

SCOTT DOUGLAS JACOBSEN

BOOK OF
STUFF

— 7 —



In-Sight Publishing

Book of Stuff 7

IN-SIGHT PUBLISHING

Publisher since 2014

Published and distributed by In-Sight Publishing
Fort Langley, British Columbia, Canada
www.in-sightjournal.com

Copyright © 2020 by Scott Douglas Jacobsen

In-Sight Publishing established in 2014 as a not-for-profit alternative to the large commercial publishing houses who dominate the publishing industry. In-Sight Publishing operates in independent and public interests rather than in dependent and private ones, and remains committed to publishing innovative projects for free or low-cost while electronic and easily accessible for public domain consumption within communal, cultural, educational, moral, personal, scientific, and social values, sometimes or even often, deemed insufficient drivers based on understandable profit objectives. Thank you for the download of this ebook, your consumption, effort, interest, and time support independent and public publishing purposed for the encouragement and support of academic inquiry, creativity, diverse voices, freedom of expression, independent thought, intellectual freedom, and novel ideas.

© 2014-2020 by Scott Douglas Jacobsen. All rights reserved. Original appearance in or submission to, or first published in parts by or submitted to, Medium (Personal) and Atheist Republic (Op-Ed and Blog).

Not a member or members of In-Sight Publishing, 2016-2020
This first edition published in 2020

No parts of this collection may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized, in any form, or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented or created, which includes photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without written permission from the publisher or the individual co-author(s) or place of publication of individual articles.

Independent Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

No official catalogue record for this book, as an independent endeavour.

Names: Jacobsen, Scott Douglas, author

Title: Book of Stuff 7 / Scott Douglas Jacobsen

Description: British Columbia: In-Sight Publishing, 2020.

Identifiers: None (epub).

Subjects: | BISAC: PHILOSOPHY / General (PHI000000)

Classification: LCC (None) | DDC (None)

p. cm.

Not printed but available on the internet at www.in-sightjournal.com

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Designed and implemented by Scott Douglas Jacobsen

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Book of Stuff 7</i>	3
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	7
1 MEDIUM (PERSONAL)	8
a David Mabuza on Women's Rights	9
b Potential Changes to the South African Constitution	11
c Building your self-esteem in a changing world	12
d How to overcome adversity in life	13
e How to identify and overcome anxiety	14
f Physical and digital bullying	15
g In Conversation with Maya Bahl on Ethnicity and Race	16
h A Philosophy of Discovery and A Philosophy of Ignorance: Faith and Feelings, and Reason and Empiricism	18
i What Would Change Your Mind? Evidence or Nothing	20
j Ontological Evidence Derived from Epistemological Naturalism	22
k An Irish Ode: Being Gullible for the Hunza	23
l Sexual Education in Ontario: Canadian Civil Liberties Association Lawsuit	24
m Canadian License Plate Etiquette	31
n From Nuns to None: #MeToo & #ChurchToo	33
o Reminder: A Note on the Level of Belief in Evolution by Authoritative Authorities	35
p Recent Surveys on the Religious and the Non-Religious	36
2 ATHEIST REPUBLIC (OP-ED)	38
a New Book - Queer Disbelief	39
b "Faithiest" by Melanie Wilderman	40
c "Bad Comedy for Bad People" with Keith Lowell Jensen	41
d Who Are We To Judge How People Live In Islamic Countries?	42
e Atheism, as American as Apple Pie	44
f Canadian Atheists Win Discrimination Case	45
3 ATHEIST REPUBLIC (BLOG)	47
a Interview with Allie Jackson – CEO, Atheist Republic Part 1	48
b Merge Catholic and Secular Public School Systems Petition	54
c Life and the Possibility of Absolute Finality with Terry Sanderson	56
d Interview with Allie Jackson – CEO, Atheist Republic Part 2	60

e	Islam Versus Nazism.....	64
f	Interview with Dr. Caleb W. Lack, Ph.D. – Director, Secular Therapy Project.....	69
g	Praying for Atheist Republic.....	73
h	Conflicts Between “Normal” Culture And Homosexuality An Interview with Peter Gajdics - Author of The Inheritance of Shame	77
i	Who Are We To Judge People Living In Islamic Countries?	81
j	How Do We Defeat the Islamic Republic of Iran?.....	89
k	Interview with Leslea Mair - Co-Director of Losing Our Religion.....	96
	License and Copyright.....	99

Acknowledgements

The collections contained herein represented scattered work, disparate thoughts, and areas of obscure, and partial work in a number of domains; whereby, with the increase in the single outlet mass contributions of articles and interviews, the other enquiries may emerge in terms of the results or outcomes of multiple publication single to small submission or publishing or articles/interviews.

Here, I present some of the latter in Book of Stuff 7: Medium (Personal) and Atheist Republic (Op-Ed and Blog).

Acknowledgement, appreciation, and gratitude in Book of Stuff 1: The Beam Magazine, College Rentals, Check Your Head, Lifespan Cognition Lab, Westside Seniors Hub, Learning Analytics Research Group, Lost in Samsara, Center for Inquiry Canada, iData Research Inc, PardesSeleh.Com, Lift Cannabis News, Karmik, Islamic Supreme Council of Canada, AUSU Executive Blog, Develop Africa, and Atheist Alliance of America.

Acknowledgement, appreciation, and gratitude in Book of Stuff 2: Gordon Neighbourhood House, Skeptic Meditations, The National Youth Internet Safety and Cyberbullying Task Force, Inc., Rational Doubt, The Black Detour, Science, Technology & Philosophy, Mendy Marcus, Canadian Science, and International Policy Digest.

Acknowledgement, appreciation, and gratitude in Book of Stuff 3: Cornelius Press, Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN), and A Life in Comedy.

Acknowledgement, appreciation, and gratitude in Book of Stuff 4: Secularism is a Women's Issue, Advice for Gifted and Talented Youth, The Humanist, The Future Of..., Fresh Start Recovery Center, and Harvest House Ministries.

Acknowledgement, appreciation, and gratitude in Book of Stuff 5: Dear Rick, People, Personas, and Politics, Treasure Box Kids, Natasha Taneka, Sundari Creations, and La Petite Mort.

Acknowledgement, appreciation, and gratitude in Book of Stuff 6: Medium (Personal) (May 1, 2018 as a starting point because of database loading troubles).

MEDIUM (PERSONAL)

David Mabuza on Women's Rights

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

October 25, 2018

David Mabuza, the deputy president of South Africa, talked about women. He wrote an article in News 24.

The parliamentary questions in recent weeks have noted the concern for women. Mabuza pointed to the ANC government emphasis on the “full emancipation of women.”

Mabuza described the patriarchal structures and sexism in society. The violent deaths of women by intimate partners. He asks a question from Katrine Marçal, who is a feminist writer.

In Adam Smith's market fundamentalist text, *The Wealth of Nations*, he asks: Who puts dinner on the table? Smith argues the “economic man.”

Mabuza thinks “our grandmothers, wives, sisters and the girl-child.” He points to childbearing by women and work in the home. That these drive the wealth of nations, “for free.”

Mabuza talks about the *Women's Charter*, too, from 1954. It states that women stretch the dollar for the children, hear the children's cries. That women bear the burden of caring for children.

The land too, when men are gone, are women's domain. Mabuza points to the civilised and democratic nature of a society. That it relates to the social and economic liberation of women.

“It depends on how we empower women to demand their inherent rights to take the advantages,” Mabuza explained, “responsibilities and opportunities of a civilised society.”

Mabuza considers women paying the highest price far above any of us as mothers. “Freedoms we have earned freely on their unpaid labour,” he notes.

In his opinion, we need to view women as special. That women are complete human beings and treated and respected as such.

In the South African Constitution, it says, “Human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms.”

Though “racial hatred and discrimination, sexism and patriarchy,” are present, we can develop. The Constitution, according to Mabuza, provides that basis.

Any discrimination and violence against women violates the spirit of the Constitution. Mabuza sees violence against women as a violation against the founding principles of South Africa.

He said, “A nation that undermines the aspirations of women and oppresses them can have no peace, no social cohesion and no development.”

He points to the extreme prejudice against black women based on class, gender, and race. Mabuza points to the “omnipresent [patriarchy] in our language, idioms, metaphors, stories, myths and performances.”

Mabuza argues that we have to make internal changes, to our individual selves. Those changes helping free women from sexism and oppression, and discrimination.

However, those biases come packaged, individual alterations can help with women's emancipation. That radical revolution comes with the emancipation of women through individual change.

He notes the ANC is for gender parity "as a precondition of the economic freedom in our lifetime." He describes how men are "absconding from parental responsibility, yet are available for power, leadership and economic opportunities."

How do we close that gap, reduce those biases unbalanced benefits? He states women have to work and make a home together. Mabuza argues for a reordering of social relations in order for equality, parity.

One "that castrates the power, income and class of men from having an overriding influence on women's choice of sexual partners."

Mabuza considers this the foundation of a society with mutual respect and equality.

Potential Changes to the South African Constitution

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

October 25, 2018

According to *Bloomberg*, South Africa's government made a decision around a change to the constitution of the nation.

It is reported the African National Congress, or the ANC, has decided to amend the national constitution with regards to the laws of the land. The purpose is to further explain the conditions upon which land can be expropriated and then have no compensation for it.

The ANC becomes closer to the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) in this sense. The ANC will only do this under the condition that this does not harm the economy, agricultural sector, or the food security of the nation because these could be consequences of any amendments related to land.

As reported, "The purpose of the amendment is to promote redress, advance economic development, increase agricultural production and food security, the ANC in an emailed statement after a meeting of its National Executive Committee in Pretoria, the capital."

Legal experts are working on the processes necessary for alterations to the constitution as we speak. The idea was and is to speed the process of giving black people more land. More access to land is one symbol of inequality between members of the nation along the racial lines.

President Cyril Ramaphosa stated, "...it has become patently clear that our people want the constitution be more explicit about expropriation of land without compensation, as demonstrated in the public hearings."

The proposals now are bringing forth concerns for investors and others about the potential for a radical land-reform strategy and then the fear that there may be Zimbabwe-style farm seizures. The ANC will be contesting national elections starting next year with the first ballot since the time of the opposition winning several municipalities deemed "key" by the reportage. That include Johannesburg and Pretoria.

The Executive Director of the Council for the Advancement of the South African Constitution, Lawson Naidoo, stated, "This is a surprising and premature announcement by the ANC because parliament is still in its review process on changing the constitution... Parliament still has to gather and evaluate the many submissions that have been made. We are in a pre-election phase and the ANC announcement is part of that."

Building your self-esteem in a changing world

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

October 26, 2018

Everyone needs a pep talk once in a while or reason to get out of the bed.

If you want to build self-esteem, you will need to work within yourself. You should try to also work in community. The better ways to build self-esteem or to behave in ways that are deserving of them and are self-respectful.

Self-esteem comes from doing things and thinking in ways, and so feeling in ways, that are most representative of your better self. Do you want to work to limit yourself, or expand yourself? Fundamental presuppositions around self-esteem are helpful. Because the development of the self comes from behaviours and thoughts.

With thoughts and behaviour as the foundation for a proper self-esteem, the basis comes from within you. It starts with taking responsibility for your own actions and thinking. It has to do with what is sometimes termed the internal locus of control.

If someone can develop in themselves a sense of control over what they can and cannot do, and if they can develop this within a framework of self-knowledge, they can begin on the process of self-discovery, and so greater self-esteem.

Proper self-esteem comes from accomplishment not simply from thinking abstract thoughts. You have to be bold in acting things in your own life. This is especially true for you younger men out there. If you're driving a car, and if someone else has the steering wheel, you are living a life on the coast mode of the car.

You are not driving your life. You are being driven. No one wants that but so few of us realize that. To simply have positive thoughts about yourself and to not take into account real successes and honest failures, you are, and to be blunt here, living in outer space.

You need to get down to the dirt and live your life and have a plan for it. That basis of a plan and working towards especially a long-term plan provide a basis for a better life. As you begin to accomplish that, you will naturally develop a certain self-efficacy and self-esteem.

It is an important part of keeping in touch with the real world while achieving things and so feeling a real sense of accomplishment and not simply an unwarranted sense of achievement. This is all part and parcel of proper and healthy self-esteem.

You earn things. You feel better. One really effective way to feel better and achieve things is to do it in community. It could be a little church. If you go to a mosque, synagogue, or a Sikh or Buddhist temple, it could be any of those things. It could be a soccer club.

It could be a yoga studio. All of these provide basis for community. All based on a common activity, at a minimum. When you work within that community and achieve something, whether being more flexible in a yoga position or donating time and finances to the food bank through the place of worship external community, you accomplish something for others and yourself with others.

It is really that simple to feel self-efficacy and to develop that healthy sense of contribution to the community and self-esteem about being worth something.

How to overcome adversity in life

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

October 26, 2018

Hard times are an inevitability of life. You will encounter difficulties. You will be broken down. Somethings will go well while other things are going wrong. Life is an admixture.

The main questions or issues to consider are how are you going to react to those difficulties when they arise. How are you going to also celebrate when the times are really good?

Life will come in waves and sometimes waves will crash together and make a very difficult situation, those are flashpoints in a personal life. This makes it crucial to understand the nature of yourself in the relationships of the world.

The best means by which to overcome the difficulties or hardships in life are through assiduous personal development. The hard work in developing resilience.

Resilience will stand you in good stead in times of difficulty. It's a skill set, an emotional and social skill set, to allow you to persist in spite of the difficulties.

Another way is to have a good and healthy social network. That network provides a solid foundation for people to fall back on who love you and who you trust and respect.

In addition to that, you can look into professional help from counselors or psychologists or psychiatrists depending on the severity of the need at a time in life.

The benefit of the first one is that it is free and it comes with the benefit of personal development. The benefit of the second option with friends and family comes from external sources when internal resources are not enough.

The last one is helpful for severe cases, but does come at a higher cost, especially financially.

You never be able to avoid the hard parts of life. You will never have the opportunity for that one extended period of time, probably. In the country that we live in, you will have an easier time than most people. Nonetheless, you will have relative difficulties within the North American context at some point.

It is extremely important to bear in mind the basics of health too. You need to be healthy. You need to focus on proper sleep for your age.

You need to focus on quality and full sleep; that also means at a good time in a quiet place. There needs to be proper exercise with aerobics, strength training, and stretching.

Also, there needs to be proper diet. If you are physically healthy, and if you're mentally healthy, then you can withstand the difficulties in life that come your way better.

So, here you go: personal development, friends and family, and professional help, and sleep, exercise, and diet.

How to identify and overcome anxiety

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

October 27, 2018

Anxiety is a modern problem. It can be a particular issue in youth. If you are a teenager, and if you suffer from the consequences of excess anxiety not channeled well, it can make the already uncertain, at times hellish, and the finding-yourself phase of life known as being a teenager even worse.

Your thoughts race. Your blood pressure rises. Your heart rate increases. You feel the sense that the world is caving in on you due to all of the internally produced pressure. Often times, this is apart from real pressure.

It does not amount to real pressure. It's simply a subjective perception of the world that triggers anxiety and general discombobulation, physically and mentally. It can be very disconcerting. Some people, they can suffer over the long term from a generalized form of anxiety. It's not a fun life. It is not a healthy life.

The question becomes, "How do you deal with anxiety, especially in early life as a teenager?" in order to be healthier and have a better youth, you need to be able to stop and take one step back. Need to hold the escalation at the moment, need to take a step back, then you can begin by respectfully removing yourself from the situation of particular anxiousness.

If you need to ask someone for the time, you can do so. If it just happens to be a triggering situation, you can simply remove yourself from it. You hold that right. Some basic techniques of dealing with the anxiety in the moment, if temporary, are to count from 10 to 1.

Another is to take it deep breathes, breathing from the belly and the diaphragm, and slowly relaxing. It is crucially important to not have the additional stress involved from anxiety in daily life. Anxiety can impair school performance.

Anxiety can impair professional performance. A generalized anxiety can harm general performance throughout life. Because it detracts emotional and therefore mental resources needed to be able to handle things that life throws at you.

Another important thing is to have a good support network, with her family or friends. If you have a good set of family members, you can confide in them to help quell some of the anxiety-producing things. It helps to talk out your problems, especially for the young guys out there where this is frowned upon — by themselves or others.

Talking it out, it is an effective methodology. If you have friends, and if you trust them sufficiently enough, you can talk to them as well. These are known as social and emotional skills. They are necessary for a higher quality of life.

We all know the feelings of anxiety, but dealing with them takes practice. Those are some ways to know how to help with the temporary and the long-term versions of it.

Physical and digital bullying

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

October 28, 2018

Bullying, physical and digital, is taken as if a simple fact of life. It does not have to be a part of life.

Even if one experiences it, you do not have to be a victim to the circumstance. You can overcome the associated difficulties involved in the kinds of the bullying received in everyday life and in professional life too.

Say you are working at a fast food joint or restaurant, you begin to feel as though the boss is picking on you or a coworker is being mean and vicious with you. The first thing to do is try to stay from the people who are the bullies. Or you can double-check and identify if this is really the case or if this is simply perceived.

They probably want some attention, and negative attention. They may feel insecure and need to take people down and so you become an unfortunate semi-random target needing taking down. If you are stuck with those individuals due to work constraints or to the particular context, then take a proactive and constructive attitude, this is a way in which to assert yourself in life.

It can be a testing ground for developing those skills. You will encounter and experience difficult people in this culture. It is important to be able to deal with them and neutralize the situation in a proactive way to defuse the tension and continue on with your day, be of service to others who may encounter that person later in their day, and have that person feel respected while you defuse the situation as much as is reasonable in the context.

This can be for digital or physical bullying. Physical bullying may be the pushing and shoving of you at work, or in public, or other areas of life. It becomes more direct. It becomes more physical in other words.

However, you can report these people to the proper authorities in the school, in public life, or gain support from those around you at the moment to be able to defuse the situation. It is not a good idea to escalate an already obnoxious or unpleasant person who is being physically bullying.

For the digital bullying, it amounts to the same the psychological state for a victim and victimiser here. However, the main issue comes from the asynchronous nature of it. That is to say the bully or you may leave a message at one point in time.

Then you can receive it at a far distant or an immediate time after sending of the message. That is the nature of the digital media. It is asynchronous.

It does not care about the particular time. If someone is continually bullying you, it is good to have a record of the bullying and to be able to then substantiate any claims made to the school authorities such as the vice principal or principal as well as police authorities if it is particularly inappropriate.

Otherwise, as a general rule in life, you want to surround yourself with those who support you, love you, and vice versa.

In Conversation with Maya Bahl on Ethnicity and Race

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

October 28, 2018

Maya Bahl is an editor and contributor to The Good Men Project with me. She has an interest and background in forensic anthropology. As it turns out, I hear the term race thrown into conversations in both conservative and progressive circles. At the same time, I wanted to know the more scientific definitions used by modern researchers including those in forensic anthropology. Then I asked Bahl about conducting an educational series. Here we are, part one.

1. Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Looking at the ways in which the concepts of race and ethnicity are used for real discovery about the natural world in forensic anthropology, how does this differ from the standard pseudoscientific and racist theories with use, at times, as political and social tools?

Maya Bahl: Race and Ethnicity have been effective in defining humanity, whether it's solving a crime or at a basic level, identifying populations and opening communication gaps. As the ever-evolving study of people and groups change, however, other standard pseudoscientific and racist theories have emerged, where it can be distracting.

Spurring on hatred as we see in political movements as Naziism or social tools as Islamophobia takes this much-needed conversation on tolerance back instead of forward.

2. Jacobsen: Evolution by natural selection is the foundation of biological sciences and medical sciences. In North America, this theory can be denied by large portions of the population, leave large parts of the population at a low cultural-scientific level.

Ironically, the leaders in denial of theory tend to promote Social Darwinism views on the social order.

Without knowledge of evolution, and connected to the previous question, and if indoctrinated with pseudoscientific and/or racist theories of human beings, how does this limit a citizen's worldview?

Bahl: Efforts have happened in limiting cultural and scientific awareness, like with what we saw in *The State of Tennessee v. John Thomas Scopes*, or more commonly known as the Scopes Monkey Trial in the U.S from the early 1900s, where a school system denied the teaching of human evolution.

Ongoing efforts in quelling human evolution's existence in education have also happened since, where it is a loss in not embracing the fundamental fact of us coming from the earth.

It does seem that whatever is favourable to teach by a handful of people, then it shall be taught, even if it's Social Darwinism by another name! This also seems to run top-down systems where the people at the top would have the most say, that they are the ones fittest for survival.

3. Jacobsen: Continuing from the previous question, how might this influence the conversation around proper, scientific definitions of race and ethnicity, e.g., those seen in forensic anthropology literature?

Bahl: The conversation would be affirmed or denied by those who are perceived to have the most say and power.

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

References

SAHO. (2017, May 8). Pseudo-scientific racism and Social Darwinism. Retrieved from <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/pseudo-scientific-racism-and-social-darwinism-grade-11>.

Manning, K.R. (1999, September 4). ESSAYS ON SCIENCE AND SOCIETY: Science and Opportunity. Retrieved from <http://www.math.buffalo.edu/mad/special/pseudoscience-race.html>.

A Philosophy of Discovery and A Philosophy of Ignorance: Faith and Feelings, and Reason and Empiricism

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

October 30, 2018

A tip of the hat to the distinction of Dr. Neil deGrasse Tyson from years and years ago.

Feelings retain a particular descriptive capacity about personal experience spoken about by the religious, which is taken as a form of evidence: “experience of the Holy Spirit in my life” or “witness of the Holy Ghost in my Christ-centered life.”

The feelings are taken as evidence. Faith is belief without evidence. I don’t think it’s coherent. But that’s the reasoning. Faith in the Bible, certainly, is without evidence.

Some point to Ken Ham, Kent Hovind, Harun Yahya, Velikovsky, and others. But few take them seriously. Some have criminal histories if that speaks to intellectual honesty if not general honest and above-board behaviour.

The moment empirical evidence enters the equation: it becomes non-faith. The second reason or logic enters the equation: it becomes rational by definition.

Thus, faith, properly understood, is precisely belief without evidence, which is calling non-empirical its antonym. Take, for example, the ‘faith’ in the Sun “rising” tomorrow.

There is lots of statistical-empirical evidence in support of it, not a feeling or a faith. Take it this way, looking at the mass of evidence and using logic, the Sun is more likely to rise tomorrow than not. I do not have a feeling it will rise tomorrow or faith in its rising tomorrow. Big differences.

I can see the Sun, repeatedly over time, can predict its re-arising, and — lo and behold — the Sun rises. Not nameless people. Again, faith is belief without evidence. Any evidence means degrees of empiricism, degrees of evidence, not degrees of faith. Faith is the binary, “You just gotta believe.” Question: why?

Some faithful have an odd counter with distrust in the reportage of living scientists in the 21st century and working models of the world while also trusting purported dead people from over 20 centuries ago who may or may not have existed telling conflicting stories in a collection of books translated from three ancient languages into modern English with assertions of creation of man from dirt/mud & woman from rib and a bush on fire that talks without vocal chords and a brain (and so on).

Science is empiricism. Empiricism is about physical-material observables, evidence. Faith is about lack of evidence. The Sun as an example is relevant. It presents non-faith without reference to experts.

To experts, in the odd skepticism, if consistent, then it should apply to the Bible, even more so based on the above-mentioned extraordinary claims or points. However, it would undermine faith in the Bible.

Science is not faith either. It amounts to consideration of the massive convergence of evidence plus the theories to explain them. An example of faith: 1) The contents of the Bible are irrefutable and absolutely true. 2) Why? 3) Because the Bible says so. No reference to evidence, simply takes the book on faith.

An example of non-faith without reference to experts: 1) The Sun keeps rising every day of my life. 2) The physical observation of a lifetime of the Sun rising morning after morning. 3) The high likelihood is the Sun rising tomorrow. Does this “do away with faith”? By definition, yes.

Or, in terms of an argument, faith, in monotheistic religions on the origin of life, says, “God did it,” or, “A supreme higher intelligence with property aseity did it.” That’s, as we all know, creationism. Not all monotheistic interpretations but a significant portion.

Non-faith says, “We have biological categories, kin selection, sex selection, natural selection, genomes passed down through successive generations with copying errors, punctuated equilibrium, transitional fossils, various forms of radiometric dating methods, and sedimentary layers and ancient fossil remains, all convergent in a common tree of life. Here’s how these break down empirically.”

There is a sincere attempt at the collection of physical observances and unification of the evidence into a single theory.

The standard, as per the odd skepticism from before, response, “How can you trust those scientists?” Yet, this is not applied to the Bible. If consistent, the level of undue skepticism would be applied to the Bible as well.

But it’s not; so, if that’s not done, I can’t take the wafer critiques of many seriously, because it is inconsistent skepticism. I see why, too. It would undermine the entire enterprise of faith in the Bible or other supposedly holy (but, certainly, at times beautiful) texts.

The arguments can, maybe, be summarized as philosophies. One looks to a faith and feelings. Another to empiricism and reason. The faith and feelings amount to a philosophy of personal assertion or ignorance, not knowing but simply believing; the empiricism and reason not as a philosophy of knowledge necessarily but of discovery.

So, a philosophy of ignorance versus discovery.

What Would Change Your Mind? Evidence or Nothing

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

October 30, 2018

During the popular consumption debate between Bill Nye and Ken Ham, two prominent popularizers of the theories — one naturalistic and followed by the majority of practicing biologists and another simply a religious proposition — of the development of life, there was a coda statement on the worldviews.

The moderator spoke to the changing of one's mind. The question: what would change your mind? Nye summarized with "evidence." Ham summarized with "no one is ever going to convince me."

In my conversations with Christian creationists and freethinkers, this has been the split, in essence.

Collective empiricist work from first principles in a real philosophy of discovery for Nye, hence evidence, whether religious or secular coming to the convergence of preponderance of evidentiary truth on the reality of evolution by natural selection.

The Christian fundamentalist reading of the Bible to filter or interpret input from the natural world into the narrative of the Bible from Ham, but only applicable to Biblical Literalist readings.

The former relies on discovery from the natural world via first-principles research. The latter relies on faith in a purported holy text to interpret the input from the natural world.

That is to say, we have the telling meaning here: the Nye view as a philosophy of real discovery, construction of a theory from first principles, and the other as a philosophy of faith, or not truly knowing, or ignorance: the philosophical split of discovery and ignorance.

Among the practicing religious and secular biologists, well over 95% of those in the active researcher category, they adhere to evolution by natural selection with a 4.54-billion-year-old Earth. As stated Professor Kenneth Miller: "Probably 95% or more of all biological scientists accept the board outlines of the theory of evolution."*

Among a small coterie of religious fundamentalists who lead this, we have adherence to a purported holy text in instantaneous or almost instantaneous creation of the world from a Creator.

Some say 4,004BCE on October 22. Others accept 4.54 billion years. We come to the predictions made by the former model and not truly made by the latter and, therefore, the truly scientific and discovery-oriented model of evolution versus the ignorance or faith-based view of creationism.

I highly recommend seeing the Nye and Ham debate. It was enlightening as to the split between a real epistemology with verifiable truth and predictions with Nye & faux epistemology with Ham, if you get a chance.

*To clarify the discussion prior to further plumbing of the issue's depth, what proportion of scientists adhere to an evolutionary account of life? What about the 'elite' scientists in the *National Academy of Sciences*?

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.

Ontological Evidence Derived from Epistemological Naturalism

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

November 1, 2018

The good thing about the scientific method and evidence from science: it's factual whether you think so or not. The big research piece or finding from psychological sciences is the extraordinarily poor data taking devices human beings are, especially in regards to experienced evidence or feelings.

Many times, and unfortunately, individuals do not know how science works in terms of the criteria taken into account for coming at reliable truths about the world.

Individual human experience and feelings are among the lowest and most embarrassing form, "How do you know the Sun is a nuclear furnace rather than a choir of angels?" The reply, "I have a feeling."

We should want the most accurate view of the world available. The main question, "What are the arguments and evidence?"

This is the main point about science. There are mechanisms in place to weed out fraudulent activity. Frauds in the scientific world are incredibly rare. So, most skepticism is undue.

What are the real standards of evidence within natural philosophical epistemology to derive facts about the natural world, ontological evidence derived from epistemological naturalism?

Not the only means but certainly among the best for functional truths about the world. An anecdote, for example, is not evidence. As has been stated, the plural of anecdote is not evidence.

A scientific mindset: we should be open to real evidence rather than confirmation bias and hearsay.

Within principles of honesty and integrity, we should ask for credible, reliable, and valid information about the natural world plus arguments.

We should not grandstand, as in simply saying the phrases, "Plenty of evidence," or, "Plenty of arguments," but, rather, present clear evidence and solid argument.

An Irish Ode: Being Gullible for the Hunza

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

November 2, 2018

Some non-scientists and gullible Westerners support the belief in the 150 years of living asserted about the Hunza.

When looking to the mainstream claims and researchers, what is the reality? The Hunza are simply at agricultural and premodern ages rather than the gullible claim of over 150 years.

This is a phenomenon found in some Westerners of wanting something to be true and, therefore, simply believing it to be true.

Westerners who wish to believe certain things as wishful-thinking uber-optimists. A drip-drop of skepticism may be needed.

These naive Westerners simply believe against the vast array of other evidence on offer: the preponderance of evidence in favour of Jeanne Calment as the oldest at about 122 years old, let alone asserted averages more than a quarter century above that.

Western religious fundamentalists argue for a separation between truth and fact, when, in fact, they argue for empirical truths in these cases and, thus, facts as truths.

We can consider the “truth” of this and the “fact” of this as a ‘true fact,’ as Western fundamentalists prefer redundancy. No dundees dancing over that age again compared to the mythological noble long-lived pre-modernists.

Apparently, some semi-clever fakesters bilk Westerners for ‘magical’ water over the Hunza, too.

If we listen closely, we can hear the clagarnach of the deluge of evidence against the thin-thatch roof of Bible fundamentalists, from then to there and now.

So it goes.

Sexual Education in Ontario: Canadian Civil Liberties Association Lawsuit

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

November 2, 2018

Some accomplishments in life deserve applause, approval, and accolades. However, accomplishment can seem ambiguous in the evaluation of the relative success of a purported achievement.

Indeed, the updates — or, maybe, ‘down-dates’ or ‘back-dates’ — for the sexual education curriculum for Ontario students are underway. It brings the notion of a good education and a bad education into the forefront of the public discourse, where it can show in the words and the actions of the general population and, most importantly, the educators.

International and national documents speak to the right of children to have their best interests in mind, where the parents, the educational system, the community, and the governments bear the responsibility to enact the best interests of the children by implication. Rights exist for everyone, not some — or in part for some and all for others.[1]

The Canadian Civil Liberties Association decided to sue the Government of Ontario based on discriminatory changes to the sexual education curriculum — or ‘sex ed’ curriculum — in Ontario (Gollom, 2018).

This suggests human rights, the best interests of the child, and the right to education for children. One core document in international children’s rights remains the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (OHCHR, 1989).

Article 3(1) of the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* states the best interests of the child should be — so a moral stipulation — the primary consideration in all actions (OHCHR, 1989).[2]

Article 28 of the *Convention* remarks, in part, on the fundamental recognition of the right to education for children (Ibid.). Furthermore, Article 29 of the *Convention* speaks to the goals of education with the inclusion of respect for others, human rights, and their own and others’ culture (Ibid.).[3]

One may reflect on the human rights of, and intrinsic respect for, the sexual orientation and gender identity minorities within the province of Ontario educational curriculum through potential non-inclusion or minimization of existence.

If an advanced industrial economy, constitutional monarchy, and democracy retains the ability to provide a fuller education or give better educational provisions via the sexual education curriculum, and if the same nation does not, does this, in part, deny the full implementation of the right to education for children as per Article 28 of the *Convention*? Also, does this violate the best interests of the child as per Article 3(1)?

Elected in 2018, Premier Doug Ford (Progressive Conservative government for Ontario) announced the retraction of the newer sexual education curriculum constructed and implemented by the previous government in Ontario led by Kathleen Wynne.

Teachers may risk punishment through non-compliance with the implementation of the old sexual education curriculum from almost two decades ago, in Ontario. This old curriculum will be an “interim curriculum” (Gollom, 2018).

Now, the Ontario government is creating a website for parents to complain or express concerns over what kids may hear in class. Does the reportage of parents, possibly *en masse*, in Ontario public schools work to build the needed bonds of trust and solidarity between teachers, parents, and government for the best interests of the child or not?

Does the potential public humiliation and intimidation of conscientious objector status teachers improve the morale of educators in Ontario or not? What might be the long-term impact on teacher-government relations into the future because of it?

Michael Bryant, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association Executive Director, opined, “[The government’s actions are a] ham-fisted dog-whistle of bigotry, of homophobia, dressed up as a consultation fix... We are calling it out and taking it to court” (Ibid.).

Some judge the decisions of Premier Doug Ford as discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community and a “lesson in homophobia” (Bigham, 2018). Others see this as the placement of parents’ rights first (Salutin, 2018).

Others, with proper authority, including Education Minister Lisa Thompson has or, have been unavailable for comment for prominent news organizations such as the *CBC* (CBC, 2018a). Still others, they opine on the level of knowledge children have about sex, i.e., a lot (Thomas, 2018).

Some may direct attention to the recent furor over the right to free speech — with international movements, dialogues, debates and lecture circuit attendees riding the wind of it, and making good money off it — in some of the culture, which, of course, remains a misnomer — ‘free speech’ — when they mean the right to freedom of expression (Government of Canada, 1982; UN, 1948).[4] As an aside, in actuality, a minor phenomenon worth little attention.

However, the argument from *Vice News* is the hypocrisy in the argument for free speech while also the prevention of educators to teach kids about consent by the government (Csanady, 2018). Take, for example, the inclusion of the term “transgender” only with a single appearance now, too (Ibid.). These limit the ability of educators to properly and fully teach the young.

Does this transgender or trans example relate to the minimization of the marginal — often suicidal due to more bullying, misunderstanding, and prejudice — in this country through the educational system regression mentioned earlier and in-progress now (PREVnet, 2018)?[5] Bullying remains a human rights violation as well (Ibid.; PREVnet, n.d.).[6]

The updated sex education curriculum emerged in 2015, as a revision and expansion of the 1998 sexual education curriculum in Ontario schools for children. In the electronic era, this included the information about gender identity, online bullying, and sexting. Something not foreseeable by most in the 1990s.

Social conservatives remain the main opponents to the 2015 educational curriculum coverage on gender identity, masturbation, and same-sex relationships.

With the call to appeal to the social conservative base of Premier Ford, several teachers’ unions and “thousands of parents and the Official Opposition have criticized the government’s decision to scrap the modernized sex ed curriculum” (Gollom, 2018).

One daughter could be marginalized in the light of the sexual education curriculum reversion to 1998 from 2015. Bryant uses the lawsuit from the family of the daughter who may face marginalization from within the school if the complete regression to the 1990s happens in the sexual education of Ontario youth.

The daughter is 10-years-old with a protected identity. The mother, Becky McFarlane, is queer. Bryant argues the interim curriculum leaves important information out of the sexual education information needed by students now.

Bryant stated, “They’ve taken out content in a way that discriminates against this family on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender identity” (Gollom, 2018). A Chernos Flaherty Svonkin LLP lawyer, Stuart Svonkin, is working with the Canadian Civil Liberties Association from three main targeted arguments:

The government’s decision is not consistent with Ontario’s Education Act, which requires the province to provide inclusive school environments.

The decision is inconsistent with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms — specifically, the equality of rights and security of the person.

The decision violates the Ontario Human Rights Code. (Ibid.)

Many human rights lawyers are working on challenges to the decision of the government of Premier Ford, on behalf of six other families. The Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario (ETFO) asked teachers to ignore the call by the Government of Ontario (Newport, 2018a). This created the foundation upon which the government based the “snitch-line” for parents about dissenting teachers (Newport, 2018b).

Windsor, Ontario LGBTQ+ leaders remain unhappy with the decision of the provincial government (Georgieva, 2018). The head of the largest school board in Ontario attempted to console and cajole the teachers about several important topics remaining within the interim sexual education curriculum (The Canadian Press, 2018). While at the same time, John Malloy, stated the interim curriculum still leaves things out now (Ibid.).

However, this has been frustrating several teachers on-the-ground (CBC, 2018b). Important to note, and as far as I can tell, Premier Ford and Minister Thompson have not taken questions — not simply for the CBC but any media outlet.

The Toronto District School Board chair, Robin Pilkey, described how the interim curriculum does not address the permissions and restrictions on educators of what can and cannot be taught to the youth.

As reported by *The Canadian Press* (2018), “She says board staff are currently combing through the new document and the now-repealed modernized version to figure out how they differ — but notes the province had months to provide that information.”

Does this disrespect the time and profession of teachers in Ontario? By implication, through insufficient time to prepare educational materials for students, does this harm students with improper and incomplete education?

The Government of Ontario declared a consultation process for the sexual education curriculum without an explicit statement as to the costs of it (Gollom, 2018). Throughout the consultation,

high school students will learn the modernized, 2015, curriculum while Grades 1–8 will learn the interim curriculum in Ontario.

“My understanding is it’s not going to include concepts like consent, that it’s not going to address issues like cyberbullying and that leaves our kids at risk,” Andrea Horwath, the NDP leader, stated, “For the purposes of satisfying backroom deals that Mr. Ford made when he was running for the leadership with the radical social conservatives in his party, he’s continuing to put our children at risk.”

As asked throughout, does this violate the best interests of the children in Ontario?

Does this, in part, deny the right to education of the children in Ontario?

Does the calling out of teachers humiliate them and not empower them?

Does this ‘snitch’ program degrade government-parent-teacher relations over the long-term?

Does the insufficient time given to teachers disrespect the time and profession of the educators?

By implication, through not enough time to prepare the curriculum for students, does this harm students with improper and incomplete, and hastily put together, educational resources?

If an affirmative response to some, most, or all of these, then those — as per statements at the outset — are accomplishments, of a sort, Premier Ford can count on the record with little in the way of “applause, approval, and accolades,” but, rather, the opposite on a number of fronts.

—

References

Bigham, B. (2018, August 28). Ontario’s dated sex-ed plan is a lesson in homophobia. Retrieved from <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-ontarios-dated-sex-ed-plan-is-a-lesson-in-homophobia/>.

CBC. (2018a, August 28). GTA school boards still parsing Ontario PC sex ed changes. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/school-boards-grapple-with-sex-ed-changes-1.4801773>.

CBC. (2018b, August 24). Sex-ed edict frustrates local educators. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/sex-ed-curriculum-1.4797055>.

Csanady, A. (2018, August 28). The Worst Part Of Doug Ford’s Sex Ed Snitch Line Is His Glaring Hypocrisy. Retrieved from https://www.vice.com/en_ca/article/paw5qk/the-worst-part-of-doug-fords-sex-ed-snitch-line-is-his-glaring-hypocrisy.

Georgieva, K. (2018, August 27). Windsor LGBTQ leaders rip into interim sex-ed curriculum. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/windsor/lgbt-leaders-sex-education-curriculum-1.4799872>.

Gollom, M. (2018, August 16). Sex-ed curricula can’t satisfy everyone, and they shouldn’t try, say some experts. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/sex-education-ontario-canada-curriculum-1.4786045>.

Government of Canada. (1982). Constitution Act, 1982: Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Retrieved from <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/Const/page-15.html>.

Newport, A. (2018a, August 28). Here's How Mississauga Schools Will Address the Sex-Ed Controversy. Retrieved from <https://www.insauga.com/heres-how-mississauga-schools-will-address-the-sex-ed-controversy>.

Newport, A. (2018b, August 23). Ontario Government Asking Parents to Tattle on Teachers Who Ignore Sex-Ed Mandate. Retrieved from <https://www.insauga.com/ontario-government-asking-parents-to-tattle-on-teachers-who-ignore-sex-ed-mandate>.

OHCHR. (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>.

PREVnet. (n.d.). Bullying: A Human Rights Issue. Retrieved from <https://www.prevnet.ca/sites/prevnet.ca/files/fact-sheet/PREVNet-SAMHSA-Factsheet-Bullying-A-Human-Rights-Issue.pdf>.

PREVnet. (2018). LGBTQ Youth. Retrieved from <https://www.prevnet.ca/bullying/parents/parents-of-lgbtq-youth>.

Salutin, R. (2018, August 28). Doug Ford will put parents' rights first. Who will do that for kids?. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/star-columnists/2018/08/28/doug-ford-will-put-parents-rights-first-who-will-do-that-for-kids.html>.

The Canadian Press. (2018). Head of Toronto school board reassures teachers on sex-ed curriculum. Retrieved from <https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/head-of-toronto-school-board-reassures-teachers-on-sex-ed-curriculum-1.4068075>.

Thomas, W. (2018, August 28). Ontario's new sex-ed: horny birds and honey bees. Retrieved from <https://www.niagarathisweek.com/opinion-story/8865152-ontario-s-new-sex-ed-horny-birds-and-honey-bees/>.

UN. (1948, December 10). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>.

Footnote

[1] If one argues for one right for oneself, e.g. freedom of religion, and against one right for another, e.g., reproductive health rights, then one denies the universality of human rights in principle and, in turn, the basic premise of human rights as something for all people through implementation of all rights — never perfect but in the fundamental ethical precept implied through the universality of human rights. Important to note, when one speaks of human rights and the international community, the purpose of the reiteration of the stipulations not only amounts to personal or group opinion in the moment about the particulars of an issue impinging on the human rights concerns of members of a society but also on the fundamental basis of stating the international rights agreed upon and signed through international rights documents, including the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989). Not simply a single person or group touting an opinion, rather, the consensus and agreements, and stipulations, of the international community, of which the single person or group agrees on — the rights of persons.

[2] Article 3 of the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* states in full:

1. In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

2. States Parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for him or her, and, to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures.

3. States Parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision.

OHCHR. (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>.

[3] Article 29 of the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* states in full:

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

(a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;

(b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;

© The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;

(d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;

(e) The development of respect for the natural environment.

2. No part of the present article or article 28 shall be construed so as to interfere with the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions, subject always to the observance of the principle set forth in paragraph 1 of the present article and to the requirements that the education given in such institutions shall conform to such minimum standards as may be laid down by the State.

OHCHR. (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>.

[4] Part I(2) in subsection b of the *Constitution Act, 1982: Charter of Rights and Freedoms* states:

...freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication;

Government of Canada. (1982). *Constitution Act, 1982: Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Retrieved from <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/Const/page-15.html>.

Article 19 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* states in full:

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

UN. (1948, December 10). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>.

[5] PREVnet (2018) *LGBTQ Youth* states:

All Youth Deserve To Feel Safe. Bullying Is A Human Rights Violation.

Questioning or accepting one's sexual orientation can be a difficult process for teens, especially when coupled with the other stresses of adolescence. Approximately 4% of teens identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or questioning (LGBTQ). These kids are more likely to be victims of bullying, sexual harassment and physical abuse and face a greater risk of social isolation.

The bullying experienced by LGBTQ youth is similar to other types of bullying in adolescence, but it is particularly hurtful because these kids are keenly aware of society's heterosexual bias.

PREVnet. (2018). LGBTQ Youth. Retrieved from <https://www.prevnet.ca/bullying/parents/parents-of-lgbtq-youth>.

[6] *Bullying: A Human Rights Issue* (n.d.) states:

When children are victimized, whether the perpetrator is an adult or a peer, their rights are being violated. Every human deserves and is entitled to respect and protection from discrimination and harassment. As a vulnerable population within society, children are at an increased risk for victimization and depend on adults to protect them and advocate for their human rights.

PREVnet. (n.d.). Bullying: A Human Rights Issue. Retrieved from <https://www.prevnet.ca/sites/prevnet.ca/files/fact-sheet/PREVNet-SAMHSA-Factsheet-Bullying-A-Human-Rights-Issue.pdf>.

Canadian License Plate Etiquette

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

November 2, 2018

Some license plates in Canada remain more offensive than others, in Alberta in particular. In 1985, personalized license plates were introduced for public creation and consumption. 80,000 have been issued.

The license plates are not permitted to reference or ridicule on a number of identifiable groupings within the province. The reportage states, “any race, religion, gender or sexual orientation, employ foul or derogatory language, have sexual connotations or use political slurs.”

Some are entitled WTF LOL, BYT3ME, B00GRR, TRUMP45, MR OCD, CHRDNAY, BEY0TCH, MUHFUGG, GR84PLA, PINAS, and the last image from the article: GRABHER. Each of various levels of offence depending on the Albertan.

These are forms of license plates are entitled Vanity Plates — self-explanatory. Service Alberta set about 7 categories of offense for the license plates. Some of the others included CARRY22, SATIVA, INDICA, KRAK, SN0RTER and LSDINGO.

One business support specialist for the Alberta Motor Association, Brian Salter, described clever word tricks and plays on words can help pass a license plate. However, they must comply within the boundaries and borders set by the 7 categories of “technical and moral standards.”

Any professional titles or indications including MLA or MD are strictly forbidden, even if a qualified general practitioner or orthopedic surgeon. Also, apparently, manners and a smile can help in the registration of a questionable automobile vanity plate.

Salter continued, “Registry agents are the first line of defence... Our responsibility is to screen anything that comes in for a request, but every personalized plate request is reviewed by a motor vehicle specialist at Service Alberta.”

Now, noting the final plate listed as GRABHER, this looks as if a deliberate political message in light of comments about personal behaviour around and to women by the President of the United States.

However, the man who wanted the personalized plate was Troy Grabher. He wanted to have the family name on the car as a license plate. Troy is in the middle of a court battle over it, now.

His father, Lorne Grabher, had the same license plate title revoked, in Nova Scotia, in 2016 based on a complaint: a “socially unacceptable slogan” rather than the last name of a family with Austrian-German heritage.

Apparently, the license plate has been the subject of international news with the exhausting associated exhausting court battle.

Troy Grabher opined, “It was all over the news, and we were just flabbergasted. Like, how could this even happen? I think it’s pathetic that’s it come to this... I’m always worried about it. I mean, I have a sticker on the back of my car saying that it’s my last name so people are aware of it.”

—

References

Snowdon, W. & Keeler, N. (2018, August 27). Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/edmonton-alberta-rejected-licence-plates-1.4797754>.

From Nuns to None: #MeToo & #ChurchToo

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

November 2, 2018

The number of nuns continues its precipitous decline in overall numbers. Also, they have begun to come out, calling out sexual abuse within the church.

Looking at the overall numbers of the numbers of nuns in the province of Quebec, we can monitor decline in the numbers of the faithful women in the monasteries decline over decades from its height.

The history, apparently, runs back about 400 years ago in the history of Quebec. But now, the most devout women in the Roman Catholic world are beginning to decline in numbers and age — as a reflection of religion in general in North America — and wither into the dark.

The height of the Roman Catholic nuns in Quebec, in total or raw numbers, was 47,000 in 1961. Now, the number decreased to fewer than 6,000 with the mean age above 80. This portends poorly for the Christian faith's largest sect or tradition in Quebec.

It amounts to an augury for the future of the country with respect to much religious faith. Something akin to a hollowing out of the faiths; if not in raw numbers, then in the seriousness with which individual believers take their religious faith.

I feel for the sisters in the loss of long-term culture. Not fun for anyone to lose a sense of place and purpose. However, other issues may dwarf this as the sexual misconduct claims continue to pour out of the religious institutions and organizations throughout the country and the world. By implication, many more remain unreported.

The continued decline of the faithful has not been helped by the continual deluge of sexual abuse case settlements. One, recently, amounted to tens of millions of dollars. One nun stopped attendance at a regular confession because of a priest forcing himself on her.

The rape happened when she was “recounting her sins to him in a university classroom nearly 20 years ago.” Apparently, this sister was silenced due to the vows of obedience to the hierarchs of the Roman Catholic Church and its attendant orthodoxy in addition to the shame and guilt coming from the rape.

By the reportage, she appeared to remain stuck in one of the first stages of trauma: denial. Ignore it, it did not happen, then everything will be better. It will go away. Now, more have begun to come forward to tell their own narratives of abuse and secrecy from within the Roman Catholic Church, where the abusers are bishops and priests.

The cases continue to emerge not in isolated incidents, countries, or even regions; they exist in Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America. The queries may emerge, as they do for me, about the hierarchical structure itself.

The unquestioned power of men who hold the levers, whether in traditional-conservative structures seen in much of the Roman Catholic Church or in liberal-progressive institutions observed in much of the culture of Hollywood.

In terms of sexual violence, the core perpetrators tend to be men in both institutions; women tend to be the main victims. Within the increasing prominence of the anti-sexual violence and justice

movements in social media and elsewhere, the church is having a moment and nuns account for a portion of it.

The sexual violence perpetrated, for example, by the Vatican in the 1990s in Africa was not dealt with or handled — euphemisms in both cases — sufficiently or at all. One of the most prominent individuals who has been charged with sexual misconduct is the sexual abuse and harassment of seminarians by the American Cardinal Theodore McCarrick.

A leading expert of the church sexual abuse and abuse of power history, Karlijn Demasure, stated, “I am so sad that it took so long for this to come into the open, because there were reports long ago... I hope that now actions will be taken to take care of the victims and put an end to this kind of abuse.”

Demasure continued, “They (the priests) can always say ‘she wanted it’... It is also difficult to get rid of the opinion that it is always the woman who seduces the man, and not vice versa.”

The references provide rather extensive coverage on the issues of both a decline in the number of Quebecois nuns, so provincial, and then the sexual abuse #MeToo moment, so international.

—

References

Peritz, I. (2018, July 25). Quebec’s dwindling number of Catholic nuns spells end of era in province. Retrieved from <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-quebecs-dwindling-number-of-catholic-nuns-spells-end-of-era-in/>.

Winfield, N. & Muhumuza, R. (2018, July 28). As nuns come forward with sexual abuse allegations, Catholic Church faces its own #MeToo moment. Retrieved from <https://globalnews.ca/news/4359088/catholic-nuns-sexual-abuse-vatican-metoo/>.

Reminder: A Note on the Level of Belief in Evolution by Authoritative Authorities

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

November 2, 2018

A conversation with a theology and Christian theological history student prompted this one.

According to *Pew Research*, as many of you well know but many or most Canadians may not accept or know, the vast majority of experts in the biological sciences adhere to an evolutionary account of the adaptation, development, and speciation of species.

It amounts to an unguided evolution by natural selection (and kin selection, sexual selection, and so on) accepted by most of the scientists linked to the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

This number differs starkly with the general perspective of the general population. It becomes less of a problem in some parts of the world survey data including the United Kingdom. However, Canadian society comes in between America and the UK in adherence, by the general population, to evolution by natural selection.

As reported, “While 98% of scientists connected to the American Association for the Advancement of Science say they believe humans evolved over time, only two-thirds (66%) of Americans overall perceive that scientists generally agree about evolution, according to 2014 data from a recent Pew Research Center survey on science and society.”

That is to say, in the English-speaking Christian and secular world, the numbers of the public or layperson adherence to evolutionary theory or the bedrock of all biological sciences — and so medical sciences as well — seems false or only partial to them.

Much of this comes from the historical inertia of a new theory of the adaptation, development, and speciation of species. Some bulwarks of non-modern science come in the form of religious fundamentalism, the non-accommodationists.

This amounts to a small reminder, for myself and, I trust, you too, on the degree of separation between the world of the practicing experts in the world of science and then the beliefs about the beliefs scientists hold.

Dennett talks about belief in belief. Taking the turn of phrase in a different context, this amounts to the beliefs about others’ beliefs. The public remains wrong about the beliefs of the people active in the field. This creates a chasm in knowledge in each grouping.

How might this change the theory of mind the public and the scientists have about one another?

As noted, “Those in the general public who reject evolution are divided on whether there is a scientific consensus on the topic, with 47% saying scientists agree on evolution and 46% saying they do not.”

So it goes.

Recent Surveys on the Religious and the Non-Religious

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

November 2, 2018

According to Dr. Phil Zuckerman in *Psychology Today*, there were two surveys published examining the beliefs and attitudes of the religious and the secular.

Both examined the level of suspicion and unwelcome behavior of the religious towards those who are different from them. That is, anyone non-religious and the perception and behavior with them.

As it turns out — though only two — with these studies, the secular people were more open and accepting of those from different countries, ethnicities, races, and religions. Tribalism and ethnocentrism were correlated with religiosity.

The universalist and cosmopolitan attitudes and behaviors were more related to the secular people.

Zuckerman states, “In this study, Americans were asked how they feel about census predictions indicating that by the year 2043, Latinos, Asian Americans, and other peoples of color will constitute a combined majority of the population, with whites being in the minority.”

Half of the Evangelicals stated that this would be a negative development. 4/10 mainline Protestants viewed this as a negative. Then only 3/10 of the Roman Catholics said the same.

The people without a religious affiliation were the ones to see this as pretty much not a negative development at all. They viewed this as more or less acceptable. It was only about 2 out of 10 to 1 out of 4. Not many compared to the others, especially the Evangelicals.

“The second new survey comes from Europe. In this 2018 Pew study, it was found that religious Europeans are considerably more ethnocentric, more nationalistic, more anti-immigrant, and more suspicious of Jews and Muslims than secular Europeans,” Zuckerman explained.

Indeed, more than half of the Christians who attend church consider their culture superior to others while just shy of half those who do not attend say the same thing. Only 25% of secular people consider their culture superior — intriguing as there is a decrease in the trend in each category but significant double-digit numbers in each at the same time.

In terms of other prominent world religions, 30% of the Christians who attend church were unwilling to accept Muslims into their families. It was only 11% of the secular individuals who were unwilling.

Most European nations’ Christians want the number of immigrants to be lower. That differs significantly from the secular counterparts in those same countries. Although, with the different cultures and religious demographic trends, there may be different interpretations of that data. Not sure.

Apparently, to one potential implicit concern about only two studies referenced here, those replicate or mimic the responses in surveys or social psychological studies over several decades.

That is, the tribalism increases with the greater levels of religiosity. Religion promotes tribalism, in short. It can be good for group solidarity and bad for the latent potential of bigotry and prejudice — covert and overt.

Bob Altemeyer observes — according to Zuckerman — that the amount someone goes to church indicates an increased probability of prejudice against “a variety of others.” American psychologist of religion Ralph Wood echoes this sentiment or observation.

Zuckerman continues, “... a massive meta-analysis conducted in 2009 by Duke University professor Deborah Hall — who analyzed 55 separate studies teasing out at the relationship between religion and racism — found, strongly religious Americans exhibit the highest levels of racism, while atheist and agnostics exhibit the lowest levels.”

Zuckerman provides some cautionary notes about surveys. The surveys are statistical devices about populations. That is to say, one cannot make statements about all in a group based on a survey but only the statistical level of a particular attitudinal and behavioral set.

“...they simply illustrate percentages, averages, tendencies, and predilections. There are many religious people who are not ethnocentric, racist, prejudice, or xenophobic, and there are plenty of secular people who are,” Zuckerman said.

Many positive outcomes emerge from the church attendance. One is the greater likelihood of being charitable with both time and money compared to their secular counterparts. They report more happiness and greater well-being. Then the last is that they even live longer.

There is also the social and psychological benefits of the community for many of the religious compared to the non-religious. However, for welcoming refugees, being open to others, and viewing a oneness of humanity, religion does not help in those domains.

ATHEIST REPUBLIC (OP-ED)

New Book - Queer Disbelief

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 30, 2018

Camille Beredjick announced a new book earlier in 2018 entitled *Queer Disbelief*. She was a former frequent writer for *Friendly Atheist* back in the day.

Beredjick wrote on the important topic of the rights of sexual orientation and gender identity minorities under the banner of LGBTQ rights.

As noted by the *Friendly Atheist* article reporting on the announced book, “The book was called *Queer Disbelief* and it was all about the LGBTQ and atheist communities: how they overlapped, where the comparisons broke down, how religion hurt (and helped!) LGBTQ people, and why atheists couldn’t ignore this issue.”

With June as Pride Month, the cost of book has been lowered now. It has been listed at only \$9.99 in paperback version and \$6.99 in Kindle. This deal, as per the month of Pride, will end at the completion of the month.

If you have not read it, and have a deeper interest in the LGBTQ rights, and the activism and writing of Beredjick, then you may want to take a look into it.

“Faithiest” by Melanie Wilderman

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 19, 2018

According to Friendly Atheist, Faithiest, by Melanie Wilderman, has been transformed into a stage play.

In the report, the premise of the story is described as an atheist who is from Oklahoma. The atheist survives a tornado. Then the atheist blurts out that they do not believe in God. It is during a live interview on cable news. Her world begins to spiral out of control after that interview.

Apparently, this is a real story fictionalized. It happened to a real woman named Rebecca Vitsmun. Her real life story, in a fictionalized form, will be presented as a stage play in Oklahoma City. The author is a woman, Melanie Wilderman.

As stated, “A dramatic comedy, Faithiest tells the story of small-town Oklahoma school teacher Abigail Asher, a well-liked young woman respected as a dedicated educator, church volunteer, and all-around good person. But her standing in the community crumbles as quickly as the locals can yell, ‘It’s a twister!’”

With the tornado, the woman, Abigail, rescues some children and then is given national news coverage. It became an accidental reveal of personal atheist beliefs and convictions. After that confession, her friends and everyone else – even those in family – view her in a different light.

Now, the personal atheism gets blasted on social media. Abigail’s loved ones do not know how to feel about her anymore. It becomes a play of personal belief and then coping in the midst of the backlash against atheism.

The director, Rodney Brazil, stated, “The central theme of the play is being able to have those tough conversations with people that have differing opinions, people who aren’t going to change their beliefs.... (The play is about) being able to have a productive dialogue about those differences in belief without it causing an end to your relationship.”

“Bad Comedy for Bad People” with Keith Lowell Jensen

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 20, 2018

According to Laughing in Disbelief, one atheist is bringing his own brand of atheism to the world of stand-up comedy.

There is a clip called The Lock In. In it, there is a discussion around the subject matter of atheism and God, and the connection with the youth world and dating arena for the young people. It is part of a larger special called Bad Comedy For Bad People.

In the synopsis of the special, it describes how Keith Lowell Jensen began a Twitter account for his daughter. It garnered an international audience: @MaxTheTiger. He did not expect international audience. One usually does not even expect a national audience with a Twitter account for a daughter, or for themselves for that matter.

As reported, “Then again, he probably never pictured having the “death talk” with li'l MaxTheNecromancer as his small, ardent atheist tried to Lazarus a froglet. And even that one wasn't as odd as learning a thing or two from the comprehensive “sex talk” his wife and several organic, fair trade bananas laid on their nephew.”

With the latest release through Stand Up! Records, he talks about the ethics around homelessness and incarceration. The complexities around veganism and teenage depression. Then he slides into a monologue on the Civil Rights Movement and the music around it.

This then moves into speaking to the gay marriage and the issues of aging with hope for a “better, kinder, future.”

Who Are We To Judge How People Live In Islamic Countries?

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 21, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: I hear arguments from different people on Islamic countries and people who live in them. Some argue for different standards for different beliefs and groups. If not in an explicit manner, then the implicit understanding in the conversation amounts to different standards for different people.

The conversations start with the general question about the judgment of people who live in Islamic countries. In these dialogues, the person may respond with a question, “Who are we to judge how people live in Islamic countries?”

Armin Navabi: We are their fellow human beings. Why does care for our fellow human beings have to be dependent on their location? Why does it have to be dependent on where they were born, their race, or how far or close they are to us? I do not understand the relevance of that. Pain is pain. Happiness is happiness. Our care shouldn't depend on whether somebody is being starved, oppressed, discriminated against, tortured or killed next to us, or a thousand kilometres from us.

The suggestion that “I can help people who are close to me more than people far away” isn't valid anymore. Our reach is now global, through social media, blogs, and podcasts. It is much easier than before to influence decisions of people miles away. Geography is not a barrier anymore. Language still is. And we are making efforts to break the language barrier as well.

In fact, given that you and I live in free countries, we might be able to make certain differences that people living in countries where our help is needed the most can't. And the influence goes both ways. We all should seek to have our decisions influenced by global connectivity rather than just being influence makers.

They Need Your Voice

You live in a country where you could say whatever you want. People living in many Islamic countries do not. They do not live in a country where they can speak their minds. That is why you might be able to make a bigger difference in their lives compared to people close to you.

Too many people who enjoy freedom of speech, peace and security, gender equality, anti-discrimination laws, and gay rights don't seem to want the same rights and freedoms for people in Islamic countries. It is so arrogant to suggest that we own these values. If implementing these rights and freedoms have proven to work, they should be implemented everywhere. The values behind the demand for such rights and freedom already exist and have been fought for, for hundreds of years. The difference is that these voices have been forced in the dark. That's where we come in and shine the light on them.

Morally Superior

Many people who have inherited enlightenment values see themselves as morally superior without actually being responsible for the adoption of these values. They might claim “We came to these values ourselves. It is up to them do the same thing.” I call bullshit. There is no country,

no idea, and no value that hasn't been influenced by other countries, by other values, and by philosophers and thought leaders from different corners of the world. Europe was introduced to its own ancient Greek philosophers through the Arab Empire.

No group of people or country lies in a bubble. Of course, they are going to be influenced by foreign countries. And they are going to influence other countries.

The world is connected. If that was true a thousand years ago, how is it not a ridiculous expectation for countries not to influence each other today? If European countries' enlightenment was due to the influence of foreign countries at that time, are we going to deny foreign influence to Islamic countries today?

Jacobsen: What about the people in Islamic countries who do not want to be influenced by other countries' cultures?

Navabi: People who do not agree with these values should bring values they prefer and compete with the rest of us in the free market of ideas. If your values are superior for your country, you should be able to sell them and win in a free and fair environment where all arguments are presented. If you have valid arguments, you should not need to deny others the opportunity to introduce competing ideas. Let the people make their decision instead of speaking on their behalf.

That is how we respond to your shitty backwards barbaric ancient ideas. Because it works. We do not silence you. We compete with you. If your ideas are better, challenge us. If you think our ideas are too liberal, too empty of spiritual guidance, too empty of meaning, and provide no purpose to life, then I am sure your ideas are going to win. So bring it on.

Atheism, as American as Apple Pie

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 1, 2019

According to Ron Millar in *The Humanist*, in an ideal implementation of the US Constitution, there would be zero formal or informal religious tests for public office. Indeed, this would not impact the politics of this powerful state actor.

However, one of the big taboos within American politics has been the idea of a non-religious, even atheist, candidate running for public office. Those atheists who run for public office remain rather brave in the face of the stigma and distinct prejudice against them.

However, Millar notes some of the more recent research is showing that there is a reduction in the former levels of the bias or xenophobia against non-religious political candidates. This is based on research done via a poll.

A poll conducted through the American Humanist Association (AHA) and the Centre for Freethought Equality via the Lake Research Partners with funding by the Stiefel Freethought Foundation showed some interesting or intriguing results.

As it turns out, there is a distinct improvement of the perception of the non-religious, agnostic, and atheist candidates within the electoral process. Thus, the atheist community, if wanting to run for political office, can begin to square off on a fairer, but not entirely even, playing field with religious candidates.

With the ongoing political costs throughout much of American history for any atheist political candidates, this became the basis for the need of the poll.

As stated, “A candidate in a very red district, where the last Democratic opponent received less than 20 percent of the vote against the Republican incumbent, said he couldn’t possibly identify as an atheist because he couldn’t afford to lose any more voters. He said he automatically lost voters by identifying as a Democrat, more since he is pro-choice, and even more with his support of LGBTQ equality.”

This becomes the grounds upon which atheist candidates lose out. Next, the survey was done. In fact, the survey showed data potentially heartwarming to some of the members of the Atheist Republic community living within the United States or looking at the American Empire from afar in one of our consulates.

In terms of the results of the survey or the poll by Lake Research Partners, 72% of the respondents stated that the atheism does not make a difference in terms of their vote. The “nontheistic, progressive Democrats in non-swing districts,” according to Millar, “should no longer feel hesitant to be public about their religious identity.”

In other words, the taboo is dropping relatively smoothly within the United States. This can be seen in some of the political campaigns.

Canadian Atheists Win Discrimination Case

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 1, 2019

An atheist family won in a recent discrimination case against Bowen island Montessori School in British Columbia, Canada.

The British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal awarded \$12,000 to the family based on a school's actions where they "kicked out" a student's parents. Bowen island Montessori School (BIMS) treated the couple differently because of their atheistic views. It was labelled discrimination by the BC Human Rights Tribunal because the school, as stated by the BC Human Rights Tribunal, "...treated them differently from every other parent at the school, and sought to suppress their expression of concerns about the nature of the curriculum that were grounded in their race, ancestry and religious beliefs."

That is to say, discrimination for lack of belief in the prevailing mythology. The parents are Gary Mangel and Mai Yasué. The child was enrolled in 2014 and Mangel sat on the board of directors. Then the school wanted to know the way in which to celebrate the holidays properly.

One person recommended "clay elf ornaments." But Mangel rejected this idea, as this, to him, promoted a Christian holiday. One asked if a Hanukkah activity may be better. But Mangel rejected this too.

Mangel was rather rude in the email correspondence:

I don't think it's appropriate to celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah, or any other religious/political event at preschool (including Remembrance Day). [My child] is three years old... [and] cannot consent to being involved in decorating military wreaths or Christmas trees or lighting Hanukkah candles. Having the kids do these things seems inappropriate, given their absolute inability to understand the religious and political symbolism associated with those acts. As Richard Dawkins (author of The God Delusion) has written, there is no such thing as a Muslim, Jewish, or Christian, etc... baby/toddler/child. They are simply too young to be making these sorts of decisions.

Other board members argued the important of a "cosmic education" through the inclusion of different religious imagery included in the school's curriculum, as this was important to the philosophy of the Montessori folks at the school.

Mangel stated that there should be "atheist Christmas ornaments." Things escalated from there as Mangel wanted none of the celebrations while the board wanted as many as possible or, at a minimum, the major traditions to be represented.

No one changed their minds and the discussion was similar to a "reality TV show," according to Mangel.

Things really came to a head when "Mr. Mangel responded, 'I'll sue them too' and then began doing the Nazi salute and marching around while he sung a different version of O Canada in which he substituted his own lyrics."

The arguments continued over the holidays. Then the school wanted the atheists to sign a contract that stated that "Multiculturalism, including the observation of a wide variety of celebrations is important to us."

The atheists refused to sign it. Then the school took this as a basis to not re-enroll the daughter of the atheist parents. The atheists being belligerent was not the legal complaint but, rather, the response to the signing, i.e., the refusal to sign it.

BC Human Rights Tribunal member, Barbara Koenkiewicz, stated, “I find nothing in the evidence that could justify the refusal to register [the child] unless Dr. Yasué and Mr. Mangel essentially agreed that they would be significantly limited in their ability to raise issues about the cultural aspects of the BIMS program.”

The school was ordered to pay \$5,000 per parent and \$2,000 for the child/daughter.

ATHEIST REPUBLIC (BLOG)

Interview with Allie Jackson – CEO, Atheist Republic

Part 1

November 3, 2017

Continue reading the article "Interview with Allie Jackson – CEO, Atheist Republic" by *clicking here*.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Recently, the Atheist Republic Facebook page was shut down. Why was that? How can Facebook do that without necessarily letting you know or with authorization?

Allie Jackson: Isn't that a good question? We would love to know why. We were shut down, not once but twice, in less than 24 hours without warning. Normally, we know when there is a problem because Facebook will let us know they removed some post for some reason.

This has happened for years. They used to send us a picture letting us know which post was removed. We had a post removed that no one could tell what it was. This has been happening for quite some time now.

We post about once per hour, sometimes more and sometimes less. They say, "We removed this post for violating our terms." We can't know which post because they didn't send a picture. Oftentimes, what they removed is innocent. It didn't break terms of service. But we've learned to live with that.

So, leading up to this ban, they stopped showing us what they were removing from our page. We didn't get an indication that a post was removed, then we've got this notification that we'd been restricted.

Some features had been restricted [Laughing]. It is mind-boggling. We click the notification. It takes us to the page. It is very normal, but then we realized that our posts weren't reaching people and nobody was able to see our post unless they went to our page.

That went on for a couple of hours. We ended up putting in an appeal, of course. We ended up rallying the community because we saw that the Ex-Muslims of North America got a notification saying this restriction will last for one week and because the post was against the terms of service.

Something that I hadn't heard before. So, a couple hours before we put in the appeal. It was the next day, but not the full 24 hours. Our page was completely taken down and unpublished. No reasons, again, and no posts were removed, just – boom! – "we've unpublished your page."

It is frustrating because we don't know what we did wrong. It is the same process. When we have a post removed, we want to improve things. We understand Facebook is a private company. We understand they have a right to run their own company.

It was not illegal, but I feel what they did was unethical. To take a paying customer and then remove the platform from 1.6 million people who want the content that we're putting out there; that is not a very business-like way of doing things, I think.

It was very frustrating on that level.

Jacobsen: Once you get past 1.5 million, there aren't that many groups. They are there, but not many. 1.6 million, given all of Facebook, it is relatively small, but given the community, it is relatively large.

The fact that it happened for a Facebook group housed, in essence, in Canada is rather remarkable.

Jackson: Absolutely.

Jacobsen: The first time when they took it down, they said you lost some features. Did they specify any at all?

Jackson: They didn't specify anything. It popped up, like a notification if somebody liked a photo or commented on something that you commented on. It popped up in a notification, not explaining what features were removed.

We had to go through and figure it out. There were two: the speak now button and the news feed. People could not leave messages, and no one could get our posts.

Jacobsen: Has Facebook done this to ex-Muslim or ex-anything groups before?

Jackson: Absolutely, the most we hear about are ex-Muslim groups, especially Arab ex-Muslim groups.

Jacobsen: Is this regardless of location, whether Saudi Arabia or America?

Jackson: Absolutely. It is so sad too. This is a small group without a platform. They can't say this is a big problem. We get these people coming to us and saying, "Wow, I had 17,000 people in a group. Facebook removed the group."

Or another is that Facebook removed the group because we post scientific stuff and have "atheist" in the title. I am on a secret Facebook group with other admins of other groups. Many have had their pages down for six months now, with no reason or warning.

Many of them hadn't even had a post removed. All of a sudden. Poof! They are gone. It is hard working from our platform and point of view because there are pages that I know – because I follow them [Laughing] – were not violating any terms of service.

If the offense is now a violation of terms of service, then let's shut down Facebook because everything can be offensive. I look at things as far as terms of service and community standards. Those are two things I have engulfed the knowledge about.

We have a group with many members. It is a big Facebook group. So, we are dedicated. If anybody looks at our rules that we lay out for the group, we are dedicated to prevention of hate speech and make sure that everything is in line there.

On the page, though, things are different. We can control what we post, but not what others post. On a page of 1.6 million, Facebook could easily find them. Every single post we've put out has never had anything to do with hate speech.

People want to say hate speech is an opinion. In reality, it is not. If you look at its definition, it talks about inciting violence or hatred toward people or a group of people. We are not setting out to hurt anyone.

We don't want anyone hurt, even their feelings. We attack ideas, not people. So, it is really difficult when people say, "You're hateful." No, we have a platform with anyone free to fight an idea.

We don't ban theists or Muslims, or Christians, or any specific groups. If somebody doesn't like what we say, maybe, they can educate us. They are free to do that.

Jacobsen: Do you think the equivalent opposite case happens when Muslim groups will state openly that atheists are going to hellfire or some equivalent, and they don't get taken down – even though that would be about people rather than others such as on Atheist Republic criticizing the authenticity of a text and the validity/soundness of arguments for one particular faith?

Jackson: Yes, I think it is outrageously unfair. We have received, over the years, so many death threats. The rainbow Kaaba was probably one of the most controversial things we've shared. The whole purpose and point was love should be free for everyone.

Everyone, anywhere should be able to love anyone the way they want. We got so much support from the Muslim community, "Please don't share my name, but I am gay and Muslim, and I can't tell anyone my name. Your message gave us a lot of hope."

It is not like we focus on atheist problems or only atheists. We focus on a lot of problems that stem from religious indoctrination, such as the hatred against the LGBTQ+ community by some people. Most Muslims support the community.

Unfortunately, they face criticism from their own community for doing that, but for me to get back to the hate speech, that happens. We have people who have sent us a man who was tied to a cross with his head cut off and his head laying at his feet. They said, "You're next."

We get people saying, "What is your physical address? Do you remember what happened to Charlie Hebdo? You're next." I have had someone say, "I am going to chop off your head and rape your neck hole."

Facebook says, "Thank you for sending this. It doesn't violate our terms of service or community standards. We can't do anything, but you can ban them." Armin and I both got banned once because he posted my picture and said, "Allie was sent to us from the Flying Spaghetti Monster, Ramen."

That got mass reported and we got banned from our accounts for it. I am seeing this. This is just what I am seeing. I am not saying this is backed because I am seeing it. But from my perspective, it seems like there is some sort of bias.

It is very frustrating.

Jacobsen: The particular case you gave with Armin Navabi, the founder of Atheist Republic, is stating a parody religion's "deity". In the other case, it is directed at someone. One is a direct threat to a person.

One is to you. Another is directed playfully at an idea. People would seem to be insecure enough to find that threat enough to report en masse. People don't want to be considered a block: all Christians, all Muslims, and so on. But then they want to take pride in saying, "We are one of the biggest religions, and so on."

I have heard this. I am sure you have too. But even more, there is a population of over a billion called the religiously unaffiliated, but, maybe, there may need to be a coalition of some form. It is like “herding cats.” I am sure you’ve heard it.

Jackson: [Laughing] It is so true. We are tied only by the lack of belief in God. Other than that, an atheist can believe in reincarnation, in ghosts, in Karma. So, when you see different organizations of atheists...

I am a big friend, to me, of an organization called Mythicist Milwaukee. They don’t believe the Biblical Jesus existed. Then you look at people like Bart Ehrman. There was a debate between Dr. Bart Ehrman and Dr. Price, both who have different beliefs. Dr. Richard Carrier and Dr. Ehrman completely disagree with each other.

Often, they write back and forth about their disagreement. You have these different groups of atheists that know what needs to be done for social justice around the world. So, it is hard. It is hard to take these people and bring them together.

The religious are lucky. They have a book and rules, which says, “All will think this way because it says in the text.” Even they can’t get it right. We have tons of Christians who love the LGBT community, then we have Christians at the Westboro Baptist Church [Laughing].

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

Jackson: They have more to tie them together. That’s what I love about the Atheist Republic. Even if we disagree with an idea, we are a volunteer team of 300 people. We have different beliefs on politics. We have different views on many things.

We don’t restrict our page to be about one topic. We don’t just dump on one thing, or take one political side. People get upset when we make jokes about Donald Trump. We make the same jokes about Hillary Clinton.

We joke. We have fun. We have different beliefs. That brings us together more than anything. Atheist Republic puts that out there. Even if we don’t believe in it, we will be a platform for you. That is a mentality for bringing all of us atheists together.

Jacobsen: **To your own experience, what made atheism seem obviously true – an argument, a disenchantment with traditional religious structures, a cranky parent, not taking the myths seriously, and so on?**

Jackson: I was a strong Christian. I prided myself on being a child of God. I talked about my high school summer vacations. While my friends were partying and drinking, I was reading the Bible. I was reading it for Bible school.

I talked about it with people. I loved God. It was my senior year in high school. Things started clicking with me. I was never really allowed to question things growing up. I lived in a very conservative household. I watched Bill O’Reilly and Fox News, [Laughing] probably more than I’d like to say.

They hated homosexuals. They hated anyone different. It was around that time that I said, “I have a friend at school who is gay. I never even really questioned my own sexuality. I was straight because that’s what the Bible said I was to be.”

I never really questioned anything. But at that moment, I was saying, “I don’t want to hate people.” The second I said that, something clicked. When I left my family, and when I started studying at a Catholic university, I would stay in the library and study the Bible.

I loved being God’s child but it began to be more difficult for me. Social media began to boom. It wasn’t big in high school [Laughing]. I saw friends posting these awful things about Jesus, so I would immediately unfriend them. It hurt.

Once I was honest with those images, I decided I might be hurting because the images hold some truth. Things became harder. I began reading the story of Samson in the library. How Samson gathered 300 foxes, tied their tails together, and marched them into town to destroy.

It was so unreal. In my head, and I am sorry, I said, “This is bullshit.” I immediately got scared. At that moment, I immediately said, “I can’t do this anymore. I can’t do this anymore.”

Jacobsen: I want to dig a little deeper. I think there is an important moment there. Where Samson pulls the foxes into town, and you realize how unreal this is and say, “This is bullshit,” then there was fear, what was the fear?

Jackson: Questioning God, questioning God, that I would burn in hell. The days following, it brings me to tears just thinking about it. It was such a draining moment of my life. I prayed to a god I no longer believed in, begging him to give my faith back.

Jacobsen: Wow.

Jackson: I spoke to God on a personal level. I truly thought I felt God in my heart, not understanding that that was my own compassion that I was showing myself. I truly thought that was God loving me, being there for me in my tough times, and I didn’t want to live with the thought of not being God’s child anymore – and losing God.

I was praying to a god I no longer believed in, to give me my faith back, because I was so lonely. After that, I didn’t feel God anymore. It took years to realize I was an atheist after that. I didn’t tell anybody. I didn’t believe anymore.

I stopped going to churches – sorry. I am choking up.

Jacobsen: It’s okay.

Jackson: I stopped doing things that normal Christian people do. I slowly stopped doing it. Then I had this fight inside me. I feared hell. I knew I was going to hell. I knew somehow the world had corrupted me.

This sounds crazy. Right?

Jacobsen: No, it doesn’t. It is telling me something very deep. Rarely, people lose complete worldviews at once. You’re describing emotional reactions that are still in place, but you’re consciously losing bit-by-bit. So, you lose the belief in God, but still have the belief in prayer – and the efficacy of it.

But when you lose that, you still had the belief in hell. So, the fear was still there. The way you ordered it was a fear I no longer had in God, but also, following that, was a fear of hell. So, I am noticing that bit-by-bit. It is almost like a jigsaw puzzle where you’re removing the pieces rather than an orb that just melts.

That’s not crazy.

Jackson: I was then scared when I realized I was an atheist. That, suddenly, I might start doing something bad because I don't have any morality.

Jacobsen: Go to hell to morality.

Jackson: Absolutely. Why do I have compassion? God gave me that. I am going to hell, even though I stopped believing in hell. I couldn't shake it. It was still there in the back of my mind. We live our lives as Christians.

When I take myself back to the mind frame, we live our lives for the afterlife. This doesn't matter.

Jacobsen: What was the branch of Christianity?

Jackson: Southern Baptist. If everything is for the afterlife, why do anything for this life? It was an amazing transformation. I was a girl who helped other Christians. I volunteered at the church. I was a good girl.

To where I am now, where I help and run a one-on-one support group through Atheist Republic, we help people all around the world. We don't have the resources unfortunately to pay a lot of money to help them with those needs.

We volunteer our time. We could be at the movies.

Jacobsen: Your Sundays are free now.

Jackson: [Laughing] That's true. There is nothing that drives us to do that as far as a spiritual being is concerned. There is no reward that we will get from him. We know there is no physical reward for it.

We know we will be making the world a better place one person at a time. If we didn't help someone out of a funk, we could find them resources for a doctor if they didn't have insurance, or that an ex-Muslim is cared about by someone – right here, right now, let's cry together. “

Tell me everything. For the first time in their lives, in their own country where they can't tell anyone about their atheism, that changes their world.

Jacobsen: In the back of my mind, when you said, “This is bullshit,” I was thinking about the power of words. Of not only that, but of the spoken word for an individual, either to hear someone else say, “I don't believe this,” or to say, “This is bullshit,” [Laughing] in more colloquial terms.

I feel as though religious authorities, and more religiously authoritarian countries, know this quite deeply. So, they label, as in Saudi Arabia, atheists as terrorists – or ideological threats [Laughing]. I think that one-on-one work is very powerful for a lot of people.

Jackson: That it is. I can't imagine doing anything else. It is my true passion. It is what I love doing. I couldn't imagine anything else.

Continue reading the article "Interview with Allie Jackson – CEO, Atheist Republic" by *clicking here*.

Merge Catholic and Secular Public School Systems Petition

November 10, 2017

Serious activist efforts can change the landscape of an entire province, even a country. Some are symbolic, but I do not see even these as minor either.

One particular petition of note is the e-petition by Doug Thomas, President of the Secular Connexion Séculière, called e-petition 1264, or E-1264 (Jacobsen, 2017; House of Commons, 2017; Secular Connexion Séculière, 2017).

The petition is about the discrimination against nonbelievers in Canada.

Another petition relates to discussions happening for a long time now. Those conversations with the decrease in relevance of formal faith including the Roman Catholic Church to Canadians – especially so for younger generations, national and even international controversies over an alternate sexual education program proposed by the superintendents of a Catholic school system, and the desire for a merger of the Catholic separate publicly funded school system and the regular public system in Alberta (Boswell, 2012; French, 2017a; French, 2017b; Mehta, 2017).

The sex education system alternative proposal appeared to have differences of intrigue. Hemant Mehta, a prominent online atheist, noted:

Their curriculum said sex was only permissible within marriage (and never before), downplayed “consent” as the main prerequisite for having sex, ignored condoms and birth control, and only spoke about various types of sex and masturbation in negative ways. (Ibid.)

The Government of Alberta officials didn’t agree. Mehta punctuated the article with the conclusion:

The Alberta government officials deserve plenty of praise for taking this strong stance against misinformation and ignorance. It won’t stop the Church from trying to spread its irrational beliefs, but it will put some giant hurdles along their path. (Ibid.)

In short, the hasty move to reinstantiate Roman Catholic Church authority in the province diminished it. Hence, the decrease in Catholic Church relevance once more, in some ways.

Enter IDEA and King: Inclusive Diverse Education for All and Former Alberta Education Minister David King, respectively. The organization tied intimately with King, regarding the two school systems, says, “At the beginning of the 21st century, this duplication is obsolete, unnecessary, expensive, and contrary to what we understand about personal and religious freedom, and the religious neutrality of the provincial government” (IDEA, 2017a).

IDEA has a petition, which garnered over 1,000 votes in under 48 hours (King, 2017). It is for a referendum on the merger of both school systems in Alberta. In the midst of the controversies, present, and the crimes, past, of the Roman Catholic Church in Canada, this seems like another decent step for secularism. If this doesn’t work this time, we can try again, from another angle.

You can sign [here](#).

Also, please see the E-1264 petition [here](#).

References:

Boswell, R. (2012, April 7). Religion not important to most Canadians, although majority believe in God: *Link to Poll*.

French, J. (2017a, October 23). *Catholic school districts want their own sex-education curriculum*.

French, J. (2017b, March 15). Catholic school board support wanes among young adults, *survey says*.

House of Commons. (2017, September 14). *E-1264 (DISCRIMINATION)*.

Life and the Possibility of Absolute Finality with Terry Sanderson

November 11, 2017

This is an interview with Terry Sanderson, the President of the National Secular Society – a British campaigning organization that promotes secularism and separation of Church and State. He has cancer. Here we talk about atheism in the 21st century, the meaning of life, the possibility of death, absolute finality, and more. Prior interview [here](#).

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What does being an atheist in the 21st century mean to you?

Terry Sanderson: It means nothing more to me than a lack of belief in anything supernatural. There is no such thing as “the supernatural”. Anything that occurs is, by definition, natural. There is nothing outside those bounds, no ghosts, no gods, no miracles. That is all atheism means to me. Add other things – humanism, secularism – and it becomes something else.

Jacobsen: You have cancer. You are about to enter major surgery. What does this make you think about the meaning of life?

Sanderson: Life has no meaning beyond itself. People who cling to religion are appalled by such thinking and regard it as sad. But trying to ponder the supposed “Big Questions” – things like “Why are we here?” “What comes after?”, “What is the meaning of life?” is a complete waste of time. These questions have no answers so why ask them? Or as Gertrude Stein put it, “The answer is: there is no answer.”

Why torment yourself with such stuff? Get on with life, enjoy your senses – have good food, good wine, good sex. Our senses are all that we have to tell us we are alive. Make the most of them.

Jacobsen: How do you feel about the possibility of death?

Sanderson: Death is not a possibility, it is an inevitability – for everyone, no exceptions. The fact that my own end may be arriving sooner than I had anticipated is disappointing only in the sense that life is good and I want more of it.

I have had seventy years of perfect health, which I have taken for granted. Such good fortune can give one a misguided sense of immortality – nasty things happen to other people, not to me. But when the reality of life’s conclusion suddenly presents itself, you start to think – sometimes resentfully – about the things you will miss by going too soon.

My mother lived until she was 97 and by that stage, with rapidly fading senses and physical decline, she longed for death and welcomed it when it came. I watched her take her last breath and she struggled to cling on, but she was under the influence of morphine so it might just have been her body’s natural instinct to survive. If she had survived, she would have cursed the doctors for reviving her. So death is not always the terrible enemy, sometimes it is a welcome friend.

One wise philosopher once said, “The living are just the dead taking a vacation” and I find that comforting. The eternity of non-existence before I was born was a state of complete unawareness for me. That is the state I expect to return to when I am dead. No need to fear non-existence

(although for some Christians non-existence is the very definition of hell, a denial of the time they had expected to spend with their god).

Jacobsen: How important does the potential for the reality of death, of absolute finality, make friends and family and their love for you?

Sanderson: Love is a wonderful thing. It is life's grandest experience. Naturally, we want our loved ones to stay with us, not to die, and we mourn when they are gone. But the pain of loss is what we must endure in order to experience love. There is no escape. I don't want my partner to hurt when I am gone, but he will. We have spent half a lifetime together and when that comes to an end it will be hard. Bereavement seems unendurable, but it can be endured. I hope that those who have loved me will remember me with affection. That's the best I can hope for.

Jacobsen: If you could advise youth on making the most of life, and fighting for the rights of others in the livelihood of others, what would you recommend for them? Even though they may not know the most about the world, this might help some who are reading this find some guidance from an elder.

Sanderson: I hesitate to give advice because life as a young person is very different to life in later years. When I think back to my own youth, it is like looking at another person. What I thought then has changed several times. And we are all molded by our genes and our upbringing, so there is no formula that fits everyone.

I was lucky to have a childhood filled with love and I have always wanted to be like my mother, who was gentle, tolerant, forgiving, understanding and affectionate.

I want people to be happy and to accept them as they are in all their irritating variety. I try not to make sweeping statements about groups and to judge everyone on their individual qualities. If you can learn to do that, you will have a happy life filled with people who love you because you love them for who they are, not for any perceived racial or religious identity or ideological label that they put on themselves or have put on them by others.

Life is about fun, too. Fun is not trivial, never think that. It is about being happy. As the great American atheist Robert Ingersoll said, "Happiness is the only good, the time to be happy is now, the place to be happy is here and the way to be happy is to make others so."

So, have fun, be silly if you feel like it (I love being silly) and don't make cruel or humiliating jokes about other people, however much you think they deserve it.

Jacobsen: The United Kingdom is much more secular and atheistic than Canada. What is one thing about the United Kingdom that Canadians should know but potentially don't with regards to lack of faith?

Sanderson: Our histories are very different and despite the long centuries of religious dominance, I have a feeling that the British have never really been very religious, not in their hearts.

If you read some Victorian novelists – like Anthony Trollope – you will see that even in those days, when the Church was very powerful in politics and society, there was still a lot of skepticism.

The Church has been cruel and greedy all along the way, and people know that, but until they got organized there was no way for ordinary folk to resist. Gradually the Church's powers have been reduced until now it is regarded by most people as a complete irrelevance.

I don't think there is much that secular or atheist groups can do to persuade people out of religion. I'm not sure that we should even try. For some people it is comforting and it brings the community into their lives. Such people will have to find their own way out of it.

The churches seem to be doing a good job of bringing themselves into disrepute by being so completely irrational and out of step with modern life. They take themselves so seriously and some religious people actually believe all the self-important bilge that they spout. Fervent religionists will have great difficulty seeing how fatuous their beliefs are. They have devoted their lives to nonsense and admitting it is next to impossible. That's their problem.

It is when they demand that we all respect faith that I get annoyed. I don't respect it. I never have. Why would anyone respect something so crazy? In some parts of the world, though, people are forced to respect religion or risk death.

Blasphemy laws illustrate just how weak religion really is at its foundations. When respect has to be enforced by threats and menaces, you know that it isn't deserved.

We should just keep on encouraging religious leaders to make stupid statements. We should continue pointing out how dangerous religious identities can be. It's a gradual process, but it is gaining momentum every day.

Jacobsen: In the latter part of life, you have experienced quite a lot. You've experienced a lot of abuse. But you have come out an important voice. How do you persevere in light of all of the pain inflicted on you simply for being different and speaking your mind for the rights of others?

Sanderson: I have never really been affected by abuse and only on a few occasions have I been threatened with physical violence.

I have love all around me from my friends and family, and I know that I can always retire to the safety of my home where warm hearts are waiting. Surround yourself with supportive friends and no amount of abuse will then penetrate.

If you see a glaring injustice (as I did with the treatment of my fellow LGBT people back in the 1970s and 80s) and you want to challenge it, then there is no easy way to do it. You just have to do your best, campaign as hard as you can and keep on going in the face of setbacks.

There may be people telling you that what you are doing is wrong, that you don't understand the issues, but don't take notice of that. If your conscience tells you that you are doing the right thing, something that will improve the lot of others and harm no one, then press on despite opposition.

Jacobsen: What have been the bigger changes away from religion in the UK?

Sanderson: Gods are no longer the most powerful influence in this country, as they have been in the past. People will claim to believe in "something greater than themselves" but pressed about what precisely they mean, it is soon apparent they don't believe any religious claims.

Most religion-inspired legislation has been repealed – abortion is no longer illegal, homosexuality has been decriminalized, family planning is easily available. The churches have

had to adjust to all these changes, but each one of them reduces their influence a bit more. Every reform secularizes the nation further. Education and easy communication have also weakened the grip of superstitious thinking.

Religion is dying in the West, in Islamic countries, though, its baleful influence continues to grow. People in poverty often turn to religion as their only comfort and solace. It's understandable. But one day they, too, may achieve the affluence enjoyed by the West and be educated without indoctrination. [It is] then that they will have the luxury of being able to reject the religious props that seem so important when they have nothing else. They will, as in the West, abandon beliefs that ultimately bring them so much misery. It is then that religion will collapse once and for all.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Terry, I wish you the best in recovery and good health.

Interview with Allie Jackson – CEO, Atheist Republic

Part 2

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

November 14, 2017

If you haven't read it yet, go back to see the article "Interview with Allie Jackson – CEO, Atheist Republic Part 1" by [clicking here](#).

Jacobsen: If we're looking at Atheist Republic, what are we looking at in terms of demographics?

Jackson: Not surprisingly, mostly male, I do look at the demographics that follow our page. We have ~70% men to ~30% women. It is uneven there. What I find is most of our followers are probably ex-Muslim, we have a huge American, Canadian, European following.

Jacobsen: Since they are mostly men, younger, and ex-Muslim, are these the countries that the ex-Muslim men, not necessarily flee to but, get away from the dominant Islamic culture?

Jackson: It always starts off with that is what they think is going to happen. However, it's something very emotional for me. A family, an entire family, had to flee Pakistan over a man saying, "Atheists might not be that bad," on social media. People ransacked his house.

They had to take his children and flee to an island north of Australia, which they got to them. Their asylum there. Then they had to go to the Philippines. Mostly, it is what you can afford. If you look at the atheist community, there are not a lot of groups that help with asylum.

Asylum costs money. People need to get to these countries. They need lawyers. If no lawyers, they are taken advantage of. There was an Iranian atheist I was helping. He got a lawyer that had no idea. He had no clue about these kinds of processes.

One of the letters he wrote cost this man his asylum. The wording he used cost him his asylum. When it was all submitted and the lawyer said, "I am sure it will be fine. He is scared to go back home," no there was a video of an Islamic video describing the beheading they were going to give him when he returned to Iran.

That is not scared to go home. That is not, "I am scared someone might hurt me." There are people actively trying to kill him. You must be so careful about what you say in these cases. People take advantage of these cases, take their money.

The Atheist Alliance International is one of the few atheist groups that they do help with this. So, everything I know about asylum, everything that I gather is from experience. I learn from one case at a time.

When I am constantly bombarded with people saying, "I need asylum. These people are going to kill me. These people found a letter I wrote. These people saw a text message I sent to somebody. They are going to kill me. My dad and family are going to kill me," you can only sit there and listen to that as an emotional shoulder for so long.

After that, you must get your hands into this. You must start mapping out ideas for asylum. So, I hit the books. I mean non-literally [Laughing]. I hit Google. I started getting contacts and figuring out: What is the process? What can help?

Jacobsen: Who can help them?

Jackson: That is a hard question.

Jacobsen: Let's say, within North America, if not necessarily help, then give guidance. Should they contact some branch of Amnesty International or another organization like that?

Jackson: The UNHCR, I have worked with them the past couple of months. We have been dealing with a couple reports on what they will do for asylum seekers, and for people from Islamic countries that are atheists seeking help, because many will not talk to me.

They won't tell me what is going on. Although, I have sent letters to one of their clients, but they will not respond to me. Finally, I got letters from their legal department, reminding me that they won't talk to me.

I have been considering them, asking, "What will you do for these people?" The Pakistani family – that I told you about – that after he had been denied, after I sent in a letter from Atheist Republic describing what this person was going through, and that it was a verified story.

The person called them and said that they had to leave and had 90 days. I began to cry. He said, "I can't bring my family back to Pakistan. They are going to kill me. I committed blasphemy." If they are going to work for ex-Muslims, or for people who are seeking refuge in another country because atheism is deadly in Islamic countries, they need to know this is an issue.

I said, "Who can I talk to so I can file a report, to help you guys help people? Do you know what atheists face in Islamic countries?" I have been getting little help by the legal department. It is difficult to tell people, "You can go to this or that person because they can help you."

I feel as if I am doing that I am passing the buck. In this case, it is somebody's life. I can't live with that. It has been hard. We get so many cases flowing in. Once they contact this or that organization, often, they get denied. Those organizations have 50 people coming to them per day.

It is not that they don't care. They do. But finding an organization that is big enough and can handle the load that needs help, I don't think it exists.

Jacobsen: I think of two cases or themes. We both know women especially in religiously dominated countries – where religion and government are one and the same – that women are functionally or effectively second-class citizens.

Bearing in mind, the religion is mixed with the government. So, if it is costing money, as you noted, to take on these cases or to travel to another country and then pay for the legal assistance, if you're a woman that is poor, it doesn't even come out as an option.

It might explain some of the first waves of this, into more secular societies, being men, possibly. Men will have the finances to do so. I think of another case, not from that perspective, but internal to North America.

There are issues for non-believing women who – it is a sensibility, so it is not a firm argument – must work through the arts over decades to get some manner of influence. I think of Margaret Atwood.

Where she takes real cases, in parts, compiles them into a narrative, in some near-future dystopia, with the most famous example being *The Handmaid's Tale*, which is coming out, I guess, in some television series, do these seem like possible trends – not from argument, but more from sensibilities and so very loose perceptions of things?

Jackson: It is hard for me. I think of women who are trapped in religion. I think of women who break out of religion, and why. In my time of doing what I do, I am not talking about the Atheist Republic work; I am talking about the one-on-one support group.

I met three women in two years, who have come out wanting help. People ask, “Why? Why is that?” I can only speak by what those few have told me. They understood that they were a slave. They understood where they were.

They said that their dream of becoming free was too great. To know there is a way to get out, and not pursue that dream, they would rather kill themselves. One woman was being abused by her husband.

Our communication didn't get far. She said she lost faith in Islam. She had two children. Her husband beat her and her kids, and treated her terribly. The last communication I got from her said, “He found our communications. I have to say, ‘Goodbye.’”

I don't know what happened to her. I don't know if she ever got out. More than likely, she was probably killed trying to leave her husband, leave Islam. It is not a kind world to women. It is frustrating because, on the one hand, everyone has a right to an opinion. But on the other hand, I think people should want to become more educated on topics to hold the right opinion because when it comes to women in countries, it is heartbreaking. It is so heartbreaking what they must go through.

There are women who have taken Stockholm Syndrome. We know women who are captured by men. People who are captured by other people will begin to identify with their captors. But, I'm sorry. When I see some women get up and say, “This is freedom for me,” I can't help thinking of the women who felt that was slavery for them.

So, it is one of the things we were talking about earlier. We can't block people. We can't say, ‘All Muslims. All Christians.’ I can't say, “All women.” But I can say, ‘One woman's freedom is another woman's slavery.’

I think people who want to speak out against women being forced to wear a burqa. They don't want to wear a burqa. I think that is perfectly valid. I think that we in America, and the West, need to stop looking at the burqa as a form of liberation.

It may be a form of liberation for some women, but let's not block women. Let's not put them into a block and say, “This is freedom for you. Take it.” It makes no sense. It is a contradictory statement [Laughing].

“You wearing that is a signal of your freedom.” It is hard.

Jacobsen: **Going back to some of your Baptist roots, when you were in interaction as a very strong believer – Fox News, Baptist with father from an Abrahamic tradition, what was**

your perception of those that were out-and-out atheists – who were outspoken, articulate, and bold?

Jackson: I didn't feel they existed. I didn't believe. My dad would tell me about these people who didn't believe in God. I thought they may live in the jungle in a tribe, so that was why they didn't believe. I didn't think they existed.

Who wouldn't want the love of God? I couldn't even comprehend it.

Jacobsen: If you look at statistics, America has a prominent level of belief in angels, efficacy of prayer, demons, heaven, and so on. Did you see what you deemed "evil" behavior as influenced by a real devil, a real Satan?

Jackson: Absolutely, I thoroughly believed in demons and Satan. I thought that, maybe, I had been possessed by a demon, who was taking over my thoughts or allowing me to focus on ungodly things and wants and desires.

I thought that could happen. When I was a child, my mother constantly talked about demons and hell. She put a huge fear of demons in us. I remember not being able to sleep because I was praying to God to keep me safe. I thought I did something bad, and so a demon would come.

My mom said we were possessed when I was a baby. She was recording babble when I was a baby. Obviously, it showed she wanted to hear the recording for some reason. It said, "Come with me mama, the baby wants you to go to hell."

So, she had our preacher come by and exorcise the house, bless the house, if you will. Now, that I look back at the story and all the things she claimed would happen, such as doors opening and closing shut all at once in the house – cabinets would open and close all the time.

When I look back at what had to have happened because she gave the tape to my dad and her pastor, who said that to the recording? Demons aren't real. I know that. I know demons aren't real. It is amazing when you stop believing in demons how all that fear goes away.

No more possession and fear of possession. What lengths do people go to keep their beliefs? Is it really to the point of faking a tape, so that your preacher will come to the house and bless it? I looked at the things I did as well, to keep my faith.

The various positions I would take and try to rationalize how God allow rape and slavery. I would rationalize these things in my head, to make it okay for me to keep my belief. People will go through very strange rituals to prove what they believe is real. Scary.

Jacobsen: Thank you for your time, and the openness to express sensitive issues.

Jackson: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk about the issues and get a chance to tell people what we do at the Atheist Republic.

Islam Versus Nazism

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

December 5, 2017

An Interview With Armin Navabi, Founder of Atheist Republic

I recently spoke with Armin Navabi, a former Muslim from Iran and the founder of Atheist Republic, an organization with millions of followers worldwide and best-selling author of “Why There Is No God: Simple Responses to 20 Common Arguments for the Existence of God”. We talk about his opinion on the topic Islam versus Nazism, the reason why both can’t be compared, and his message to Muslims.

Scott: Why can’t people compare Islam and Nazism, according to them, and why do you think they’re wrong?

Armin: Their argument is at a time when you have the rise of the alt-right in the West, when people are discriminating against Muslims, when people who look like Muslims are being targeted and harassed in the streets. Comparing Islam to Nazism is not helpful and fueling hate. It’s helping more people demonize Muslims.

Scott: In my opinion, empowering the wrong people is a bad idea, such as the ethnic nationalists and the people that are neo-fascists. Islam is not people but a set of ideas -- or more precisely a set of ideas plus suggested practices in which people practice in certain degrees and believed in certain degrees. What I think is you can make a comparison if you’re talking about ideas plus suggested practices in a similar way National Socialism or Nazism does have a set of ideas and likely suggested practices.

I suspect that the inclination behind a lot of people are saying is looking at not only a set of ideas as neutral but a set of ideas as bad and then making comparison as both ideas are bad. You can’t compare two ideas that are bad.

When people want to protect those who believe Islam but not those who believe in Nazism, they don’t want to make a comparison in what they want to protect and in what they consider a bad set of ideas, ordinary Muslims and Nazis respectively. However, if you do look at the ideologies and suggested practices, you can make comparisons.

The question that follows from that comparison is, “What is the judgment? What is the ultimate value of either particular claims and the ideologies at large”?

For Armin, the judgment is already there when you compare Islam and Nazism because when you compare two things, you are suggesting that they are the same.

Armin: My response to that is something that would make them hate me more, which is [that] I don’t think Islam is as bad as Nazism. I think Islam is worse than Nazism. They think, “Okay great job, Armin, you just gave the best narrative to the alt-right and white supremacists. You just said that Muslims are worse than Nazis”. I never mentioned Muslims, never mentioned Nazis. I said Islam. You should know that as this is coming from people who criticize Islam and they say we’re criticizing Islam, not Muslims. And when I say Islam is worse than Nazism, they’re suggesting I’m demonizing Muslims, which I’m not. They will say "you’re simplifying it". To that I respond, You’re only listening to my conclusion instead of my entire argument.

Scott: How could you say Islam is worse than Nazism?

Armin: First of all they tell me "you can't even compare them since they're apples and oranges. They're not in the same category." To that I respond, they're both ideologies. When I compare Christianity with Islam, nobody says anything. When I compare Communism with Nazism, nobody says anything. But when I compare Islam with Nazism, *everybody* loses their mind.

To be fair, I think most Nazis are way worse than most Muslims. Most Muslims are great people. And this is the problem with Islam. The problem with Islam is that it does better job taking advantage of good people to sell its evil. Nazism doesn't have the sugar-coating required for you to take advantage of enough good people for it to spread enough.

Religions like Islam and Christianity are destructive, but they also come with these sweet messages like "Love thy neighbor", "Take care of the poor", "Be kind to your parents", "Take care of the elderly". Stuff that people already did and would have done without religion.

In fact, these simplistic morality messages within these religions were already discussed in way more advanced and nuanced way by ancient philosophers thousands of years ago before the Bible and the Quran.

So it wasn't their invention and people would have come to this conclusion because people, in general, are nice. On average, people are more sympathetic to their fellow human beings. But the Bible and Quran take the credit for this. And by taking credit for it they have an easier job to spread.

If you have an ideology talking about how you are the superior race and how Jews are evil and how everybody else is disgusting, if that's your main message, it's really hard for you to sell this and spread it because you have to rely on certain kind of people to spread this.

For example:

If I have a poison pill that tastes like shit and kills you right away, it's really hard to spread this poison. But if I have a poison pill that is sugar coated and doesn't kill you right away, then it's easier for me to start selling this poison and spread it far and wide.

I think that's the genius of Christianity and Islam. It's not genius by design; it's genius because these are memes that survive, just like we have the natural selection for genes. It's the ideologies that can survive longer spread farther and infect more people.

Scott: How can you say that Islam is even close to what Nazis did?

Armin: Granted, Nazism is way more harmful per year in power. By harmful I mean has more victims. Per year in power, Nazism is way more harmful. But, Nazism cannot survive for long in power. It was in power as a government only in less than one generation. It's not fully defeated but how many Nazi regimes do we have right now? Zero. How many Islamic regimes do we have right now? More than zero. Islamic regimes last longer. They had victims for the past 1400 years and still have victims today.

People tell me, "How can you say this right after what happened in Charlottesville? You have to adjust what you're saying and take the political climate into consideration and adjust accordingly for you not to fuel hate."

And I tell these people, "You're being very selfish because you're only looking at the political climate around where you live."

That woman dying in Charlottesville was an absolute tragedy, but you have to understand while that one person died in the hands of Nazis, there are hundreds of people dying in Yemen because of the religiously-fueled Sunni-Shia-divided Yemen.

I hate Islam because I care about its victims which are mostly Muslims. Being anti-Islam is being pro-Muslim because the main victims of Islam are Muslims. This is not anti-Muslim hate. In fact, you cannot be anything but anti-Islam if you care about Muslims.

If you don't stand against Islam you're abandoning Muslim women, Muslim homosexuals, Shia Muslims under Sunni regimes, Sunni Muslims under Shia regimes, Baha'i Muslims, Sufi Muslims, Ismaili Muslims etc. Not enough people talk about Yemen because it doesn't serve the Muslims narrative because these are Muslims killing Muslims. It doesn't serve U.S. narrative because U.S. gets a shitload of money selling weapons. This is a war crime.

You think we're being islamophobic? Saudi Arabia is bombing mosques in Yemen. How many people are dying by the hands of Nazis today? They ask me, "what's the point of comparing Islam to Nazism?" The point is to show people's priorities. Because people don't care about their fellow human beings. People care about just what's happening in their own backyard.

Consider this: which one is worse? The atomic bomb or the Kalashnikov?

Scott: Probably Kalashnikov in the hands of people over a long time.

Armin: Number of people who died by the Kalashnikov is way more than the atomic bomb.

People are more afraid of plane crashes than car accidents. Even though car accidents have way more victims. It's the same with Nazism and Islam. Nazim, when it came to power, managed to destroy many lives in a short amount of time. But If you look at the larger impact of Islam, it should scare us more.

The leftists accuse us of being Islamophobic and we're trying to tell them that no, we are criticizing ideas not people. My suggestion is forget the leftists, because what's the point of criticizing Islam? A lot of people who criticizes Islam, they're trying to warn the West. But Islam is coming and you can't stop it. Unless you actually talk to Muslims. And more importantly, what you're afraid might one day happen to your Western country, is already a reality for many Islamic countries. We need to stop playing defense. We need to reach out to Muslims in Islamic countries.

The best way to fight Islam is to reach out to Muslims. And the best way to reach out to Muslims is to befriend Muslims. Trying to convince Westerners and non-Muslim Westerners that are afraid, that's not going to stop anything because this is an ideology and it will continue spreading unless you talk to the people that believe it.

In fact, the more people see Muslims themselves as the threat, the more people will victimize Muslims. The more you victimize Muslims, the more it helps Islam to grow. Religion feeds on being the victim. The only way to stop Islam is try to reach out to people. You can't stop it by force. You have to actually try to convince people out of it. That's the only way you can fight Islam.

The people we need to warn [about] Islam are Muslims. To be able to talk to Muslims [about] how bad Islam [is], we have to try to convince them that us being against Islam is not us being against Muslims. That's a very hard thing to do but not as hard as most people think.

The reason why it's very difficult is because most Muslims see Islam as part of their identity. But I think Muslims are much more than just Muslims just like an atheist is way more than just an atheist and a Christian is way more than just a Christian.

As an atheist, I'm a husband, I'm a humanist, feminist, Game of Thrones fan. I think every Muslim is more than just a Muslim. But we have to acknowledge that many Muslims see Islam as a major part of their identity. Our attack on Islam is not intended as a personal attack. Even when they see it a personal attack. We should invite them to take our intentions into consideration when they're judging us. This is very important for Muslims because we are all looking for allies.

I tell Muslims that they might find things we're saying offensive. But it's better to be offended than to be discriminated against. We will challenge your ideas, but we will stand with you against those who challenge your rights. We will fight your ideas but we will defend your rights.

So you have to see us as allies because you need allies. We need you as our allies because the bigots are not just your enemies, they're our enemies as well.

You also have to see that the left is not helping you. Not all of them but many people in the left that are saying "Don't say these things", "these are offensive", "you're attacking Muslims." You must understand that they are the ones being bigots because they're suggesting that you can't take criticism. That you are like children who need protection from these Westerners. You can't handle criticism of your ideas.

They don't react to us when we criticize Christianity, only Islam. So you have to see that it's a kind of bigotry because they're suggesting that maybe Christians are mature enough for us to disagree with them. You must fight that.

What I'm waiting for is the day that some Muslims show the world that they are tolerant, that they're not sensitive little "snowflakes" by opening their mosque to ex-Muslims speakers. Imagine if your mosque was the first mosque that invites an ex-Muslim speaker. Be that first mosque. Show the world that you can handle criticism.

My main point is we need to reach out to Muslims instead of the left. If we try to challenge Islam, Muslims should be our target.

It might feel like a personal attack but it's not our intention.

I usually ask Muslims if they disagree with Christianity and the answer is always "yes". Are you a Christianophobe or anti-Christian? Do you hate Christians? And they usually say "no".

That's just a very simple example to show why disagreeing on an ideology is not the same as hating them because they do it themselves. Every Muslim disagrees with Christianity but most Muslims won't say they hate Christians or they're anti-Christian.

Sometimes I hear some Muslims say it's okay to criticize Islam but just don't ridicule it. First of all, we must be able to ridicule what we want but whether that's productive or not, I would tell you that I know a lot of Muslims that came to our page because they found something offensive and they stayed on our page, the Atheist Republic page, long enough for them to eventually doubt their beliefs. It was the offensive things that attracted them until they eventually left Islam.

Second, when we ridicule Islam, we're not coming to a mosque and ridiculing Islam, we're not going to a Muslim page and ridiculing Islam, we're not going into your living room and telling you that your god is fake.

We are doing this on atheist pages, atheist websites, atheist twitter accounts. So if you're seeing these contents you don't like, you either don't know how to block people that you don't like or you're actively looking for it. If it's the first one, I suggest a search on YouTube on how to block a page. It's either one of those things or if you're curious, then you can't tell us to stop because you're the one on our platform.

If I were to defend mocking Islam when I'm talking to a Muslim, I tell them this:

“When I was a Muslim we used to make fun of other religions. Like I ask a Muslim, “Don't you find it ridiculous that god could have a son?”

Every religion makes fun of other religions. If it's okay for Muslims to make fun, then it's okay for atheists to make fun of Islam.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Armin.

Interview with Dr. Caleb W. Lack, Ph.D. – Director, Secular Therapy Project

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

January 19, 2018

*Caleb W. Lack, Ph.D. is a licensed clinical psychologist, an Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Central Oklahoma, and the Director of the Secular Therapist Project. Dr. Lack is the author or editor of six books (most recently *Critical Thinking, Science, & Pseudoscience: Why We Can't Trust Our Brains with Jacques Rousseau*) and more than 50 scientific publications on obsessive-compulsive disorder, Tourette's Syndrome and tics, technology's use in therapy, and more. He writes the popular Great Plains Skeptic column on skeptick.com and regularly presents nationally and internationally for professionals and the public. Learn more about him [here](#).*

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: As the Atheist Republic audience is international and, therefore, highly varied, we have to lay the groundwork, though we've done this before. What is secular therapy?

Dr. Caleb W. Lack: Technically speaking, "secular therapy" is any type of psychotherapy that does not invoke the supernatural in the conceptualization, assessment, or treatment of various mental health difficulties.

This doesn't mean you'd necessarily ignore something like a person's religious beliefs, but you wouldn't resort to interventions which either involve some sort of religious component (e.g., praying for forgiveness, asking for a deity to heal you). However, just because someone is practicing non-religious therapy doesn't mean that they are actually practicing scientifically-informed, evidence-based therapy.

The Secular Therapist Project (STP) was designed to be a free service to help connect non-religious individuals who are seeking mental health care with non-religious psychologists, psychiatrists, counselors, and other therapists. However, what's unique about the STP is that we aren't just a database of therapists like you might find at Psychology Today.

Instead, we very carefully screen potential therapists who want to become part of the STP. We screen them to make sure that a) they are appropriately licensed in their state or country, b) that they are secular in nature as well as practice, and c) that they actually use evidence-based treatments, which have been shown to be effective at helping improve mental health problems in controlled clinical trials.

This means not only will our therapists not try to preach to you or convert you, but that they are also using the most well-supported types of treatment to help you.

Jacobsen: As the Director of the Secular Therapist Project, I suspect traumatic stories come to you. If I may ask, without breach of confidentiality, what have been some of the more tragic or emotionally moving secular therapeutic stories witnessed or experienced in your career?

Lack: Sadly, there are some pretty commonly repeated themes that we see. The most frequent stories revolve around abuse that stems from religious beliefs or from a loss of family and friends when someone becomes non-religious.

For example, people tell me very often about physical and emotional abuse they suffered as a result of their parents' fundamentalist religious beliefs. This has been regular, high level corporal punishment ("spare the rod, spoil the child"), witnessing their fathers beat their mothers, being emotionally abused via being taught about their own inherent evil nature and sins, and even sexual abuse.

The sexual abuse is often by members of the clergy or high level people in their churches, which then gets covered up (as seen repeatedly in the Catholic Church), or by being married into relationships where the husband treats the wife as property to be used (and abused) however he desires. This may include denial of educational opportunities, being told to stay in abusive relationships by church leaders, and so on.

The second major theme is typically a loss of community and support. Many churches are very good at community building, fellowship, and establishing social networks. You have a built-in friend group when you belong to a church, people who share your ideals and beliefs, who offer help and support when you need it, who you can turn to if you need a shoulder to lean on.

The majority of the religious also share the same religion as their families, which means for many that faith and family are highly intertwined. Often, when an individual steps away from a church, their friends and family in that church turn their back on that person, particularly for those in fundamentalist or evangelical religions.

As such, this can mean a huge loss, as people are rejected by formerly close or even life-long friends, by family members, and by the community which they have invested huge amounts of time, money, and energy into for years or decades. So, many people are literally going through a grieving process and have nowhere to turn to for support, because their support networks have abandoned them. They feel alone, abandoned, adrift.

This can even have an impact on one's livelihood, most prominently for those pastors, preachers, and other clergy members who move into atheism, but also for others. I've heard numerous stories of people who were fired from their jobs after becoming more open about their lack of religious beliefs. That wasn't, of course, the "official" reason they lost their jobs, but it happens.

Another aspect I should mention is that of religiously-motivated abuse under the guise of "therapy." This includes the so-called "conversion therapy" which aims to change one's sexuality, which is so psychologically abusive that it's been banned in most U.S. states, but also the threats of eternal damnation that are directed (often by members of their own family) towards people for something that is largely biologically driven. The LGBTQ community has borne a huge amount of abuse due to religious beliefs.

Jacobsen: For international non-believer community, family members remain religious in unhealthy ways, e.g. fundamentalist interpretations of scripture enforced on the patient. What recommendations are standard for these difficulties of the patient?

Lack: Sadly, many people do lose long-standing relationships when they realize they are no longer religious. This loss of support and community is why organizations like Recovering from Religion, Grief Beyond Belief, Camp Quest, Secular Sobriety, and others are so important. What they are doing is building a secular support network.

While scientific skepticism or secular humanist organizations provide intellectual or philosophical support and do much needed “front-end” work such as activism or lobbying, the “back-end” organizations are helping to provide emotional, physical, and psychological support.

Finding a strong, caring support system is key. While this can be difficult, being able to join online groups and reach out that way has helped many people no longer feel so isolated, and is a great step towards building offline relationships.

Jacobsen: How big is the secular therapeutic “movement” -- for want of a better term? Where is the movement centralized? Are there areas of the world where the secular therapy is bereft, simply not an option -- even with access to a computer and internet connection due to state or community, even familial, oppression of the individual non-religious person?

Lack: I would say that depends largely on where you are, geographically. Here in the United States, many people on the coasts are fairly horrified when I talk about how therapists who do not overtly advertise themselves as “religious counselors” attempt to bring religious beliefs into treatment.

In the Bible Belt, though, we have large numbers of counselors and therapist who have been trained in overtly religious graduate programs, often at private religious institutions, that fail to make appropriate distinctions between doing “religious counseling” and other kinds of therapy.

I have had numerous people tell me that their therapist tried to convert them back to Christianity or blamed all their mental health or relationship difficulties on the fact that they were not “right with the Lord.” And these are people who were NOT seeking religiously-inspired therapy.

Many people, especially the religious, hear the term “secular therapy” and think that it would only be something that a non-believer, an atheist would engage in. In fact, all of the evidence-based therapies that we have for mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and many others are “secular”, meaning they were developed without the use of supposedly supernatural aids and interventions.

Almost all therapists who are religious (as opposed to “religious therapists”) use secular therapy in their practice. In other words, they are not using prayer, or exorcism, or invoking some religious concepts to heal a person of their mental health problems. Instead, they are using our “secular” therapy techniques because they work.

To further complicate the issue, not all people who do “secular” therapy are also doing “evidence-based” therapy. In other words, I might use therapeutic techniques and orientations that are not actually based in scientific findings and it can still be secular in nature.

Things like psychoanalysis or attachment therapies fall into this realm -- they aren't religious, but they are also pseudoscientific. That's one of the reasons why our requirements for joining the Secular Therapy Project are threefold: our therapists are licensed, secular, *and* use evidence-based practice.

Jacobsen: How does a transition from religion to formal non-religion impact marriages, common law partnerships, and relationships?

Lack: Well, as I said before, loss of support networks is a huge issue for many people who transition out of religion. When one partner in a committed relationship has a major shift in their

belief system, this often puts an enormous strain on the relationship, particularly if the religious partner has a very literal, dogmatic, or fundamentalist belief system.

If you believe that your partner is now condemned to spend an eternity burning in hell, how can that not? And on the other side, if you believe that your partner is wrong about something they are basing their entire life and behaviors on, how can that not?

Working through issues such as how children will be raised (in a religious faith or not, to what degree, and so on), what family will be told about why one person is not longer attending church services, and many other issues can be very stressful, often to the breaking point. That doesn't mean that mixed-faith marriages are impossible, they certainly aren't, but they do require a large amount of strong communication and commitment from both sides.

Jacobsen: Are there any cases where some people simply can't be helped?

Lack: Certainly some people find themselves in environmental situations where therapy isn't the best solution to their problems. It doesn't matter how excellent of a treatment I have for depression or PTSD if you are in an environment that's actively causing you to have those problems and you can't leave.

That's why a good therapist will work to conceptualize an individual's case globally, looking at not just how an individual thinks, feels, and acts, but how their environment (whether family, friends, work, or something else) may be contributing to or maintaining distress. This allows a good therapist to recommend interventions at a family level or a higher environmental level and not only need to focus on the individual.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Dr. Lack.

Praying for Atheist Republic

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

March 11, 2018

A Story Gone Viral

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: *You tweeted a picture of your mom. You pinned it on your Twitter account. Now, as of this interview, it has 12,000 retweets, 17,000 likes, and became viral “hit” on Reddit and 9gag. What is your mother’s personal story?*

Armin Navabi: My mom was nine-years-old when her mother died from breast cancer. Her father remarried and the new wife asked my mom’s dad to kick out the 6 kids which he did. After that they had to figure out ways to survive on their own which made them tough kids. She and her siblings were close.

My mom was very smart. In school, she did well. She wanted to go to medical school, but she ended up being a nurse.

Before the Islamic Revolution

My dad kept asking her out on dates, but she was always playing hard to get with him. My mother spent most of her time in the library. During the time my dad courted her, she remembers getting chocolates and roses laid on top of her library book.

My dad would leave it on top of her book everytime she leaves the table to get a new book. Which, by the way, she found very cheesy. But they ended up dating for a while. They have had their relationship ups and downs, but my dad would always woo her back.

In the beginning, the revolution against the Shah was for freedom and not for Islam. But it became more Islamic. It took a turn in a way people did not expect. After the revolution, many who participated in the Islamic revolution were shot and killed by those who came into power.

The Big Sign in the Hallway

My mom was in the hospital working at the time when Khomeini was either coming down from the plane or he was giving a speech. I am not sure exactly which one. Everybody surrounded the television and watched the historic moment.

She said something to the effect of, “*We’re fucked.*” That comment made people turn around and look at her. The next day when she came to the hospital, there was a big sign in the hallway. On top, it said, “*The Whores of West*” and her name was on that list.

The Iran-Iraq War

My dad served the war as one of the doctors during the Iran-Iraq War. They had this underground hospital where they kept on cutting arms and legs without anaesthesia of people who got shot. It was terrible.

One time, he wanted to treat some captured Iraqi soldiers. They asked him why he wanted to treat the enemies. My dad replied: if he was not allowed to treat them, then he was going to leave. The doctors were in high demand, so they let him.

When my dad came back from the war, he went back to work at the hospital where he met my mom. My mom worked as a nurse in that hospital.

One day, he went to the hospital's cafeteria. He was shocked to see how much control the religious police had there. He was not happy about the situation of seeing the police there. He asked them to leave and told them to have some respect for doctors. Suddenly, the soldiers pointed guns at him.

The other doctors surrounded my dad to create a barrier. Someone came to my mom and said something like, "There is this doctor and things got heated with the soldiers and the doctors are trying to protect him." My mom told me that as soon as she heard this, she immediately knew that it was him.

She immediately ran to the cafeteria. While she was running, she suddenly realized that this is the man she loves.

When she got there, she saw soldiers pointing guns at what looked like a group of doctors surrounding this man, who was standing right in the middle. It was my dad. My dad saw her from a distance, looked up and said, "*Hi, Jila!*"

She replied, "Hi." And then, she ran away.

The Red Scarf

Early after the revolution, the rules about wearing the hijab were stricter than they are today in Iran. Hijabs were mandatory. My mother's hijab was red. She was arrested for it. It was a different time since it was not yet accepted to wear fashionable hijabs. As a punishment, she had to go to mandatory purifying Islamic lectures.

At the lecture, somebody was telling her something to the effect of, "*My dear sister, why would you do this to our young men? They have sacrificed so much blood, so many lives for our revolution. They have died in war and you would tempt them with corruption like this?*"

Her reply was, "*No. You don't understand. My hijab was red in honour of the blood that they have sacrificed for us.*"

Armin's Superstitious Mom

In Iran, many people believe and pray to god and to the Imams when they need something, even if they do not pray five times a day or do not fast during Ramadan. Not everyone with religious views is very religious. Many people who consider themselves believing Muslims, even hate religiously zealous people.

My mom was very superstitious. She believed in curses, and good and bad omens. My mom would go and find these secret spell casters and pay them lots of money for the success of her sons. They would write spells and give her instructions on what to do with the writings.

Once, she made me wear a necklace that has some Qur'anic scribblings on it. She put a stone in the chain. I still have it. She told me to have it with me during my exams. It was self-contradictory because these are Qur'anic verses. This is supposed to be a spell, but Islam is against casting spells.

Praying for Atheist Republic

I went through a religious phase. I took Islam seriously. It was annoying to my parents. I tried to make them take Islam seriously. They did not pray. I was trying to get them to pray and fast.

They never went to mosque unless there was someone's death or celebration. I did not want them to go to hell. They wouldn't listen to me. So, when I decided to become an atheist, it was a relief for them.

I started Atheist Republic in Iran. Soon after, I came to Canada. It started growing and growing. I quit my job in Canada. I started to focus on Atheist Republic.

My mom was supportive. You would think your mom would get very angry because my parents spent so much money on my education in order for me to get a good job and now I decided to work on activism.

She prayed to god that Atheist Republic would become successful. It was ironic. I told her, *"Mom, praying to god that my war against god would become successful doesn't make sense."* She said, *"A mom has to do what a mom has to do."*

Pigeon Experiment and Losing Faith

My mom slowly started losing her faith. One thing that really got to her was the superstitious pigeon experiment. Even pigeons can become superstitious by random things; the pigeons can be conditioned to develop superstitious behaviours in belief that they will be fed.

Then she asked, *"I'm like those pigeons?"*

But then she said, *"Maybe those pigeons feel good doing what they're doing and getting a reward for it. Let me be superstitious. At least, I feel like I am helping you. Even when it's not doing anything, it just makes me feel good. Let me have that."*

On Her Deathbed

I wish I called her more. I wish I talked to her more because she loved it when I talked to her. Some of my family members would get bored when I talked about religion and politics. She would talk, listen, and comment because she wanted to keep on talking to me.

When she got cancer, it was way too advanced to do much about it. My dad was not ready to let her go. They got her a VIP room at the hospital. Anything he said would happen. Since he was a doctor, he knew a lot of people in the hospital.

I wanted to go to Iran, but they knew that I wouldn't get past airport security, and would be jailed and on death row. My mom said, *"Please don't let my last memory of you be you in jail."* So, I couldn't go see her because of the book I wrote *Why There Is No God* and founding Atheist Republic.

She told the doctors in Iran that she does not want to die without seeing her son. I feel partially responsible for this because I couldn't go and see her. The doctors said that she can't leave the hospital. However, she said she doesn't care. That she wants to see her son before she dies. She left the hospital and came to Vancouver.

My mom died shortly after because she was not getting the care she was getting in Iran. When she got to Canada, she had to wait for a long time to see a doctor. The good part was unlike the doctors in Iran they were not listening to my dad anymore, but asking her what she wanted.

My dad wanted chemotherapy, but my mom did not want it. She said she is done. My dad was trying to force her to do chemotherapy because he was not ready, but the doctors respected what she wanted for treatment.

One time, in the hospital, she asked me if I am sure -- if I really think there is nothing after death. So, I told her, "Yes, that is what I think."

Then she said, "Good... because I am so tired."

One time, when I went to see her at the hospital, she had these headphones on and was listening to the Azan (Call to Islamic Prayer). She was embarrassed and said, "*Armin, I know this is all bullshit, but it's really helping me. It really helps me with my pain.*"

I was like, "*Mom, why are you apologizing to me? You don't need to be embarrassed. Just do whatever you want. Do whatever it takes for the pain.*" It is sad that she felt embarrassed to do something Islamic in front of me.

Before her death, she told my dad that she does not want any Islamic ceremonies for her death. She was happy to know that she is going to get buried in Vancouver because she did not want people to pray over her grave.

There were a few attempts of this in Iran for her. However, my dad made sure he cancelled all the ceremonies because it was my mom's wish that they have nothing like that.

A lot of people asked me, "*Aren't you sad that you'll never see her again? Don't you wish that there was a reunion or an afterlife that you'll meet her one day? Isn't that such a cold way of believing in the world?*"

I always respond, "Even if you ignore the fact that we have to believe in things that are true and that we have evidence for rather than the things that we like, you have to also understand that the afterlife does not come with just heaven. The afterlife comes with hell."

We were told that most people will burn in hell. My mom would also be burning in hell right now if Islam is true.

I'm sad that I'm never going to see her again, but I am much at peace knowing that she is not being tortured right now by a fucking sadistic god because she did not worship him enough.

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

Conflicts Between “Normal” Culture And Homosexuality

An Interview with Peter Gajdics - Author of *The Inheritance of Shame*

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 14, 2018

Peter Gajdics is the author of The Inheritance of Shame: A Memoir. He can be found in Amazon, Twitter, Facebook, and Goodreads. Here we plumb the depths – as the cliché goes – about conversion therapy, his life and experience, and book.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: As you struggled with the identification of your homosexuality as something deviant in your 20s, how did you feel? How did others feel about you - loved ones, friends, colleagues, and strangers?

Peter Gajdics: It's true that in my 20's, even before then, I struggled with the sense that I was somehow “deviant.” Popular culture throughout that time, the late 1960's through to the 1980's, reinforced this belief not only in what it said about homosexuality but in what it did not say. Silence produces its own variant shame, and the invisibility of gays in popular culture throughout my formative years—except, as I say, when homosexuality was presented as deviant and homosexuals as terribly unhappy and suicidal—imbued in me a kind of shame, or negative self-image. I experienced shame as a sort of dirtiness within my very being, my soul, which could never be washed away. This “dirtiness” or unworthiness manifested in eating disorders, for example. I think this is why we often see images, say in films or books, of people who've been sexually violated taking a shower immediately after the attack, because the trauma of rape and sexual violence penetrates through to a person's core self and leaves them feeling disgraced, and violated, “dirtied” in some fundamental way. In my 20's, I also experienced enormous rage, because the flip side of shame is often outrage. On some level, intuitively we know that shame is unnatural, not part of who we were meant to be, so our systems fight to exorcise it from our beings, just as our immune systems fight to heal us from the invasion of disease. Neither side, the shame and its opposite, is balanced, but I think the rage is at least an attempt at healing. Rage first propelled me into writing about my own experiences in the “conversion therapy,” but rage is not a sustaining force in any person's life. Eventually, rage will turn on itself and become counterproductive.

As far as how “others” felt about me back then—I can only say that some friends were incredibly accepting of me as a gay person in my 20's, and yet the shame and self-loathing within me persevered. I had great difficulty accepting who I was, largely because of the lie that I'd been raised to believe, which said the sexual abuse from my childhood had “created” my homosexuality. I could not find my way out of that lie, no matter how hard I tried, because the fact was I had been sexually abused, and I was, now, homosexual. The two issues intermingled in my mind, just as the shame of sexual abuse and the shame, especially back then, of being gay, intermingled and coexisted. I could not tell one from the other. I grew up hearing my church condemn homosexuals, and that kind of hatred was parroted through my family, each time like hammering a nail into my heart. Ultimately, my own identification as a “deviant” was something I had to unlearn, just as a knot done up must absolutely be undone. I think the “problem” for many is that they don't even see these “knots” because culture or religion still reinforces many of

them as truth. If your whole community tells you that a lie is truth, how will you ever learn the difference? Knots like these strangle the life out of people, and must be undone.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How do you build fortitude in your sense of self and personal sexuality?

Peter Gajdics: The question of fortitude, I think, extends far beyond a person's sexuality, or perhaps is inclusive of one's sexuality in as much as we are first and foremost sexual beings. The nature of character, and personality, and a stern belief in who we are as individuals, is not really something that anyone can give us—we have to develop those things within ourselves. Building this kind of fortitude has something to do with resilience, and introspection, humility, using our hardships as life lessons in our fight to become more ourselves, even distancing ourselves from the noise of popular culture long enough to find our own voice, instead of just constantly pushing back against other voices. Forgiveness is instrumental to this development, because I think we are always being called on to forgive ourselves for not living up to our ideals, and then of course to forgive others. We forgive to set ourselves free, never to condone anyone else's behavior. Without forgiveness we are always trapped in the past, treading upstream. Anger at being violated is reflexive, but I think that if we get blocked by or imprisoned in these kinds of reflexive emotions, like anger or revenge, we are never going to progress; rather, negative emotions like these are meant to move us to the next step, not lock us into their malevolence. The question of fortitude has a lot to do with a life well lived, but what does that mean, really? We are all, all of us, making mistakes and saying and doing things we later regret, but I think that recognizing the humanity in our endeavours also helps us build this very fortitude.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What have been the damages of conversion therapy to scores of homosexual over time?

Peter Gajdics: When we talk about the damage inflicted on scores of people as a result of this thing called “conversion therapy,” I think it's important to remember that these “therapies” occur across a spectrum of treatments aimed at making a gay person “not themselves,” and that these kinds of attacks long pre-date the 20th century. Even before gays were called homosexual, which is still only a relatively recent phenomena, there were always people who experienced same-sex attractions, and those people also faced alienation and isolation; sometimes they were forced to live out their lives not as themselves but as the society dictated, which has been typically driven by opposite-sex pairing and desire. Of course, at different times in history, same-sex desire also has been celebrated, but the point is “conversion therapy” is a latter 20th century invention, and the persecution of people that we call gay today is not limited to the 20th century.

In terms of actual “damage”—I am not sure we can ever quantify the pain and lost lives that have resulted from these sorts of bigotry and hatred. How do we quantify this kind of “damage”? People end up killing themselves because of familial rejection, ostracism from their religion, hate crimes perpetrated by others as a result of misinformation about what it means to be gay or homosexual. This kind of “damage” is too enormous, I think, to quantify. Besides, long before anyone ever attempts suicide, many of these “therapies” can result in a person ending up living out the rest of their lives in a state of complete despair, a shell of their former self. “Shell shocked” is how I'd describe myself after my own six years in the “therapy,” and I think it's often similar for a lot of survivors. Thankfully, I began to heal, but not without great effort.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Have there been any positives to come out of this conversion therapy movement in your opinion, even ironic or unexpected ones?

Peter Gajdics: Obviously, I would never advocate or endorse anything remotely close to “conversion therapy”. That said, one thing that often does happen during or even after these kinds of “therapies” is a sort of forced “disidentification,” to borrow language from writer Eckhart Tolle, with mainstream sexual identity. Conversion therapy—the act of stepping outside one’s sexuality and becoming more the observer, then attempting to become “the other”—this very act often forces a person outside of mainstream sexual identity, in this case, gay sexual identity, much in the same way that gays were historically forced outside of whole societies. Forced alienation and isolation like this can produce enormous distress; at the same time, an over identification with the culture of one’s “sexual orientation,” I think, is also largely ego-driven and can end up producing more of an obstacle than a vehicle toward ultimate freedom, because in attempting to be more of ourselves, which is always the goal of “coming out” and declaring one’s homosexuality, we often become trapped in the illusion of a subculture. We leave the closet only to enter an even larger one, known as our “sexual identity.” I’m not sure this is as big of a problem for those identifying as heterosexual, rather than gay, simply because straight people are the normative and so to them their culture is largely invisible—they don’t necessarily over identify with any of it. For gays, however, because we have in effect forced our way into visibility, the unfortunate tendency is to then over identify with our newfound visible culture, in effect to “become” what is largely an illusion. Conversion therapy has the potential to basically disrupt this over identification, and in a backhanded or “accidental” way to create an emotional and mental space within a person that can then present an opportunity to replace an ego-focussed lifestyle with something much deeper and resonant, call it spiritual, or closer to our essence. Again, I would never advocate the use of conversion therapy, I’m not even saying that this “forced interruption” that results from these therapies produces anything beneficial, but for me at least, this has been one positive outcome—but one that has been hard-earned.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Where does the demonizing and reasoning behind killing homosexuals, especially gay men, source itself?

Peter Gajdics: I think that this demonization of gays can be largely attributed to the forced or unnatural medicalization and moralization of homosexuality. Nothing much is new about any of this, since these kinds of judgments have been occurring for centuries, but I do think that specific events in the 20th century alone, as progressive as many have been for gay liberation, have also produced extreme trauma to scores of homosexual people. Psychiatry, as just one example, and its pathologizing of homosexuality as an illness in need of a “cure,” caused in some cases irreparable harm. Trauma like this does not end after a few decades; it can take generations for this kind of venom and lie to weed itself out of a culture. Attacks against gay men in particular, I think, can be correlated to great distress and confusion around gender, the nature of what it means to be a “man” in our culture, which homosexuality seems to provoke in many straight men. For many men still living today, homosexuality represents all that is vile about a loss of manhood—submission, sensitivity, gender variance. Images such as these can become overwhelming to some men (who in many cases may actually be closeted homosexuals), and the instinct to eradicate “the other”—to physically kill them—predominates. We are often scared of “the other”—this is what xenophobia is all about. I think that many hate crimes are committed in the name of these kinds of lies, and fear. The degree by which we could say that gay liberation has succeeded, and continues succeeding, can be directly attributed to the severity of how bad it became for gay people everywhere. But I do not think the war is over; lies, fear and shame are all shapeshifters. Gay people everywhere, each and every one of them, need to speak their own

truth—not just collectively, as “a people,” but each person as their own individual. Truth is on each person’s side.

Who Are We To Judge People Living In Islamic Countries?

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

June 14, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: I hear arguments from different people on Islamic countries and people who live in them. Some argue for different standards for different beliefs and groups. If not in an explicit manner, then the implicit understanding in the conversation amounts to different standards for different people. The conversations start with the general question about judgment of people who live in Islamic countries. In these dialogues, the person may respond with a question, “Who are we to judge people living in Islamic countries?”

Armin Navabi: We are all human beings. That is what we all are. Why does care for our fellow human beings have to be dependent on their location? Why does it have to be dependent on where they were born, their race, or how far or how close they are to us? I do not understand the relevance of that. Pain is pain. Happiness is happiness. I believe that it does not matter if somebody is hungry next to you, or if somebody is hungry a thousand kilometers from you. It does not matter if somebody is being oppressed right next to you or if somebody is being oppressed a thousand kilometers from you. That somebody is human. They need your help.

We Are All Connected

The idea of “I can help people who are next to me more than I could help people far away from me” does not exist anymore. We are all connected globally, through the advances in technology, that it is so easy to help other people with little effort and little budget.

Today, you can make a huge difference for people you have never even met or will never even meet. You can make a difference for people, whichever corner of the world they are in now. In fact, you might be able to make more of a difference because you live in a country where you could speak freely.

They Need Your Voice

You live in a country where you could say whatever you want. People living in Islamic countries do not. They do not live in a country where they can speak their minds. That is why you might be able to make a bigger difference in their lives compared to people close to you. They need your voice. Because when they do speak, these people will get prosecuted and go to jail. They lose their freedom. They lose their safety. These are people taken away from their children. There are even people who pay the government for the cost of executing their loved ones.

Arrogance in Freedom

Liberated countries enjoy some or most of these rights: freedom of speech, right to peace, equality, anti-discrimination, men and women are equal, homosexuals should not to be prosecuted for being gay, and for people of the minority to express their views without being punished. The people who are enjoying these rights have no empathy for what the people in Islamic countries are suffering from there. To me, it is arrogant when some people suggest that this is maybe because these are our values but not theirs.

Morally Superior

Because of this, they claim moral superiority for following these values. That people who follow such humanist values are going to enjoy life more, and live a life with more peace and more happiness. Since we are claiming superiority for this, we think we are deserving of these values and other people are not.

Other people might never be able to see that these values are good for them because they weren't always in the situation where they had these values. Later on, they progressed to adopt these values, but people are denying them on the same grounds. They might say, "We came to these values ourselves. They should do the same thing." I call bullshit. There is no country, no idea, and no value that has not been influenced by other countries, by other values, by philosophers and thought leaders from different corners of the world. Europe was introduced to its own ancient values through the Arab Empire. If it wasn't because of the Arab Empire, we would not know how much of those ancient values would have come back from Greek philosophers. They were influenced by foreign countries, foreign philosophers, and foreign thought.

No group of people or country lives in a bubble. Of course, they are going to be influenced by foreign countries. They are going to influence other countries. They are going to be influenced by other countries. There is no way a country could progress in a bubble. They need outside influence as we need outside influence. The world is connected. If that was true a thousand years ago, it is more true today because we are more connected today. If European countries want an enlightenment, because of the influence of foreign countries at that time, are you going to deny foreign influence to these countries today since we are even more connected now?

Moral and Pleasure Matrix

I will say to people who do not agree with these values, to bring on your values and sell your values to these people, but do not deny us the opportunity to come and introduce these values to people that might want them. Compete with us in the market of ideas, compete with us and tell us why your values are better; however, that is not what you are doing. You are telling us, we are not in a position to judge, so we should shut the fuck up. That is the position you are taking. I am saying, if you think our ideas are wrong, bring up better ideas, but do not deny these people the opportunity to choose their ideas. Ideas that we think are better.

If you think we are wrong, introduce them to more ideas, not fewer ideas. That is how you compete with our ideas. That is how you respond to a bad idea. That is how we respond to your shitty backwards barbaric ancient ideas. We do not silence you. We compete with you. If you think our ideas are imperialist, foreign, too liberal, too free, too empty of spiritual guidance, too empty of meaning, too empty of providing purpose to people, then I am sure. If your ideas are better, they are going to do good.

Exploiting Evolution

You should bring your ideas to the public and compete with us. Do not deny the people, who might prefer our values, the opportunity to hear us because you think somebody might take advantage of these ideas for their agenda. Because if that is your argument, then we should stop teaching evolution in Western countries. Because it was not that long ago, when the Nazis took advantage of the evolution of science to sell their agenda and to tell people why we need to stop letting some races spread, some races should be superior. The whole genocide of the Jews. All

those gas chambers and crimes were committed by the Nazi Regime. They were based on the truth, based on the misuse of an actual true scientific principle, which is evolution.

If you are looking at how people could misuse something, we should stop teaching evolution in Western countries because we have a history. In fact, you should try to suggest a value to me. I could come up with a way that it could be misused.

Misuse of Human Rights

In fact, if you are worried about the fact that we are talking about human rights being misused by the military/industrial complex to bring war to these countries, why are you not equally concerned about the Islamic values that have been used, time and time again, in history, for killing, for war, for torturing people, and for denying people's rights? We have more examples of Islamic values being used to do the same thing. Based on the argument, we should deny Muslims the opportunities to spread their ideology because of the history and examples that came from the misuse of it.

You cannot stop telling the truth because of somebody being able to misuse it. Because if you do that, then you cannot say anything. Everybody should stay home and shut the fuck up.

The only way that you could fight the misuse of good ideas is to expose them as misuse of good ideas. Because if you do not compete bad ideas with better ideas, those bad ideas are more easily used, more easily misused, than good ideas. If your values are better values, then any misuse of it is a misrepresentation and is another inferior value that you should fight for rather than it. When we say these values are superior and you say, "Well, who are you to say?" You could still say that about any claim. I could say, "Who are you to say? Who am I to say?" Let us say your claim is we should not interfere in other people's countries, who are you to say we should not interfere in other people's countries?

Challenge Your Ideas

The point of bringing your ideas out there is to challenge them. If you go around the argument and look at the person who is making the argument and you think that they do not deserve to make such argument, then you are making a judgement about the person, whether or not they are deserving to make an argument. Now, you are in that position where we can ask the same from you: who are you to deny this person making the argument?

Another thing is when people say, "Oh, Christianity is the same. It is as bad here. Look at the people. Look at how many police are killing black people or look how Christianity is also barbaric. Ancient ideology that could be as harmful."

To that, I say, "Fuck you." I am not talking about those things. I am talking about something else. An example: Imagine if you have a fundraiser for cancer. You are trying to raise money to fund research for cancer. You want to fight cancer, and then people come in and start shouting. They say, "What about AIDS? Why are you not talking about AIDS? AIDS is a disease too. AIDS is also killing people. You guys do not care about AIDS!" What would I do? I would probably kick these people out. AIDS is bad. Yes! However, we are talking about cancer because we are talking about the problems of cancer. That does not mean we are denying that AIDS is also a problem.

However, you are not helping by shifting the discussion to something that this fundraiser is not fighting for now. You are not helping, and fuck you for making everything about you. Because

what you are doing is you are taking part in the Oppression Olympics. You think that if the conversation is not about the things that attacks your people or the things that have affected your life, then it is not worth talking about now. If you have been hurt by Christianity or by racism in the US, then when we come and say, "Islam is hurting people," you are saying, "No, let us pay attention to this." That makes you self-centered because you cannot stand it when other people are talking about being victims of something else other than what concerns you. You cannot stand people who are bringing awareness to something that you or the people around you are not victims of. If that is the case, then you are selfish and arrogant. However, some people might say this cancer and AIDS example does not make sense because Islam and Christianity have the same root.

Religion As A Whole

This is why we always want to say that we should not talk about Islam. Talk about religion as a whole. Okay, let me add to my example. Let us say we had a fundraiser about pancreatic cancer and then somebody came and said, "Skin cancer is a problem too. Why are you not talking about skin cancer?"

Is that close enough for you?

Sometimes, it makes sense to focus on a specific problem, even if it has similarities with other problems. Different problems manifest themselves in different ways. They harm people in different ways. They have different answers.

It makes sense to focus on a certain problem. Sometimes, it makes sense to look at it as a whole. However, it does not make sense when you always try to shift the attention to a different category when we are focusing on another one. It does not make sense because you are not helping. We are having a discussion about a certain topic and all you are doing is coming and saying, "pay attention to the problem that I care about." That is what you are doing.

Better Than Most

The obsession for a certain issue might be for different reasons. It could be because you were hurt. It might be because you know more about a particular topic. It might be simply because you care more about a certain issue. Who cares? At least, you are talking about a problem, which makes you better than most people.

For example, if somebody is going out there and rescuing dogs, I am not going to tell them, "What the fuck do you have against cats? Why are you not rescuing cats? Are other animals not good enough for you? Do they not deserve saving?"

This person maybe cares about dogs. Maybe, he is passionate about dogs. However, the fact that he is rescuing dogs. He might be doing more than most people. Do you know what you say to somebody who is going out there and rescuing dogs? You say, "Thank you." That is what you say to that person.

For example, let us say somebody says to me, "Why are you focused on Islam? Why not all religions?" I tell them, "Why are you so focused on other religions? Why not all dogma?" They might say, "Okay, all dogma."

I am like, "Why are you focusing on all dogma? Why are you not focusing on all bad ideas? Does a bad idea have to be a dogma for you to focus on it?" Then they go, "Okay, all bad ideas."

I am like, “Bad ideas? What about other bad things? Does something have to be an idea for you to attack it? Diseases are not ideas. Why are you focusing on bad ideas?”

“Alright, so let us be more general, bad things are bad. Good things are good. Is that general enough for you? Is that good? How helpful is that? How helpful of a claim that is... bad things are bad?” You cannot get more general than that.

General Activism

Some people prefer to look at it more generally. Others might want to look at it more focused in a more specific situation. For example, there is a certain village in the Philippines, where the people need help now. This person wants to specifically focus on this group of people. People who do not have access to water. It is focused. Nobody will go to this person and be like, “Why are you focusing on that specific village?” That is incredibly focused, but I am sure most people will say, “Congratulations, that is good. Thank you for helping these people.”

But when it comes to Islam, many people, atheists especially, say, “Why are you focusing on Islam?” I do not think it is because their problem is that you are being too focused. I think they feel a certain amount of bigotry if you are focused on Islam because they do not say that about any other form of activism if it is focused on anything.

Have you ever heard anybody say that about any other form of activism? It looks ridiculous. Let us say somebody is focusing on the environment in Iran. Nobody comes to him and says, “Why do you not care about the environment in Iraq?”

Pushed Back for Bigotry

Every form of activism gets this bigotry pushback. However, this specific claim that you are being too focused is either regarding Islam or nationalism. For example, if Americans are focusing on other countries, they might get accused on why are you not focusing on problems at home.

I know a lot of people who are nationalistic and anti-globalist do not like this. However, I do not understand it. Why do we have to care about a certain group of people because they happened to be born on this side of the border instead of on the other side of the border? Is that good criteria for us to start caring about somebody? Why is that? What makes this so special? With this line in the sand, all of the sudden the person that is born on this side of it matters more?

Western Values

Another thing, I want to address Western values. The name: “Western values.” The reason why it is called Western values is because it first happened in Western countries. The fact that these values were adopted more in Western countries is a historical accident. Because they are named, “Western values,” now, that does not mean that the West should own these values. The West does not own women’s rights. The West does not own human rights. The West does not have a monopoly over not discriminating against gay people. The West does not have a monopoly on secularism. The West does not have ownership over freedom of speech.

The fact people are accusing us of bigotry because we are suggesting that these values should be global and introduced globally, you are being the bigots. You are claiming ownership over some values because you happened to historically come across it -- before the rest of the world. You are the people unwilling to share. You think that this is good for you, but it is not good for other

people. Why is it not good for other people? What makes them so different from us that it works for you but not for them?

Western Superiority

You are the people claiming superiority. What is it about values that make somebody claim ownership over them? Why can we not introduce these values? Why can we not promote these values? It has been introduced, but we could promote it even more. Why can we not promote them? Could somebody use it to attack these countries? Reality check: somebody is using other values to oppress women.

If we go back to arguments people use when you are talking about Muslims and Islamic ideology, you are not looking at the main threat in the world. You are not looking at the main powers at play, at the destruction and the harm that they cause.

You have to see who is in control and not look at these minority Muslims in our Western countries. You have to make the difference where it matters the most now. Those are the ideas. The values that are being used to oppress people in foreign countries and in their countries by these major superpowers in the West.

I tell them that is a narrow way of looking at it because where I come from Islam is in power. You are underestimating Islam as a major superpower when you think about it that way. Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world. Islam is going to become the number one main ideology in the world soon.

Islam Colonization

Islam is dominating not lands but minds. Islam is used to rule over people and to oppress people. Islam has been used to colonize people. Do you think white people are the only people that can colonize?

Islam has been used for colonization way before the British discovered what that even means and that it is even an option. It is okay if it happens voluntarily. If people are adopting other people's cultures or ideas or values voluntarily, that is not colonizing them. We are asking for these other values and ideas to be heard and considered rather than suppressed or silenced.

We asking for a seat at the table, at every table. I am not talking about a seat at a table talking about humanism and secularism in the United States, in the United Kingdom, in Canada, or in France. I am talking about a seat at a table in Iran, in Bangladesh, in Saudi Arabia, in Malaysia, in Indonesia, in Pakistan.

We demand a seat at a table. We are going to get it. if you think that that is us imposing our values on other people, fuck you. Because you are enjoying the benefits of these values, somebody at some point in your history was told that these values are not for your country. They did not stay silent. They sacrificed their lives. They sacrificed their safety. They sacrificed their comfort for you to enjoy that today. People are doing these things in Iran, in Saudi Arabia, and in Bangladesh. They are suffering for it.

Moral Cowardice

You are a moral coward for thinking that it is morally wrong for us to voice our feelings on the killing of secular bloggers in Bangladesh. Do you think it is not right for us to judge? Do you think you are not in a position to judge? To judge whether women having less inheritance rights

in government, as a witness in court, on what they wear, where they go, what jobs they get, who they talk to, do you think that you are not in a position to make a moral judgment on that? That makes you a moral coward.

But what is moral or not? If you are making that judgement based on how different sets of actions influence people's well-being, then there is always a right answer and a wrong answer. There are many good answers and many bad answers. It does not take a genius to see that hanging gay people is not good for the well-being of the society. If you think that you are not in a position to make a moral judgment for other countries, I want you to tell me what you would say to the person that is about to be hanged because they are gay.

Go ahead and tell that to that person right before they are being hanged, say, "This is not that bad. In my country it is bad, but here, this is your culture, so shame on you for being gay. If you were in the United Kingdom, I would be marching for gay pride and being gay and proud, but here it is a different country. So, fuck you, fuck your gay ass, you deserve being hanged here."

For The People in Islamic Countries

All the people who are in jail in Iran or Saudi Arabia; all the bloggers who died trying to spread secularism and humanism; all the people in Malaysia who after the government came out and said that they need to hunt down atheists; on behalf of those people, all the people that were burned or tortured for accusations of desecrating the Quran in Pakistan; on behalf of all those people, I want to say, "Fuck you to whoever says that it is their culture and who are we to judge and ask, 'What's right for them?'" On behalf of every woman that suffered from Islam; on behalf of every homosexual person that suffered in Islam; and on behalf of anybody that dares speak against Islam and paid the consequences for it, I want to say, "Fuck you" to whoever says, "Who are we to judge?"

Enlightenment for All

The Western countries went through the Enlightenment. Now we want this for other countries as well. We want the same enlightenment values. We want to fight for those values. If you are arrogant enough to want to deny the rest of us the same process, if you are not going to help, then stay out of our way. It is interesting a lot of people come and tell me, "Armin, why are you saying these things? That is our country. It has nothing to do with our country. That is Iran." I almost, almost want to say, "Mother fuckers, I am from Iran." However, I do not think that is even relevant because I think you should not need to be from there for you to care about them.

Situation in Yemen

Who do I care more about right now than even the people in Iran? I care more about the people in Yemen. If I could speak Arabic, I would have been tweeting more about the situation that is happening in Yemen because they are suffering more than the people in Iran. The fact that you think we have to be from there to care about them makes no sense to me. However, if you think that, and if you do not want to be part of the solution, and if you do not want to lend a voice to people that need you to lend them a voice, the people that are voiceless. The people that cannot speak for themselves.

If you are not going to use your platform to help them, then stay out of our way because we are going to keep doing that. We are going to keep doing that. It does not matter how many times you call us a bigot. We are going to keep fighting for those people.

If you think they need to do it themselves, then fuck you again because it would be much faster and much easier if we could help them out. Because we enjoy the freedom of speech here. We enjoy some security. We could bring more attention to their problems, to their suffering. We could help. We could help. They need our help. They are asking for our help. For you to deny that to them because you think they do not deserve it, it is selfish. It is selfish to judge your life by a different standard than what you are judging their lives by.

So, who are we to judge how people in Islamic countries live? To that I say, "That is the wrong question. The right question is, "Who do you have to be to remain silent?" The answer to that is, "You have to be a monster." You have to be a monster to have seen such crimes being done against your fellow human beings and judge it by a different standard than what you would have done if it was happening in your own backyard.

How Do We Defeat the Islamic Republic of Iran?

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

September 14, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: How do we defeat the Islamic Republic of Iran?

Armin Navabi: Before we get into that, let's first talk about the current government and the different perspectives people have on this government depending on who they are. From a regional perspective, the Islamic Republic's influence has been growing over time. For years, they've been building very powerful networks all over the Middle East -- especially where Shias are present -- and have been promoting and selling their version of Shia Islam. Iran's Islamic regime has a very loyal following in countries like Syria and Lebanon. And by spreading their tentacles all over the Middle East using their proxies, they have more pawns to play with than anybody else. If you're thinking of making a move against the Iranian regime, you have to know that they are capable of making things difficult for any players running against them. This is something that the Iranian regime had worked on for years and years and it paid off big time when the United States removed Saddam Hussein. And after that, ISIS provided Iranian regime with the excuse to start intervening in other countries in the Middle East. It was like a gift from the United States to the Iranian regime.

Jacobsen: How does religion play into Islamic Republic's meddling in it's neighboring countries?

Navabi: Khomeini did not want the Iranian Islamic Revolution to be only about Iran. His intention was for this movement to become an Islamic movement all over the Islamic world. Unfortunately for Khomeini, nationalism and Sunnism were barriers that his revolution never managed to break. Initially his revolution scared Sunni monarchs and other leaders but eventually, most Sunnis saw his revolution as a Shia revolution and even in majority Shia Iraq, most people did not join his movement against Saddam as he hoped.

The current regime managed to get closer to Khomeini's goal of exporting Iran's Islamic revolution without sacrificing a fraction of blood and resources that Khomeini did. The Iranian regime has learned how to play this game much more efficiently.

Jacobsen: How did the Sunni countries react to this?

Navabi: Consider this. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia tried to export Wahhabism after Iran's revolution, in competition to Iran exporting their version of Shia Islam and loyalty to the velayat-e faqih. Yet many Wahhabi groups across the world are now against the Saudi monarchs. If Sunni extremists caught Bin Salman today, he would probably be tortured and beheaded. Many people within Shia groups like Hezbollah and others would give their lives for Khomeini. Khomeini managed to successfully become the Supreme Religious Leader for many Shia groups inside and outside of Iran, not just a political leader. Not as successfully as he hoped but still.

The Iranian regime played a major role in defeating ISIS. Wherever Iran's regime is meddling, it is doing so with the permission and invitation of their government. Iran's regime often points out that their meddling was by request of the countries they meddle in, unlike the US. And that they are only meddling in their own region, again unlike the US. They needed the Iranian regime's support. No other regime was willing to provide ground troops the way the Iranian one did. To

Saudi Arabia, it looks like the Iranian regime is building a Shia Empire or a Shia Crescent all around Saudi Arabia. With the fall of Iraq, the Iranian regime's stay in Syria, and the election of Hezbollah in Lebanon, nobody denies the amount of backing and support the Iranian regime has in the region. Once the Iranian regime moved into these countries for the excuse of defending them against ISIS and another Sunni militia, they do not want to leave. The Iranian regime now has a direct route to the borders of Israel.

Israel and Saudi Arabia are afraid of the Iranian regime. This is why these countries are now cooperating and also why they are both lobbying the United States to take a stronger stance against the Iranian regime. Saudi Arabia with all its high-tech modern weapons purchased in some of the greatest arms deals in history from the United States could not defeat the Houthis in Yemen. If they can't defeat them, what are the chances against the Iranian regime? And Israel with all its military might could not defeat Hezbollah. Yet Hezbollah is just one of the Iranian regime's proxies. Israel and Saudi Arabia have strong militaries and better weapons. What they don't have is support on the ground, and that's what the Iranian regime knows is the most valuable weapon and has invested in for years. The US and its allies have too much interest in areas where the Iranian regime has influence. This makes any military move against the Iranian regime very difficult.

When the United States was fighting ISIS, they did not have a plan for what happened after the defeat of ISIS. But the Iranian regime seemed to be a step ahead. The US's support for groups like the MEK as an opposition to the current regime seems to suggest their lack of understanding of the lack of support for them among the Iranian people. Saudi Arabia also seems to be taking actions first and evaluating the consequences later. From their actions against Qatar, their war on Yemen and the kidnapping of Lebanon's Prime Minister, every decision they make against the Iranian regime seems to be making the Iranian regime stronger. In Lebanon, the way Hezbollah responded to their prime minister being kidnapped was very strategic.

The greatest weakness of the Islamic Republic is the level of dissatisfaction of the Iranian people with their government. Many Iranians think that their government cares more about exporting their Islamic revolution in neighboring countries than their own people. The protests in Iran are about a wide variety of issues, including human rights violations, unemployment, and high prices. The problem for the government is that protests or any other form of dissent against the regime undermine the legitimacy of their religious authority in the region, which is the foundation they build their network on. For the regime's brand of Shiaism to sell, it needs to portray its Islamic Republic as an ideal system. If the Iranian regime can't maintain the illusion that it enjoys the support of its own people, their legitimacy will be questioned. This is the Islamic Republic's Achilles' Heel. This is why the Iranian government constantly tries to sell the idea that their people are happy with their government; and even if there are protests, there are mostly legitimate concerns that will be addressed and not a demand for regime change.

The US, Saudi Arabia, and Israel have more powerful armies, but what they don't have is manpower, loyal followers in the region and the connections that the Iranian regime enjoys. But the Iranian regime will lose its ability to maintain and grow this network if it doesn't present an image of legitimacy at home.

However, this is not a weakness that can be used against the government. Not without the level of trust these countries have among the Iranian people. There are some Iranians who ask for

foreign support. But many other Iranians who are against the Islamic regime do not wish to see any foreign involvement.

Jacobsen: How is the United States intervening? How should the US intervene?

Navabi: Many protesters say that if the US government supports the uprising of people in Iran against the Iranian government, the Iranian regime will use this to sell the narrative that these protests are not the legitimate concern of the people but a few bad actors that are agents of foreign governments who are mostly motivated by their own agenda. Many Iranians remember how in 1953 the British intelligence and the CIA orchestrated a coup against Iran's Prime Minister Mossadegh who was nationalizing Iran's oil against British interests. The West has a history of supporting dictators against democratically elected leaders for the sake of stability in the region. They picked stability over democracy but ended up getting neither.

Supporting authoritarians that share your interest over democracy and human rights might seem like a good idea in the short run. But in the long term, your support makes you lose credibility, which is exactly what you need to build loyal supporters and a reliable network on the ground. Democracies prove to be other democracies' best allies. Authoritarians often become US allies, but they are not as stable. And putting them in power comes at a cost; the cost is that people remember. If they ever get to choose their own leaders, they might not pick ones that the US would consider an ally. The problem is that lobbyists and politicians often don't look at the long-term costs given that their careers don't last that long. Another problem is that if you have a record of supporting dictators, not many people will believe your narrative when you try to intervene in another country in the name of supporting human rights and freedom.

Democracies are reliable allies and worth the long-term investment. Democracies produce richer economies. Richer economies become better trading partners. Trading partners are less likely to go to war with each other. When trade industries become more influential in a country's politics than war industries, all sides win.

Jacobsen: What are some examples of the US backing authoritarians, dictatorships, and tyrants?

Navabi: We don't even have to go back in history to find examples. Let's focus on today. When the US supports Saudi Arabia's massacre of the Yemeni people and allows the oppression of Saudi citizens by their government and supports Saudi Arabia's appointment to the Human Rights Council, it loses credibility. It makes it apparent that the United States only fights human rights violations when it serves its interest and that its agenda is not really to alleviate the suffering of people.

This makes it easy for countries with even the worst human rights records to point to the double standard and give the impression that any accusation of their human rights violation cannot be trusted. The solution would be to fight against human rights violations consistently. But it's unreasonable to expect any country's government to take actions that don't serve any of their own country's interests. So the challenge for us human rights activists is to argue that being consistent with your human rights records does serve your country's best interest. And we do that by bringing up this credibility factor.

The most effective intervention is one that the majority of the people of a country welcome. But that requires credibility. To gain that credibility, one must be consistent in his or her support for certain values. This is something that Iran's government understands and does that well with

their brand of Shiaism. The US played the same role with capitalism against communism during the Cold War. They understood well that this was a battle of ideas and not just of military might. They could have used the same strategy with a new brand: support for human rights, free speech, and secularism. But they dropped the ball on that and it would take years to fix it even if they wanted to.

Jacobsen: How can the US and other nations support human rights there and elsewhere for that matter?

Navabi: There are many options and most are cheaper than military intervention. One option is to support particular human rights and various enlightenment values. Providing easy anonymous access to social media goes a long way toward giving the people in any country the tools to fight for their own rights. Social Media companies should stop banning and removing anti-Islamic content with the goal of protecting Muslims' religious sensitivities. The content that some policymakers in Palo Alto consider a threat to minorities are voices of dissent against oppression from the majority in Islamic countries. The PC culture is a Western trend but it has global consequences. In the name of protecting victims against abusers at home, we could silence victims globally. Access to these tools is essential. Military intervention gives you unpredictable results and managing what happens after is usually more difficult and costly than the intervention itself. Supporting dissent is less invasive, less expensive, and more effective force for change.

Jacobsen: Can military intervention be a good support?

Navabi: Military intervention can be beneficial if done right. However, it is not the solution for the Iranian regime. This war is not a cost that the people of the United States, Iran's neighbors or many Iranian people (#NotAll) are willing to pay now. The Iranian regime is much more powerful than when Saddam's regime was in power.

You also have to consider the agenda of the people who have an influence on such decisions. Would the war against the Iranian regime really be because of the security of your country's citizens? Or are there other factors independent of the tax-payers' best interest? How much of an influence are Israel, Saudi Arabia, and military lobbyists having on such decisions and do American want to pay for such a war if it is serving their interests? When groups like the MEK are influencing people such as John Bolton and Rudy Giuliani, there doesn't leave much room for doubt that at least some - if not most - of the support for war against the Iranian regime has nothing to do with supporting Iranian people.

Any form of military intervention for the purpose of regime change without planning for what comes after is doomed to fail. When it comes to the Iranian regime, there aren't that many good options for what comes after a regime change. What usually fills a power vacuum are the most organized and well-funded groups. As the West discovered already, it can end up with something worse than the regime they helped remove. Many people in Iran support a military intervention from a foreign regime, but many others are against it.

And the people who are against such intervention include many Iranians who are against the Islamic Republic. Such an intervention will either bring into power another authoritarian regime or a democratic one. The authoritarian regime that comes into power can be another Islamic anti-Western regime. A democratic regime is also not guaranteed to be pro-West. The images from the Iranian protests might suggest otherwise, but we shouldn't underestimate the anti-Western

sentiments many other Iranians still have, especially if such a regime is coming into power right after another military intervention in Iran.

Intervention against the Islamic Republic in Iran needs to be a long-term plan and without military involvement. The support of the people for your intervention is important. Without it, you're either going to get a democratic regime that is against you or a dictatorship that supports you against the will of its people. The way I look at it is by evaluating every group and their goals and interests. And then look at the paths each one of these groups can take in achieving their goals. What is the opportunity cost for each path they can take?

We have to look at different sources of influence and interest groups in Iran:

- 1 1.The Islamic Republic's main sources of power and influence:
 - a Hardliners, Conservatives & the IRGC
 - b Moderates and Reformists
- 2 The Iranian people:
 - a Pro-regime anti-reform
 - b Pro-regime pro-reform
 - c Anti-regime pro-Western intervention
 - d Anti-regime anti-Western intervention
- 3 Opposition groups:
 - a People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran or the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK)
 - b Monarchists
 - c Secular democrats
 - d Ethno-nationalists
 - e Pan-Iranists
 - f Ethnic minority autonomy groups (especially Kurdish)

Each group's members often exaggerate the commonality of their views among the Iranian people. Without reliable polls, it is hard to determine the truth. Most people agree secular democrats and monarchists are the most popular oppositions, and that the MEK remains the most hated one. Many people underestimate the support for the government. Much of this underestimation comes from observation of the protests.

While the enthusiasm people have for the Islamic Republic is significantly less than early revolution years, it is entirely possible that more than ten million people in Iran fully support the government today. There are also many Iranians who abhor the government yet are against an attempt to topple the regime given their observation of what happened in Iraq, Syria, and Libya and the price the people there had to pay for regime change. Yet there are many other voices that demand regime change by any means necessary.

One interesting small but fast-growing group are anti-Islam anti-democracy ethno-nationalists that support the government and see Shia Islam as a hidden version of Zoroastrianism. They consider all of the Middle East to be part of the Persian empire that should one day be

recaptured. They think Iran's religion should one day go back to Zoroastrianism; that Islam and any other Arab influence on Iran's culture needs to be erased. Even though, they believe the current government is not ideal (given that it's both Islamic and a republic); they also feel there is no better option until they manage to reintroduce Iranians to their ancient Aryan heritage.

They consider the main enemies of Iran to be advocates of secular democracy and ethnic minority groups fighting for autonomy. Given that foreign intervention by Western powers emboldens both these groups, they spend a lot of their activism discouraging Iranians from asking for help from the international community. They often use examples in history to convince Iranians that foreign intervention has never been in the best interest of Iran. This message is finding a lot of appeal in young anti-government Iranians that have given up hope on both reformists and opposition groups that have been promising the toppling of the government for the past forty years. One key figure that is leading this movement is Omid Dana who advocates for these ideas on his fast-growing outlets including his YouTube channel under the name Rodast.

Jacobsen: How can we address all these groups?

Navabi: We need to ask what are the goals and ideal scenarios for each one of these groups and interests and how are they trying to achieve it. Then you need to see which groups and interests you belong to. After that, you need to see which other groups and interests you share the most goals with or at least which groups and interests' path to their goal also serves yours. You need to look for the pathways of mutual benefit in order to work together as an informal coalition. You might find multiple options, but then you have to analyze the opportunity cost for each. Not every good option is the best option. The best way to predict the next moves is to assume parties are rational but have different values and interests. Then put yourself in their shoes and ask yourself what you would do to survive.

For example, the goal of some of the most influential interest groups in the US government is to reduce the Islamic Republic power in the region. The goal of human rights activists is to reduce human rights violations. Human rights activists might rely on the support of the US government for their goal. They would have to argue that giving voice to human rights activists in Iran will damage Iran's legitimacy in the region. But then you would have to consider what impact this would have on anti-intervention Iranians. Would human rights activism be associated with an excuse for intervention and make it more difficult to bring attention to legitimate concerns?

Jacobsen: What do you recommend?

Navabi: We need to provide cover for the extant oppositions in Iran. It wouldn't be difficult to provide the technology these groups need for them to have fast and undetectable access to social media and make it easy for the least tech-savvy people to get around government firewalls. This should be backed up with guides and tips on how to get access and remain anonymous.

This is a form of intervention that is difficult to hate even among anti-Western activists. All you're doing is giving everyone a louder voice. You're not adding to the voice, or meddling in their decisions. You are just providing a platform for everyone to get their message out. Including those who might be against you. By giving voices of dissent on the ground a global audience, we are encouraging activism.

Encouragement of activism in all oppressed countries gives much-needed reinforcement to the same trends that brought the West its enlightenment. Enlightenment values do not need to be

exported from the West to oppressed nations. These are values that many already have been fighting for in these countries. We only need to amplify what is already there. By supporting free speech, you encourage dissent against barriers to the Enlightenment values everywhere, not merely in countries that are a threat to your interests.

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, especially so in depth this time, Armin.

Interview with Leslea Mair - Co-Director of Losing Our Religion

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

October 29, 2018

Leslea Mair is the Co-Director of the documentary film Losing Our Religion. Her work builds on the research done by Linda LaScola and Daniel Dennett through the foundation of The Clergy Project. Here we explore the documentary film. The film is scheduled for purchase in November 2018. You may order your copy from the website [Losing Our Religion](#).

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What was the inspiration for the title and content of the new fabulous document film Losing Our Religion?

Leslea Mair: Wow, that's quite a compliment! Thank you!

I wanted to make this film after hearing about The Clergy Project. I think changing your mind about something as important to your world view as religion is such an interesting process. But for ministers to stop believing struck me as a real personal earthquake. I read the stories of the non-believing clergy in Daniel Dennett and Linda LaScola's studies and really wanted to explore stories like that. I was so curious about how that plays out for people, not just in the short term.

Jacobsen: You co-directed the film with Leif Kaldor and based on the work of Professor Daniel Dennett and Linda LaScola. How did you come into contact with Leif Kaldor and the research of Dennett and LaScola?

Mair: Leif and I met at a film festival in central Saskatchewan, close to where we both grew up, about 20 years ago. We've been business partners and a couple since then. We bring complementary skill sets to directing - we've made quite a number of films together. It's a partnership that works really well for us.

I was the one who tripped across the studies that Dennett and LaScola published, but we were both intrigued by it from the start. I think I first read about them on some secular/atheist blogs and started thinking about what kind of story you could tell about it, so the film was kind of my baby at the start. But we always bounce ideas off one another, so Leif very quickly became involved in the process. His take on the subject was a little different than mine - his childhood had a lot more religious influence than mine did, so it was a good counterpoint to my thinking in the early stages of developing the idea.

Jacobsen: On reflection and reading of Dennett's and LaScola's work, what particular findings struck you, stood out to you?

Mair: The thing that really struck me was how traumatic giving up on believing was for people. You have to understand, I've never been a believer, so the idea that you can still be emotionally attached to the idea of a deity even when you've ceased believing in it was a little foreign to me. I wanted to understand that better.

What also made an impression on me - although it didn't completely surprise me - was how swift and unkind, sometimes even cruel, the reactions to these people were when they either confessed or were found out. I was surprised by how strong that reaction was, and that the risks people take in talking frankly about nonbelief are very real and quite severe in some places.

Jacobsen: Minister Gretta Vosper contributed to the documentary film as well. What role did she play in the film?

Mair: Gretta is one of the people who is trying to make non-belief work in a traditionally believing environment. She's an out atheist in the pulpit. The United Church of Canada is one of the most liberal and progressive denominations out there - I grew up in the United Church myself. So when Gretta and I first started talking, it totally made sense to me that if there was any organization that could handle this, it was this one. But there was still some serious pushback. She was called up on the carpet and has been judged unfit for ministry by a panel in the UCC, but she's still in her congregation. They're still trying to figure out what to do with her - they don't know how to excommunicate her because they've never done anything like that -- there's no process, really. It would be funny if it didn't have such serious repercussions for her.

What role Gretta and her congregation played was to show that a church-style community could be secular in nature. They're trying to pull a shrinking institution into the future. It's important work, and the struggle continues.

Jacobsen: How do their narratives speak to the stories of others throughout North America?

Mair: Brendan and Jenn Murphy are our primary characters. They're a couple in the US -- Brendan is a former evangelical pastor, Jenn is his wife.

When I met them, Brendan was a "closeted" atheist and still working in ministry, but Jenn was a devout believer. So they were dealing with multiple layers of crisis. Brendan had joined The Clergy Project and Linda LaScola had put him in touch with me. When he agreed to an interview, he wanted to bring Jenn along, and I was fine with that. I didn't think it was going to amount to anything. I was SO wrong! Jenn's a really brave and amazing woman. She was so nervous that day, but she still sat down and gave me not just an interview, but really opened up. This was a major shake-up for her in her personal life and in her faith, and I'm still blown away at how much courage she and Brendan had in doing this.

I was able to follow their story from that point, through leaving the ministry under duress and into their current lives.

Jacobsen: What documentary films speak to telling these important narratives of loss of faith, especially in countries without the massive number of public privileges won such as our own?

Mair: There are a few out there - one of our contributors, Jerry De Witt, is featured in a film that has an excerpt out on the New York Times Op Docs called "The Outcast of Beauregard Parish" about his experience exiting the ministry. And there's a film called "One of Us" about the struggles of three ex-Hasidic Jews who are adjusting to secular life. And Bart Campolo has just come out with a film about his relationship with his father, Tony Campolo, and how they've navigated Bart leaving faith behind.

I don't know of many films coming out of non-Western countries on the subject, but it's very dangerous to approach atheism in many places. You'd be taking a grave risk and often putting your contributors in jeopardy. I'd love to find a way to do that if some risk could be minimized.

It's also hard to find the funding to make a full-length documentary film, or I suspect we'd see a lot more of them. The stories are certainly out there, and there are more of them all the time as people leave faith behind. As far as I know, *Losing Our Religion* is the only feature-length documentary on The Clergy Project so far.

Jacobsen: What targeted areas of activism seem the most relevant at this moment in time now? For example, the work to prevent the ongoing attempts at the encroachment of individual rights to reproductive health including abortion, the rights to medical care, the right to die, and so on, from groups, ironically, with open, grand, self-righteous proclamations about individualism, the "divine individual," and individual rights as the highest values to attain within the country - ironic because their preventative and obstructive attempts stand in opposition to these individual rights of legal persons in Canada, of full adult citizens in Canada. I see a similar tragic irony in pro-life activists killing doctors.

Mair: Oh, gosh. There's so much work to do, isn't there?

We're in such a rapid state of change right now. I think that the majority of people -- especially here in Canada, although I know a lot of Americans who feel the same way -- support reproductive rights, the right to die and universal health care. It's the vocal minorities that get in the way of those rights. I think Dan Barker said it best in our film when he talked about the religious political right dying out, knowing they're dying out, and lashing out at anyone and anything that threatens them. The world is changing. It's going to continue to change. The one advantage the religious right has is that it has an organized voice. I think we have to build communities of support so that we have an organized voice as well.

The really hopeful thing is that those communities are starting to happen -- the Oasis communities and Sunday Assemblies and other humanist and secular groups are starting to grow and they're becoming more active in addressing social justice issues. So I'm optimistic. There are some really fantastic people out there.

Jacobsen: Any final thoughts or feelings in conclusion?

Mair: Not that I can think of!

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

Mair: Thanks so much for taking the time, Scott!

License and Copyright

License



In-Sight Publishing by [Scott Douglas Jacobsen](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](#).

Based on a work at Medium (Personal) and Atheist Republic (Op-Ed and Blog).

Copyright

© 2012-2020 by Scott Douglas Jacobsen and *In-Sight Publishing* 2012-2020. Unauthorized use and/or duplication of this material without express and written permission from this site's author and/or owner is strictly prohibited. Excerpts and links may be used, provided that full and clear credit is given to Scott Douglas Jacobsen and *In-Sight Publishing* with appropriate and specific direction to the original content.