a harsh and controlling interpretation of Islam meant that they



pushed their loved one away from Islam. Yet, there are just as many families where Islam is interpreted so that people feel accepted, loved and valued.”

# Killer Trigger Warning-Disclaimer: Mike Drop on Christianity

March 22, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

*BET* conducted an interview with the rapper Killer Mike, recently. In the interview, as outspoken as Mike has been for years, he may have caused a bit of a ruckus with some commentary on Christianity. His baseline argument: Christianity does more harm than good for black people.

In an episode of *Trigger Warning With Killer Mike*, which is on *Netflix*, there was further exploration of the world of African-American communities and the cultural taboos within it.

This particular episode covered the belief in a Jesus who was European, Caucasian, or simply 'white.' A Middle East holy figure who was white, think about it. Killer Mike considers this an idea needing deconstruction: directly and without recourse to apologetics. The episode was entitled "Church of Sleep."

As reported, "Using 'Church of Sleep,' a recent Q&A with the Atlanta MC further examines white Jesus, the African Diaspora, ancestral devotion, economic self-sufficiency, the current state of affairs for Black people, and more..."

In the interview, Killer Mike reported on how he viewed African-Americans as imprisoned with the image of a white Jesus and that they are in the "bondage of Christianity."

"What I ended up discovering is that not only is that image oppressive because it denies the identity of myself—all of it hurts the followers," Killer Mike explained, "Personally, white Jesus is not good for me. And for my community, it's not good for them. So I went in with the [intention] of destroying this image, a very patriarchal and racist image."

In the process of this rapid deconstruction of the image, Mike created a new church entitled the Church of Sleep, hence the title of the episode. He noted prayer simply, for him and his family, is talking to oneself and finding their own inner divinity.

Mike has a shrine devoted to his grandmother and mother with an entire prayer room within the household, where there are women divinity figures.

Astutely, Mike stated, "People find community and stability in religious practices and churches, so I get it. Like, I still go to church. I will go to church with my children and their mothers. 'Cause the sense of community and fellowship—I get that. I ain't giving no money at the end. I don't buy or need to buy loyalty to talk to God."

He noted how he has been questioning the faith, asking critical and probing questions, for years, since about the age of 15. Mike stated that he studied religion and philosophy at Morehouse too.

"Without the African diaspora, particularly the East and Horn and formerly South Sudan—without South Sudan, you wouldn't have religion. You wouldn't have Abrahamic religions. All of those religions borrow from folklore, from mythology," Killer Mike explained, "You wouldn't have—without the Orishas of Africa, you wouldn't have Greek gods. So without a basis of calling out the attributes of gods of different names and having different powers, the

Greeks would never set up what became figures like Zeus and Hercules, so I'm cool with everything that came before those."

He noted a binary position or set of responses to his critical inquiry. Either the African-American community likes the message or not. By Mike's thinking on the issue, the indoctrination into Christianity and, in this particular consideration, into the mythology of a white Middle Eastern Jew named Jesus begins at age 4, approximately.

Killer Mike stated, "You're put in a school or nursery or something, and you're not free anymore because you have to agree to the structure of that reality. But before that, your imagination is alive. You're already in tune with God. You're already talking to the air. No one knows who you are talking to. You're walking out into the grass, so that's appreciating God to me. So to me after that, you kind of agree to the system and you spend the rest of your life trying to un-agree and sometimes you don't."

BET's interviewer was an intriguing person, to say the least. They asked good questions, direct queries getting at the heart of it. They asked about the path to personal enlightenment, of which Killer Mike recommended paying closer attention to the internal voice for them. As a youngster growing up, as with most gifted young people, he simply began to question the foundational belief structures handed down to him. He continued to disbelieve it. Now, he is one among many leading a charge of, at a minimum, critical thinking about Christianity and, at least, a white Jesus in African-American communities.

# Shining Light Upon the Hill of Songs: A Morning Star's Waning, Singing in Descent

March 23, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Prominent actress, Ellen Page, has been more outspoken, recently, about what she sees as injustices, then simply speaks directly on the subject matter. Some of these can include environmental issues, and hateful rhetoric and leadership or racism.

The *Progressive Secular Humanist* wrote on this calling out of an American actor, Chris Pratt, in an interview with Stephen Colbert. The interview focused on sheep, sheering of sheep, and a diet coming from the Book of Daniel in the *Bible* called the Daniel Fast. Pratt said that this diet made him feel good.

As reported, “According to its website, the Daniel Fast is ‘based on the fasting experiences of the Old Testament Prophet,’ and serves to help people ‘draw nearer to God.’” Always, always, there should be a “maybe” followed by a comma and a space—and other conceptual necessities—preceding bold pseudohistorical statements like the one there, as in: “...maybe, the Daniel Fast is based on the fasting experiences of the purported Old Testament ‘Prophet’...”

Pratt described to Colbert how this was, in essence, their church’s Lent, to bridge the conceptual gap with Colbert, who is a practicing Roman Catholic Christian. The diet consisted of no meat, no sugar, and no alcohol. The interviewed continued in this chummy way.

Page went on social media to critique Pratt because of the anti-LGBTQ nature of the church that Pratt takes part in now; in fact, Page, at the same time, was critiquing the soft interviewing of Colbert.

A statement (2015) from the church, Hillsong Church, stated, “God’s word is clear that marriage is between a man and a woman.”

Thus, the traditional view is the one purportedly endorsed by a supposed god, where this god is displeased and looks down upon gay ‘lifestyles’ and gay marriage.

That is to say, Hillsong Church views homosexuality as a social lifestyle rather than a reality; an innate tendency within the human species. Why? Because God did not intend things this way, likely. He intended marriage between male and female without homosexuality in the cards.

To their credit, the statement noted a welcoming attitude to everyone coming into the church. However, they do not affirm all—what they non-scientifically assert as—“lifestyles”:

*Put clearly, we do not affirm a gay lifestyle and because of this we do not knowingly have actively gay people in positions of leadership, either paid or unpaid. I recognise this one statement alone is upsetting to people on both sides of this discussion, which points to the complexity of the issue for churches all over the world.*

Discrimination in marriage, regressive in social outlook, and bias in hiring all-at-once; this is Hillsong Church circa 2015, where this extends to the non-Australian extensions in which Pratt and other American celebrities take part now. Other promoters of the Hillsong Church have been “Justin Bieber, Selena Gomez and the Kardashians.”

America is coming to the head of a huge culture war. One of the linchpins, among many, is the issue of LGBTQ+ acceptance within their society or not. This callout by Page will be among a number of others, as this continues to be just below the surface of public consciousness.

As with the many explosions in American history, the outcome will be further repression of the LGBTQ+ community or further acceptance of them. Hillsong Church is based on Australia but boasts over 100,000 members worldwide. It is a massive church, where the lead pastor, Brian Houston, has been embroiled in media ploys to try to clear the name of infamous misogynist pastors including Mark Driscoll of defunct Mars Hill Church.

The Hillsong Church stands against stem cell research, abortion, supports Creationism, and views homosexuality as against the teachings of the *Bible* but Hillsong Church, itself, does not, at the same time, condemn homosexuals. This exists along the lines of “hate the sin but not the sinner” seen in some weaker arguments in the Pentecostal arsenal for social control of homosexuals and theological grounding for marital and sociocultural discrimination of the LGBTQ+ community.

The bottom line is that Houston does not think the Bible can be unwritten or rewritten, as it is the fundamental delivery from He on High, the Creator of the Universe. Pastor Chad Veach of Zoe Church—Pratt’s pastor and church—modeled everything after Hillsong Church. These are not complicated moral issues. These are not complex questions about the nature of human relations. These are basic, elementary even, moral and ethical questions.

Do you, as a leader of a community, want to include sexual orientation and gender identity minorities into your communities as full members or simply as advocates of Christ in the church as members but those members who simply are not permitted the possibility to be real equals based on the contents of the holy text within the fundamentalist Pentecostal reading of the *Bible*? In short, do you want to include homosexuals in the community as full participants or not?

If you don’t, then you do not believe in equality for all, as in the case of marriage only for heterosexuals in binary units or a male and a female united in the eye’s of God as a husband and wife. If you do, then you believe in the inclusion of these members of the community, not as honorary badges of marginal progressivism.

Furthermore, if the latter, it would be an interesting reflection and observation that the progressive secular communities have already been working on this issue for some time without the need to pray on it, to read the holy text for answers, to go to a higher religious authority or body for detailed theological exegesis, but only to the basic instincts, when unencumbered by too much dogma, for inclusion, general honesty, and compassionate community-building based on mutual respect and camaraderie.

It becomes a basic ethical fact. Either LGBTQ2IA+ are included in the subculture or not. If not, please explain the reason. Because, the reasons, typically, are amoral if not immoral and based on the tacit understanding of a purported holy text in which they may be identified spiritually as equal—whatever that means—but, in the concrete world, the nitty-gritty of everyday life, simply get left out as equals compared to the heterosexual communities. Pratt, Houston, Veach, et al, seem to have failed this base moral question. Pratt et al in terms of implicit endorsement, e.g., attendance and financial in terms of tithing; Houston and Veach in terms of preaching and theology. Page is on point; I look forward to reading her next one.

Get flipping.

# Vaccines: The Mattering of “Matters Into Your Own Hands”

March 24, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

A young man, 18-years-old, Ethan Lindenberger, has not been vaccinated, pretty much, his entire life, [NPR reports](#).

This is becoming a common phenomenon with the rise of measles cases, for example. Lindenberger is among a cohort of young people who are simply tired of the denial of medical science, in this case, vaccines, that can put their—as young people—health as a real risk.

Now, this cohort of young people, in part, is simply going outside of the dictates of the parents in their lives and getting vaccines themselves; even though, the parents may have been deluded into anti-vaccination hysteria over the years.

It is a sincere, heartfelt, and honorable desire: to protect one’s children. But it comes at a cost when being explicitly exploited by the peddlers of what has been termed junk science, pseudoscience, and non-science depending on the framing of it.

Lindenberger, literally, is being vaccinated for diseases including “hepatitis, polio, measles, mumps, rubella, or the chickenpox.” That’s remarkable. The mother of Lindenberger, a Jill Wheeler, is an anti-vaccine advocate, which simply translates into anti-medicine or anti-science advocate based on the firm empirical basis of the efficacy of vaccinations.

This, much or all of it, started with the reiterations of a [debunked study](#). The notion is that the vaccines themselves, somehow, “cause” rather than correlate with autism. Do vaccines cause autism? No. Do vaccines correlate with autism? As far as I know, “No.”

As some have joked, autism may increase chances of interest in science and maths; thus, autism ‘causes’ vaccines. Aside from the lighthearted sideshows, these are serious issues, of which, unfortunately, due to the negligence of the elders in these young people’s lives, the youth are having to take matters into their own hands—to, potentially, save their lives. And that’s no joke.

## Plan, Accordingly: Expect the Expected

March 25, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

According to the *Friendly Atheist*, a Republican State Representative, John Ragan, filed a bill called HB 1490 in which taxpayer money would not be permitted to subsidize abortions.

The basic belief, here, is that the funding of abortion will endorse secular humanism in addition to violating the separation of church and state. I will not need to delineate the obvious to the audience here, on those first points of inquiry implied by the strange but expected bill.

The language of HB 1490 states some of the common tropes within the rhetoric amongst pro-life advocates; those who wish to deny safe and equitable access to abortion, which, as described by Human Rights Watch, is a fundamental human right and, in fact, saves women's lives—literally—and livelihoods.

Important to note, this is not simply about the legislation. The documentation, in terms of rights, is explicit about three criteria. One is accessibility. Another is safety. A third is equity. It should be within the national consciousness.

Women have the human right, in fact, fundamental human right not simply “human right,” to reproductive health services with abortion as an aspect of this. The notion of abortion is to have the ability to get one in a legal fashion, as a fundamental human right.

Think about the opposition case, if women have their access to abortion denied, what will happen to these women who become pregnant with an unwanted child, for an example?

As a friend and colleague and former child violin prodigy, Paul Krassner, noted decades ago, there will need to be underground referral services, where, in fact, Krassner provided some referral services; in other words, women will get those abortions anyway.

When women get them in a legal or illegal context, in which the access is there or not & the state approves it or not, the main consideration becomes the respect for fundamental human rights or not.

By refusing to provide these services, which are far and away one of the least frequent provided services by reproductive health centres anyway, the legal structures, the society, and the opposition actively oppose the right to this fundamental human right and, in fact, the eventual—and statistical—health and wellness of women. It may not be in every single case, but, on average and based on the empirical evidence available to us at an international level, the general principle of heuristic is women will have improved wellbeing, as a group within societies, with the provision of abortion services.

That's layer one. The basic respect for the right for it, as women will get them anyway. Thus, the best work would be to give this to them anyway. Following from this, we come to the second consideration, which is safety. Once women have it, is it safely available to women? This is a highly relevant question given the context of the United States of America after the appointment of Brett Kavanaugh.

If not, then this violates the fundamental human right. Women will be in only marginally better circumstances getting unsafe abortions in a licit context as they would in an illicit environment.

Therefore, the purpose of a legal protection and provision of abortion services under the banner of reproductive health services would be two-fold: 1) the protection of the fundamental human right of women and 2) the increased probability for the improved outcomes for women in the context of a needed medical service, abortion.

The final criterion is equity, or “equitable.” Different sectors of the population of women have different levels of access to these provisions. This requires an explicit statement as to the import of the protection of women of color, rural women, poor women, and so on, in the case of provision of abortion.

With these criteria for the respect and implementation of a fundamental human right, it is simply about safe and equitable access to abortion services. Without these, with these made illegal or women turned into outlaws for needing or even wanting them, women will die or become injured by the thousands, in the former case, and by the millions, in the latter case, according to Human Rights Watch, at an international level.

The language of HB 1490 simply speaks to the talking points of the pro-life stance on this debate. That is to say, there will be references to direct opposition about abortion not being murder, about abortion not being immoral, and abortion not beginning at conception, and so on:

*The naked assertions that “abortion is not murder”, “that abortion is not immoral”, and that “life does not begin at conception” are unproven faith-based assumptions that are implicitly religious and are unproven truth claims that are inseparably linked to the religion of secular humanism;*

The stance of secular humanism is against religious dogma, where the stance is not dogma, e.g., no holy text, nothing to pray to, no suggested practices, no gods as traditionally defined at least, and so on; thus, the assertion of secular humanism as a religion simply speaks to the indication that religion, in the United States, continues to garner a bad reputation as an idea and as a term, which is cynically being exploited by Ragan in the language here.

This comes from a fundamentalist branch of Evangelicalism within the United States that has been working to demonize secular humanism, and other groups, for some time, including feminists, activists, progressives, and the like.

The statements continue:

*That the establishment clause prohibits the state of Tennessee from enforcing, respecting, recognizing, favoring, or endorsing policies that fund abortion facilities with tax dollars because the practices are nonsecular and such appropriations have the effect of excessively entangling the government with the religion of secular humanism, putting religion over nonreligion;*

To deconstruct this, the obvious implication of the title “secular” in secular humanism is the endorsement, explicitly if not implicitly, of the separation of church and state, or, more properly, place of worship and state. How does this qualify as a faith, exactly?

As we have seen in the history of the United States, the conservative religious fundamentalist base—not simply old fashioned conservatives—are working with what has worked for progressives in the past and then, non-creatively, attempting to reverse the arguments with their own talking points on the notion of religion interfering in the politics and health provisions of the country, which has been a progressive argument and pro-choice—as in, pro-human right, pro-



maternal health, pro-infant health, and pro-women's reproductive health—argument for years in order to prevent the encroachment of the fundamentalist religion into the reproductive lives of women.

Now, the conservatives realize the loss in the courts, e.g., *Roe v Wade* from 1973, but then see the utility in the form of the argument of the prevention of religion entering into political life. In this case, the attempt is to fight the 'evils' of secular humanism by trying to label secular humanism as a religion and then working to encroach religion into the public sphere, into the domain of reproductive health services and reproductive health rights for women, through the denial of abortion services, but from the opposite angle.

By the implication of this reversal, the pro-life sector represented by Ragan, perhaps not all but many, therefore, become people of politic rather than people of principle and may reflect the general assault on the population by "people of means," as recently declared as a preference by billionaire Howard Schultz. The principles would be the same, as in the arguments would be consistent. But now, the arguments have reversed for Ragan and, thus, the principle is not principles but the restriction on the rights of women—full stop, by whatever arguments or means in order to do it.

The statements in the reportage continue:

*The direct or indirect subsidization or facilitation of abortion with funds distributed by the state of Tennessee constitutes paying for an abortion and, therefore, conflicts with the First Amendment establishment clause of the United States Constitution;*

*The state of Tennessee may not favor or endorse one (1) religion over another, nor may the state of Tennessee favor or endorse the religion of secular humanism generally over nonreligion.*

By the respect for human rights and the provision of a fundamental human right, the notion is the utilization of the First Amendment establishment clause to the United States Constitution in HB 1490 as, in some way, a religious issue from the other side, where, in fact, the basic principle of secular humanism is human rights and the separation of place of worship and state.

The argument for the prevention of abortion services through the labeling of secular humanism as a religion simply restricts the provision of abortion services to women—for the vast majority of cases—in need of one. By default or reflection, this would lean towards and instantiation of the pro-life position, or standard fundamentalist religious position, of the prevention of abortions for women. In either case, the outcome is the same: women simply denied equal status in American society through the denial of respect for their fundamental human rights.

"Not that we should have to waste time debunking any of that, but the assertion that abortion is 'murder' or 'immoral' and that life begins at conception are all faith-based statements that also have no basis in reality. It's rhetoric, not science," Hemant Mehta explained, "To suggest that a pro-choice chance promotes secular humanism but that an anti-choice stance has *nothing whatsoever to do with religion* is the sort of lie we've come to expect from conservative Christians. Keep in mind that the laws have nothing to do with whether abortion is 'moral.' That's your call, not the government's."

In addition to HB 1490, Ragan, according to Mehta, is also endorsing, as a co-prime sponsor, a bill with the clear intent to ban abortions based on the detection of a fetal heartbeat, where, not conception, but the heartbeat detection becomes the first point of no abortion possible. As the

readers here can tell, and certainly know, the work is to try anything that work, simply to restrict women's freedom; the sensibility seems to come in the indirect pervasive truth, in some manner: a fear of sexually and economically free women—not a proof of this but a sense of it.

Mehta, properly, notes, “I guess it's not government overreach when it involves *his* religious beliefs. In case that point about hypocrisy isn't clear, Ragan also co-sponsored a resolution *just this year* that would literally change the state's Constitution to say our ‘liberties do not come from government, but from Almighty God.’”

As Mehta reasonably and accurately observes, the issue is not about principle; it is about the innervation of a singular interpretation of religion into government rather than the permission of all voices via the denial of religion into public life. No religion in the politics is simply a recognition of the obvious: a respect for the non-religious and the religious across the board through equal treatment. The religious have been in power forever; thus, any movement towards equality feels like oppression.

The issue may seem ambiguous, to some, in the single HB 1490 case, but, if compared across examples, then the conclusions seem clear: the purpose is forced intervention into public life of one denomination of Christian religion in American legal structures and political life in order to have the consequence of the denial of the fundamental human rights of women.

And as this comes down to an individual choice of abortion, if you do not want an abortion, then don't get one; if you disagree with it, on religious grounds, or for others, then still don't get one, but, at the same time, don't deny the safe and equitable access for women, or, if the case may be, other women.

# **An Immodest Proposal: International Coalition of Ex-Muslims (ICEM)**

**March 26, 2019**

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen**

The increased prevalence of backlash against ex-Muslims in violation of freedom of belief and freedom of religion at a minimum may represent an opportunity in disguise, especially with the rapid rise of the numbers of councils and groups organizing for their own and others' safety and activism to use freedom of speech to speak on their own behalfs.

There are a wide range of ex-Muslim groups including Central Council of Ex-Muslims, Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain, Central Committee for Ex-Muslims, Former Muslims United, Ex-Muslims Initiative, Ex-Muslims of Austria, Ex-Muslims of Switzerland, Atheist Republic formerly Orkut, Atheist & Agnostic Alliance Pakistan, Council of Ex-Muslims of Singapore, Muslimish, Ex-Muslims of North America, Council of Ex-Muslims of France, Council of Ex-Muslims of Morocco, Ex-Muslims of Scotland, Association of Atheism, Faith to Faithless, Humanistisch Verbond: Ex-Muslims of Norway, Atheist Alliance of the Middle East and North Africa, Council of Ex-Muslims of Sri Lanka, Ex-Muslims of Maldives, Alliance of Former Muslims, Council of Ex-Muslims of Jordan, Iranian Atheists & Agnostics, Iranian Humanist Atheists & Agnostics, Council of Ex-Muslims of New Zealand, Central Committee for Ex-Muslims of Scandinavia, and so on.

With this wide smattering of groups of varying sizes, and the inevitable growth of them and others, I would propose an International Coalition of Ex-Muslims, or something like this, in order to form a power base at an international level for solidarity building and centralizing, akin to IHEU, and then, also, for the ability to put sincere and heavy pressure on the United Nations to respect the fundamental freedoms and rights of ex-Muslims all over the world.

And why not?

## Anand Giridharadas Wins Humanist Award

March 28, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Anand Giridharadas, Aspen Fellow/Mckinsey consultant who became, subsequently, anticapitalist, was awarded the Rushdie Award for Outstanding Lifetime Achievement for Humanism in Culture.

According to *Boing Boing*, the award was given out by the Humanist Hub and by the Humanist Community at Harvard along with partners. Some of those partners included the Harvard College Community of Humanists, Atheists, and Agnostics (HCHAA) and the American Humanist Association.

The award was presented at the annual “social enterprise” conference via the Harvard School of Government and the business school. Giridharadas will present the “1000 top leaders, practitioners and students” as a speech for the award.

His book entitled *Winners Take All* has been an important contribution, apparently, to the critique of the ultra-rich around the world and then those self-same ultra-rich using ‘philanthropy’ as simply a means by which to reputation launder.

Enter Harvard University, whose graduates constitute some of the world’s richest, most sociopathic, most generous donors to any university—the Harvard endowment was selected for study by Thomas Piketty in his *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* because it is the only privately held,” The article concluded, “...oligarch-scale fortune whose books are open for study. Congrats to Giridharadas, of course, but more important, bravo to the Harvard Humanists!”

# Malignant Design: A Factor in Evolution

March 29, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

As noted by linguist and prominent general atheist—in general terms with specifications based on what is exactly being denied—Noam Chomsky, the nature of the Young Earth Creationism and Evolution controversy simply remains within the sociopolitical realm, in which the controversy should, in fact, shift to that which has a large number of evidence: unlike Young Earth Creationism, which has none.

The shift of the conversation should be into Malignant Design, for which, by some metrics described by Chomsky, has much more evidence than some aspects of either theory, of which the former, Young Earth Creationism, has none and the latter, Evolution by Natural Selection, has plenty.

Malignant Design has more evidence in terms of the level of suffering in the world, whether by human machinations, e.g., conspiracy, war, bad medicine, apparently anti-vaccination now, and so on, or strictly non-conscious mechanical processes of the natural world, e.g., storms, tornadoes ripping through communities, pestilences, deadly diseases, infections, and so on.

Chomsky, in the *Khaleej Times*, stated, “Unlike Intelligent Design, for which the evidence is zero, malignant design has tons of empirical evidence, much more than Darwinian evolution, by some criteria: the world’s cruelty. Be that as it may, the background of the current evolution/intelligent design controversy is the widespread rejection of science, a phenomenon with deep roots in American history that has been cynically exploited for narrow political gain during the last quarter-century. Intelligent Design raises the question whether it is intelligent to disregard scientific evidence about matters of supreme importance to the nation and world—like global warming.”

The issue of the world’s suffering is tracing the motivations and consequences of the pain and misery seen throughout the world due to human actions and decision, policies, initiatives and programs, and failures to plan ahead and prepare for likely disasters, but also having appropriate scientific investigation and widespread-enough comprehension of the reasons for actions of the material world and then how certain disasters can impact human livelihood; each of these angles is important in order to, in a rational manner, deal with the problems confronting us. The reasons may be irrational, as in human motivations and fear, but the consequences and investigations of the irrationalities can be rational; with the natural world, it is simply not fooling ourselves and having specific tools in place, including the scientific method, to properly know the world to respond in a rational way to the likely consequences of natural phenomenon of the world impacting us.

Malignant design, if one is to notice the world’s suffering, akin to knowledge about mutual aid, is an important adjunct to knowledge of evolution, as a factor in evolution.

# Short Interview on Raif Badawi with Ensaf Haidar

March 30, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen and Melissa Krawczyk (Arabic to English Translator)

*\*The Arabic script is at the bottom.\**

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen: In brief, what is your family background?**

**Ensaf Haidar:** I was a Saudi woman before I became a Canadian citizen. I was born to a conservative family in Saudi Arabia.

**Jacobsen: What is your personal background?**

**Haidar:** My name is Ensaf Haidar, wife of prisoner of conscience Raif Badawi, imprisoned in Saudi Arabia, mother of three children, and a Canadian citizen living in the Canadian province of Quebec.

**Jacobsen: How did these influence your development?**

**Haidar:** Certainly, memorization of the Quran during my studies had a big impact. I even specialized in Islamic Studies in college.

**Jacobsen: For those who may not know, who is Raif Badawi?**

**Haidar:** <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/what-did-raif-badawi-write-to-get-saudi-arabia-so-angry>.

**Jacobsen: How long has he been imprisoned now?**

**Haidar:** It's around 7 years now.

**Jacobsen: How are other writers affected?**

**Haidar:** Unfortunately, everyone is afraid and the prisons are full of writers.

**Jacobsen: How is Canada's leadership helping persecuted writers in some ways and not in others?**

**Haidar:** I think that the politicians in Canada are doing a wonderful job. Canada has always been strong and open about defending human rights, not only in Saudi Arabia, but all over the world.

**Jacobsen: Why do theocracies fear writers?**

**Haidar:** Your question reminded me of a famous quote by an atheist Saudi writer named Abdullah al-Qasemi, who said that the worst thing about the religious is that they tolerate the corrupt and don't tolerate the intellectuals.

The pen is more powerful than bullets in the Arab and Islamic world.

**Jacobsen: How are you feeling given the distance of the man you love?**

**Haidar:** There are no words in the world that can possibly describe my feelings about Raif and what is happening to him.

**Jacobsen: What else can be done to save the lives and protect the rights of writers and dissidents around the world?**

**Haidar:** Speak up loudly – have the conversation everywhere, at every opportunity. Urge politicians to embrace human rights issues.

**Jacobsen:** Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Ensaf.

# The President of the Alberta Sex Positive Centre on Sex-Positive Lifestyles

March 30, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

*Angel Sumka is the President of Albert (Canada) Sex Positive Centre. Here we talk about men.*

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What should men know about a sex-positive lifestyle?**

**Angel Sumka:** All people, regardless of gender, should know that sex-positive culture (which is not a lifestyle, although there are some lifestyles that are sex-positive in nature), is about valuing the diversity of human sexuality, and recognizing that consensual sexual activity is pleasurable and healthy. I think it is important to consider the benefits to our intimate relationships in learning to have this attitude, as when we are accepting and remove shame from our thinking about bodies and sexuality, we create a safe space for our partner to talk to us about their own thoughts and desires.

**Jacobsen: How can men be better lovers?**

**Sumka:** All people, regardless of gender, become better lovers when they communicate openly and honestly, and listen to the feedback they receive from their lover(s). There is no one true way, everybody is different, and the situation is different.

**Jacobsen: For young men, or inexperienced men at any age, how can they start to have a more sex-positive perspective and skill set?**

**Sumka:** For all inexperienced people (I am sure you are seeing the trend here), sex positivity starts with the self. Think about how you perceive gender and the ways in which that is helpful and not so helpful. Challenge your biases about sex and gender, think critically about what you think you know about sex and pleasure. The best way to improve your sexual skill set is to start by learning about your own body, and how to communicate your own needs, and inviting your lover(s) to do the same.

**Jacobsen: What are the principles of safe sex? How often are these not practiced? What are some tips and tricks to make this easy to practice?**

**Sumka:** The principle of safe(r) sex is that we each, as responsible individuals, can take measures to reduce the risk of harm or infection for ourselves and our partners. This starts with communication about our risk profile (do we use condoms? Do we get tested? Are we in a high-risk category, such as i.v. drug use?), includes being regularly tested, and using appropriate barriers. Often missed is that we have the responsibility to continue to be educated about sexual risks, such as learning about the risks associated with unprotected oral sex with various types of genitals.

**Jacobsen: What are the main things with sex that men do not get, whether a homosexual or heterosexual?**

**Sumka:** As you may have noticed, I work hard to not lump people together by gender. Society, however, does not get that consent is not optional. Anytime you go to touch another person,



regardless of how casually, you should be first ensuring they are 100% ok with that touch. Same with sexual comments. Your sexuality does not negate your responsibility to be sure the person you touch wants that touch. Your gender does not excuse you from requiring consent. It always troubles me that so many of us resist the idea of enthusiastic consent. Why are we ok touching people that do not want our touch?

**Jacobsen:** What forces are generally sex-negative in society?

**Sumka:** Humans, ones that feel shame about sex and continue to ensure that others feel the same way, are the ones that drive sex-negativity.

# Interview with Josh Johnson of Atheism 411

March 30, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

*Josh Johnson is an Administrator of Atheism 411. Here we talk about his life and views.*

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** Within personal and family history, was religion or atheism part of it?

**Josh Johnson:** A lot of my earlier memories take place on a theological seminary that my mother was attending, and then in and around churches and parsonages. While my mother's brand of religion was always about as progressive as religion could get, she eventually left the church over their terrible treatment of the LGBTQ+ community – something that I'm still quite proud of.

I was lucky that my parents have always been about as progressive as their generation and upbringing allowed, as if that weren't true, I'm sure I'd have turned into an entirely different person. Their liberal-slanting brand of worship was considered downright blasphemous by other members of my family, whose "Hellfire and Brimstone" style of theology was certainly trotted out for my benefit on more than one occasion.

**Jacobsen:** How have your views on religion and non-religion evolved over the years?

**Johnson:** It was part luck, and partially a genuine effort from my parents that allowed me to see such a wide spectrum of religious faiths as a child. I was a curious kid (on levels), and the more I compared and contrasted the beliefs, the more it became clear that even the seemingly similar denominations had deeply contrasting ideas on the same subjects. Multiple parties all speaking for what is supposedly the same all-powerful entity, each giving different sets of instructions... I don't think the idea of being a believer ever really "took".

I can remember trying to pray once as a kid, "testing God" if you will, and when the experience was as empty for me as it appeared for others, being pretty sure the whole thing was a ruse. I functionally gave up belief in any kind of god at about the point I gave up belief in Santa.

I was dragged to church for a few years more, until I started taking an active interest in getting a Sunday school teacher to quit in protest over my non-stop questions, at which point church became optional. I briefly opted to join the Unitarian Universalist church as a teenager, as an open atheist, in an effort to better socialize with folks my own age. While the "religion without a creed" was conceptually interesting, and I met a lot of good people, at the end of the day I still found it unfortunately rife with a more traditional style of church politicking.

Since then, my only interest in anything religious has been academic. It's harder to talk people out of their baseless superstitions if you aren't fairly well-versed in them.

**Jacobsen:** In an examination of the landscape for atheism, there has been a large increase in the numbers of nonbelievers in the advanced industrial economies. Why?

**Johnson:** For starters, have you ever tried to live your life according to the dictations of an ancient "holy" text? If we just look at the Bible, you're given a poorly written and contradictory set of rules that discourages rational thought, and encourage every kind of bigotry you can think of.

No kind-hearted person can read any fair translation of the Bible from start to finish without finding it, as a complete work, to be a morally reprehensible tome. It's pro-slavery, it's proudly violent, and it calls on you to treat other human beings badly. While I'm far from the first to have noticed, the god of the Bible is a truly evil character that expects horrendous things of his followers.

In my observation, most "believers" don't even believe most of the insane ramblings that their religions are based on. They just like belonging to a community, and in a great many cases their parents successfully implanted a fear of eternal torture in Hell, which keeps them from asking too many questions. If you think simply calling yourself a "Methodist" and paying lip-service to an invisible all-powerful man on holidays is all you need to protect yourself as you keep on living an otherwise "sin-filled" life, it's easy enough to imagine how so many people can live "religious-lite" while running on auto-pilot.

Living in an age where practically everyone has some form of access to the internet, it's become harder to call yourself religious and not feel embarrassed by large portions of what you're meant to believe. To give a quick example, according to the Bible you're not meant to go near a woman when she's on her period. Simply touching a menstruating woman means you become unclean for a week, so says the source document for Christianity.

So why are there less and less religious people, in an increasingly digital age? Because the most ignorant person you know, knows that that's an unacceptable stance. Sexism, racism, homophobia and more are required of a "good believer", so says their texts. As self-education becomes as easy as picking up your phone, less and less people are willing to be associated with that kind of willful ignorance.

**Jacobsen:** However, alongside this increase in the atheist population within the nonbelievers, we have seen a collection of two reactions. Mostly male leaders, often white, in each case.

**The one stream is more, stronger, and more literal forms of fundamentalist preaching, especially within North America and often tied to white ethnic nationalism.**

**Another stream is the attempts to reinterpret the purported holy texts by a collection of unqualified, hyperbolic, and humorless people to make the *Bible* – as it's mostly Christian imagery – cool again, where this tends to have thinly veiled rightwing laissez-faire economics and social views built into them.**

**Do you notice these too? If so, why are these the streams of reactionary 'movements' in the religious and religious-curious camps?**

**Johnson:** I have certainly noticed the unfortunate truth that many recognized "atheist leaders" (I don't like the term, as atheists don't have a central hierarchy or any kind of clergy analog, but I know what you mean) are white men, and I have certainly seen many white men – including atheists – push grossly unacceptable ideas into the public sphere as of late.

While the "alt-right" infestation currently plaguing the United States has certainly been felt in atheist communities, we (the collective crew at Atheism 411) count ourselves among their staunch opposition. I've seen some semi-famous atheist YouTubers and bloggers becoming unapologetically bad people. We've even had to throw out a contributor on at least two occasions in the last 6 years for seemingly out of no where throwing out some kind of bigotry – including bigotry against believers in religion themselves.

Before I go any further, I want to clarify my stance on religious people: I love them. Religious people are my family, my friends, my neighbors. Atheism 411 is a humanist group, and the reason I oppose religion is because it hurts people. Tangibly and regularly, religion harms innocent human beings all over the globe... and I oppose that. But humans are awesome, so we have a zero-tolerance policy (both in our public groups, and for our page contributors) for any kind of bigotry. You can disagree with someone without dehumanizing them, and anyone incapable of meeting that reasonable mandate is not welcome among us.

Which unfortunately brings us back to the question: Since atheists are human beings, and a human being can be any kind of person – including a bad one – we have dealt with our share of bigots. While I have seen racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic atheists pop up in our online communities, the response of myself and my admin team is always to remove them from the community ASAP, and usually to address the issue publicly if it affected more people than can be spoken to individually.

This of course opens us up to cries of being a “progressive echo-chamber”... which, to be honest, doesn’t bother me as much as some think it should. Don’t get me wrong; we welcome every kind of atheist into our community, political beliefs aside, as long as they follow a simple set of rules. But those rules include respectfully talking out your differences, and NOT being an openly bigoted bully. Which means that people who believe other human beings are somehow worth less, or entitled to less of a fulfilling life than they are, simply aren’t allowed in the club.

Funny thing about a club for humanists... You have to care about humans, to join. Even the ones who don’t look, love, or even think the way you do. Seems fair enough, to me.

As for people trying to make the Bible “cool”... I’ve not seen any successful attempts, let’s say that.

### **Jacobsen: How did you become involved in Atheism 411?**

**Johnson:** I’m a marketing consultant by trade, and what finally got me to sign-up for Facebook was a specific client insisting that I start writing their FB ads for them, too.

I was a hold-out on social media as I’ve been creating websites myself since the late 90s, and the appeal/reach of social networking on other people’s websites hadn’t yet bashed me over the head.

I’ve always been an opinionated lad, but around 6 years ago I decided I wanted to start writing on atheistic topics. I found a Facebook page called “Atheism for Beginners” – founded by Matthew Happle – that had a modest following of around 7,000 people, and applied for a spot making content with a rather narcissistic image of myself juggling knives (I do that), with text imposed over it decrying the terrible bigotry that religion has a unique hand in perpetuating around the world.

I got that spot, and over time the page changed. For one, the name got swapped out for “Atheism 411” – which means “Atheist Information”, for those of you who have never experienced U.S. phone codes – and it grew in size considerably (around 46,500, at time of writing).

For a lot of its growth-period, my essays and other original content made up a large percentage of what the page put out, so I eventually took on a partnership with Matthew and became co-owner of A411 and its related Facebook pages and groups.

While Mattie is still my partner and co-owner, I've largely taken over the day-to-day "business", in so much as it exists. Or I should say, the technical responsibility for said; Truth be told, I'd be incapable of keeping it in any kind of order if it weren't for the small team of admins that selflessly and awesomely dedicate a lot of their spare time to making sure our pages and communities are friendly and entertaining places to visit. They're my brothers and sisters, I love them, and I can't thank them enough.

**Jacobsen: What is the mission and mandate of Atheism 411?**

**Johnson:** We seek to peacefully talk people out of their dangerous superstitions.

We see copious evidence of religion uniquely influencing the world in a negative way. The holy texts for JUST the Abrahamic religions are still used all around the world to justify slavery, the oppression and subjugation and murders of women and members of the LGBTQ+ community...

True story; because of my position with Atheism 411, people send me videos sometimes of terrible acts perpetrated in the name of gods. This is how I saw my first literal "witch burning".

Obviously there's no such thing as magic, so they weren't real "witches"... but I've had the sickening displeasure of watching in confusion a video where people beat frightened men and women unconscious with tree branches, then cover them in branches and light it ablaze.

I probably wouldn't have chosen to view the video, had I known what it was when I clicked. What it featured wasn't at all clear to me, even after it started.

It wasn't until the images were effectively seared into my brain that I realized what it was I was even watching... the violent and terrifying deaths of innocent people, because "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." (Exodus 22:18 KJV)

It is my mission to peacefully talk people out of the ignorant and baseless superstitions that lead to that kind of depravity. Because the people who did that weren't "twisting the Bible"... they were reading it literally, and applying it to reality. And that's the same book you'll find on the back of pews in churches around the world.

To pretend religion hasn't earned rebuke is intellectually dishonest, to say the very least. And we have always aimed to be one of many good sources you can come to for said rebuke.

**Jacobsen: Also, what is its niche? Where can people find it?**

**Johnson:** We aim to be a reasonable voice, even though we know what we're saying is conceptually offensive to a lot of people. Open dialog is important, sometimes especially when it's uncomfortable. Religion is definitely one of those times.

You can find us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/Atheism411/>

You can also find the videos I've made for our channel discussing atheist topics here: [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLArID5f-q46EAEyVNvWpCKefTI6AEg\\_L-](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLArID5f-q46EAEyVNvWpCKefTI6AEg_L-)

**Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Josh.**

# The Fallout of an Unprepared Mind, and Nation

March 31, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

As reported by *Nature*, in the case of a nuclear catastrophe, the United States of America is woefully unprepared as a nation, because of the current severity of the problem and the statement of the potential response to nuclear threats by the US; this leaves the leadership with unprepared minds and the nation with an unprepared infrastructure and, potentially, will in order to combat this great threat, among the greatest alongside overpopulation and anthropogenic climate change/global warming.

We are in a lot of trouble. We do not need incompetent antics to prevent the work to reduce the risks of nuclear proliferation that increase the risks of a nuclear attack. As reported, “The United States is not prepared to deal with the aftermath of a major nuclear attack, despite North Korea’s efforts to develop nuclear weapons and the increasing tensions between nations overall.”

This was the assessment, not the judgment, of public-health experts taking part in a meeting on nuclear preparedness organized and, presumably, hosted by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. An expert in disaster nursing at John Hopkins University, Tener Veenema, described the meeting as “an acknowledgement that the threat picture has changed, and that the risk of this happening has gone up.”

Veenema was the co-chair of the conference. As the reportage notes, with the decline and fall, and collapse, of the former Soviet Union, the central concern since 1991 of the United States in terms of research and preparedness for the possibility of a nuclear strike has been on terrorist attacks. The focus there is with what is called a dirty bomb. Those 1-kilotonne weapons that can then spray radioactive material.

*Nature* continues, “But North Korea is thought to have advanced thermonuclear weapons—each more than 180 kilotonnes in size—that would cause many more casualties than would a dirty bomb (see ‘Damage estimates’).”

Obviously, this increases the magnitude of the concern and the risk in terms of thermonuclear devastation. With thermonuclear warheads on the development horizon, potentially, the next response, according to Cham Dallas of the University of Georgia, is simply to shrug and then act as if nothing can be done.

“The US government’s spending on nuclear-weapons research and response has dropped drastically over the past few decades—as has the number of health workers with training in radiation medicine and management,” *Nature* reports, “According to a 2017 study<sup>1</sup> by Dallas, more than half of emergency medical workers in the United States and Japan have no training in treating radiation victims.”

## By Golly Ms. Molly, Gone, Mrs. Lawrence

April 4, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Famed actress, Jennifer Lawrence, famously stated when she was 25 that she simply could see herself getting married at that point in her life. Although, she could see herself as someone who could become a mother.

This was in a prominent interview with none other than Diane Sawyer. Given the context of Ms. Lawrence's relational life at that time, in intimate life, she had split with the British actor Nicholas Hoult, which was after a 5-year relationship. A significant period of time for someone in this age bracket.

Lawrence, at the time, opined, "I was also in a relationship with somebody for five years and that was my life... Being 24 was this whole year of... 'who am I without this man?'"

At that time, at 25, she never saw herself as someone who would ever need to walk down as the aisle, saying, "I don't know if I ever will get married and I'm OK with that... I don't feel that I need anything to complete me. I love meeting people, men, women, whatever, I love people coming into your life and bringing something."

It was a time in her life when she, probably, felt a need to rediscover herself and assert her identity, which, for someone with a life in the public eye, is all the more difficult, of course. To state, that she does not need a relationship to feel complete.

It is in this sense that public statements like those can provide emotional support for women who feel questioning themselves and where the larger culture may, in fact, be pushing a false image and so message; one that women need to speak out about, and, in the case of Lawrence, even in the midst of the pain provides a supportive statement of not needing a partner while still wanting to be a mother.

But, of course, this can also leave room for change. Now, Lawrence is engaged after dating for 6 months, or more, and will be working towards a marriage with her new fiancé named Cooke Maroney.

# On the European Commission's High Level Expert Group on Sustainable Finance Report

April 4, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

*\*This interview was conducted in 2018.\**

**Scott Douglas Jacobson:** So in the past, you have been a member of the European Commission's High Level Expert Group on Sustainable Finance, with the recent report published in February 2018. How did you come to earn that position?

**What are the main propositions within the final report?**

**Professor Paul Fisher:** So, there was a request for nominations at end 2016. I should note that serving on the committee was unpaid, so this is a volunteer committee. I was nominated by Cambridge University as a Senior Associate there. With my background at the Bank of England and working on climate change there, that was probably the basis for it.

The recommendations are comprehensive. We're expecting them to pretty much endorse everything, to set out their plan for what happens at least over the next year and a half before the next round of European elections.

They'll be doing groundwork, to be taken forward to the next European Parliament. But we don't know for sure what will be in the actual plan (*editorial note: subsequently published in March 2018*). The recommendations are summarized under ten summary headings, although, there is probably about 100. It is quite difficult to be precise! Let's say 100 recommendations.

**Jacobsen:** What are those areas?

**Fisher:** The first one is to introduce a common taxonomy. Because you cannot start to talk about classifying financial assets without precise definitions. So if you want to know what a green asset is, everyone has to agree on what the definition of green is.

It isn't about rules at this point. This is about getting the dictionary correct. They're already working on this, trying to specify this new taxonomy. And once you've done that, you can start making policy decisions based on the classifications.

The second area is around clarifying the duties of investors, to look at longer time horizons and bring greater focus on ESG factors (that is environment, social, and governance). This is in particular for investors who invest on behalf of other people.

So in particular, if you have a pension fund, you are investing on behalf of the pensioners, you should have a really long-term focus, which should bring sustainable issues to the forefront. Now, the incentives for asset managers are often shorter term. We're looking at that.

Also, the duty of other investors managing their own money, companies at least, to think about those sort of issues. Because your duty to your company is not about short term profit making.

To make sure you include future shareholders as well as current shareholders, you need to think about how sustainable profits are.



Third are disclosure rules. We had a report last year from the Task Force on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures. Basically, we want a framework that moves as close as we can get to the recommendations from that task force, and get it as close to mandatory as we can. There may not be any new legislation. It is meant to be voluntary rules, for disclosure on a 'comply or explain' basis. That disclosure is supposed to be around material exposures. It is proposed to cover things like governance, strategy, risk management and targets and metrics.

The fourth one is around empowering the citizens to connect with politicians. This includes things like improving information on sustainability performance, and financial literacy. It starts getting into having simple labels for retail funds, about sustainability.

Financial advisors should ask their client about their preferences. So, we can make sure that they are recommending what is suitable. That is supposed to happen under current laws. But they do not ask about sustainability.

Fifth is getting into sustainable finance standards, starting with green bonds. These are bonds, which are issued by borrowers with the proceeds promised to go to some specific green purpose. The market has been growing quite rapidly. We have recommended a European green bond standard. So bonds, that meet that standard can have the label.

Sixth, to improve the supply of projects that need investment, we want to start something called Sustainable Infrastructure Europe. Because a lot of the work we've been doing is looking at the supply of finance. But it is the demand for finance which is struggling to keep up. There are not enough green projects to go around. We need technical assistance, especially for the public sector. That should help raise money for infrastructure.

Seventh, there is a general point about reforming governance and leadership of companies, sustainable finance competency, particularly within the financial system. The director's duties and stewardship principles in that regard need to be clarified. So, we think boards somehow should have some competency on these issues. That they should consider things like carbon emissions and other factors. That blends closely with the investor duties, of course. But this recommendation applies to all companies.

Then finally, we want to enlarge the role of the European Supervisory Agencies. There are three of those, in particular, which are the European Banking Association, the European Insurance and Occupational Pension Association and the European Securities and Markets Association. But what those three agencies do is coordinate with national regulators in their areas.

So, basically, first is prudential supervision of banks; the second does insurers and the other one does market conduct and consumer protection. That recommendation has, to a certain extent, been implemented already. Because we already had the clarification last year. They should encompass sustainability, as a result of our recommendations.

So, those are the areas – eight in all, which are the summary of the recommendations. Then there are detailed sections within the Report, which cover all that.

**Scott: You are also deeply involved with the Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership and Climate Alliance Australia. How do those particular organizations orient themselves in a similar direction, e.g. sustainability?**

**Paul:** The CISL group, having been going about ten years. What they're doing is work with companies, various work streams, mainly with the sustainable finance people, in banks, insurance, and asset managers. They look for common problems in the industry, to solve them.

They provide executive education for these companies: bringing big companies up to speed with what the issues are and what they should be doing about it. Policy work, which is where I come in, it is to try and convince the policy setting agenda.

In Australia, it's a much smaller group, but similarly, they work largely towards trying to get boards to take climate risks seriously. That has been going for a while in Australia. All of these groups work quite closely together.

They're very similar outlooks. But in Australia, the problems are somewhat different, in that the politics is toxic because of the importance of the coal industry. There is a lot of superannuation funds who are big investors similar to life insurance companies. They've got funds at risk.

**Scott:** I want to ask about a personal approach question as well. Because you do have several years of experience in these areas. Where others do not have the ability to do it or the skill set built up to know what to do?

**So when it comes to working with them, in a policy and sustainable economic framework, how do you go about working to influence decisions, either on your own where you are volunteering or contributing to a larger initiative to make that positive impact?**

**Also, how does that approach differ from some of the approaches that might be taken in different contexts that are not taking into account a longer-term sustainable perspective?**

**Paul:** Most of the people have a lot more experience than me on the sustainability agenda. I've only been working on this for a few years. Some have 20 or 30 years' experience. But most specialists in sustainability or they were from financial companies – specializing in particular aspects of finance.

My background: I was a macroeconomist and policymaker. I was the only one in the group who was a regulator and doing macro. So what do I bring to the party? It is that experience of how to do policy, how to join things up as a macroeconomist, and what the regulatory issues can be in these scenarios. I am not a campaigner in the way, a lot of green campaigners are, or the sustainability people are.

I am interested in public policy, in good private policy for that matter. So, there is a sense of detachment which being an economist, a policy person, should bring you. I go out to talk to companies in the financial sector, I try to do that when I can. I say: forget the politics and campaigning. Even though this is a social, moral, ethical issue, you have to leave that aside and work with the mainstream business risk issue. If you do that, then you will start making the right decisions.

You will realize what the risks are, what the opportunities are, where the economy is going. Trying to bring that clear-headed view of what the issues are. It is giving people permission to get on and do the right thing, forgetting about the politics – that isn't important.

Most of the banks have these issues under their head of corporate social responsibility. So, it is seen as something needing doing, because the community wants it. But this should be under a business head, which is a CSR issue.

But you are not going to start transforming your business, taking opportunities and avoiding risks, unless, your heads of business units are on side. So get away from the many years of campaigning, get down to hard economics and the business environment and say, "This is the right thing to do if you want to make money."

**Scott: That is funny.**

**Paul:** Invest in renewable energy if you want to make money!

**Scott: That is very funny. I live in Canada. It is on a similar context. I could see an argument. In the short term, people are okay with tar sands, but in the long term may want to reconsider that as their main energy resource.**

**Paul:** Tar sands are a stranded asset already. You should not be investing any more money in tar sands because it would get lost. It is a big black pit to pour money into. They should be investing in wind, solar, wave power, and hydroelectric. All sorts of things, but not fossil fuels.

The cost of renewable energy is now going through, falling below the costs of fossil fuel energy. The costs (of renewables) are still falling at 20 to 40 percent per year. So, this is a very rapid growth. UK energy production is at about 25 percent renewables. Germany over a third.

This is where the world is going. It is where the money is going to be made. Not in tar sands. Or other oil and gas. Gas may have a longer life than oil. But basically, the demand for it is going to see a very sharp drop. For example, we'll basically have electric vehicles powered by renewable energy, we won't have petrol/diesel vehicles.

**Scott: You do not have an obligation to make a statement here. What might this imply for either provinces or nations as a whole, pushing for things like pipelines in the immediate future?**

**Paul:** They're wasting their time and their money, basically. They need to be looking at renewable energy sources, not fossil fuels. Fossil fuels will be phased out, in a relatively short time period, I would say.

Renewable energy is getting so much cheaper, in many parts of the globe. It is cheaper to produce certain energy at home than the transmission cost across the grid. So however it is made – electricity – in the first place, there is a cost of transmitting it that is greater than it would cost to produce it at home. That's becoming increasingly true, everywhere could have solar energy. Other places will have wind energy, whatever the local conditions will supply. We won't need oil or other fossil fuels at all.

**Scott: What was done before the geopolitical situation with countries heavily being exporters and heavily reliant internally?**

**Paul:** Saudi Arabia is frantically trying to come up with a new economic policy. So, they can see the writing on the wall. Countries like India, China, need to jump through and go straight to clean energy. The problem is, they rely heavily on coal.

It is creating terrible pollution. So, they know they have to change, from the smoke and pollution. That was what drives those countries, what will drive all of this overall is the economics of it as well. But the cost of the pollution effects will help drive it.

So, this isn't any sort of cost, going green. This is a choice for cheap, renewable green energy. This is another example: Tesla are working on roof tiles which are solar panels. So, you replace

your regular roof tiles with Tesla tiles. You can have solar energy built into your house. Now, whether Tesla has succeeded making a business out of it, I do not know, but that is the way forward. Solar energy and wind energy, possibly, built into the buildings

We already see commercial buildings doing this, make them much more energy efficient. So, these changes are really happening. The difference will be when they go mainstream, as products.

**Scott: What is the predicted time for them to become mainstream?**

**Paul:** I think, usually happens, quickly. 2-5 years, we've already got the technology for driverless, electric cars. I've been in one. I sat in the middle of a three-lane highway without my hands on the wheel. Electric cars, they're so quick!

**Scott: I was in one in California. You do not hear much because they're so well-built. At the same time, you feel as though you are going through, or at least I felt as though I was going through, the downswing of the roller coaster – by what I was seeing, rather than feeling.**

**Paul:** It is not quite there yet, too expensive or too heavy. They are supposed to be bringing out the car this year, Tesla, which is half the price. Tesla isn't a mainstream product yet. Somebody said that Toyota produces more cars in a day than Tesla has ever produced.

So, there is some way to go before it goes mainstream. But we are starting to see a big pickup in hybrid cars, which have some electric capacity. There will be no petrol, diesel cars allowed in cities, in 2030, 2040. People are starting to see the writing on the wall.

This is all going to happen. It'll happen because of the economics. It'll be cheaper to be driverless.

**Scott: What do you consider the boldest proposal for the next 10 years in terms of renewable energy, sustainable energy?**

**Paul:** I do not think it will take much more than common sense. People are supportive. What we're going to see will be quite striking, it is not just about policy. The economy will change quite dramatically. It will change because of the economics. That will drive it.

That is going to be the boldest thing to happen. Petrol/diesel cars to electric cars don't need a policy shift. It will be consumers that drive it.

And we're now seeing, in the UK and Europe, the big push back against plastics. Or making sure that plastic is recyclable plastic at least. That happened, for me, in the past a month or two, after a television program. So when I think of the boldest thing, I think this is just going to happen by consumer action. It will happen because the economics will drive it.

We're well on the way to see very big changes in the economy and the way in which people think about those issues. The policy is already mainstream. Since 2015, the Financial Stability Board has changed its policy agenda. The setting up of a G20 Study Group for green finance, which in turn led to the EC Experts Group on Sustainable Finance. So, all these things have come since September 2015. Now, it is an unstoppable policy.

Trump may disrupt, nonetheless. But what you are seeing in the US is cities, states, individual businesses, taking up the reins where the government has stepped back. So, I expect to see big changes. Some will be predictable, but some of them will be unpredictable.

We know big changes are going to happen. We do not know precisely what they're going to look like. We've seen what will happen to the car industry, what will happen to the energy industry. There are many other industries out there.

**Scott: Thank you for the opportunity of your time, Mr. Fisher.**

# Growing Up in Nigeria

April 5, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

*\*This is in support of an upcoming Nigerian book, as a Foreword.\**

The nature of an education amounts to the preparation of the mind for an independent existence in ideas. In a manner of speaking, this means a philosophical life. A life built from the quest for increased epistemic justification for some fundamental grasp at the ontological structure of the world and its emergent or derivative manifestations seen in the perceived world inhabited by us. Thus, four referents implied with reality, our selves, the relation of reality with our selves, and the relationships of our selves with other selves. Each implying different standard strata of analysis of the world and applying different conceptual frameworks for comprehension. Every area of education deals with a distinct domain of discourse within these four systems.

In a near idealistic context, these would form the basis for a universal education: What defines reality? What defines our selves? What defines the relation of reality with our selves? What defines the relationships of our selves with other selves? A universal education should include these without explicit statement of them. Looking at the selection of the quotations by Olumide in the *Mental Development: A Nigerian Child's Perspective*, we can note the *Satanic Verses* author, Salman Rushdie, who constructed words in such a manner to enflame dogmatic inquisitors' ire at him, even though among the irascible, granted.

Further examine the terminology used by Rushdie with the word "childish," the leaving of childish things behind us, in a way echoed speaking. This reflects the notion of Albert Einstein, Steven Weinberg, and 1 Corinthians. Fundamentalist religious belief as childish and a moon to the Sun of humanity's frailties. As Einstein opined, "The word god is for me nothing more than the expression and product of human weaknesses, the Bible a collection of honourable, but still primitive legends which are nevertheless pretty childish. No interpretation no matter how subtle can (for me) change this," the compilation of immature fables for the human soul with reflection in the parts seen inhumane but ever-so human.

The philosophical life requires questions to terra firma, to the Earth, toward the empirical in addition to the sky, to the heavens, toward the abstract and theoretical. We live in our stories. Also, our narratives live in us. A mutual cohabitation of the soul in spiels. In some sense, the tall tales of old remain important but marginal to much of modern life while important, to most, for some edificative purposes. The more famous, and infamous, individuals with the ability and opportunity to live a philosophical life retain particular misrepresentations.

To the fundamentalist religious view of the world, as American Astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson states on several occasions, the ability to manufacture the image of a famous, unimpeachably brilliant individual into their – the fundamentalist religious – ranks creates a peculiar, deliberate, and false cachet of some brands of fundamentalist religious worldviews, where this can apply to fundamentalist ideologies of most or all forms. The operations of fundamentalism remain the same. Take, for example, the notion of Einstein in support of fundamentalist Abrahamic religions or the Abrahamisms – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (and Bábism, Bahá'ism, Druze faith, Mandeism, Rastafari, Samaritanism, Shabakism, Yazdânism).

Einstein remarked, “For me the Jewish religion like all others is an incarnation of the most childish superstitions. And the Jewish people to whom I gladly belong and with whose mentality I have a deep affinity have no different quality for me than all other people. As far as my experience goes, they are no better than other human groups, although they are protected from the worst cancers by a lack of power. Otherwise I cannot see anything ‘chosen’ about them.”

In this, we can observe the direct explication by Einstein of not only the Abrahamic religions but “all others” as a product ‘incarnate’ of the “childish superstitions” of human beings. Our weaknesses anti-sublimated, superimposed, or superjacent onto the texts and traditions of fundamentalist religion. In particular, we may see the wisdom, too, in the abhorrence or, perhaps, only conscious avoidance of power. The misrepresentation of Einstein remains common, benign in some circles and malicious slander in others, of which he remained aware and spoke firmly against in terms of traditional fundamentalist religious belief.

True education, as affirmed and hinted in *Mental Development: A Nigerian Child’s Perspective*, permits open inquiry and discovery of the world in minds old and new, especially the true statements of prominent individuals in history. To question, for the current example, the notion of Einstein in some basic sense in support of the fundamentalist religions seen throughout the world with the simple quote, or potentially misquote, stating, “*Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.*”

Indeed, Einstein held fast to a belief in God within the philosophical constraints of the Laws of Nature and the God of Spinoza. Some form of deism or type of pantheism acceptable within the modern scientific discourse and evidence of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The inability to distinguish truth from falsehood creates a problem. Olumide explains, “Religious truth, cultural truth, racial truth, political truth, economical truth, to think all these correct and worth considering is to travel in an abyss, an endless and fruitless moral adventure.”

To the misrepresentation of Einstein, as implied in the prior quotations, he stated, “It was, of course, a lie what you read about my religious convictions, a lie which is being systematically repeated. I do not believe in a personal God and I have never denied this but have expressed it clearly. If something is in me which can be called religious then it is the unbounded admiration for the structure of the world so far as our science can reveal it.” Herein, we find the belief in a Spinozan Deity or Pantheity, and not a Theity – an important distinction, conceived within the constraints of the Laws of Nature while also dismissing the honorable, primitive legends of the Bible as “pretty childish” and the Jewish religion and others as “childish superstitions.”

Saliu states the strange situation of rapid societal alteration with the concomitant stagnation in the upbringing and reading of Nigerian youth. He notes, “...to read and repeat words in languages they don’t understand every day, without provision for independent reasoning, critical thinking and profound education, which could have made them better individuals, great human resources and an asset to our dear country and the whole of humanity.” This reduces education to parroting or repetition, and memorization, rather than individual discovery and enquiry for the benefit of Nigerian civil society.

An honest and universal education may lead to questions about the outgrowths in public life about the superiority and inferiority of one’s own nation and associated dominant faith. As Steven Weinberg, in the *Atheist Tapes*, said, “I’m offended by the kind of smarmy religiosity that’s all around us, perhaps more in America than in Europe, and not really that harmful because it’s not really that intense or even that serious, but just... you know after a while you get tired of

hearing clergymen giving the invocation at various public celebrations and you feel, haven't we outgrown all this? Do we have to listen to this?"

Note the phrase of "outgrown all this" as a query of someone feeling weary of tiresome activities, to grow out of something means to become unlike a child or to develop from the contractive to the expansive horizon and vision of the world, this move from the childish to the mature echoes the sentiments of Einstein in other contexts. Education, in some sense, becomes about a philosophical life, where a life of philosophy produces someone with a mature soul.

Olumide directly notes the purpose of the text as conquering the world with courage and placing Nigeria rightfully in its place as one of the beautiful colors that forms the mosaic of world civilization. The text, in many ways, may become a brief introduction to theories about and means by which to nourish the mind of Nigerian youth at crucial periods in their life trajectory from childrearing to diet to limits on environmental influence on biological outcomes, to sex to addictions to critical thinking and more.

To the last example from the outset, even the wise aspects of holy texts speak to the nature of removal from the childish ways of the past, 1 Corinthians in the *Bible* speaks about this. 1 Corinthians 13:11 speaks about the leaving behind of childish things when thinking as a child, saying, "When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me." (NIV) To speak, think, and ratiocinate as a child, this rephrases the essence of the statements by Einstein, Weinberg, and Rushdie, and the thrust of the overall text of Olumide. The philosophical life, the mature mind, and the universal education come from the passing of childish ways.



# Waleed Al-Husseini on the Restrictions of Speech, Secularism, and More

April 5, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

*Waleed Al-Husseini founded the Council of Ex-Muslims of France. He escaped the Palestinian Authority after torture and imprisonment in Palestine to Jordan and then France. He is an ex-Muslim and atheist.*

We have been corresponding and conducting interviews for a long time now. I reached out once more to talk about some principles, apparently or to some, seemingly in conflict with one another.

These were the ideas of freedom of expression and secularism and then restricted expression and theocracy. Both stand opposed to one another, including the various tendencies in form for them their arising.

The values of France tend towards secularism and freedom of expression. Al-Husseini holds values more in line with secularism and similar values. He believes in a firm separation between the state and religion.

Al-Husseini stated, “All of these things do not exist in Islam. It only exists when they are all Muslims as part of humanity (‘it’ only exists? What is ‘it’?) But these can then be computed only within the framework of Islam and Islamic values, which is why they are asking for the defence of the hijab in the name of liberty, but then they attack criticism of Islam in the name of racism.”

Al-Husseini makes the distinction between the arguments about race and racism, and Islam and the doctrines, in the criticism here. He views the *hijab* as an example of slavery and second-class citizenship within the societal framework.

That is to say, he sees this as a means by which to see women as a sexual tool. It becomes a political tool for more fundamentalist versions and interpretations of Islam too.

He does see this form of criticism of Islam as a fundamental human right found in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

When I asked about Sharia Law and Sharia courts in some interpretations of Islam, these can exist separate or distinct from universalist traditions of law, wherein a dual-law system can be set and found in a secular society.

Yet, the society will have a dual-law set with one of the two being theocratic-based and, therefore, infringing on the fundamental basis of secularism as the separation of, in this instance, Mosque and State.

“This is what happened in the UK, and that’s why I don’t like “secularism” and prefer the term “laïcité”! With secularism, they make insular communities and everyone lets them do what they want,” Al-Husseini stated, “I remember in 2010, maybe one court released someone who was charged with beating his wife, because he said that it is okay to beat your wife within Islam and our religion!”

He makes this as an argument for the separation of the place of worship and the public & political life of the citizenry. He sees the battle for secularism as a long one ahead of the citizenry who desire a secular state.

Al-Husseini argues the education in secularism should begin in the earliest years of an individual. In that, there should be a stoppage of teaching religion as true or false in schools, but, instead, keeping these battles for the minds of the young as a true education in simply the facts of the faiths: what do individuals all over the world believe?

Al-Husseini continued, “Also, we should stop telling kids about jihad and should not separate people into Muslims and non-Muslims! It provides a simplistic view of the world. Let them see all of us as humans of many stripes and shades, and types. And the governments should have a secularism law and work hard for it!”

He observes a common problem not simply in the education but in the people, too. As there can be a problem in the people simply not adhering to the tenets of a secular state, this can create a problem.

Another can be obscurantism about aspects of some parts of a faith. Al-Husseini spoke of terms like Islamophobia, from his point of view, being a problem.

“Because, for example, there are the jihadists or terrorists who physically attack you, but then there are these moderates who also attack you in courts!” Al-Husseini stated. He can see this in the admixture of the definitions between racism, hatred and fear of another because of ethnic background or look, and bigotry against an individual believing Muslim.”

He noted this was something that he talked about in his last book. Al-Husseini concluded on the assertion that e-Muslims know more about Islam and the ways of Islamism than individual Muslims.

## Recent Secular French History

April 5, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

*Waleed Al-Husseini founded the Council of Ex-Muslims of France. He escaped the Palestinian Authority after torture and imprisonment in Palestine to Jordan and then France. He is an ex-Muslim and atheist. Waleed Al-Husseini founded the Council of Ex-Muslims of France.*

There were some issues in the recent history of France. I reached out to Al-Husseini to get a secular perspective on the issue.

Al-Husseini spoke on the fundamentalism as a problem in the headlines. But there is also peripheral, but important, issues around miniskirts. He notes this within the context of the world of social media too.

In the Computer Age, there is, in fact, a problem of bad news making the cut and then travelling through the hotwires of the world faster than other news. The miniskirt moment was one such news item within the French sphere.

Al-Husseini stated, “Every time, you will find something: summer coming soon and so there will be people discussing the issues around the Burkini. You will continue to see these headlines that make it seem like the Dark Ages.”

There are Muslim leaders who would prefer an internal-to-Islam, doctrines and practices, change or reformation. Al-Husseini views this as a problem. In that, many Muslims simply may not want the change. Some individual Muslims would simply prefer to learn fundamentalist forms of Sharia.

“That is why even in this time it’s impossible for reform in Islam. Now, it’s like in reform Nazism, in their time when they have the power. Islam has the power, and the religion has connections and money. So, it is impossible. Maybe later they can!” Al-Husseini said.

He talked about the time of a “revolution of light” with the time of the mu‘tazilah. He saw this as a wonderful thing for every one of the time. In that, the Quran was simply viewed as a historical document and nothing more than this.

Now, the problem is that the Quran is viewed as a document for every time and place. But some in the ex-Muslim community can be part of the movement of the reformers.

“We are the reason of making many Muslims use the term moderate because of us because they just don’t accept to kill us! We know more from the inside. Most of us know the Quran through its original language in Arabic, which is the strongest translation of the Quran!” Al Husseini exclaimed, “And we know the ways of them and will never be in these traps and we showed and explained this, we can be part of a united Muslim from who really want to help against the fundamentalists.”

It was this note of a move to modernity and a modern interpretation of a faith within a naturalistic and moderated framework that can be the basis for the work of some Muslims and some ex-Muslims working together.

# See No Evil, Hear No Evil, Speak No Evil: Monkey See, Monkey Do, Monkey Hearsay

April 6, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

*Education with regard to science in the US has just deteriorated. It's shameful.* (Jacobsen, 2017)

James Randi

*I am sentimentally attached to the Jewish tradition, which I was raised in. But I don't take seriously the truth value of my own tradition or of other religious traditions.* (Institute of Physics, 2013)

Edward Witten

*We are far more impressed by stories than by studies, we are so good at pattern recognition that we see patterns that aren't real (like the Virgin Mary on a toasted cheese sandwich), we tend to jump to conclusions before we have all the evidence, and we let emotions trump reason. Science and critical thinking don't come naturally to us; it requires a lot of education and effort to overcome our brain's default thought processes, and not everyone can do it.* (Jacobsen, 2016)

Harriet Hall

*Science is the engine of prosperity. From steam power to electricity to the laser to the transistor to the computer... However, the information revolution has a weakness. The weakness is precisely the educational system. The United States has the worst educational system known to science. Our graduates compete regularly at the level of third world countries. So, how come the scientific establishment of the United States doesn't collapse? If we are producing a generation of dummies, if the Stupid Index of America keeps rising every year...* (Dr. Kaku's Videos, 2016)

Michio Kaku

*Probably 95% or more of all biological scientists accept the board outlines of the theory of evolution. In the National Academy, the percentage is probably even higher... I do not have proof of God, and I am sceptical of those who claim otherwise. But I find something remarkable in the very fact that we, as a species, have been able to learn so much about the universe and the nature of existence.* (Jacobsen, 2014a; Jacobsen, 2014b)

Kenneth Miller

*Like everyone participating I'm what's called here a "secular atheist," except that I can't even call myself an "atheist" because it is not at all clear what I'm being asked to deny. However, it should be obvious to everyone that by and large science reaches deep explanatory theories to the extent that it narrows its gaze.*

*...As for the various religions, there's no doubt that they are very meaningful to adherents, and allow them to delude themselves into thinking there is some meaning to their lives beyond what we agree is the case. I'd never try to talk them out of the delusions, which are necessary for them to live a life that makes some sense to them. These beliefs can provide a framework for deeds that are noble or savage, and anywhere in between, and there's every reason to focus attention on the deeds and the background for them, to the extent that we can grasp it.* (Chomsky, 2006)

Noam Chomsky

*Evolution and creationism pose particular challenges.*

*The religious stuff, that's layered on top of it there. I think there are understandably people who feel threatened by natural selection because they feel, rightly or wrongly, that it threatens some of their cherished religious beliefs.*

*I think that's something that those of us who are skeptics communicating with a public, I think we have to be very sensitive to that and realize that we are potentially threatening people's worldviews. (Jacobsen, 2018b)*

Scott O. Lilienfeld

*To me, the brain evolved in order to get you to do certain things in certain ways: largely to reproduce. However, along the way, your brain in eating and having sex releases certain chemicals that feel really good. Evolution has modified your brain over time to make you feel good by doing certain things.*

*What does that mean? That means that our brains get us high. Lots of things that we do get us high.*

*Watching a good movie, voting for the right candidate that we think will take this country to the next stage, watching the Raptors do as they did, or Milos Raonic doing so at Wimbledon, or swinging on a swing, or watching the birth of your child, these things get us high.*

*They are incredible experiences. Religious belief is the granddaddy of all highs. (Jacobsen, 2018a)*

Christopher DiCarlo

*The only way, therefore, that dialogue as a rational experience can take place is that, on the part of religion, the dialogue be limited to the rational foundations for religious belief. Even then, the only way that any such dialogue could have universal significance is that we could assume that there existed common rational foundations across all religious traditions and that is simply not the case. It seems, therefore, that any fruitful dialogue requires that the rational basis for certain specific religious beliefs in certain specific religious traditions be confronted with what is known from the natural sciences. The natural sciences, in particular, have made great advances by adhering rigidly to canons of what is scientifically true. In fact, in recent years the norms for judging the scientific truth of a given theory of life's origins and evolution have been extended, it appears to me, in the direction of inviting dialogue with philosophy and theology. (Jacobsen, 2014d)*

Fr. George V. Coyne, S.J.

*Creationists, however, especially the intelligent design creationists about whom I have written so much, deliberately conflate philosophical and methodological naturalism. They argue that leaving God out of scientific explanations is tantamount to personal atheism. So my concern as a researcher has been to clarify the relationship between philosophical and methodological naturalism. I argue that although philosophical naturalism rests on what we have learned about the world through the naturalistic methodology of science, methodological naturalism does not, conversely, require philosophical naturalism as a personal worldview because it does not exclude the logical possibility of the supernatural. I think that this is the most accurate and*

*intellectually honest position to take even though I myself am no longer religious. (Jacobsen, 2013)*

Barbara Forrest

*President George W. Bush favours teaching both evolution and “Intelligent Design” in schools, “so people can know what the debate is about.” To proponents, Intelligent Design is the notion that the universe is too complex to have developed without a nudge from a higher power than evolution or natural selection.*

*To detractors, Intelligent Design is creationism — the literal interpretation of the Book of Genesis — in a thin guise, or simply vacuous, about as interesting as “I don’t understand,” as has always been true in the sciences before understanding is reached. Accordingly, there cannot be a “debate.”*

*...So far, however, the curriculum has not encompassed one obvious point of view: Malignant Design.*

*Unlike Intelligent Design, for which the evidence is zero, malignant design has tons of empirical evidence, much more than Darwinian evolution, by some criteria: the world’s cruelty. (Chomsky, 2005)*

Noam Chomsky

*I think that comes down to a fundamental question, “Is there any objectivity to our moral ideals?” The answer to that is, “No. Either you empathize with humanity or you do not. If you empathize with humanity, you feel an imperative.” Now, that does not mean you cannot use reason against your opponents. Most of them are, or would at least claim, that they share this bond with humanity and would try and make a case that what we are doing makes no difference.*

*That leads directly from ethics to science. If what we are doing makes no difference, then there is no moral choice, is there? However, if science shows there are important choices that could be made, then you have to take a stand. Either you possess humane ideals and think all human beings are worthy of moral concern. Or you think this will not happen for 20 years. I am 80 now, so I do not think I will live to see the consequences, and assume I have no grandchildren — so to hell with everyone. Moral imperatives arise out of moral commitments. If you have no commitment that gives you a bond with humanity, I cannot open your mouth and thrust one down your throat. (Jacobsen, 2014c)*

James Flynn

Of the notable natural science education moments in North American history is the Scopes Trial or the Scopes “Monkey” Trial, an important point to reflect on, especially as newer survey data indicates a consistently large minority of Canadians would fall within a standard categorization of Young Earth Creationist (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018; NCSE Staff, 2008; CROP, 2017). The Scopes Trial represented a moment of grotesque ignorance on display, enshrined in law and protected in its enforcement, and presented the intrusion of religion into law for the prevention of critical thinking and science education from entering into the educational system.

H.L. Mencken, deceased and famous American journalist, who brought this trial particular fame — and himself mind you, on June 29<sup>th</sup> stated:

*It is common to assume that human progress affects everyone — that even the dullest man, in these bright days, knows more than any man of, say, the Eighteenth Century, and is far more civilized. This assumption is quite erroneous. The men of the educated minority, no doubt, know more than their predecessors, and of some of them, perhaps, it may be said that they are more civilized — though I should not like to be put to giving names — but the great masses of men, even in this inspired republic, are precisely where the mob was at the dawn of history. They are ignorant, they are dishonest, they are cowardly, they are ignoble. They know little if anything that is worth knowing, and there is not the slightest sign of a natural desire among them to increase their knowledge. (Mencken, 1925a)*

Mencken would continue in much the same tone throughout the trial, even coining the title of the “Scopes ‘Monkey’ Trial” [Foster, n.d.]. The trial lasted from July 10 to July 21, 1925 in Dayton, Tennessee, in the United States. There was a charge on a specific school teacher for teaching evolution via natural selection, where this implied breaking state law (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018). Mencken joked, “...it is believed that settlers will be attracted to the town as to some refuge from the atheism of the great urban Sodoms and Gomorrah” (Mencken, 1925b).

Bearing in mind, of course, Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, and the trial happened several decades later. The continuance of non-scientific or proto-modern scientific theories do not happen within a vacuum. Indeed, Mencken commented, scathingly, on the context for Tennesseans there:

*Prayer can accomplish a lot. It can cure diabetes, find lost pocketbooks and restrain husbands from beating their wives. But is prayer made any more efficacious by giving a circus first? Coming to this thought, Dayton begins to sweat. (Mencken, 1925b, July 9)*

Primitive beliefs, forms of life, and ways of thinking fester without some aspects of the light of modernity. Forms of magical thinking representative of a community, probably, in poverty-level conditions. A bad life can lead to hopes for a better one in another transcendent realm in an instant with enough pleading, begging, and solicitation to the highest choir of divine. A few months prior to the official trial in July, the legislature for the state of Tennessee determined unlawful the teaching of anything but the literal idea of the creation of man and woman as taught in the *Bible* in the Book of Genesis (Ibid.).

In preparatory remarks, Mencken sniped with derision stating, “Two months ago the town was obscure and happy. Today it is a universal joke” (East Tennessee State University, n.d.). In the height of the reportage, Mencken declared, “As for the advertising that went out over the leased wires, I greatly fear that it has quite ruined the town. When people recall it hereafter they will think of it as they think of Herrin, Ill., and Homestead, Pa. It will be a joke town at best, and infamous at worst” (Mencken, 1925k).

The *Butler Act* was introduced by John Washington Butler on January 21, 1925 and then became effective on March 13, 1925 and remained in force for 40 years, passing in the House by near unanimity with 71-6 while the “Tennessee Senate approved it by nearly as overwhelming a margin, 24-6” (Scoville, 2018).<sup>[1]</sup> Butler, himself, was a member of the Tennessee House of Representatives (Ibid.). Mencken thought little of the citizens surrounding the trial, where he reported:

*Whatever lies above the level of their comprehension is of the devil. A glass of wine delights civilized men; they themselves, drinking it, would get drunk. Ergo, wine must be prohibited. The hypothesis of evolution is credited by all men of education; they themselves can't understand it. Ergo, its teaching must be put down.* (Mencken, 1925a)

Also stating, “Dayton, of course, is only a ninth-rate country town, and so its agonies are of relatively little interest to the world” (Mencken, 1925k). This set the basis for a pivotal moment in the ongoing and still current, given the demographics, sociopolitical controversies of the teaching of a philosophy of discovery (and substantiated knowledge frameworks) and a philosophy of ignorance (and loosely knit together and self-inconsistent faith tenets), where evolution represents the former and creationism the latter. Mencken did not think highly, at all, of the context of Tennessee or the system of jurisprudence in place.[2]

In line with the tenor of this ‘debate’ through time, the proceedings of the trial garnered “world attention” with a “promised confrontation between fundamentalist literal belief and liberal interpretation of the Scriptures” (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018).

In *Impossibility of Obtaining Fair Jury* (1925c), Mencken opened commentary on the trial of John T. Scopes, opining:

*The trial of the infidel Scopes, beginning here this hot, lovely morning, will greatly resemble, I suspect, the trial of a prohibition agent accused of mayhem in Union Hill, N.J. That is to say, it will be conducted with the most austere regard for the highest principles of jurisprudence. Judge and jury will go to extreme lengths to assure the prisoner the last and least of his rights. He will be protected in his person and feelings by the full military and naval power of the State of Tennessee. No one will be permitted to pull his nose, to pray publicly for his condemnation or even to make a face at him. But all the same he will be bumped off inevitably when the time comes, and to the applause of all right-thinking men. The real trial, in truth, will not begin until Scopes is convicted and ordered to the hulks.*

The defense was Clarence Darrow, originally a corporate lawyer and later a “champion of labor, proponent of the poor and defender of the most-hopeless of death row cases” (Frail, 2011). The prosecution was William Jennings Bryan (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018). Interestingly, the two men, Darrow and Bryan, were aligned in the 1896 presidential election (Frail, 2011).[3] Apparently, Darrow didn’t care for Bryan as a person at the time, even seeing the man as hyper-religious and excruciatingly idiotic (Ibid.). Mencken took this same attitudinal stance of Bryan (Mencken, 1925m).

Straight with the opinion, cutting with the remarks, cunning with the wit albeit cruel, the Mencken tenor continued throughout the coverage of the Scopes Trial by Mencken. He saw the trial as determined before and during the proceedings.[4] The 1920s trial, in a way, reflected the changing mores and tensions between the traditionalist Victorian types fearing the change of ways in the nation and the modernist intellectuals who wanted to flourish more in their mentalities about the ways of the world, in this case the natural world (Linder, n.d.). Even in spite of some citizens’ disbelief, they feel the need to believe, at the time. In *Sickening Doubts About Value of Publicity* (1925b), Mencken speaks of Bryan in distrust and as, fundamentally, a charlatan:

*The trial of Scopes is possible here simply because it can be carried on here without heat — because no one will lose any sleep even if the devil comes to the aid of Darrow and*



*Malone, and Bryan gets a mauling. The local intelligentsia venerate Bryan as a Christian, but it was not as a Christian that they called him in, but as one adept at attracting the newspaper boys — in brief, as a showman. As I have said, they now begin to mistrust the show, but they still believe that he will make a good one, win or lose.*

The showdown, purportedly, of the time came in the form of the Scopes Trial between the traditionalists and the modernists, or the creationists and the evolutionists (Linder, n.d.). By the end of the trial, the judge in the case decided “any test of the law’s constitutionality or argument on the validity of the theory” should be ruled out (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018). As noted by Mencken in *Trial as Religious Orgy*, Dayton, Tennessee was not a favorable location for Scopes, “...evangelical Christianity is one hundred per cent triumphant... It may seem fabulous, but it is a sober fact that a sound Episcopalian or even a Northern Methodist would be regarded as virtually an atheist in Dayton. Here the only genuine conflict is between true believers” (Mencken, 1925d).

He continued to remark on the prejudicial nature of the whole affair with the “local primates” in support of a man who “confessed that he was prejudiced against evolution” via “hearty round of applause from the crowd” (Ibid.). He described the situation as “resolving itself into the trial of a man by his sworn enemies,” where one “local pastor led off with a prayer calling on god to put down heresy” and the judge, himself, “charged the grand jury to protect the schools against subversive ideas” (Ibid.). Mencken reported on the basic inability of the Evangelical Christian community to imagine an individual who does not accept the “literal authority of the *Bible*” and who must, if he rejects the divine Word of the Lord, be misunderstanding the basic written word of He on High (Ibid.).

Indeed, and as one may expect in a sufficiently large enough population, he described a person for who the *Bible* became the light of their life, and the cloud of their intellect, stating, “One of these holy men wears a sign on his back announcing that he is the Bible champion of the world. He told me today that he had studied the Bible four hours a day for thirty-three years, and that he had devised a plan of salvation that would save the worst sinner ever heard of, even a scientist, a theater actor or a pirate on the high seas, in forty days” (Ibid.).

He saw few genuine skeptics ever combatting with the locals; if a true skeptic exists in these parts, and during those times, Mencken would consider these individuals simply amongst those who keep mostly or only to themselves (Ibid.). Rumours abounded, as written, “Darrow himself, indeed, is as much as they can bear. The whisper that he is an atheist has been stilled by the bucolic make-up and by the public report that he has the gift of prophecy and can reconcile Genesis and evolution,” where “Darwin is the devil with seven tails and nine horns” (Mencken, 1925e). Humorously, Mencken told a coda tale in miniature:

*...and there arose out of the darkness a woman with her hair pulled back into a little tight knot. She began so quietly that we couldn’t hear what she said, but soon her voice rose resonantly and we could follow her. She was denouncing the reading of books. Some wandering book agent, it appeared, had come to her cabin and tried to sell her a specimen of his wares. She refused to touch it. Why, indeed, read a book? If what was in it was true then everything in it was already in the Bible. If it was false then reading it would imperil the soul. Her syllogism complete, she sat down. (Mencken, 1925e).*

A whole series of individuals akin to this self-trotting out woman sprinkle the news work of Mencken.<sup>[5]</sup> He remarked in *Darrow’s Eloquent Appeal* (1925f) on the iniquity befalling the

locals through the speech of Darrow, who, in essence, never had a chance. But in his peculiar wisdom, Mencken cautioned:

*I sincerely hope that the nobility and gentry of the lowlands will not make the colossal mistake of viewing this trial of Scopes as a trivial farce. Full of rustic japes and in bad taste, it is, to be sure, somewhat comic on the surface. One laughs to see lawyers sweat. The jury, marched down Broadway, would set New York by the ears. But all of that is only skin deep. Deeper down there are the beginnings of a struggle that may go on to melodrama of the first caliber, and when the curtain falls at least all the laughter may be coming from the yokels. You probably laughed at the prohibitionists, say, back in 1914. Well, don't make the same error twice. (Mencken, 1925f)*

We will come back to this point on efficacy and wariness of the methodology, though right in the arrow and sufficient with the quill, potentially, wrong in the weapon. Nonetheless, from top-to-bottomless pit, the State of Tennessee, now headed by Haslam, retained at the moment of the trial astonishing protections against the better educated peoples of the legislature and state. By July 15, 1925, the trial began to heat up (Mencken, 1925g).

The police were present more. Mencken reported, “The cops have come up from Chattanooga to help save Dayton from the devil. Darrow, Malone and Hays, of course, are immune to constabulary process, despite their obscene attack upon prayer. But all other atheists and anarchists now have public notice they must shut up forthwith and stay shut so long as they pollute this bright, shining, buckle of the Bible belt with their presence” (Ibid.). His interaction with an officer was interesting enough, where they reflected the observation of “the ordinary statutes... reinforced by Holy Writ, and whenever there is a conflict Holy Writ takes precedence” (Mencken, 1925g).[6]

“The cards seem to be stacked against poor Scopes, but there may be a joker in the pack. Four of the jurymen, as everyone knows, are Methodists, and a Methodist down here belongs to the extreme wing of liberals. Beyond him lie only the justly and incurably damned,” Mencken, in some sense, hoped and lamented at the same time (Mencken, 1925g).

But he, Mencken, also remarked on obedience to the words of Bryan, who went into the mess for fame and other forms of value in notoriety. He spoke of the ways in which Bryan during the trial, not after, became a vanguard of the faithful and the Christ-bitten. Mencken stated:

*...the old mountebank, Bryan, is no longer thought of as a mere politician and jobseeker in these Godly regions, but has become converted into a great sacerdotal figure, half man and half archangel — in brief, a sort of fundamentalist pope. The other is that the fundamentalist mind, running in a single rut for fifty years, is now quite unable to comprehend dissent from its basic superstitions, or to grant any common honesty, or even any decency, to those who reject them. (Mencken, 1925h)*

In this, both the inability to accept the critique and facts of the theory of evolution, even propounded in an educational institution or uttered in the Tennessean court of God Almighty. Bryan, as the one heading the charge, at the time, against Darrow and Scopes, became someone automatically instilled into the halls of the respectable, trustworthy, and almost those worthy of worship. However, as this progressed and the trial continued onward, Mencken would not mince words about Bryan, who appeared to begin to have health problems during the trial or after it.[7]

Mencken stated, “A typical Tennessee politician is the Governor, Austin Peay. He signed the anti-evolution bill with loud hosannas, and he is now making every effort to turn the excitement of the Scopes trial to his private political uses” (Mencken, 1925i). That is to say, Mencken notes the basic ways in which ignorance becomes the fashion of the fancy and the fanciful alike, but of utility to the political types. There was even stunning giveaway as to the nature of the entire ‘legal’ enterprise with the leading lady of light, and ‘truth’ and ‘justice,’ could reign supreme.[8] When Stewart was queried by Hays about the opportunity to give the other side a chance to present its evidence, the statement from Stewart, “That which strikes at the very foundations of Christianity is not entitled to a chance” (Mencken, 1925i).

In a moderated and somewhat serious, and almost out of character pedagogic, state of mind, Mencken, ever the feminine and a well-formed realist, starkly said:

*Darrow has lost this case. It was lost long before he came to Dayton. But it seems to me that he has nevertheless performed a great public service by fighting it to a finish and in a perfectly serious way. Let no one mistake it for comedy, farcical though it may be in all its details. It serves notice on the country that Neanderthal man is organizing in these forlorn backwaters of the land, led by a fanatic, rid sense and devoid of conscience. Tennessee, challenging him too timorously and too late, now sees its courts converted into camp meetings and its Bill of Rights made a mock of by its sworn officers of the law. There are other States that had better look to their arsenals before the Hun is at their gates. (Mencken, 1925j)*

This triumph of faith over fact, of non-science over science, of emotional appeals over reasoned argument, and of literature over evidenced presents one of the central problems of the current period and of the time of Mencken’s harsh criticism and most well-known journalistic work. The law bent towards injustice and the incorporation of religion into it, in violation of basic principles of secularism, but with the raucous approbation and approval of the Dayton and, indeed, majority of the Tennessean public.

Mencken remarked on the simplistic view of the world and the basis in consolation of hell for the unbelievers and heaven for the true faithful.[9] He also spoke to the ways in which the *Butler Act* would lead to the immediate detriment of the educational system for Tennessee, and how its enactment would steadily erode and degrade – in quality and respect – the educational system of the state, explaining, “With the anti-evolution law enforced, the State university will rapidly go to pot; no intelligent youth will waste his time upon its courses if he can help it. And so, with the young men lost, the struggle against darkness will become almost hopeless” (Mencken, 1925k).

The stark limits of the Scopes “Monkey” Trial came down to a singular, not even inquiry but, query: did Scopes teach the heathen evolution by natural selection? By all levels of the public, the law, the cultural mores, state attitudes, educational standards, and judicial enforcers, the answer: indeed, Scopes did commit the crime. Convicted of the crime of science education of the young in the state of Tennessee, Scopes earned the fine of \$100 (Linder, n.d.).

Of the more scathing comparisons of the forms of mind possible amidst the trial, Mencken (1925a) opined:

*The popularity of Fundamentalism among the inferior orders of men is explicable in exactly the same way. The cosmogonies that educated men toy with are all inordinately complex. To comprehend their veriest outlines requires an immense stock of knowledge,*

*and a habit of thought. It would be as vain to try to teach to peasants or to the city proletariat as it would be to try to teach them to streptococci. But the cosmogony of Genesis is so simple that even a yokel can grasp it. It is set forth in a few phrases. It offers, to an ignorant man, the irresistible reasonableness of the nonsensical. So, he accepts it with loud hosannas, and has one more excuse for hating his betters.*

His coverage, though rather biased and humorous, notes the starker differences in attitudes and opinions about unguided evolution by natural selection amongst those given a formal higher education. Given the current statistics in the United States, the number of Young Earth Creationists, though an extreme view as seen in the Ark Encounter or Answers in Genesis, remains high even in the current period.

With an appeal, the state Supreme Court acquitted Scopes on a technicality – to their credit – while also upholding the law against the teaching of evolution – to their demerit, where the acquittal was based on being “fined excessively” (Ibid.). However, the law was only finally repealed in 1967 (Ibid.). In a single move, in less than a year, barely over half of one, almost half a century of students remained ignorant of the reality of evolution in its full breadth and grandeur.

Quoting Mencken, not all, but many Americans, including and especially Tennesseans in this case, got it good and hard for forty years after the trial, he remarked:

*Once more, alas, I find myself unable to follow the best Liberal thought. What the World's contention amounts to, at bottom, is simply the doctrine that a man engaged in combat with superstition should be very polite to superstition. This, I fear, is nonsense. The way to deal with superstition is not to be polite to it, but to tackle it with all arms, and so rout it, cripple it, and make it forever infamous and ridiculous. (Mencken, 1925l)*

But with typical acuity of rendering the heart of the matter into text, Mencken described the misinterpretation, in standard cultural parlance of the time, of the meaning of freedom of religion or “religious freedom (Mencken, 1925l). He sees the common misunderstanding as viewing not only the freedom to believe and preach the religion but also to have, in some manner, an immunity from public opinion and governmental control in any regard; whereas, Mencken stated:

*A dunderhead gets himself a long-tailed coat, rises behind the sacred desk, and emits such bilge as would gag a Hottentot. Is it to pass unchallenged? If so, then what we have is not religious freedom at all, but the most intolerable and outrageous variety of religious despotism. Any fool, once he is admitted to holy orders, becomes infallible. Any half-wit, by the simple device of ascribing his delusions to revelation, takes on an authority that is denied to all the rest of us. I do not know how many Americans entertain the ideas defended so ineptly by poor Bryan, but probably the number is very large. They are preached once a week in at least a hundred thousand rural churches, and they are heard too in the meaner quarters of the great cities. Nevertheless, though they are thus held to be sound by millions, these ideas remain mere rubbish. Not only are they not supported by the known facts; they are in direct contravention of the known facts. No man whose information is sound and whose mind functions normally can conceivably credit them. They are the products of ignorance and stupidity, either or both. (Ibid.)*

Concluding the reportage, “But it was Darrow who carried the main burden, and Darrow who shaped the final result. When he confronted Bryan at last, the whole combat came to its climax. On the one side was bigotry, ignorance, hatred, superstition, every sort of blackness that the human mind is capable of. On the other side was sense. And sense achieved a great victory” (Mencken, 1925l). In this unabashed and impossibly positive reportage and opining, Mencken gives the method its form and, thus, its content, where the enemy, Bryan, must be destroyed and the ally, Darrow, shall be haloed.

This, probably most clearly, can be observed in the multiple publications and statements about Bryan immediately and then shortly after death. Mencken, in *Darrow’s Eloquent Appeal*, made an incorrect prediction, too, by the way, speaking of Bryan “He may last five years, ten years or even longer” (1925f). In fact, Bryan died shortly after the trial; Mencken gave him a rather cruel and direct obituary, where Mencken excoriated the late Bryan – more than once:

*Has it been duly marked by historians that William Jennings Bryan’s last secular act on this globe of sin was to catch flies? A curious detail, and not without its sardonic overtones. He was the most sedulous fly-catcher in American history, and in many ways the most successful. His quarry, of course, was not Musca domestica but Homo neandertalensis...*

*Bryan lived too long, and descended too deeply into the mud, to be taken seriously hereafter by fully literate men, even of the kind who write schoolbooks... The truth is that even Bryan’s sincerity will probably yield to what is called, in other fields, definitive criticism... This talk of sincerity, I confess, fatigues me. If the fellow was sincere, then so was P. T. Barnum. The word is disgraced and degraded by such uses. He was, in fact, a charlatan, a mountebank, a zany without sense or dignity. His career brought him into contact with the first men of his time; he preferred the company of rustic ignoramuses...*

*... The artful Darrow led him on: he repeated it, ranted for it, bellowed it in his cracked voice. So, he was prepared for the final slaughter. He came into life a hero, a Galahad, in bright and shining armor. He was passing out a poor mountebank.[10](Mencken, 1925m)*

Although, these forms of ridicule and statement can come out into the public domain.[11] Publications will accept them. The adoring fan base and public will love them. The hurt via religion may even sadistically enjoy the scolding. However, these may not help with the outreach to the mislead or the infuse critical thought as a way of thinking rather than simply as a set of empirical productions in the play of science, as only a body of naturalistic knowledge.

Let’s take the modern case of Kirk Cameron, a Biblical Literalist, Evangelical Activist, and Fundamentalist Christian Documentarian, he argues for working around the critical faculties of the non-believer, as, obviously, this works less and less with modern education and the infecting of the public mind with scientific rationalism, where Cameron’s colleague, Ray Comfort, agrees with the tactic (Comfort, 2003; Powderwombat, 2010). Mencken’s technique can be done. One can take the diverse vocabulary of Mencken and clever display of mockery, to his sagacity-in-witticisms and high-snark-wordplay – in other words, to (exaggerated) wit:

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\*The Young Earth Creationist movement belies a certain proficiency in forced, and celebrated, unknowing – as if an unbirthday, where the presents for every day, save one

to be ignored and hidden in the attic to gather dust at all costs, of the year comes wrapped in illogic, tied-up and bowed in stupefying bromide-full decoys and terror-tactics, and, upon opening of the ‘gift,’ shows itself containing the dullest-senses observations and among the more childish theories ever invented in the history of the human species – with secured ignorance and an admirable efficiency in deluding the minds of the young, and the more uninformed and already misinformed sectors of the general public, comes in armies of the brainless and spine-full of humanity.

Who knew corals and jellyfish could exist in human form? Those in whom dumb becomes not only congenital & acquired but also super-descriptive, as in a super-set trait to provide an explanatory framework for all other outputs, behaviourally and verbally – and, indeed, mentally, though unknown to the harbourer of this diligent, thorough, conscientious, and ever-present and persistent master of mind. But this also indicates a peculiar acumen in assured, triumphal ignorance, and oafish, immature certainty of a mule ensemble in targeting the vulnerable sentimentalities and soft-spots of the public conscience instead of intellectual capacities.

Kirk Cameron, well-known ignoble steed, of whom much can remain unsaid while some may be stated, he, once, spoke of circumnavigating rational faculties – of “circumnavigating the intellect” – as if this equates to a virtuous act or a reflection of virtue in character, which only tells the tall and, likely, lifelong tale of a man incapable of deep reflective thought, and so needing to resort to such measures in attempts at conversion of the heathen-out-yonder in the outlying lands of sin within Sodom and Gomorrah while also lacking the intelligence to pull off the dishonest conversionary liar-and-dim-stone stunt.

Known for his intellectual steam power in the electronic age, this enchinodermata Homo Sapiens *sans* Cartesian *cogito*, or perhaps “*Homo Boobiens*,” represents a person for who the Hero’s Journey is not seventeen steps but one – and to whom the Tragicomedian’s Journey remains more appropriate as this is every step ever taken, where all paths for this eternally archetypal tragicomic hero lead to robust certitudes and ignorance as our wayward would-be Jonah adventurer gets stuck in the belly of the whale unwilling to be pooped out – possibly because the ‘food’ for the poor gargantuan cetacean amounts to among the most intellectually non-nutritive collocations of atoms ever amassed and agglomerated – and thereby unmetamorphosed and still unsurprisingly made of the self-same excremental material, always landing in the same position whilst continually spinning in circles, as if a top, in the mastery of the far-flung-imaginary and with the high-falutin’ stature of the foolhardy fool leaving not himself but everyone else in dizzying confusion as to what was just uttered with, all the while, a smile of a simpleton’s blank face tinged with the hardy scent of hometown dustbowl emptiness, the senseless and ignorant of sense ignoramus – albeit an honest, sincere, and striving donkey, in effortful, besweated, and dull proselytizing, where even the grass grows weary of his prickish advances.

A stultifying display of the highest ignobles and a man among the greatest viceroys of the basest vices with bold pride binding to anti-Faustian bargains, where the man manages to make the hefty bet, gain nothing and also lose nothing, and still thinks he acquired something, already knows everything, and remains perfectly wrong on both counts as surely as a cube has twenty-four right-angles, i.e., overt arrogance, inked ironically in a

theology of the humble-virgin born-and-sacrificed carpenter, and illusory comprehension tied with inescapable jackassery and dunderheadedness, matched only in his Tennessean creationist tenacity as in his own dumbassery.

By the powers vested through Castle Greyface and Palace Numskull, he wields the power of the Major General at the heights of Mount Zion's cloud-headed; a man who is the leader of the pack of Mount Olympus heading the charge of the Godly know-nothings; an admiral with an ocean's worth of sunk intellectual costs, based on words said, reaching the depths of the Marianas Trench; a man who never even knew the man who knew too much, and was a man who never knew much, too; a mathematician tabulating his cognitive contents in at the invention of zero; a philosopher of the first-rate in empty phrases and deep inanities, who when finished in their evacuation from his tiresome mouth and dispensing in endless vacuities leaves Cameron's clodhopper skull to implode with stunning quickness that collapsed stars doomed to become black holes can only aspire to and even blush in reflection upon the swiftness of the eventuality, and where neutron stars only dream of the thickness of his skull in the first place.

As clownish as this act and ideas may seem in the instant gloss of the moment, there can also appear the base metal underneath the fool's gold coating of the uttermost fool; Cameron intends this not only as high-minded and under-handed personal tactics of conversion of Satan's fiendish lost – coming from a low intellect even over-rated then – but also as clear, down-home, chummy, brotherly, and deranged advice for fundamentalist religious believers in Christ Almighty to intake on faith and to reach out to the unsaved Pagan peoples of Mordor and followers of the faithless Sauron and incarnation of evil, Melkor. Where is Eru when you need Him? Pray, then tell.

If it weren't for his ineradicable dopiness and hopelessly clumsy demeanour, and empty-faced – and headed – naivety, the sheer act and behaviour of reaching out in his own manner would harbour something akin to southern charm from a mental mute and donnish deaf-dork, without the south or the charm. A tremendous talent for tactless tact; an undeniable ability in blatant nuance and blowhard whispers, and platitudinous wisdom; someone not bound to the phrase “unfathomably stupid” because the depths can be plumbed, roundly, and many times with stunning and astonishing rapidity, based on their distance from veracity and fathomable shallowness and sheer audacity of idiocy, in whose dopiness secures his own derision in public – and deservedly so in private as well.

Snark, in this Mencken manner, even of He-Haw the Asshat Cretin-King unable to even rise to the level popular sophistry and anti-intellectualism, becomes cheap-shot, though imaginative, while also, unfortunately, uncivil in contradistinction to the elitist wordsmith-bootsniffing and Gibraltarian climbing and posturing of Mencken, reflexively indicative to the male weakness not of sentimentality in this case but of vanity, as noted by none other than Mencken himself (*In Defense of Women*).

He also noted the strength in women as non-sentimentality, in realism – indeed, as the supreme realists of the species, potentially overlooking or missing the deeper historical context for most women for hundreds and thousands of years: not much to feel nostalgic about, exactly, especially in the precarious nature of women's lives under Christendom and other dominant religions read as instruction manuals, in part or whole, for the construction and maintenance of patriarchal culture, where women not only get listed as

but, in literal fact, are property, chattel. The closest intimation for the poor young fool, Cameron, of this reality for women in general may come only in the form of himself as the Bell-Dame of the Bamboozled. Chesterton took on the same view, “Women are the only realists; their whole object in life is to pit their realism against the extravagant, excessive, and occasionally drunken idealism of men,” as a mirror of the chrestomathic pithy life axioms of Mencken.

The perspicacious vulgarity and mean nature of this snarkiness technique in word simply brings about an inefficacious and, indeed, counterproductive means by which to reach the minds and feelings of the wider public in the general populace and the specific public in one’s (supposed or purported) opposition and enemies. Plus, of the chief weaknesses of personal attacks, no matter how contrived, retains a substructure of the cheap and easy, and a representation of a shallower and more stunted than necessary emotional life.

Aggressive and, at times, deserved taunts and jeers will not change the attitudes of the individual, including Cameron, or garner the sympathies of the speaker’s audience or, more properly, stimulate critical faculties, but may, in rarer instances, engender, in its more noble manifestations, wider general public skepticism about the mountebanks and modern Pharisees marked by worship of Mammon and feigned devotion to God on High, so does not, at root, amount to an effective means by which to extricate and extirpate the utterly sincere religious fanatics bound by fears of hell and promises, nay hopes, of heaven with the tremendous to-the-death motivational propulsion system of unquestioned zeal and unquerry-able fervor.

The only means by which to change the current state, whether the end to slavery or women’s suffrage, or better working conditions, comes from mass public organization and pushes for improvements in the awareness of the public, and, in this particular instance, changes to the educational systems that currently are producing motivated, indoctrinated, and ill-informed spokesdolts for fundamentalist ideologies, which points to a weakness in the critiques of Mencken in some sense: the Nietzschean elitism linked to racism – thus anti-humanist, who sees an imaginary crime in the pseudoscientifically-premised act of miscegenation, and somewhat detached disdain for general welfare, in addition to the remarkable leap of faith for an unbeliever sufficient to jumpstart what would become Objectivism with laissez-faire economic, social, and political views.

Of the views presaging the movement of the computerized ideologues writ Randroids seeing others simply as losers, clingers, parasites, a national majority tribe and international collective of the deserved penury, worthy of dishonor and miseducation as they are petulant hangers-on, and selflessly deluded Christian sheep of the lower castes of humankind bound to their delusions and fate in poverty worthy of ridicule, distrust, and given a predetermined lowly estate in life, for ever, until death does them – and the higher class of *ubermenschen* who hold fast to the utmost industriousness, assiduous work ethic, and titles as maverick-nobles, as the downtrodden American Businessman standing against the masses of the insolent and lazy – a favour of ridding the Earth of them.\*

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The work here seems easy to some degree. Mocking not only the beliefs of the public, Mencken also took the time to lay out the objections. Ridicule, at times, may work. However, the tactic



will, more often than not, raise emotional walls and intellectual defenses. This cannot be ignored, as human beings are not simply floating thinkers. The *techne* of Mencken, though done to a relatively high level, does not represent the best means by which to reach the wider public, to educate as well as inform, or to instill the protective measures of critical thinking, where this would help in critiques of fundamentalist ideologies, whether coming from literal religion or defenses of state violence, aggression, and rights-violations around the world.

In this sense, the pattern of emotions runs a course of hilarity at the surface impression, horror as the reality sets in, and pity and compassion for the individuals, and anger at a failed educational system; in an information age, individual citizens, and the young especially, do not want ignorance, or worse the illusion of knowledge, but, rather, remain kept ignorant by dubious and deliberate work by fundamentalist religion and its, often male, handlers.

The American public's educational system, and in this case the legal system as well, disserved the general populace's ability to know about the world abounding around them and the reality of far more unanswered than even marginally answered queries, even so-called 'big questions,' in the disciplines carved in the humanities and the sciences. The general public has been wronged with bad education, not only in America but elsewhere. A healthier proactive approach to teaching modern science would be more helpful than elitism, mockery, and disdain – how ever entertaining.

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[1] *Tennessee's Butler Act* (2018), in part, states in a quotation:

*...it shall be unlawful for any teacher in any of the Universities, Normals and all other public schools of the State which are supported in whole or in part by the public school funds of the State, to teach any theory that denies the story of the Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible, and to teach instead that man has descended from a lower order of animals.*

Scoville, H. (2018, February 25). Tennessee's Butler Act. Retrieved from <https://www.thoughtco.com/the-butler-act-1224753>.

[2] *Sickening Doubts About Value of Publicity* (1925b), in part, states:

*The basic issues of the case, indeed, seem to be very little discussed at Dayton. What interests everyone are its mere strategy. By what device, precisely, will Bryan trim old Clarence Darrow? Will he do it gently and with every delicacy of forensics, or will he wade in on high gear and make a swift butchery of it? For no one here seems to doubt that Bryan will win — that is, if the bout goes to a finish. What worries the town is the fear that some diabolical higher power will intervene on Darrow's side — that is, before Bryan heaves him through the ropes.*

Mencken, H.L. (1925b, July 9). *Sickening Doubts About Value of Publicity*. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/stream/CoverageOfTheScopesTrialByH.L.Mencken/ScopesTrialMencken.txt>.

[3] *Everything You Didn't Know About Clarence Darrow* (2011) states:

*You had the growth of the Populist movement—a widespread feeling out in the West and Midwest that the financiers of the East were using the gold standard to keep the average farmer and the average working man in poverty. For the first time, in Chicago in 1896 [at the Democratic National Convention], you had a major party declare that it was going to represent the poor. That was Bryan's amazing feat of political rhetoric: he was this young, unknown congressman and he stood up there and he captivated that convention hall and brought the Populists and the Democrats together.*

*Darrow was part of that same movement, but he never particularly cared for Bryan as a person. He thought Bryan was too religious and basically too stupid to lead a major party, and it really grated on him that Bryan got the presidential nomination three times. So their rivalry began to simmer and fester, and when Darrow had a chance to ambush Bryan in the courtroom in Dayton, Tennessee, in 1925, he took full advantage of it.*

Frail, T.A. (2011, June 10). *Everything You Didn't Know About Clarence Darrow*. Retrieved from <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/everything-you-didnt-know-about-clarence-darrow-14990899/>.

[4] *In Impossibility of Obtaining Fair Jury* (1925c), in part, states:

*There is absolutely no bitterness on tap. But neither is there any doubt. It has been decided by acclamation, with only a few infidels dissenting, that the hypothesis of evolution is profane, inhumane and against God, and all that remains is to translate that almost unanimous decision into the jargon of the law and so have done. The town boomers have banqueted Darrow as well as Bryan, but there is no mistaking which of the two has the crowd, which means the venire of tried and true men. Bryan has been oozing around the country since his first day here, addressing this organization and that,*

*presenting the indubitable Word of God in his caressing, ingratiating way, and so making unanimity doubly unanimous.*

Mencken, H.L. (1925c, July 10). Impossibility of Obtaining Fair Jury. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/stream/CoverageOfTheScopesTrialByH.L.Mencken/ScopesTrialMencken.txt>.

[5] *Souls Need Reconversion Nightly* (1925e), in part, states:

*There followed a hymn, led by a somewhat fat brother wearing silver-rimmed country spectacles. It droned on for half a dozen stanzas, and then the first speaker resumed the floor. He argued that the gift of tongues was real and that education was a snare. Once his children could read the Bible, he said, they had enough. Beyond lay only infidelity and damnation. Sin stalked the cities. Dayton itself was a Sodom. Even Morgantown had begun to forget God. He sat down, and the female aurochs in gingham got up.*

Mencken, H.L. (1925e, July 13). *Souls Need Reconversion Nightly*. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/stream/CoverageOfTheScopesTrialByH.L.Mencken/ScopesTrialMencken.txt>.

[6] *Law and Freedom* (1925g), in part, presented an interested dialogue reported by Mencken between an enforcer of the law and himself:

*The captain in charge of the squad now on watch told me frankly yesterday that he was not going to let any infidels discharge their damnable nonsense upon the town. I asked him what charge he would lay against them if they flouted him. He said he would jail them for disturbing the peace.*

*"But suppose," I asked him, "a prisoner is actually not disturbing the peace. Suppose he is simply saying his say in a quiet and orderly manner."*

*"I'll arrest him anyhow," said the cop.*

*"Even if no one complains of him?"*

*"I'll complain myself."*

*"Under what law precisely?"*

*"We don't need no law for them kind of people."*

Mencken, H.L. (1925g, July 15). *Law and Freedom*. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/stream/CoverageOfTheScopesTrialByH.L.Mencken/ScopesTrialMencken.txt>.

[7] *Fair Trial is Beyond Ken* (1925h), in part, states:

*Bryan sat silent throughout the whole scene, his gaze fixed immovably on the witness. Now and then his face darkened and his eyes flashed, but he never uttered a sound. It was, to him, a string of blasphemies out of the devil's mass — a dreadful series of assaults upon the only true religion. The old gladiator faced his real enemy at last. Here was a sworn agent and attorney of the science he hates and fears — a well-fed, well-mannered spokesman of the knowledge he abominates. Somehow he reminded me pathetically of the old Holy Roller I heard last week — the mountain pastor who damned*

*education as a mocking and a corruption. Bryan, too, is afraid of it, for wherever it spreads his trade begins to fall off, and wherever it flourishes he is only a poor clown...*

*It is a tragedy, indeed, to begin life as a hero and to end it as a buffoon. But let no one, laughing at him, underestimate the magic that lies in his black, malignant eye, his frayed but still eloquent voice. He can shake and inflame these poor ignoramuses as no other man among us can shake and inflame them, and he is desperately eager to order the charge.*

Mencken, H.L. (1925h, July 16). Fair Trial Is Beyond Ken. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/stream/CoverageOfTheScopesTrialByH.L.Mencken/ScopesTrialMencken.txt>.

In a note mixed with charity, pity, ridicule, and degradation in one, in *Malone the Victor* (1925i), Mencken explained and opined:

*Bryan has been roving around in the tall grass for years and he knows the bucolic mind. He knows how to reach and inflame its basic delusions and superstitions. He has taken them into his own stock and adorned them with fresh absurdities. Today he may well stand as the archetype of the American rustic. His theology is simply the elemental magic that is preached in a hundred thousand rural churches fifty-two times a year. These Tennessee mountaineers are not more stupid than the city proletariat; they are only less informed.*

Mencken, H.L. (1925i, July 17). *Malone the Victor*. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/stream/CoverageOfTheScopesTrialByH.L.Mencken/ScopesTrialMencken.txt>.

*Malone the Victor* (1925i), in part, states:

*The old boy grows more and more pathetic. He has aged greatly during the past few years and begins to look elderly and enfeebled. All that remains of his old fire is now in his black eyes. They glitter like dark gems, and in their glitter there is immense and yet futile malignancy. That is all that is left of the Peerless Leader of thirty years ago. Once he had one leg in the White House and the nation trembled under his roars. Now he is a tinpot pope in the coca-cola belt and a brother to the forlorn pastors who belabor half-wits in galvanized iron tabernacles behind the railroad yards. His own speech was a grotesque performance and downright touching in its imbecility.*

Mencken, H.L. (1925i, July 17). *Malone the Victor*. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/stream/CoverageOfTheScopesTrialByH.L.Mencken/ScopesTrialMencken.txt>.

[8] *Malone the Victor* (1925i), in part, states:

*Yet even Stewart toward the close of yesterday's session gave an exhibition that would be almost unimaginable in the North. He began his reply to Malone with an intelligent and forceful legal argument, with plenty of evidence of hard study in it. But presently he slid into a violent theological harangue, full of extravagant nonsense. He described the case as a combat between light and darkness and almost descended to the depths of Bryan. Hays challenged him with a question. Didn't he admit, after all, that the defense had a tolerable case; that it ought to be given a chance to present its evidence? I transcribe his*

*reply literally: "That which strikes at the very foundations of Christianity is not entitled to a chance." Hays, plainly astounded by this bald statement of the fundamentalist view of due process, pressed the point. Assuming that the defense would present, not opinion but only unadorned fact, would Stewart still object to its admission? He replied.*

*"Personally, yes." "But as a lawyer and Attorney-General?" insisted Hays. "As a lawyer and Attorney-General," said Stewart, "I am the same man." Such is justice where Genesis is the first and greatest of law books and heresy is still a crime.*

Mencken, H.L. (1925i, July 17). Malone the Victor. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/stream/CoverageOfTheScopesTrialByH.L.Mencken/ScopesTrialMencken.txt>.

[9] *Tennessee in the Frying Pan* (1925k), in part, states:

*They believe that they are not mammals. They believe, on Bryan's word, that they know more than all the men of science of Christendom. They believe, on the authority of Genesis, that the earth is flat and that witches still infest it. They believe, finally and especially, that all who doubt these great facts of revelation will go to hell. So they are consoled.*

Mencken, H.L. (1925k, July 20). *Tennessee in the Frying Pan*. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/stream/CoverageOfTheScopesTrialByH.L.Mencken/ScopesTrialMencken.txt>.

*Tennessee in the Frying Pan* (1925k), in part, states:

*The Tennesseans have tolerated their imbeciles for fear that attacking them would bring down the derision of the rest of the country. Now they have the derision, and to excess — and the attack is ten times as difficult as it ever was before.*

Mencken, H.L. (1925k, July 20). *Tennessee in the Frying Pan*. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/stream/CoverageOfTheScopesTrialByH.L.Mencken/ScopesTrialMencken.txt>.

*In Memoriam*: W.J.B. (1925m), in significant part, states:

*Has it been duly marked by historians that William Jennings Bryan's last secular act on this globe of sin was to catch flies? A curious detail, and not without its sardonic overtones. He was the most sedulous fly-catcher in American history, and in many ways the most successful. His quarry, of course, was not Musca domestica but Homo neandertalensis...*

*Bryan lived too long, and descended too deeply into the mud, to be taken seriously hereafter by fully literate men, even of the kind who write schoolbooks... The truth is that even Bryan's sincerity will probably yield to what is called, in other fields, definitive criticism... This talk of sincerity, I confess, fatigues me. If the fellow was sincere, then so was P. T. Barnum. The word is disgraced and degraded by such uses. He was, in fact, a charlatan, a mountebank, a zany without sense or dignity. His career brought him into contact with the first men of his time; he preferred the company of rustic ignoramuses...*

*...He seemed only a poor clod like those around him, deluded by a childish theology, full of an almost pathological hatred of all learning, all human dignity, all beauty, all fine and noble things. He was a peasant come home to the barnyard. Imagine a gentleman,*

*and you have imagined everything that he was not. What animated him from end to end of his grotesque career was simply ambition – the ambition of a common man to get his hand upon the collar of his superiors, or failing that, to get his thumb into their eyes. He was born with a roaring voice, and it had the trick of inflaming half-wits. His whole career was devoted to raising those half-wits against their betters, that he himself might shine. His last battle will be grossly misunderstood if it is thought of as a mere exercise in fanaticism – that is, if Bryan the Fundamentalist Pope is mistaken for one of the bucolic Fundamentalists...*

*...When he began denouncing the notion that man is a mammal even some of the hinds at Dayton were agape. And when, brought upon Clarence Darrow's cruel hook, he writhed and tossed in a very fury of malignancy, bawling against the veriest elements of sense and decency like a man frantic – when he came to that tragic climax of his striving there were snickers among the hinds as well as hosannas. Upon that hook, in truth, Bryan committed suicide, as a legend as well as in the body. He staggered from the rustic court ready to die, and he staggered from it ready to be forgotten, save 3 as a character in a third-rate farce, witless and in poor taste. It was plain to everyone who knew him, when he came to Dayton, that his great days were behind him – that, for all the fury of his hatred, he was now definitely an old man, and headed at last for silence. There was a vague, unpleasant manginess about his appearance; he somehow seemed dirty, though a close glance showed him as carefully shaven as an actor, and clad in immaculate linen. All the hair was gone from the dome of his head, and it had begun to fall out, too, behind his ears, in the obscene manner of Samuel Gompers...*

*...When I first encountered him, on the sidewalk in front of the office of the rustic lawyers who were his associates in the Scopes case, the trial was yet to begin, and so he was still expansive and amiable. I had printed in the Nation, a week or so before, an article arguing that the Tennessee anti-evolution law, whatever its wisdom, was at least constitutional – that the yahoos of the State had a clear right to have their progeny taught whatever they chose, and kept secure from whatever knowledge violated their superstitions. The old boy professed to be delighted with the argument, and gave the gaping bystanders to understand that I was a publicist of parts...*

*...His eyes fascinated me; I watched them all day long. They were blazing points of hatred. They glittered like occult and sinister gems. Now and then they wandered to me, and I got my share, for my reports of the trial had come back to Dayton, and he had read them. It was like coming under fire. Thus he fought his last fight, thirsting savagely for blood. All sense departed from him. He bit right and left, like a dog with rabies. He descended to demagoguery so dreadful that his very associates at the trial table blushed. His one yearning was to keep his yokels hated up – to lead his forlorn mob of imbeciles against the foe. That foe, alas, refused to be alarmed. It insisted upon seeing the whole battle as a comedy. Even Darrow, who knew better, occasionally yielded to the prevailing spirit. One day he lured poor Bryan into the folly I have mentioned: his astounding argument against the notion that man is a mammal. I am glad I heard it, for otherwise I'd never believe it. There stood the man who had been thrice a candidate for the Presidency of the Republic – there he stood in the glare of the world, uttering stuff that a boy of eight would laugh at. The artful Darrow led him on: he repeated it, ranted for it, bellowed it in*



*his cracked voice. So he was prepared for the final slaughter. He came into life a hero, a Galahad, in bright and shining armor. He was passing out a poor mountebank.*

Mencken, H.L. (1925m). In Memoriam: W.J.B. Retrieved from [history.msu.edu/hst203/files/2011/02/Mencken-In-Memoriam-WJB.pdf?mod=article](http://history.msu.edu/hst203/files/2011/02/Mencken-In-Memoriam-WJB.pdf?mod=article) inline.

Bryan (1925n), in part, states:

*Bryan was a vulgar and common man, a cad undiluted. He was ignorant, bigoted, self-seeking, blatant and dishonest. His career brought him into contact with the first men of his time; he preferred the company of rustic ignoramuses. It was hard to believe, watching him at Dayton, that he had traveled, that he had been received in civilized societies, that he had been a high officer of state. He seemed only a poor clod like those around him, deluded by a childish theology, full of an almost pathological hatred of all learning, all human dignity, all beauty, all fine and noble things. He was a peasant come home to the dung-pile. Imagine a gentleman, and you have imagined everything that he was not.*

Mencken, H.L. (1925n, July 27). Bryan. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/stream/CoverageOfTheScopesTrialByH.L.Mencken/ScopesTrialMencken.txt>.

Aftermath (1925l), in part, states:

*Putting the matter blunt and stark, Mencken compared Darrow and Bryan, opining, "Bryan went there in a hero's shining armor, bent deliberately upon a gross crime against sense. He came out a wrecked and preposterous charlatan, his tail between his legs. Few Americans have ever done so much for their country in a whole lifetime as Darrow did in two hours."*

Mencken, H.L. (1925l, September 14). Aftermath. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/stream/CoverageOfTheScopesTrialByH.L.Mencken/ScopesTrialMencken.txt>.

[11] Trial as Religious Orgy (1925d), in part, states:

*There is, it appears, a conspiracy of scientists afoot. Their purpose is to break down religion, propagate immorality, and so reduce mankind to the level of the brutes. They are the sworn and sinister agents of Beelzebub, who yearns to conquer the world, and has his eye especially upon Tennessee.*

Mencken, H.L. (1925d, July 11). Trial as a Religious Orgy. Retrieved from <https://archive.org/stream/CoverageOfTheScopesTrialByH.L.Mencken/ScopesTrialMencken.txt>.

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