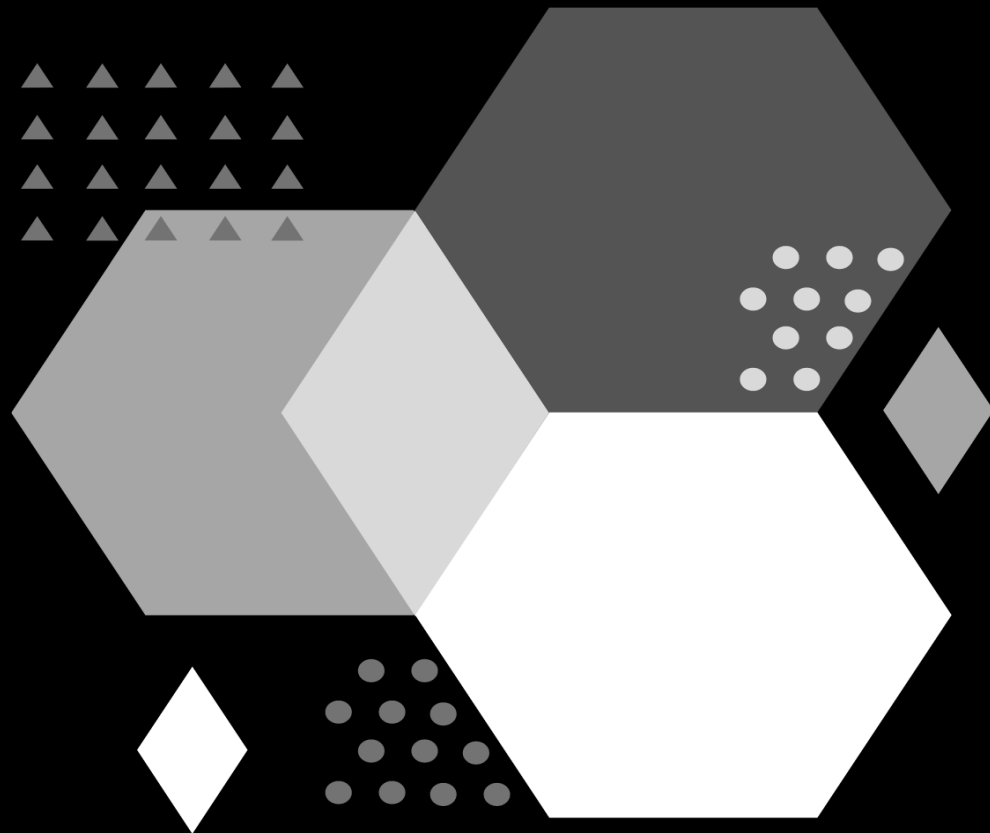


Book of Stuff 8



Scott Douglas Jacobsen

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Book of Stuff 8

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MEDIUM (PERSONAL)

Interview with Dr. Sven van de Wetering on the IAT, Prejudice, Xenophobia, and Canada

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

November 2, 2018

Dr. Sven van de Wetering was the head of psychology at the University of the Fraser Valley and is now an associate professor in the same department. He is on the Advisory Board of *In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal*.

Dr. van de Wetering earned his BSc in Biology at The University of British Columbia, and Bachelors of Arts in Psychology at Concordia University, Master of Arts, and Ph.D. in Psychology from Simon Fraser University.

His research interest lies in “conservation psychology, lay conceptions of evil, relationships between personality variables and political attitudes.” We have been conducting an ongoing series on the epistemological and philosophical foundations of psychology with the current sessions here, here, here, and here.

Here we explore the Implicit Association Test, reduction of prejudice and xenophobia in societies, non-null xenophobic societies, and fraught worldview interactions in Canada.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: As an expert in social psychology, some ideas emerge in the public conversation around subject matter related to the professional peer-reviewed literature of social psychologists. I want to focus, today, on the Implicit Association Test (IAT).

Many utilize the findings to bolster well-meaning programs to reduce implicit bias, not simply explicit bias. Does the evidence of Implicit Association sufficiently endorse the implementation of policies and programs in different areas of professional life of the Canadian public?

Dr. Sven van de Wetering: More than 20 years after the IAT was first developed, it is still not entirely clear what it measures. The thinking behind it is noble: The idea is that asking people explicitly about their prejudices leads to biased results because there is a social stigma attached to uttering racist/sexist/homophobic opinions.

Because most people want to avoid that stigma, they will tend to respond in a less racist/sexist/homophobic manner than they would if that social stigma did not exist. The IAT is thought of by many people as a way of circumventing the tendency toward socially desirable responding to surveys.

If it were true, it would be wonderful, but that does not appear to be what the IAT actually does. In most circumstances, the IAT does an even worse job of predicting behaviour than an explicit attitude survey does, which suggests that whatever it is that the IAT measures, it is probably not the person’s “true” attitudes, if such a thing even exists.

I’m not as up on the literature on the IAT as I would like to be, but the most compelling account I have seen of what it is that the IAT actually measures states that these so called “implicit attitudes” are nothing more than a statistical aggregate of all the associations one has been exposed to with a concept.

So, if one has seen African-American people portrayed in a negative light more frequently than one has seen European-American people so portrayed, the IAT will find an implicit prejudice against black people, regardless of whether one actually believes the portrayals.

The fact that most people, including many African-American people, appear to have negative implicit attitudes toward African-Americans as measured on the IAT, or that the same is true of homosexual people, overweight people, old people, etc. suggests that typical portrayals of members of stigmatized groups still tend to be more negative than portrayals of non-stigmatized groups.

I think that is unfortunate. On the other hand, I'm not sure that specifically targeting people's implicit attitudes will be all that helpful. If organizations are finding that their employees are being rude or insensitive to members of stigmatized minorities, it might be more effective to target the offending behaviours directly instead of trying to modify performance on the IAT, which is probably easier to do.

Modifying performance on the IAT is not as helpful because those "implicit attitudes" do not, in many cases, drive the offending behaviours.

Jacobsen: In terms of psychological phenomena, and the reduction of prejudice in large groups including societies, what tends to reduce the degree of xenophobia in societies?

van de Wetering: I've been trying to figure that out for about 25 years, and still don't claim to know what's going on. Exposure to a great variety of people is usually helpful, especially if that contact is carried out under conditions of equal status, in pursuit of common goals, under fairly enjoyable circumstances, and in situations that allow people to get to know each other reasonably well.

Such contact is often hard to arrange, but I never cease to be amazed by the recurring tendency for xenophobic attitudes to be strongest in areas where there are very few members of minority groups around to be prejudiced against.

Beyond this, xenophobic attitudes tend to be activated by disorder and social threat. When people perceive the social environment as chaotic and uncertain, when they perceive a breakdown of the moral norms that help structure their lives, then people start to become more hostile to outsiders and stigmatized minorities.

I still wonder how much of the worldwide turn toward right-wing populism is driven by things like the terrorist attacks of 9/11. I like to tell people that cows, hot dogs, and falling television sets all kill more people in North America than terrorists do.

The point of my telling this to people is that this belief in massive, inimical forces sitting on the fringes of North American society plotting our downfall is so powerful for many people that it seems to change their whole worldview and activate the little seed of xenophobia that is probably buried in all of us.

Violent crime is still on the wane, terrorists kill very few people compared to even very banal risks that most people don't worry much about, and yet the terrorists and criminals influence our society in a way that those other risks do not. People think of terrorist acts as acts of war; I try to reframe them as public relations stunts. I'm fighting an uphill battle, though.

Given the literature on xenophobia, the actual answer to your question is probably that people will become less xenophobic if they are exposed to diversity, and if they perceive their society as peaceful, prosperous, and moral.

The problem, of course, is that there is always crime and deviance, and even if rates of crime and deviance are going down, any deviant act can be sensationalized.

There are powerful incentives to perpetrate such sensationalism, with the result that public perceptions of disorder are not very strongly correlated with actual disorder. Not an easy problem to fix, especially if you believe in free speech (which I do).

Jacobsen: Has there ever been a null xenophobia society? What have been cases in history of, apparently, optimized xenophobia, and explicit *and* implicit bias?

van de Wetering: I don't think there ever has been a null xenophobia society. Every once in a while, someone claims that a certain society has no xenophobia. When I do a little digging, it doesn't take me very long to find out that claims of the lack of xenophobia are greatly exaggerated.

On many measures, much of Canada looks to be pretty low on xenophobia. Despite that, it's easy to find cases of racist epithets, discrimination, hate crimes, and widespread implicit bias. I sometimes wonder if xenophobia is like temperature; you can try to drive it down, but the lower you get, the harder it gets to get lower it more, and you can never reach absolute zero.

Jacobsen: Are the interactions between religious and non-religious people in Canada immune from the forms of xenophobia seen in history and in other societies?

van de Wetering: I actually think the relations between religious and non-religious people are somewhat fraught in Canada. We have norms that more or less forbid the discussion of religion in a wide range of contexts, and that keeps the tension under the surface.

As a university professor, I find it very striking how hard it is for my students to admit to having religious beliefs. I'm sure many of them do; I teach in a so-called Bible belt. It seems to me that what we have is something like the arrangement we have with smoking.

It looks like we have no smoking on campus because smoking on campus is forbidden, and smokers therefore take their cigarettes elsewhere. Similarly, it looks like we have no highly religious people on campus, because strong expressions of religious fervour are non-normative, so the religious people take their fervour elsewhere.

This state of affairs is conducive to superficial peace, but not to a deep mutual understanding between more secular and more religious people. Maybe that is the best we can achieve, but it doesn't look to me like an absence of xenophobia.

Jacobsen: If you could build policy to reduce prejudice in Canadian society, and if you could recommend this to the political, policy-making, and decision-making classes in Canada, what form would the policy take provincially-territorially and federally?

van de Wetering: I honestly think most governments in English Canada are doing fairly well. I approve of official multiculturalism, and think that keeping a lid on really virulent hate speech while still avoiding stronger restrictions on free speech is probably about the right balance to strike.

I would probably let in more refugees than Trudeau has done, but not a lot more; the backlash that Angela Merkel provoked by letting in really large numbers of refugees will probably prove, in hindsight, to have been a counterproductive consequence of her actions.

It's enough to make me cry, because I thought her intentions were very noble, but political limitations on what is possible are very real and difficult to circumvent. Because we are far from most of the trouble spots of the world, we have a fairly easy time vetting our immigrants. We can afford to be more generous than we are, but not without limit.

The one area where we are really falling down in reducing prejudice is in our dealings with our First Nations. After our government spent decades trying to destroy their culture, we are finding that people whose own cultures have been severely damaged but who also sometimes have trouble participating fully in ours (if they want to) will often not do very well.

I am hesitant to propose concrete programs to deal with this problem; I don't think paternalistic white men should be taking the lead in dealing with this problem. I do think more funding needs to be made available to First Nations to assist them in helping themselves.

Jacobsen: What firmly does reduce prejudice, xenophobia, bias, and so on? What firmly does not?

van de Wetering: I don't think there is a magic bullet that will reduce prejudice and xenophobia in all circumstances. Laws against discrimination are a good idea in societies where discrimination is open and above board.

Once those laws have taken effect and been reasonably well enforced, unofficial discrimination goes underground and becomes much harder to prove in a court of law. The temptation then is to enact still stronger anti-discrimination laws and to enforce them still more vigorously.

At some point, I suspect that that strategy reaches a point of severely diminishing returns, and the costs and the threat of backlash are not adequately compensated by the small decrease in discrimination one is able to achieve by those means. At that point, other strategies may become necessary.

I am wondering if the #MeToo movement is pointing the way. The laws against sexual assault are already on the books, and they are even sometimes enforced. The issue is now that so many cases are not reported, and therefore not dealt with.

The #MeToo movement aims to change the informal norms surrounding the making of formal complaints of behaviour that is already illegal. Some sort of similar strategy might make sense in other domains of discrimination.

There are a couple of difficulties involved in trying to reduce prejudice. One of them is inherent in any form of social action: Social action differs from non-social action in that the objects being acted on (other people) are not some inert objects that passively accept the actions one undertakes, but are instead social actors like oneself, with their own goals and strategies.

Even as you are trying to persuade them to let go of their prejudiced ways, they are trying to persuade you to defend the integrity of your shared culture by stemming the tide of immigrants they believe are threatening it.

Related to this is a special difficulty specifically related to reducing prejudice: because people will resist one's efforts, and even undertake active counter-efforts, it is often easy to see them as bad guys.

The problem here is that the world is not divided into bad people who are prejudiced and good people who are not. Instead, the world is full of people, all of whom can be seduced by the good guy/bad guy narrative that brings such uplifting feelings of moral clarity and self-righteousness.

Once one decides that a certain category of people is the enemy, one has begun to be seduced by that narrative, the very narrative one is angry at the opponent for having fallen prey to.

I have met people who say they would feel very comfortable sitting down and eating a meal with a person who was transsexual, or a Syrian Muslim, or indeed a member of virtually any stigmatized group one would care to name, but who also say they would not be willing to talk with someone who had voted for Donald Trump.

To me that moment of moral clarity is the moment of downfall; one is just as big of a bigot as the person one is angry at, only the identity of the stigmatized groups has changed.

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

The Search for Fundamental Particles by Canadian Scientists

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

November 3, 2018

The_Globe and Mail talked about the search for new particles by Canadian scientists.

With 10 quadrillion high-energy collisions in the world's largest particle accelerator, there may be some answers to questions about the potential for other missing fundamental particles in the Standard Model of Particle Physics or elsewhere. This raises questions.

The questions about the potential for discoveries by Canadian scientists and researchers through international collaboration. "Canada is one of dozens of countries participating in the project, which will eventually see the collider's performance increase tenfold by the middle of the next decade," *CBC News* stated, "Researchers hope the higher number of collisions that result will increase the likelihood that they will spot some extremely rare clues to a more fundamental theory of matter than the current standard model of particle physics."

The TRIUMF accelerator in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, associate director Oliver Krestor, talked about this as the next big stage in the work of the LHC. The LHC or the Large Hadron Collider in Geneva, Switzerland empirically verified the existence of the Higgs Boson.

There seems not much left to see for the Standard Model of Particle Physics. However, as things have progressed, there has been hope to develop a theoretical and eventually empirical framework for the incorporation of dark matter into the Standard Model of Particle Physics.

"The situation has perplexed physicists who are looking to replace the standard model with a new theory that can encompass dark matter, a substance whose existence has been inferred by astronomers through its gravitational influence on stars and galaxies, but that has never been directly detected," the article explained.

The Director-General of CERN, Fabiola Gianotti, wants to find the smallest potential deviation from the current evidence to see if there are other portions not accounted for in current theorization.

"The LHC works by accelerating protons in two opposing beams around a 27-kilometre-long circular tunnel. The beams cross at only four points where protons that are travelling at nearly the speed of light can collide and release enough energy to spontaneously form new particles, such as the Higgs," the reportage explained, "These decay in an instant, but they leave their traces in the building-size detectors built around the collision points. Canada supplied hardware for one of those detectors, called ATLAS, and is currently developing new components for an intermediate upgrade that will begin after the beams are shut down for two years starting in November."

It is a complicated affair. The round of data gathering take place between 2021 and 2023 with the overhaul happening to incorporate a more potentially groundbreaking series of experiments through the collider's superconducting magnets being replaced.

The purpose is to increase the amount of data coming from the experiment of the collider. 150 researchers work at the LHC. They are working for the improvement in the future of the particle physics research.

Keep It Upbeat

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

November 5, 2018

Life can suck. Life can also be pretty darn awesome. In fact, the clouds are more often spread out with lots of sunshine and sometimes life gives you nothing but sunshine.

The people who tend to get nothing done are those who sit around and complain, moan, blame others, engage in self-pity, and feel at odds with the world.

Those who tend to get things done are those who have an optimistic outlook on the world because you have to think that the world can be better.

So, the fundamental difference between the power of positive thinking and the weakness of negative thinking comes from the practical reality.

Those who can get things done think that the world can be better than it was the day before. If someone keeps that up day after day after day, they are more likely to produce a world worth living in, because the world they produce is more positive than the prior one.

It is a fact that the negative thinkers can sometimes think of themselves as hard-nosed realists. However, they are more often cynics, which is not to be confused with a realism.

A realist will look at the situation and analyze it relatively objectively within the information that they have on hand at the moment. A cynic will give up any sign of problems.

A realist will give up half the time because half of the time the situations do seem bleak. However, they maybe have limited information.

Whereas, the optimist will continue forward in any case. So, in any of those cases of bleak and not bleak, the optimist will persevere and continue on to make that better world. The world needs optimists. That's the power of positive thinking.

The Drug Epidemic All Over the World: Authoritative, International Calls for Decriminalization

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

November 5, 2018

I want to talk about a problem today. The problem reaching to all corners of the globe, in nations, in communities, maybe, even, in your own family. It is an unfortunate fact of the modern world. That's the reality of illicit substances or drugs, and their various abuses, overuses, and at-times associated overdoses.

Our current era of technological marvels, scientific wonders shedding new views on the natural world and our relationship with the cosmos, comes with the concomitant problem of easier illicit production, distribution, and consumption of potentially harmful substances or drugs (WHO, 2018a; WHO, 2018b).

In particular, and on even one metric of opioid overdoses, there are 70,000 to 100,000 individuals dying from opioid overdoses each year, which is the main cause of the estimate 99,000 to 253,000 deaths from to illicit drug use in 2010 (UNODC/WHO, 2013). 8,440 overdose deaths happened with the EU28 in 2015 (European Monitoring Centre for Drug and Addiction, 2017). Indeed, there were 1.3 million high-risk opioid users in Europe alone (Ibid.).

In America, there were about two-thirds of the 64,000 deaths associated with opioids or synthetic opioids (Global Commission on Drug Policy, 2018). These types — and there are others — of substance have the potential to be addictive and harmful, in the short or the long term. It is both sad, moving, and a clarion call for our need to make the world safer for the next generations. What can we do?

We can first of all pay attention to the experts of the world. Those taking significant portions of their lives to commit themselves to the study of important topic areas in medicine, in biological sciences, in pharmaceutical sciences, demography, anthropology, human psychological sciences, and so on.

Many girls and women are impacted by drug addiction and overdoses, even deaths. They even have fathers, uncles, brothers, grandfathers, and sons and grandsons who have died from drug overdoses. However, the long-term and overwhelming evidence is men use more illicit substances and deal with more of the consequences in personal life (NIH, 2018a; NIH, 2018b).

That means the impact on men and boys creates impacts in the lives of women and girls. Men and boys they love. Women and girls who are loved. When looking at the important organizations on the international stage, we can look into those who have made the warnings and calls to action about drug abuse and use, e.g., the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UN General Assembly Session on the Approach to the World Drug Problem (UNGASS) in its 2016 unanimous conclusion, through drug policy and the Sustainable Development Goals, and others (UNODC, 2018; Yakupitiyage, 2017; UNODC, 2015; Sustainable Development Goals, n.d.).

One of the main global organizations for the health and wellness of the public is the World Health Organization. The main collective entity representing the world's population, and which produced

the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* 70 years ago, is the United Nations. Both the World Health Organization and the United Nations issued a joint statement calling for the decriminalization of all drugs (WHO, 2017).

Former Portuguese Prime Minister António Guterres called for the decriminalization of drugs in Portugal and instituted the programs while the prime minister there. Now, Guterres, following Ban Ki-Moon, is the Secretary-General of the United Nations. He is also calling for decriminalization from this station as well (Secretariat to the Governing Bodies UNODC, 2018).

Indeed, even the late Kofi Annan, he made a call for the decriminalization of drugs around the world for the better wellbeing of the world's peoples (Pablo, 2017). Same with the Global Commission on Drug Policy comprised of 12 powerful former heads of state (2016). Even in the US, the public is mostly in favour of the decriminalization of cannabis or marijuana, which would comprise harm reduction methodologies (Geiger, 2018).

In select nations, there is a continuous call for decriminalization and then the eventual enactment of the policies and initiatives of decriminalization of drugs in the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, and Portugal, and other countries (Travis, 2014).

Prominent among them is the success of Guterres. It is an affirming legacy in the process of decriminalization and the interests and wellbeing of the public. The major organizations in the global order see the wisdom in decriminalization. Many nations are seeing eye-to-eye with them.

Then in Canada, two of the three major federal or national political parties have called for the decriminalization of drugs too. The main health officials of some of the most populated city centres in Canada — Vancouver, Montreal, and Toronto — have called for decriminalization as well (Dickson, 2018). There is this continual groundswell internationally, multi-nationally, and nationally, especially close to home nationally with Canadian society.

The reason is stark, and clear. Canadian citizens are dying because of overdoses. The punishment-oriented or punitive approach is the methodology for dealing with drugs most visible in countries like the United States, where the purpose is to punish. They imprison and fine drug users or holders to make an example of them and others.

As far as the evidence is concerned, it tends to increase drug use and overdoses. It does not decrease them. That is why the experts are not calling for more or even continued criminalization of drug users. It impacts the poor and minorities the most (Fellner, 2009). To further the criminalization of drugs, it would harm people in penurious circumstances and with minority ethnic backgrounds more than the richer and dominant ethnic groups in a country.

But what is the alternative? Why are there calls for decriminalization at all levels of the world system?

The alternative is harm reduction (Harm Reduction International, 2018). Decriminalization is part of the process of implementing harm reduction philosophy. But what is harm reduction outside of the calls around the world for decriminalization? It is, in fact, a wide range of policies, programs, and practices devoted to the reduction of harms associated with drug use.

It is an acceptance of drug use in the society with an emphasis on ways in which to reduce the harms to the general public, especially in the sectors of the population without the want or the will to halt personal substance use. When HIV was becoming more prominent and spreading

throughout some of the subpopulations in some countries of the world, harm reduction began its early development processes.

Some of the first beneficiaries were drug users who inject the substance into them with a needle. In Canadian society, we see the work of safe needle exchange sites to reduce the transmission of HIV and infectious diseases. Without a clean needle, the diseases can spread from user to user through contaminated needles. It sounds simple. But it is akin to the first people who found out about washing hands prior to surgery as a good idea to prevent infection from the surgery.

The harm reduction philosophy means more than these too. It is akin to reproductive health services for women. Where women deserve and reserve the right to reproductive health services, including abortion, women should have safe and equitable access to these services, as noted by Human Rights Watch. It is stipulated in a number of human rights documents. Similarly, the point of harm reduction is not forcing drugs on the citizenry but providing safe and equitable access to the least among us — the forgotten, bruised by life, and often coping with substance abuse.

They deserve our care, compassion, and concern as fellow global citizens and travellers in this journey called life. But these are lofty notions and ideals. How do we best work in the pragmatic and implement programs for the needs of the least among us? Some of the solutions already mentioned and proposed by major organizations of the world and health authorities representing nations in the world or of major cities in, for example, Canada.

Others include the safe needle exchange programs. Still others, they include the work to incorporate access to safe injection sites for a reliable and safe place for drug users. Also, the provision of a drug called naloxone through kits (Miles, n.d.). These can stop overdoses in their tracks. The reason is they block the opioid receptors of the body, so the fentanyl-laced opioid substances do not kill them.

Thousands of people are dying every year in the one of the highest-ranked on measures of wellbeing nations in the world, Canada. It is due to this opioid epidemic spreading across the nation, where naloxone kits can prevent overdoses enough to provide time for proper medical care in the uncommon cases of overdoses in drug users who can be abusers.

The safe needle exchange programs, the safe injection sites, the naloxone kits, and the decriminalization all help reduce the deaths and health problems to the public. These harm reduction measures improve the overall health the society, which would, otherwise, be impacted by the deaths of individual drug overdoses. Remember the drug fentanyl mentioned before.

That is a major culprit here. It should not be laced with opioids and other drugs. However, the problem is the illicit or criminal status of the drugs. The criminalization is the problem, which directly relates to the illicit status and illegal-unregulated production of the drugs. When done this way, the opioids are accidentally, and sometimes intentionally, laced with fentanyl, which is a deadly drug. Decriminalization reduces the harms there. Many of my fellow Canadians and global citizens would not heartbreakingly be dead as a result, too.

Take, for example, the case of Guterres with Portugal. What was the actual impact of the harm reduction measures?

The situation is in stark contrast to the punitive measures. There are no arrests for drug possession. More people have begun to receive treatment. As a direct result, the total number of people having addiction problems, HIV/AIDS, and drug overdoses have plummeted in Portugal

(Vastag, 2009). What if this happened in Canada? What about the rest of the world, as per the calls for harm reduction to be implemented through decriminalization?

These harm reduction measures have been nationally empirically proven to be effective to greatly improve the public's health and safety. Harm reduction is an evidence-based approach to combatting the drug problems of the world and has been recognized around the world by the health experts to improve the lives of the general public. It is all the more urgent based on the potential to reduce harms to individuals, families, and communities, to implement the methodologies shown to work almost immediately — within a couple years or less.

Given the demographics of who is imprisoned or fined, the public health benefits would accrue to the most vulnerable populations of most societies, which are the minority subpopulations and the lower classes/the poor. Those public health benefits would make their lives healthier, easier, longer, and less mixed up — unduly — with the law.

These populations are the most deserving of better consideration and equal opportunity within the society, whether considering deliberate cultural genocide and attempted extermination of the Indigenous population in North America or the slavery of the African-American population in the US. They continue to suffer under the consequences of a long history of repression and abuse. Indigenous men and women in Canada only got the right to vote in 1960. African-Americans in America saw only further equality with the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s. The War on Drugs, in America, or the criminalization of crimes without victims mostly affect these more vulnerable populations.

With the evidence before us, and with the stark contrast between the outcomes of the punitive approach and the harm reduction approach to the drug issue around the world, and with the calls from all the relevant experts internationally and nationally, one major step to tackle the problem of drugs will be the recognition of harm reduction as the way to solve this problem.

The next steps will be education of the global public about the empirical evidence with the examples before us, with Portugal and others as positive successes. Following this, we should work towards a national and international collective set of efforts to solve the issue of drug abuse and overdoses. Human beings have used drugs for thousands of years. They have abused them for as long as they have been around. However, we have the means, through minimal expenses and compassion, to reduce the harms to those all over the world impacted by addiction, drug abuse, and overdoses.

This is not a trivial thing either. Speaking as a high-level representative of the UN community, the harm reduction approach is based on a firm, strong commitment to the health of the general public, as explained before, and human rights. Who can help work for the public health and human rights?

Our communities, frontline workers, policymakers, politicians, and researchers to name a few. Then there are those heading out into the world as the next generation of educated workers and leaders. You are the investment of the future of the rest of the world. You can be the positive force for good that the world so desperately needs, as we have issues in climate change, nuclear proliferation, food shortages, natural disasters, and so on. The problems of the drug epidemics are one of those grand challenges recognized by the most influential organizations and people in the world as a problem.

The best part of these solutions is that they are typically low-cost, low-risk, and high-payoff. They respect the individual to make their own informed choices about drugs. But they provide the health services to the public. And if someone has a moral objection to them, they do not have to use them. But for those who do need them, they have them available for use. It respects all involved parties, produce real positive outcomes for the population, and works to create a more stable world for all.

Become a part of that future, we need you.

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In Conversation with Maya Bahl on Hypothetical Redefining of “Ethnicity” and “Race”

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

November 8, 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.

1. Scott Douglas Jacobsen: If in some hypothetical reconstruction of the definitions of race and ethnicity, knowing what you know, how would you redefine the concepts for a new, more accurate term, and idea, based on the modern science?

Maya Bahl: I would keep the traditional definition of race tracing itself from genetics and biology and ethnicity being socially constructed intact, but to also anticipate variation, both in measurements and in the people themselves.

From time immemorial there has been variation in human populations, where in Western history, for instance, we have seen this with each conquest made by Alexander the Great as he extended his rule towards Asia and there being inter-relationships as a result.

Racial Fusion Theory has been suggested in explaining whether Alexander the Great’s prominence was for practical reasons in sustaining the Greek Empire or if it was to make one race, as Alexander and his legion had married into Persian populations.

Humans are 99% similar genetically, with skin colour seeming to be the only distinguishable exception, so my definition for a people-centric discipline would more than ever be to anticipate variation!

2. Jacobsen: When examining these issues, with the prior articles covering the standard colloquial and professional definitions, and knowing sectors of society will use these for divisive rhetoric and political gain, what are the main cautionary notes about the complexity of the subject matter for those wishing to look into the evidence and theories?

Bahl: This general field is constantly evolving, and so with it there’s bound to be conflicting information, where making sure sources are legitimate and sound is a sure way to get to the truth. Another way in ensuring certainty is to check in with official international and national associations and organizations.

3. Jacobsen: You are mentored by forensic anthropologists. What are they currently researching? What is the current reach or edge of the research in forensic anthropology?

Bahl: Having studied Anthropology at Bridgewater State University, I first became inspired by the subject from an introductory class that was taught by Dr. Ellen Ingmanson, where in her bone lab classroom I got the inspiration of identifying human bones.

Dr. Ingmanson’s work is mainly in biological anthropology and with studying primates in understanding the evolution of intelligence and how it relates to cultural behaviour.

She conducts observational research through object manipulation, tool use, communication, social skills, behavioural variation, infant development, ecology, and nonhuman culture, and ensures the care and protection of her subjects from her knowledge of primate behaviour.

There have been many advances in technology in Forensic Anthropology, so there has been a lot of news surrounding more effective methodologies and systems that get to the truth. Also, there have been more observational breakthroughs, like whether baby laughter would compare with a chimpanzee.

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

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Ann Coulter on Particular Suffrage: 2001, 2003, and 2007

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

November 10, 2018

Ann Coulter, conservative writer, author, and public commentator, over the 2000s spoke on the issue of universal suffrage or the right to vote.

In the core of the statements by Coulter, the foci remain the young, women, and, in particular, single women, because these demographics vote Democrat rather than Republican.

Much conservative thought incorporates zero-sum thought. The notion of a loss experienced or felt with the inclusion of non-group members, e.g., Democrats or associated statistical voting blocks, becoming active in politics.

Coulter mused, in a consistent manner, on the right to vote for the young or women. However, the focus here remains the vote of women. In particular, the quotes, gathered through Wikiquote, between February, 2001 and October 2007.

Take, for example, the first instance from the now-defunct show *Politically Incorrect* hosted by Bill Maher:

I think [women] should be armed but should not vote ... women have no capacity to understand how money is earned. They have a lot of ideas on how to spend it ... it's always more money on education, more money on child care, more money on day care. (Politically Incorrect 26 February 2001)

Less than 100 years after women earned the right to vote in the United States, sectors of society may not see this as much of a joke as a call to action.

Similarly, some religious leaders may make the call for violence against women, which some see as comical, others as dismissible, and still others see as a call to action to keep women from becoming independent of their control.

Important to note, a significant following of the Republican Party, now, is fundamentalist Evangelical Christianity, which links to the base of Coulter. These individuals believe in the right to vote for themselves but not for opposition; thus, these constituents do not believe in democracy.

Indeed, as with the religious incursion on reproductive rights and other human rights-political issues, the religious innervation begins to erode in principle and practice the separation of a place of worship and state and, therefore, by default self-defines (them) as theocratic and anti-democratic.

The second example is here:

It would be a much better country if women did not vote. That is simply a fact. In fact, in every presidential election since 1950 — except Goldwater in '64 — the Republican would have won, if only the men had voted. (The Guardian 17 May 2003)

Some see her as a joke. But others see her as making a call to action. With the mobilized fundamentalist community, they see the culture secularising as a culture war. In fact, a cosmic battle between Good and Evil.

There are a number of issues like it. But this rhetoric appeals to the Evangelical base of the Republican Party now.

There are plenty of White Evangelicals that fight for women in the home, having lots of babies early, marrying early, not being in the political life, not to speak out for their rights, and so on. That country is truly divided now.

Coulter speaks for one base, often white, Christian, married, well-to-do, Evangelical, and Republican men and women. It shows in the voting patterns too.

Uneducated married white women voted for Trump. Black women, educated women, and single white women did not (as much). Since 2001 to, at last, 2007, Coulter has been consistent on this point.

This may become a clarion call to some of the base, as with some cultural commentators questioning the ability of men and women to work together. Last word to Coulter:

If we took away women's right to vote, we'd never have to worry about another Democrat president. It's kind of a pipe dream, it's a personal fantasy of mine, but I don't think it's going to happen. And it is a good way of making the point that women are voting so stupidly, at least single women.

(interview with New York Observer 2007–10–02, quoted in “Coulter: “If we took away women’s right to vote, we’d never have to worry about another Democrat president””, Media Matters for America, 4 October 2007)

Trouble for Construction in Fredericton

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

November 11, 2018

According to *CBC News*, there are some ongoing and upcoming headaches for the Fredericton folks based on the summer road construction.

The general manager of the business improvement organization talked about the scrambling for some of the owners of some of the companies. They have been cut from business due to the construction going on, which is causing a loss of income for some of the business owners.

Bruce McCormack, General Manager of Downtown Fredericton Inc., talked about the ways in which the City of Fredericton have not been able to communicate with the local businesses in an effective way.

“He said they could have better planned around the periods of congested traffic and loss of parking spaces if given sufficient notice when the intersection at Regent and Queen streets was closing,” *CBC News* stated.

The city failed to provide sufficient notice to the businesses in Fredericton. They suffered for it.

“We realize that construction has to work and we need that infrastructure, so we’re willing to work with the city, but we need to know the information,” McCormack opined, “There’s got to be a balance.”

The construction will cost the restaurant owners about \$100,000 in total. Fredericton has 22 main construction initiatives ongoing including the renewal of the sewer mains in St. Anne’s Point Boulevard.

This will close a main part of the city for 11 weeks. The article continued, “City engineer John Lewis outlined five more major construction projects — Smythe Street, Forest Hill Road, Lincoln Road, Riverside Drive and Sunset Drive — that will take place over the next several weeks.”

Terrah Short on Mental Health, Resilience, and Coping

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

November 22, 2018

Terrah Short earned a Bachelor's in Philosophy (Analytic) with a Minor in Disaster Risk Reduction from Western Washington University in March 2017. She is a product of a working single father and the Puget Sound area of Western Washington in the United States of America. We met briefly through some model united nations work. Here we talk about her views, background, and work.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What is your background in brief?

Terrah Short: I am a first-generation college graduate with a Bachelor's in Philosophy (Analytic) and a minor in Disaster Risk Reduction from Western Washington University in March of 2017. I've grown up in the Puget Sound area of Western Washington, raised by a working single father.

Jacobsen: In reflection on early upbringing and background, what early intellectual interests and difficulties in pursuing them?

Short: I learned to read from an early age and I was always encouraged to read. Reading and writing became my passion early on, and it became both something I enjoyed but also something that allowed me to escape. I enjoyed reading mostly fiction, but even in elementary school, I was fascinated by the way the world worked. I checked out as many books on as many scientific topics as I could. However, though I did not struggle with my reading and writing skills, my science and math skills were hindered by my ability to pay attention to details, grasp mathematical concepts, and follow instructions as in-depth as were required to be precise and successful in science. Music became the third area, besides reading and writing, that I was truly able to completely wrap my mind around and immerse myself into.

Jacobsen: How were those interests reflected in academic studies? How are those difficulties reflected in potential hiccups in academic studies?

Short: My high school allowed me to branch out to the beginnings of the topics that really interested me, which expanded more so in college. I was able to participate in essentially all the musical courses I wanted: concert band, jazz band, and concert choir. I was able to excel in English courses by testing out of freshman English and being able to move forward with higher level courses. Being around the right teachers got me connected with journalism and other styles of writing, such as taking my poetry seriously. At university, I was able to take a variety of courses to explore my interests, which were across the board, but I found myself gravitating towards philosophy courses as well as courses that helped me look in-depth into humanity, how we interact, such as social justice focused courses, anthropology, and other humanities.

Jacobsen: You have taken a role in leading and Model United Nations. How has this helped with intellectual development?

Short: The great thing about Model United Nations is that it did not have to stop once I graduated from college. I found MUN my sophomore year and I had no idea something like it had existed. It

is something I wish had been at my high school, though I am not sure it would've had the same impact it did finding this community in college. MUN provided me with a place to develop my interpersonal skills, research skills, my ability to create meaningful arguments, to take a position that might not be my own for the sake of simulation, and one of my largest areas of growth was in my public speaking. Though there is still constantly room for me to grow, my writing and research skills in the style of MUN have improved conference by conference, and though I consider writing in general a strong suit, that is not always the case for MUN. So, it is very good for me to continue to have this challenge to meet head on conference after conference, especially as I work to figure out what my next steps academically are.

Jacobsen: How has mental illness manifested in your own life? You only have to divulge as much as you feel comfortable with at this time.

Short: Mental illness has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. I was a terribly anxious child who also lived with undiagnosed ADHD, and later on, depression. Though the anxiety is what I remember most vividly as a child. Being afraid to sleep, terrified of death and loss. It often felt like I was going through an existential crisis every week because of how deeply I felt the dread of death, of an eternity of nothingness. I was raised Catholic, but I was never satisfied with the explanations provided, especially surrounding death, the afterlife, things that differed from the scientific facts I learned and read about in school, and so on. I'd experienced loss early on, my paternal great-grandfather had died in front of myself and many of my family members unexpectedly at the age of 5. Fairly consistently from then on death was a major part of my life, as were major bouts of uncertainty with my mother, who was a heroin addict who lived with her own mental illnesses as well as Crohn's disease. Her diseases often exacerbated one another.

So, starting around age 12, my depression began to manifest through severe isolation, numbness, hopelessness and using escapism and self-harm to manage what I was going through while still maintaining my grades as best I could. My anxiety and depression fed off one another, as did the undiagnosed ADHD, that was not diagnosed until college.

Against what was best for me, I was quite good at masking or hiding how bad things got for me, and it almost made it worse how hyper-aware I was of the logical and emotional side of what I was experiencing. I could understand that I was going to be okay, that my brain wasn't healthy and that I needed other kinds of support, but it often frustrated me that I couldn't make the pain of the mental illnesses resolve with simply knowing I was illogically feeling like the world was ending or that everyone hated me and I was an absolute failure.

Off and on I was able to advocate for myself that I needed more support than just talking to my dad or my grandmother, and this was something they often didn't understand. Why would I need someone other than them to talk to? Why did I need to take medication or pay someone to listen to me? I pushed and pushed because it's what I wanted and eventually I was able to start my journey of finding the right combination of medications to help support me as I went through life and therapies to help me manage what I was going through.

More recently, physical health, as well as an injury, have resulted in a large relapse into a major depressive episode that has been quite consuming, challenging my ability to function, participate in the things I love, feel like a person worth interacting with, and so on.

Jacobsen: Are there any other associated disabilities alongside the mental illness? How does this impact functioning in life? How does this seem to impact other people's perspective of you?

Short: I live with Crohn's disease, an inflammatory bowel disease that can affect all areas of the digestive tract that can lead to abdominal pain, severe diarrhea, weight loss, malnutrition, increased risks of colon and related cancers, and also manifests in extraintestinal symptoms such as joint pain, fatigue, skin problems, eye problems, kidney and liver damage, and other issues related to complications from treatments. There is no cure for Crohn's disease.

My life is severely impacted by Crohn's, affecting what I can eat, my energy levels (which are also severely affected by my depression when it's at its worst), and the fact that often my life must revolve around my medications. Primarily, every six weeks I have an infusion of an immunosuppressive biologic called Remicade that has its own plethora of risks and is very expensive.

I feel that because my disability is invisible and chronic, and because it varies in its severity based on the success of my current treatment and other variables in life, that I am often perceived as unreliable, flaky, and often fundamentally misunderstood. There are days that I can pass and function as a normal person my age would, but that could lead to a large setback and require a longer recovery time from a simple night out at the bars with friends. I never truly know how my next day is going to be, but there are many factors that allow me to predict which direction I'm headed and how to best mitigate the more severe end of my symptoms.

Jacobsen: What should people say to those meant to mental illness and with disabilities? What should they, certainly, not say to those same people?

Short: Honestly, there is not one thing someone can say to an individual with a mental illness, disability, or both. Just as folks not living with mental illness or disability have days when they're down, struggling, or sick would not all need to hear the same thing, neither do those who are not able-bodied or living with mental illness. I think there are definitely some things *not* to say, such as: You don't look sick! You're too put together to have an x mental illness or x disability. But you have it so good, why are you depressed? You're too young to be in that much pain or to be that sick. You're just self-diagnosing. But you have so many friends, you shouldn't feel alone. People have it so much worse.

There are so many things, some that seem so innocuous, that can have such a deep, painful impact on those living with mental illness or disability.

Jacobsen: What are some myths about mental illness? What are some myths about disabilities? What truths dispel those myths in either case?

Short: We will get better and not need medicine or talk therapy for the rest of our lives. We'll grow out of it. Some do, some are able to get through what has been causing them so much pain, whether it be resolving a deeply seeded issue, getting through a bout of situational depression, which differs from the major depressive disorder. Similarly, with a disability, some disabilities and illnesses are temporary, but many are not. Wishing us well or to get better soon is sometimes quite painful to hear when we know for a fact there is no cure or that better is never permanent nor is it ever much past the threshold of our norm.

Some painful myths that I have noticed for myself and my friends who also live with mental illness and/or a disability is that we cannot truly have meaningful, fulfilling romantic relationships, can't or don't have sex, we are a drain on the system, we don't work, that we just want pity, or that we don't have the same aspirations and dreams that folks not living with mental illness or disability do. It seems silly to think that there are people who believe these sorts of things about those of us living with these conditions, but there are people out there like that. People who believe we should not be allowed to reproduce, make our own decisions about our bodies, and its that sort of ignorance and sometimes straight up hatred that can cause the most pain. Though at this moment I am speaking mostly for myself and how I perceive the world around me, I cannot say with complete certainty what others with mental illness or disability are feeling, I do have some consensus from my friends from conversations we've had. I honestly could go on and on about this topic because right now in society, so much is working against folks living with mental illness or disability, especially if they are not cis-white heterosexual middle-class men and women.

Jacobsen: Have you lost anyone to suicide? What was the event? What was your relation to them? What was the personal and social reaction to it? How do you cope? How do you move forward after the loss?

Short: Yes, I have lost two people in my life. The first was one of my best friend's older brother's in high school. He disappeared and was found in his car. He was the big brother and we were the annoying kid sister and her friend when we were at the house. We were all confused, not knowing something was so wrong that he was suicidal.

The one that had a more profound impact was my mother's suicide. As I stated partly in an answer to a previous question, my mother was a heroin addict who was constantly between being clean and relapse, as many addicts are. She also had lived with depression; her life was not an easy one. She was born with a lazy eye, which was with her through her life and caused her anxiety and confidence issues. She was a brilliant young woman, with a lot of potentials, but her mother, my namesake Terri, suffered from alcoholism and drug addiction. It was not a cycle she was able to break. She also lived with Crohn's disease, which was made much worse by her inability to take care of herself, her cigarette habit, as well as her heroin addiction. She was constantly in and out of the hospital, and this made me both numb to her telling us she was dying as well as made me severely anxious to be anywhere near a hospital.

The beginning of the end for her was after she had become severely ill in August of 2009 and had to be admitted to the hospital. She stayed in the hospital for 99 days. I visited her one time, and it was a traumatizing experience because she was a 35-year-old woman who looked like she was in her fifties, bed bound, and extremely ill. Things began to improve for her, she began to heal but was on dialysis, unable to walk, and soon enough "too well" to be kept in the hospital. She called my dad and me, asking if she could stay with us, and though ultimately it was not my decision, I told her no, I was in high school and wanted to not be held down by her anymore, I needed my space and could not imagine her living with my dad and I. I do know now that regardless of what I had decided, my dad would not have let her live with us. But she had nowhere to go, she'd worn out every family member over the years, so in the end, she was released from the hospital and went to stay with a friend. Twelve hours later, on November 3, 2009, she'd be found dead.

I got a call from my dad after school, I had gone to my boyfriend at the time's house, and I was annoyed my dad was calling because he had given me permission to go to my boyfriend's house.

He told me I had to come home, and I told him I was given permission to go out that day. Well, the next thing he said made my heart stop and I was unable to process anything nor do anything but sob for ten minutes. “Your mom is with the angels now.”

Once I calmed down enough to tell my boyfriend what happened, he took me home, my grandma and my dad were both home and I sat there with them. I don’t remember much of that time processing it.

Now, we found out later on when I ordered the autopsy report from the coroner’s office that she died by an overdose of Benadryl and OxyContin that she had crushed and put into her dialysis catheter. She was not a dumb person, she knew what she was doing, but maybe she was just in pain and wanted to get some sleep... That’s something we’ll never know. She was alone. She left no note. She just left questions and a relationship that would stay one sided and painful.

Most often reactions to this are sympathy and an inability to quite understand what to do or say in response. My reaction was anger, immense sorrow, numbness, and overwhelming pain. Coping has not been consistent. It has been writing, music, crying, spending time with animals, drowning myself in sleep, in books, in video games. I have continued to take medication to manage my depression, anxiety, and grief. In the end, there has never been one thing that helps all of the time, nine years later, most often it just is not having to focus on it.

I move forward by being an advocate for mental health awareness, by trying to be as honest as I can about my mental illness and my experiences, to help others feel like they’re not alone, that there are others who experience similar pains and loss. I try to move forward by learning to accept, however, I have not made that much headway in that respect.

There will never be a recovery from this, similarly, as there is no cure for my depression, my anxiety, my Crohn’s; my mother’s suicide will always be a part of my life, but I am capable of turning all this pain and grief into something that will help others.

In the end, one of the things that help me the most with everything that I live with, that challenges me, is my ability to use my own experiences and pain to advocate for and help others on a personal, and hopefully on a systemic and institutional, level so we can be a healthier society.

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

Indian Fashion

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

November 26, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What is your background? How did you get here?

Prateek: So, I was born in India. I am Indian. I went to a boarding school. Post that, I didn't go to college. I was trying to be a jack of all trades back then. I started a few small — I wouldn't say completely startups, but I kept doing a few things just to make money, so walking into a startup.

It was compensating for the fact that I didn't go to college, so it was learning in the real world. Post that, I applied to a couple of jobs in New York because I always wanted to live there and also of all the jobs that I applied to, only one company got back, which was JP Morgan. I was offered a couple of rounds of interviews. I got the job.

I still do not understand why because I was extremely under qualified for the job, for the position. However, because I so wanted to be there and work, everything fell in place because of that. So, I didn't get through.

I worked there for a half a year and I realized, that is when I realized, that this is not what I want, this is not what I to do. I would follow something that I enjoy. That was a battle — fashion design, art, all of that.

So, then I could go back to studying, go to a fashion school, a design school, and use whatever money I had saved over a year and a half of working at JP Morgan, I could use that money to start my own brand.

So, the latter seemed a little more probable idea, although it could fail miserably because you do not have a fashion background, that seemed more sensible. I started developing the idea, took about a year.

During that period, I was visiting many factories to see how products were made, where fabrics come from, visiting farms to see where the cotton grows and all of it, just trying to go behind the scene.

That is when I realized that how — what a big, we are in such a mess. How terrible the factories are, how the working conditions are pathetic, the farms are bad; farmers are in debt. The supply chain has completely screwed up.

The middlemen are making lots of money. They're exploiting everyone else: the farmers or the workers. All the problems that the fashion industry faces started coming to light. India is a good place to know that because it is hard because labor laws are so strong in the US, say, any developed country.

That it is very hard for someone to practice in unethical ways. It is not easy to have a garment factory in the US and exploit because labor laws are very strong there. The owners can be taken, strict action can be taken; although, there are many.

There are a few unfairly run garment workshops in America, but the number is far, far bigger when it is India, Bangladesh, Turkey, Pakistan. So, that is why India was a good place to understand what goes behind the scene. So, when I visited a couple of places to see how the products are made.

So, I always pretended to be a buyer just so they let me in. Otherwise, you can't just walk into a factory and say, "I want to see it." There were many emails exchanged before. I was, "Okay, I live here and there. I want to place so many orders and blah, blah, blah...I want to see your factory and all of that."

Once I went, that is when I realized how this is messed up. then you keep going, keep going back to the chain. You go to the factories, then you see where the thing happens. You see the farm. You interact with the farmers, then you read a lot about it.

That is when I realized this needs to be changed. I know it is not something that can happen overnight, in a year or two, because the fashion industry is surely old and it is been set in its ways, but a small start of doing things the correct way, so to say, or differently, can lead to a bigger change in times to come.

So, I decided to set up a small workshop where we would work — that is when the whole planning thing happened. Now, we need to change this, how can we do that. So, of course, that is when the sustainability side came in.

Okay, we need to be ethical. We need to pay the workers properly. We need to have proper working conditions. We need to provide them with safety measures. When they're working during the day, they need to be given lunch at subsidized prices.

When you actually uplift the standard of the workers, you see what's wrong with other factories and workshops and you try and change that. So, you try implementing ways where you can bring in that change.

So, those things took about 18 months to get in place, to understand what's happening, to understand how the product is made because I knew what I wanted. I knew the designs. I could design. I know what colors I want. This is the print I want; this is how the product should look, this is the fit I want.

But how to make that? I had absolutely had no idea. I didn't know what cotton to use. So, there was trial and error, lots of learning, lots of visiting these factories, which now I know. So, that is when the whole ethical component.

Then I realized how cotton is having a very negative impact on the fields, on the environment in general, because it is one of the most chemical consuming crops. So, that is when the idea of being organic arose.

The first few t-shirts we made three and a half years ago, as a trial to understand how a t-shirt is made. Not to use organic cotton because we didn't know about it. Then once we started wearing them to test them and to wash them, I felt itchy. I didn't like it.

Okay, how should we improve this? That is when I started studying, started understanding and reading about cotton and fabrics. That is where organic cotton came into place. So, let's visit factories that have knit organic cotton.

So, we started visiting them. Then we started visiting farms that grow organic cotton. So, if you say it is organic cotton, I just can't believe it is organic cotton. I need to see how it is done. I need to prove that it actually is organic cotton.

So, we spend some time there trying to understand how it is all there. Of course, they're all certified, but still, farmers, visiting those farms, seeing how it is grown, what fertilizers are used, if natural manure is used and so on.

Jacobsen: How did things play out next for you?

Prateek: That is when I decided, "Let's implement, let's be organic, let's just go 100 percent organic. Maybe, we'll have temptations. Maybe, we'll have limited fabrics to work with, limited colors to work with, but it'll be the best fit to go forward."

So, that is how, but again there were many hurdles. Organic cotton is just 2 percent of all the cotton in the world. It is so hard to acquire it, as into source organic cotton because what little is grown, usually many bigger companies, they tend to buy it.

The fabrics sell off quickly. So, for us to be able to source organic cotton and get good quality of organic cotton was tough, I had to pester this Indian company. It is one of the best in the world for its organic cotton.

They were initially being reluctant to even meet. It took almost two months of sending them an email every day and going to their office every single day, just beating the door down basically. *I will not take "no" for an answer.*

I need to meet this person who owns the company. I need to meet him. Every single day, I used to send him an email, go to his office, try to fix a meeting. Over time, he knew who I was, then he eventually did agree to meet me.

I said, "Okay, I know we are a very small company. We are just starting off. I cannot match up to the buyers that you have, but I do want to work on this. I know you can supply. I know you can give you whatever fabrics you have."

So, eventually, he agreed and we came down to a fixed price and all of that. So, he agreed to give us stock fabrics. For example, if a bigger company orders for 500 kilograms of x color and they end up taking, say, 400 or 450 kilograms, so whatever is left, the other 50, he would give it to me, at a subsidized price.

So, my limitation, I cannot choose a color. I cannot choose a fabric, but at least I'm getting organic fabrics, and then I used to design according to what fabrics or colors that we have. So, I've never been to fashion school.

The easiest thing for me to design was a t-shirt because I wear them. I know what I would want and how I would want them to be. So, that was the easiest for us, to start with, so I started with about 9 t-shirts in the first round, where we made 50 pieces of each.

By the time we came up, then, of course, we took about 6 months to barely sell half of them. But that gave us a lot of feedback. Okay, these are the things that we need to improve, these are the things that are nice, people like the quality, the print quality, the neck, whatever issues that came back, the feedback was constructive.

So, by the time we moved down to a second collection, it was much wider. We had about 20 t-shirts. The quantity was also a bit more. We had overcome the negatives of what the first batch had to offer.

Now, we are in our third season where we are approximately 80 styles, including sweatshirts, tank tops, t-shirts, and so on. We still have not been able to push our sales as much as we would like to, but it is definitely better than what it was compared to the first season.

So, that is how it all started and that is where we got here.

When you're buying the t-shirt that you're wearing, you do not know where it comes from, how it is being made. It is only when you go behind the scene. Sometimes, I actually fail to understand how a company, say, Zara, or H&M, how they have a new collection every 15 days.

I do not understand that. Today, we have a fashion week. For example, usually big companies like Gucci or Louis Vuitton, they come up with the fashion week, when they showcase the collection in fashion week; they're always six months ahead.

For example, spring/summer 2017 would be showcased in December 2016. December 2016 is when a big brand would showcase their collection of what they're going to launch six months from now.

What Zara does is pretty much offer the fashion show within 15 days, apply the same concept into more ready to wear stuff and then they launch in stores; so, I'm baffled. How do they do that in 15 days? Do they have robots working for them, or are they making those products on a ship, and by the time the ship docks at a new place, at the store, the products are done?

So, when you're buying these products. You never realize what goes behind the scenes. Only when you actually go and check these factories out. I did visit factories with H&M, Zara, and other people like these.

These brands make their products and most of them are made in India. That is when I realized, the whole interest towards articles — that is when I came to know that. Now, there's an opportunity for us to change things, to bring about the change.

So, that is when I got interested in ethical and sustainable fashion.

Jacobsen: How did your educational/professional experience inform fashion work?

Prateek: I was always interested in art design, clothes. I was always designing, selecting clothes for other people or for myself, or even looking at that. Or even looking at people who were wearing nice things and getting inspired by that. So, there was always that.

Then I knew that this is the product line I want and this is the design I have in mind and that is how I want to do it. However, I also feel all my work experiences of, say working in a startup, starting small businesses when I was in school, or little financial deals that I have because I studied finance while I was in school.

So, all of that did inform the fashion work. Then, of course, working with JP Morgan where you are always crunching numbers, that did help me a budget or negotiate prices. Trying to come up with the cost model, where we can make things in the budget and then also be able to sell it, all of that stuff.

So, that experience helps. All the things inclined towards fashion and design. That did help me develop the idea and the plan. The importance of it is very high. So I know, as I said, the change cannot be overnight or repeated over a year or two.

It is a movement; it is an evolution in its own way. So, it would take time. It also comes under the conscience of the person who was behind the brand. People who are running the brand. When they genuinely want to be ethical and sustainable, they will be.

If one of these bigger companies genuinely wants to be ethical, they have all the money in the world to do so. If they want to be environmentally friendly, they have all the money in the world to do so.

But the fact is, for them, profits are so important and they need to answer their shareholders and investors that they do not care about the whole sustainable and ethical part of fashion. All they're concerned about is if they made 10 billion dollars in season 1.

They need to make 15 billion dollars in season 2. It is the people running the company who need to be genuinely interested in being ethical and sustainable. So, no matter what, they will not care about them or they would focus on ethical and sustainable fashion.

For example, I find it funny when H&M says that they have this conscious collection. Or an eco-friendly collection.

Jacobsen: It becomes a niche within their entire market rather than the entire market for them.

Prateek: Yes, but it is sticking because consumers are for the ride if you can take out those ten t-shirts and those ten pants, ethically made, why can't you do that with the other 99 percent of your collection?

If you can do that for 1 percent of your collection, what is stopping you from taking the other 99 percent the same way? So, you're doing exactly what they're doing to make the other products. They're just labeling it ethically made or organic, and then they're charging 5 or 10 dollars extra on top of that.

So, they're selling the same product to the same consumer, but saying that it is all packaged well and all goody good — and they're charging 10 dollars more. That is how I see it. If you can get 100 t-shirts out of the ones that you're making per year if you can make one which is ethical and sustainable and organic, what is stopping you from changing the other 99 percent?

So, it is a farce in the company when H&M does that. Genuinely ethical brands — it is either 100 percent or it is not. You can't be selective. This 1 percent of our collection is ethical and the other is not.

It is just good marketing and trying to have a good feeling. So, it is very important for bigger brands to actually consciously take steps to do that, but because the company stops them from doing so, then that lets smaller companies like ours come up or other smaller brands around the world.

There's many of them coming up right now. It is very important. That is where the extension of a brand also comes in because we realize that many smaller brands and designers do not have the platform to sell whatever they make and many them, even locally many they have very sustainable collections.

Everything is ethical. So, we have this additional platform on our website where we curate smaller designers who do not have a presence online or offline but are ethical, sustainable, are using

organic and natural fabrics, are using local fabrics, so we are giving them a platform to showcase their work also.

So, if you go on our website, you see the women's collection, the kid's collection, are all curated from these designers. These small local designers or brands, which do not have a presence.

So, that is why it is important to even give these designers and companies a platform to sell.

So, that is another addition to what has been recently started just in a couple of months. It was important for buyers and sellers. It is all a cycle when you become a part of it. It is the importance of being a fair trade.

Many people can say it is fair trade, to be honest. How do you verify it? That is where the certification becomes a little important, but eventually, it is eventually the conscience of the brand that would make them fair or not.

It is very important to buy fair trade. But how do you determine what is fair trade or not? It is very tough. So, what is the importance of fair trade products for buyers? The thing I feel good about being sustainable and fair trade is because our products would last longer than a fast fashion product.

So, bigger brands, they intentionally made products which do not go beyond six months or eight months because then that would push you to buy their new collection. Whereas our products, we make that no matter how many times you wash them, it still looks good.

It looks new. You can wear them over seasons, over years; you can put them aside for a couple of months and then bring them out again. They'll still hold strong. So, it is very important to buy fair trade products because there's good quality assurance there.

Then you're getting a nice product, which would last you longer. So, in the long run, you do end up saving money also. Emma Watson is doing a good job when it comes to supporting ethical fashion. She's quite vocal about it as well.

She tends to opt for brands or even local designers that do. That is actively ethical and sustainable. So, she is a leader. So, the brand started with the name, which I just came up with. We were scribbling words actually all over this big board that we had at our garage where we started out from and the two names, the two words "brown" and "boy" happened to be next to each other.

We liked the whole name. It doesn't have any meaning to it, but it just sounds interesting and sticks to you. And, so that is why we just stuck with that name. It sits about being ethical, sustainable.

Also, we are one of the few brands that are ethical and sustainable. We feel that we've taken much more responsibility on ourselves for being frontrunners in other things that we believe in.

For example, *we were one of the first brands in the world to feature a trans model.*

So, we feel that we can use the platform of our brand. We can use the platform of our brand to stand up for things that we believe in, including ethical practices and sustainability, now we are vegan also.

Plus, to promote, or to stand up for equal rights, there is an idea. I came across a friend of mine who is trans, who is transgender, so we decided to feature him in our catalog and actively talk about it so that there is acceptance.

Similarly, we do the same thing for LGBT all over the world, particularly in countries where it is illegal too. Particularly, where it is illegal or where it is a criminal offense to be gay; so, we are actively supporting groups that are doing that, and we are speaking about it.

We also spoke in favor of saving refugees, for equal rights for women. We recently partnered with a small Canadian company. They make a paddle for men, women, and kids and a percent of their revenue goes towards children in underprivileged India.

So, we are partnering with brands. We are talking with another small movement in the US where we went from the new collection that we will be launching soon. We will be putting an orange zig-zag tag, on the side.

It is about creating awareness about child abuse. So, we are always constantly partnering and looking out for things that we believe in that needs topics to be discussed, things that we need to stand on.

So, we actively fight for LGBT rights in India, because it is illegal — it is a criminal offense to be gay in India, so we do fight for that. We do fight for trans rights here, and other places as well, and for Syrian refugees.

Talking about these topics and actively using the brand to fight for equal rights in our own small way, I know we are not creating a revolution, but probably even if one person, even if we reach out to one person and we change their minds a bit, or we force them to think, we would consider ourselves as successful in some way.

Those are the few things. We are also working on a few other ideas of how we can actively push these things at the forefront and talk about them. So, these are one of the few things that we as a brand have taken upon us to do.

Jacobsen: What are some of the featured products?

Prateek: So, we started off with t-shirts because that was honestly the easiest thing to design in terms of fit, of the pattern. Then we move onto sweatshirts, tank tops, pants. Now, we are working on a women's collection as well.

My personal favorite is the upcycle collection where, when you're working, the package we work on, the package we design, we are trying to minimize waste also. So, when we are cutting a t-shirt, a lot of extra fabric goes to waste.

So, we have put our pattern in such a way that we maximize the output per kilogram of fabric and eventually, there is some amount of waste that will come out. That is something you cannot do without.

If you are cutting a fabric, there is a waste. But we can minimize that. What is left of fabrics we have, we come up with this upcycle collection. So, now, it is combining two fabrics or adding a pocket to a fabric or using that extra fabric, the waste fabric, the cuts, and incorporating them in design in such a way that we do not have to throw them in landfills.

We can use them in making designs. We send for recycling, to the factories where we bought our fabric from. So, part of it goes into recycling, but a large part of it, we try to incorporate it into our design.

So, if you see our upcycle design, it is cross patterns, or having pockets or using multiple colors in the same t-shirt. So, these are all additional fabrics. That is one of our features; it is something I'm

quite excited about because it is minimizing waste and then creating an entirely new collection out of it.

Jacobsen: What is your customer base — the demographics?

Prateek: The customer base and demographics, anyone who is ethically inclined or conscious about where their product comes from would be our customer base. If you compare our prices to other brands, other ethical and organic brands; our pricing is far lower than what they have priced.

That is also intensive because I do not want it to be a snobby brand, first of all. Secondly, I want young people, you and I, to be part of the whole movement. Now, a young person who is just out of or just in college or is about to start a job does not have 60, 70 dollars to pay for a t-shirt.

But if they're paying 20 dollars for a t-shirt at Zara or H&M or even 20 to 25 dollars, then if you price an ethical and organic product at the same amount then they will be pushed towards buying, choosing ethical.

So, trying to price our products as any other regular brand would do, so that young people are thinking, "Okay, I have a choice. Should I buy a 25-dollar shirt from Zara or should I buy a 25-dollar shirt from a brown boy — a t-shirt that is ethical, organic, and would last me much longer than 3 washes?"

So, that is why they're consciously priced compared. If you're adding all the discounts we are giving, sometimes it comes lower than that. So, this is something that we are consciously doing so that young people come into the whole cycle of choosing ethical.

They do not have to be a hipster or they do not have to pay 50 bucks, 60 bucks, for a t-shirt and then show off about it. They can be ethical. They can be sustainable, organic, at a low price for a t-shirt. This is hard for us in a way.

So, considering all the costs we incur, we are barely making any profits. Our goal is to make it so that we have enough revenues to expand our collection and bring new designs the next season and reach out to more people.

We are not focusing on making 100 percent profits, as of now. Our focus is to make it so that we are able to sustain a sustainable company. Eventually a sustainable company, a different company needs to be sustained; if you start selling products at extremely low prices or a loss, they will not be able to sustain the whole idea of it.

So, we are just pricing ourselves enough so that we can sustain the brand in the long run. It is taking small steps, taking baby steps every season so that we bring in more and more people under this movement or banner, and to bring in young people.

So, I've made myself clear when I say that as a brand we do strongly stand for human rights and workers' rights and not only in the field of fashion, but outside of it as well. Bangladesh is actually very close to where I stay and where our factories are.

It is just a three-hour train ride and an hour's flight away. So, I know that Bangladesh also needs many ethical changes when it comes to their structure of production. And it is quite similar to India too.

Honestly, because I'm from India and I spent 8 months here. It gives me an opportunity to bring about that change in India. So, I'm doing that here. So, human rights are extremely important for us.

So, what I did was when we started out, so the workshop that we first made, we went to these old factories that we visited where the workers were working in poor conditions. I simply asked and gave them an offer to work for us at a better price.

They'll have better wages because now we are paying them ethically. They'll have better, shorter things and better working conditions. The benefit with these workers was that I'm not hiring 100 people.

I was barely able to get 15 people on board, 15 workers. But even that 15 is a change. The benefit was they're getting a better working condition. They're getting better wages. They're getting subsidized food. All of that.

For me, the benefit was I did not know anything about how a t-shirt was made. These workers came with the know-how. So, their conditions are also improving, plus we are getting a skill, we are getting a lot.

We are getting 15 with experience. So, when I would design, I would always consult them. Okay, should we do it this way? Would that be a better stitch? What else we can do? What is a new way we can do it?

So, they also had many inputs to give in the beginning. We poached workers from other factories that were unethical and we brought them to ours. So, I know it might not sound the idealistic way to go about it, but that it was good for them also because now their standard of working is improving.

We are pulling people out of garment factories, which are unethical. So, that is how we started with our first workshop. We were very small back then. It has been a year and a half. Now, we try and work with others because we realize that we cannot design and create a brand at the same time at our own workshop.

So, it is sailing on two boats. We decided to gradually start delegating work to ethical and fair trade certified factories because that way we will be able to concentrate more on building the brand on the front end; whereas, the manufacturing is being taken care of.

But even then we have appointed personnel at the factory making certain that everything is being followed. Everything that is being done is followed strictly by ethical standards. We have a hawk's eye on the manufacturing center to make sure that everything is asked for how it should be.

It is all ethical. It is all keeping the workers in mind. So, that bit is also now taken care of so it gives us more time to invest and work on building the brand, of coming up with new ideas, of partnering with newer young artists, with smaller designers, and so on.

So, it is helping us do all the front end bit a little more actively. So, again, a big part of it is of course to have equal opportunities for women and child labor is a big issue in India. We are in our own way trying to fight that.

We are trying to create awareness about it too. Our workshops do not encourage or indulge in it anyway. It is hard to bring about a change or to force other factories to follow this. But the only way we can do this is by, eventually, if you give the parent the opportunity to send the child to school, they will not send their child to work.

So, that is where we are deciding to deal with the issue. For example, our workers who work for us, our craftsmen; we give them an opportunity to send their kids to school so that they have a better shot in the future.

They do not have to send their kids to a farm or to a factory or to a store to work. That is where tackling the problem would be effective. It is where it all starts from. Rather than putting a ban on a factory, because no matter what, people find ways to overcome those, and finding nooks and crannies where they make things workable.

It is when you give them opportunities or options, where you can you send your kids to school; you do not have to send them to work. We are giving you this opportunity. We try to bring systems where we are helping them send their kids to school, so they do not end up working in factories and places that.

With women, we make sure that we employ them and give them equal opportunities in employment. Many factories, many workers are men and not many women working, so we try to push employing more women.

So, we are going to a few villages in rural India where these women have these skills which are being passed down from generation to generation, and we are trying to divide these patterns or these stitching techniques into more modern designs.

Here, we will only be working with women and giving them an opportunity to do these designs. We are working on a home collection also of ceramic products, which we launched in 2016/17. Even that entire range would be handmade by women, these are small ways that we are trying to encourage to be part of the entire chain, to keep them away from exploitation, and also keeping these small traditions and craftsmen skills alive.

No one is using them. They stopped practicing it. So, we are trying to revive these embroidery techniques, designs, patterns. The women that work for us have the same right that men have, same working conditions, and same pay.

We are trying, in the ceramic collection we come up with, to make all the t-shirts bridge the gap and not only in small ways but in much bigger ways. Many times women are forced into doing certain things, which we are trying to fight against.

All of this happens when you are creating awareness, more than anything else. Awareness creation is talking to them at a much more grass root level, so that is where we are trying to make an impact or trying to implement new ideas.

Jacobsen: Child labor and slavery are problems, major ones. These include children throughout the world. Tens of millions of children in the case of child labor and a few million for child slavery. How can individuals get the word out about these other rights violations?

Prateek: Child labor is a big, big issue in India. It is a huge issue. Many laws have been passed against it but still, it is rampant. I see that on a very regular basis here. I've got into many fights and arguments with many establishments in my city when it comes to this.

No matter how many rules and regulations we come up with, problems can be tackled when you bring a change in the chain of order, the way the person thinks. So, when you are giving them opportunities, e.g., when you give the parents an opportunity to send their kids to school, that is a very big way to deal with this.

Jacobsen: Any recommended means of contacting Brown Boy?

Prateek: We are always very proactive in working and collaborating with people who are on the same page as us. So, anyone can call us anytime. They can email us. We always love working with startups, with conscious companies, with bloggers, with ethical brands.

For example, with designers who do not have a platform to showcase their work, we love working with them. We love partnering with them. We are working with local artists now to create small collections with them, so that is how startups should be.

So, we are not respecting ourselves or putting ourselves in any box. We are always open to working with new ideas where we feel that we can make, even if it is a small difference, to partnering with young talents, to develop new ideas of how we can bring about change in the way things are.

Because it just encourages me all the more to work, it is refueling yourself with new ideas and new people. An idea implemented and actually turning out to be something. There are absolutely no restrictions and the doors are always open for anyone.

Again, this is something that we will be applying for our new work. The habitat that we are trying to create. It is an open studio. It is a creative hub. It is an incubation center for startups, for creative people, for young talents, for anyone who feels that if they walk through the door, they will be able to gain something out of it.

They will be able to contribute, and they will be able to take something: enhance themselves. So, our company is always open. The best to contact I guess is email, phone.

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

Most Canadians identify as Christian: Indigenous spirituality and culture compatible with Christianity

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

December 2, 2018

More than 2/3rds of Canadians self-identified as Indigenous also identify as Christian.

One of the 94 recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission into residential schools included the church's reconciliation with Canada's First Nations people. The church recently offered a commitment to reconciliation, one day shy of the March 31 deadline.

The National Indigenous Bishop for the Anglican Church of Canada, Mark MacDonald, delivered his church's so-called "commitment to reconcile" with Canada's First Nations people, March 30, 2016, confirming that the church will never partner with cultural genocide, affirming the UN declaration on rights of indigenous people. MacDonald highlighted the new relationship moving forward stating "the churches have said that they will be partners to us in life in a way that before they were partners with what brought so much pain and misery."

The church's commitment is an important one for many First Nations people. Not just because of the role Canadian churches played in the residential school system but because today, two-thirds of aboriginal Canadians identify as Christians.

We don't have a church building. Our faith is built into our culture and our belief that God is with us is built into our traditions.- Jillian Harris, Indigenous Christian studying to become a priest

The Current wanted to explore the future of this relationship and where churches need to go from here to deliver on their promise to reconcile.

Interview with Onkar Sharma on ‘Justifications’ for Circumcision and FGM

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

December 2, 2018

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What are the standard justifications for circumcision, where you live, and around the world?

Onkar Sharma: It's very much practiced all over. As for circumcision, in European countries, it is not practiced as a rule. Now there is a ban; unless, sexual health demands it.

Muslims and Jews quote religion-based tradition. The campaign has been started by groups of young men all over the USA. They are trying hard to ask policymakers to put a ban on such practices. Hindus generally do not practice it. In rare cases, on health grounds but by medical doctors.

Jacobsen: Are justifications for circumcision legitimate or illegitimate? Why are these, typically, imposed on men with circumcision and on women with FGM?

Sharma: It is not legitimate and should be banned all over unless Medical condition (phimosis) calls for it.

Circumcision in no way can prevent masturbation. In fact, it increases the urge for sex. Masturbation is the way to still the urge. More men with circumcised penises masturbate than those without.

Yes, its primary intention was that, even in ancient times, and, more generally, to diminish sexual pleasure for the male. According to religion, sex was supposed to be for procreation, and not for pleasure.

Jacobsen: What would reduce the rate of implementation of them? How can policymakers and health professionals inform the public for health campaigns to reduce this practice based on ignorance?

Sharma: Absolutely correct. If the natural human body were so unhealthy, then Hinduism (Sanatan Dharma) would have disappeared in India centuries ago.

In yoga, the tradition is that the body is the finest tool for achieving wisdom, integrity, and wholeness as a human being, and that, as such, the whole body is to be protected against any non-essential mutilation.

Of course, in the very rare cases of medical necessity, medical intervention is preferable to serious health problems or death.

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

New Humanist Event in Nigeria

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

December 9, 2018

Leo Igwe is the founder of the Nigerian Humanist Movement and former Western and Southern African representative of the International Humanist and Ethical Union. He is among the most prominent African non-religious people from the African continent. When he speaks, many people listen in a serious way.

He holds a Ph.D. from the Bayreuth International School of African Studies at the University of Bayreuth in Germany, having earned a graduate degree in Philosophy from the University of Calabar in Nigeria. Here we talk about a new humanist event.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Looking at the landscape of belief in Nigeria, why is this new event important to maintain the excitement of the secular community there?

Dr. Leo Igwe: This event is important in several respects. First, it is the first of its kind because, at this event, humanists, atheists, agnostics, and freethinkers in Nigeria are meeting to discuss an unusual topic: Leaving Religion.

Humanists are convening to share their stories and experiences. Too often, people who are persecuted for leaving a religion or for renouncing religious beliefs suffer physical attacks and psychological abuses.

Those who are critical of religious icons and doctrines are threatened, harassed and intimidated. Unfortunately, there are no spaces for non-believers, those who exit or question religions to discuss their persecutions and experiences.

Thus, many non-believers live in fear. They suffer silently. Those who doubt or disbelieve religious claims think that they are alone and that their persecution is normal because those who persecute non-believers do so with impunity.

This convention provides a rare and historic platform to break the silence and give the doubters and disbelievers a space to share their stories and register their concerns.

This event is also important because it sends a very important message to the Nigerian society, that there are Nigerians who doubt or disbelieve religious claims, that Nigeria has a vibrant secular community.

In addition, the dominant impression is that the religious public treat others kindly and compassionately including non-believers. In fact, there is seldom the case. This event draws attention to the religious cruelties, to the various ways that the religious maltreat those who exit religion.

Jacobsen: How does this build on prior events?

Igwe: In the past, meetings have been organized to provide a rationalist and humanist perspective to witchcraft related abuses, Osu caste system, religious extremism, and related human rights abuses etc.

These programs presuppose that rationalists and humanists exist in Nigeria but they do not say a lot regarding the conditions and circumstances under which they live and operate.

This convention fulfills that purpose. It builds on the previous activities by focusing on the predicament of humanists and rationalists in the country.

Jacobsen: What will be the highlights of the event?

Igwe: The program will highlight the stories and experiences of those who have abandoned religion and those who are trying to do so. There will be testimonies from those who left the Christian, Islamic and traditional religion.

They will recount their struggles with their families, friends and the community at large. At this event, those who have exited religion will explain the reasons and justifications for their actions. They will also get to meet other apostates in a friendly and welcoming environment.

Jacobsen: What is the main reason for the humanists to attend this event in Nigeria?

Igwe: To get the world to know that they exist and to understand that there is a non-religious demography in this very religious nation. Humanists need to register the fact that the rights, lives, and interests of non-believers matter.

As I noted, humanists need to know that they are not alone. And that those who are persecuted for leaving religion, or for being critical of religion will not walk alone.

Jacobsen: Why is community important for the humanists in Nigeria?

Igwe: A community is a necessity for humanists because one potent mechanism that religious believers use to undermine humanism is ostracization.

They sanction those who exit religion or those who live as non-religious persons. Religious believers cut off family and community ties. They treat non-believers as social outcasts.

Building a community is critical in beating back the tide of persecution and abuse that humanists suffer in Nigeria.

Jacobsen: Where is it? Where can people find out more about it?

Igwe: This event is taking place in Abuja, which is the capital of Nigeria. Abuja is actually in central Nigeria where there have been clashes between Islamic jihadists, herdsmen and Christians.

More information about the event can be found here <https://iheu.org/event/abuja-humanist-convention/>

Jacobsen: Any other information?

Igwe: People who leave religion or who question religious beliefs live in constant fear of their lives, their jobs, businesses, and family relationships.

This is because sanctioning, sometimes violently those who renounce religions or those who criticize religious claims has been part of the religious tradition.

Religion is so visible in Africa mainly because the religious do everything overtly and covertly to suppress, oppress, undermine, exclude and make invisible irreligious and non-religious persons and perspectives.

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

Igwe: It's been my pleasure.

Religious Ideologues Block Gay and Straight Alliance Formations

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

December 15, 2018

According to *Global News*, there are continual roadblocks and struggles for the establishment of gay and straight alliances or GSAs at schools in some parts of the country.

For example, we can look at the situation in Calgary, where safe spaces for LGBTQ+ students continue to be a concern for “teachers and students.” In that, there is deliberate prevention of their establishment.

One student, Jane McNeil, at St. Jean Brebeuf Catholic school in Calgary, Alberta, was referred to a school counselor who said, “He’d go, ‘It’s like this: it’s OK to be left-handed, as long as you write with your right hand.’”

She had, recently, come out as a lesbian there. This was at the start of 2016’s school year. The Alberta Education Minister, David Eggen, penned an open letter with an affirmation of the right of students to form GSAs, as one might expect in a civilized society.

Often, the opposition to the LGBTQ+ community comes from religious fundamentalists and chauvinists who complain about identity politics, where they assert the LGBTQ+ ‘agenda,’ in their terminology, is an ideological position.

When, in fact, the Biblical notion of only two sexes and things coming in “kinds” is both known to be pseudoscience and the original ideologue position. The world is more complicated than the philosophy for kids, or the “childish” — to quote Einstein, found in the supposedly holy text. One enforced on much of the North American society, which is slowly being sloughed off as if a snake molting.

MacNeil, in reaction to the letter, exclaimed, “I was like, ‘Ya! This is the greatest thing that’s ever happened to me! I don’t know if there’s any other gay people here but I can make a safe space for us.’”

The mother of MacNeil spoke to the principal about the creation of a GSA. Immediately, there were blockades by religious ideologues or those possessed by the fervor and zeal of fundamentalist religious ideology.

MacNeil wanted to label the GSA, “GSA”, fair enough. “We voted on the name at least three times... I think if I had just called mine ‘Skittles’ or something, maybe it would be running, but I was determined.”

However, even one year after the GSAs being protected by law, the Catholic system insiders — teachers, six of them, remaining anonymous — spoke about the blockades being put in place to prevent their formation, i.e., religious ideologues chauvinistically preventing the affirmation and implementation of the rights of others in favor of their assumed rights as a religious people.

It is the common narrative of the religious enactment of rights for themselves, at times, and the denial of rights for others, often the LGBTQ+ community or the non-religious in general.

One teacher stated, “I’ve heard of different clubs out there in the Calgary Catholic system called spectrum, or saga, or sassy, or rainbow club or different things... but never GSA.”

The *Global News* team agreed to anonymity for the six Catholic school teachers based on the real fear to their careers and professional lives. MacNeil noted the group was closely monitored by the principal.

Jennifer Woo, the director of instructional services for religion and family life at the Calgary Catholic School District said, “Of course we follow the School Act and we do have policies and procedures in place which can be reviewed and supported by the ministry.”

Eggen remarked that the law states students have the right to have a GSA and then to call the GSA what they wish. Within four months of going out to create the GSA, MacNeil simply switch schools to a public one, now, she is as stated to be “an outspoken advocate for LGBTQ students.”

MacNeil opined, “I was so sick... I was sick from trying to make myself have a safe space, from trying not to cry in religion class, from trying to be as I was.” Now, still a believer in God, she concluded, “I am devout, just in my own way.”

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Add Water

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

December 16, 2018

Evolution is *the* theory of life. Any deviancy simply asks, “How wrong are you?”, rather than, “What alternatives?”

Often, in the creationist community, as seems typical among religious fundamentalists, the leaders are lunatics, exploitative, or ignorant. The followers are often exploited or kept at a low cultural level, including science as culture — knowledge, and process.

My sympathies are with the followers and not the leaders in the sense.

You can ask, “How old is the Earth?” Creationist in public won’t answer or can’t answer, typically. Nonetheless, several paths of evidence, including multiple types of radiometric dating, for example, point to a 4.54-billion-year-old Earth. Biblical literalists estimate 6,000–10,000 years.

One of these is incorrect, to quote Eddie Izzard.

Its other obvious lines of evidence come from the gradualism in other sciences rather than the nonsensical notion of instantaneous creation of any life. Gestation of a child takes time.

For some time, two schools competed: catastrophism and gradualism. Then gradualism simply won out. Things evolve slowly over time. Solar systems develop over longer periods of time. Universes change and unfold slowly over deep time too. Human beings grow and mature in predictable stages too. Not all at once; all signs point to gradualism.

One pseudoscience, as he works from pseudohistorical documents — including the *Bible* — Velikovsky, posited catastrophism and garners many followers on the fringe today, of various stripes of creationist.

A form of catastrophism in the Solar System to explain biblical events with stellar, planetary, and astronomical events, the flood for Noah, the plagues visited upon Egypt, and so on. It’s not science. Why?

It assumes certain things as true then works backward to suit the (Biblical/religious) narrative rather than form the theory based on the evidence from the experiments first. It’s backward in the scientific process and, therefore, pseudoscience.

The proper, and a bad joke, response as to how things arose as life: add water or add time.

Things change slow relative to us, because of long reproductive lifespans — 20–30 years between generations and increasing. Bacteria adapt faster because of faster reproductive cycles. We see an adaptation of organisms to different environments.

With the small adaptations within a species, we simply come to the next notion: take 4.54 billion years, “add ‘water’” or simply add time, and the small changes become the phenomena like speciation.

That is to say, changes within the species over long periods of time leads to speciation or creation of new species. We have, in practical terms, an infinite amount of time to work with here. The theological notions for this are kinds.

But since the Christian God created kinds as extant today, they cannot change into new kinds, as this would violate the principles of God's creation; therefore, the terms one can find in some Christian universities, for example, are micro-evolution, change within species, as a reality, and macro-evolution, change into another species, as an impossibility.

In some places, this is dogma, and it's wrong. In particular, "kind" remains a theological term, and a creationist one, and not a biological sciences term. Species is the biological sciences term. "Kinds" implying a religious world and catastrophism — an incorrect view; "species" implying evolution, gradualism, and biological sciences — a correct view. Why the latter?

Some species become isolated in a bottleneck, geographically, from others, say via geological shifts or climatic events. This can take hundreds of thousands and millions of years for speciation. Adaptive mutations slowly conform to the developing group of the former species to the new environment, where it has been forced by external events to remain now.

Over sufficient time, more bad or useless mutations produce mediocre organisms but others produce functional mutations slightly more advantageous to the organisms in the context of the new and myriad environmental pressures there.

It could even be maintained as a species for millions and millions of years. Some organisms simply do not have pressure to change because of stable geologic conditions for millions of years, whether on land or in the sea. Sometimes, as with Neanderthals, there can be both genocide and interbreeding.

Our ancestors killed them and mated with them. In genetic studies, we have about 3% Neanderthal DNA in us. But the pathways to speciation can be multiple. The bottleneck is one example with new environmental challenges.

What happens to those unable to adapt over time? They die. Survival of the fittest simply meant — not strongest, fastest, and most intelligent but — better suited to the current environment.

One example is human beings and chimpanzees, bonobos, gorillas. We share common ancestry, as animals and primates, with precursors millions of years ago. We evolved differently or founded different evolutionary pathways for survival and reproduction.

We can trace a 100,000-year genome history from the Great Rift Valley to every part of the globe including 12,000–15,000 years ago to North America across the Bering Land Bridge during the last major ice age.

Our earliest archaeological evidence of Indigenous populations in Canada date about the same time. It is about the convergence of evidence in archaeology, in genetics, in geology, and then the massive fossil collections all around the world.

Another, which is only one set of lines of evidence, is, as you mentioned, forms of radiometric dating relevant time periods, whether deep geological time in the tens of millions of years or the deep human recorded history time of only several thousands of years.

Carbon-14 is the most famous. But there's probably more than a dozen including Potassium-Argon. There are many in use at this time. The decay rate of them provides the relative estimates. The radioactive elements have certain half-lives, which help give estimates — plus or minus — as to the age of things.

Different telescope magnifications help for different magnitude research questions in astronomy similar to different radiometric dating methods help for temporal research questions in geology, archaeology, and so on.

In theological terms, this creates new “kinds,” against biblical assertions, or, in biological sciences terms, new “species,” in line with modern unguided evolutionary theory.

These amount to functional explanations about the world with evidence, theories to encapsulate them, and reason to link them.

This is different than narrative a la the Bible then fitting everything to it: the Bible says on the first day in Genesis, etc., the Garden of Eden, Adam from dirt, Eve from rib, snake tempting Eve, Eve tempting Adam to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, this the Fall, etc., virgin birth of the Son of God, death-burial-resurrection, and forgiveness of sins for a new life in Christ.

An easy first question: what evidence of the Garden? If none, then no Fall, and if no Fall, no need for Christ. This aside. Where is the functional explanation of the world akin to the above based on your question?

The short of the long to the example question: human beings are either supernatural creatures or part of the natural world, or created or evolved. Evidence states: humans evolved and, hence, we come from the natural world and exist as part of it.

As such, what did humans evolve from here? Answer: a common descent from pre-human mammals, which makes humans cousins, evolutionarily speaking for the species, with chimpanzees, bonobos, and gorillas who exist today. We did not come from monkeys but share common evolutionary roots.

To get it: nature simply added water.

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Hawking as a Feminist

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

December 16, 2018

One of the greatest scientific minds of the 20th century and early 21st century, Stephen Hawking, was a not only a great astrophysicist but also an insightful commentator and rights activist.

His prominence provided a platform. One which he used wisely and justly in speaking for the rights of women.

An important note to his life in an era of renewed pushback against equality with Bolsonaro in Brazil, Duterte in the Philippines, Putin in Russia, Kim Jong Un in North Korea, Trump in America, Xi Jinping in China, and other antifeminists — to be read as anti-women's rights, anti-equality, and, thus, anti-women.

In an interview with Piers Morgan, Hawking put the clamp down on the sexist commentary of Morgan.

As reported, “Back in March 2017, Morgan mentioned that having five important female leaders at the highest positions in Britain is probably the “scientific evidence” gender equality needs.”

Hawking replied that this is not scientific proof of gender equality that is required but, rather, that “women are at least the equals of men or better.” Noting, Prime Minister Theresa May, the Queen, Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, Home Secretary Amber Rudd, and Met Police Commissioner Cressida Dick shifted the landscape.

While at the same time, this was not the case in the private sector. When asked about acceptance, and to the point, about identification as a feminist or not, Hawking replied, “Yes. I have always supported women's rights.”

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Waleed Al-Husseini on 2019 for French Ex-Muslims

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

December 18, 2018

Waleed Al-Husseini founded the Council of Ex-Muslims of France. He escaped the Palestinian Authority after torture and imprisonment in Palestine to Jordan and then France. Here we talk about 2019.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Looking into 2019, what are the prospects for increased secularization of France?

Waleed Al-Husseini: Our secularism is dangerous in 2019. We are losing. They were talking about reforming the law of 1905 at this time. I don't agree with doing this now. Because they are doing this to bless Muslims and Islamists, and let more Islamic values into society.

To be more clear, I'm with reforming it to go forward not backward, like what they will do now. I want to keep all religions and religious values out of public life.

That's why our fight now should not let this happen. We should stand up against it and show the dangers of this.

Jacobsen: How robust is the ex-Muslim network within France?

Al-Husseini: We are still the same, standing for our values, but now we work more and more with other secular organizations in France to show the dangers of Islamism and to be part of the defense of secularism in France.

That, in general, will work, but for ex-Muslims, we still follow some cases in Arabic countries who face 'justice' for blasphemy. In France, we still meet to support each other and to not feel alone in this belief and kind of discussion about the situations in Islamic countries.

Jacobsen: What are the channels for the ex-Muslims to challenge religious fundamentalisms and find asylum within countries?

Al-Husseini: There are not real channels. We, in just some cases, contact the human rights organizations to talk and try help the ex-Muslims. The rest is to help here more in France. We just give the testimony to be acceptable of asylum.

That's the maximum that we can do: the testimony for the time being. To fight fundamentalists, it will require more, especially working with other organizations and publishing articles in the name of all of us to face the dangers of Islamism.

That's what we do now. They talk in the media more and more. By this way of changing the thinking of people, we make them understand the dangers through a different way.

Jacobsen: Who are more prominent anti-ex-Muslim figureheads within France now? What is being done about them?

Al-Husseini: The most anti-ex-Muslim groups in France are these Islamist organizations who just attack us. It is an injustice all the time. They try to make us stop talking. There are a lot of these types of organizations. Also, we don't forget the Far Left who attack us in the name of racism: imagine that.

But also, the real dangers of some Muslims recognizing us in the streets and, literally, attacking us. We're attacked because we're ex-Muslims. The situation is complicated here.

Jacobsen: What should the government be doing, but simply isn't, to protect the nation's ex-Muslims who are, statistically, more unsafe than others?

Al-Husseini: As said before, the situation is complicated in France and the government can't do many things, especially now with all these manifestations of yellow jacket in France. The government have a lot of things on their hands, but they can arrest the individuals who call for killing us and killing others like us.

However, you can see how things are complicated even with terrorists' attacks.

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

Scott Douglas Jacobsen founded In-Sight Publishing and In-Sight: Independent Interview-Based Journal.

It's Raining, It's Pouring

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

December 22, 2018

In the ongoing, decades-long wave of decline in the attendance, adherence, and outright belief in Christianity in the advanced industrial economies, especially in the light of the Roman Catholic Christian Church continuing to produce legal-worthy scandals, recent news came out reflecting this, which produced a conference with associated content by the Vatican as well.

This time, it was in Germany. Over the last 18 years, the Roman Catholic Church closed more than 500 churches. Over the next decade, a similar trend is projected for the Netherlands as well. The phenomena is spreading around the world, according to Father Pawel Malecha.

That is to say, within the internal reportage of the Vatican, the decline within the church, in specific countries and regions, continues unabated and retains its border crossing abilities. Here we come to the fulcrum, the question of whether the Christian Church will experience a revivalist spirit or a steady, albeit bumpy, decline into the future, except in those born into the faith.

The closed churches have been used for purposes deemed unfit for Catholic uses. This includes the deconsecration of churches “for a pornographic exhibition.” Some churches have been forced to close due to the expenses of lawsuits based on the sexual abuse scandals within their particular history.

This is the trend and a growing one, in geographic extent and population-based-rate.

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The Free Speech Warriors Who Weren't

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

December 22, 2018

One truism, probably, exists within the framework of the so-called “free speech” debates in the current period, minor as they seem. That is, the consistent use of the right based on the particular national context, whether in a specific nation or in an international consideration of the matter.

Many prominent individuals with large online followings, at least in North America and some of Western — mostly Northwestern — Europe, who may, indeed, be classical liberals and free speech activists in some form.

However, these individuals do not seem to have done the homework requisite for the movement; that is to say, these individuals, as a qualitative heuristic, seem to enjoy the influence and finances more than the true comprehension of the waters in which they swim, speaking of the oceans of rights.

Even with the possibility of a true classical liberal and individual who adheres to the American peculiar notion of free speech specifically, I retain a chariness about it.

There are many claiming self-identification of these terms, as signifiers without necessarily real content in actions and a track record to match the self-identification.

However, and as a more general point, regarding free speech or Classical Liberalism, or British Classical Liberalism, or something akin to John Stuart Mill's notion of liberty, I remain wary. Why?

Because the majority of North Americans proclaiming self-identification as Classical Liberals aren't Classical Liberals, aren't classical, aren't even liberals, and may be closet excuse-makers for rights violations around the world done, in part, by their own nation or set of them as a coalition, i.e., neoliberals who retain a character as neoconservatives in economic, social, and political outlook.

On free speech, as hinted, this is an American Constitution First Amendment term. If speaking in an American context, this remains the correct phrasing. Outside of this, it is wrong, which is the crux of the matter. Most use the wrong term in the wrong context, quite a lot.

Here, in Canadian society, with Article 2(b) of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, it's “freedom of expression”; and in Article 10 of the United Kingdom *Human Rights Act* it's “freedom of expression,” and in Article 19 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* it's “freedom of expression,” this extends to the *European Convention on Human Rights* as well, in Article 10.

This also states “freedom of expression.” In each case, except the American, the protection is more general than freedom of speech or “free speech,” because “freedom of expression” remains the enshrined right.

Whole electronic movements exist on American myopia and obsession of a singular right, often without understanding the wider context, i.e., movements using an American rights conceptualization without apprehension of the broader context.

The first-pass clarity in their own minds would legitimate their movements; but in the absence of this, the seriousness of them, in spite of their earnest attempts, does not hold much water.

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Consensus, Refugees, and Migrants

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

January 25, 2019

In terms of the documents within the international community, one of the more important, and recent, documents comes in the form of the *United Nations Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration* that started in July 13, 2018 under the auspices of the United Nations but then was put into serious consideration as the months progressed, as the various migrant crises continue to accrue and the international community requires a robust framework and set of targeted objectives for the management, in a legal and globally agreed upon way, of mass migration with, approximately, one quarter of a billion people identified as refugees and migrants now.

A December 10, 1948, document set in motion the equality of all human persons as being human beings come in the form of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. The rights of refugees and migrants inhere to them as human beings as much as a billionaire, a genius, or royalty. This is a modern era of rights, where, in time, this will extend to other animals and also to artificial constructs.

But for the time being, the issue in front of us with the Rohingya cannot be ignored with, perhaps, 1 million as, in essence, stateless and in need of assistance. But there is also the emphasis in this global compact starting on July 13, 2018, of the right of national sovereignty being kept as well as the non-binding legal nature of it; the Member States of the United Nations can opt out of it.

In that, there is a great deal of leeway to it. But, as of December 19, 2018, the United Nations General Assembly, the main UN organ, not only approved but “fully endorsed” it. The votes of the Member States do not lie about it. As we can see, there is a clear stipulation set about the ways in which the international community overwhelmingly is in support of it.

152 approved it; 5 were against it, including the US and Israel; 12 abstained; and 24 issued a no vote; in other words, or in short, if an individual Member State were to vote, the overwhelming consensus is an approval of the global compact. This is strong support via the international community for the need to keep national sovereignty, maintain an orderly and proper refugee and migrant adoption process, retain the rights of refugees and migrants as human beings, emphasize an overall framework negotiated and agreed upon at the highest levels of international consensus, and with an overwhelming consensus in support of it.

This is about a month and a week ago. We can do better. We can work towards the common goals and strategies within this overall framework for the global compact as a means by which the international community can begin to help those among us who are the most desperate, of greatest need, and deserving of the same rights and freedoms, and considerations, as those of us who are freely writing on their plights.

Respect for Human Rights, Rightfully, Should Remain... Universal

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

January 27, 2019

Angelus reported on the, indeed, positive contribution to the dialogue in the 8th decade of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* from the Roman Catholic Christian Church and its purported Vicar of Christ on Earth.

In affirmation of the fundamental rights and freedoms of all human beings within the UDHR, the Pope, Francis, provided a positive statement as to the moral force or ethical authority of the UDHR. This is a tremendous statement and an important contribution in voicing the continued salience of the UDHR for the international community. The Pope may harbor one of the largest adoring, though increasingly distraught and questioning, audiences, in the world. Any work for the inclusion of the UDHR in his speaking is truly important.

On January 7, 2019, Francis stated, "...the essential instrument for achieving social justice and nurturing fraternal bonds between peoples... a fundamental role is played by the human rights set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose 70th anniversary we recently celebrated."

Making a nuanced distinction between the scales of possible ethics, Francis not the import of a document for the global community with a universal and rational basis rather than a subjective and partial one, where the latter may devolve, in its practical effects, into "new forms of inequality, injustice, discrimination and, in extreme cases, also new forms of violence and oppression."

Francis, on World Day of Peace, reiterated the statements of St. Pope John XXIII (1963), "Man's awareness of his rights must inevitably lead him to the recognition of his duties. The possession of rights involves the duty of implementing those rights, for they are the expression of a man's personal dignity. And the possession of rights also involves their recognition and respect by others."

That is to say, rights or privileges come with associated duties or responsibilities, a benefit for a cost for all. It is a set of rights and privileges for all with associated duties or responsibilities for all. The emphasis of Francis on the need to work on common solutions is relevant for the work of the international community with the urgent crises facing us from several levels of analysis and multiple angles. Glad to see the support.

Sand Does Not Muddy the Waters

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 1, 2019

The *Progressive Secular Humanist* reported, a couple years ago and as an important note, on the position of Bernie Sanders, who is a long-time politician and, thus, an important figure to pay attention to if, indeed, there exist non-theist political types.

We can find this as an intriguing notion in the political landscape of America. A longstanding fact, not conjecture, as to the near impossibility of an openly atheist or simply non-theist politician existing within the United States of America.

In the case of Bernie Sanders, the article argues for a humanist value orientation, where this implies a lack of commitment, professional or personal, to the organized religion on offer around the world.

The other is the set of values affirmed as a set in humanism. As he describes, he does not harbor a specific religious commitment, especially to organized religion. He stated, "I am not actively involved with organized religion... I think everyone believes in God in their own ways. To me, it means that all of us are connected, all of life is connected, and that we are all tied together."

In the context of a people who will vilify and destroy the lives of any outward atheist in their midst, the pragmatic solution for atheists or non-theists is simply to denude the definition of God from some legitimate context in previous centuries' definitions and meanings, with real-world implications mind you, and then to simply move these goal posts to some vague interpersonal connectivity.

No superreality connecting every human being to every other human being; no means by which to transcend this mortal coil; no manner by which to leave the cages of flesh in which we inhabit because the flesh's structure and dynamics produces us, thus the notion of a self apart from bone and sinew becomes moot akin to this redefinition of God to simply: you and me, not even for eternity.

Sanders, as a pragmatic person with tendencies towards the idealistic within the United States, considers the intrusion of faith-based life stances into politics a dangerous combination. One reason to, potentially, surmise is the ways in which the world of politics is a world of argument and compromise while having some assumption of a connection to the real world; where with the world of the faithful, we find the continual orientation towards a life sitting on the otherworldly, when the needs of others do not fit into this framework then the assertion is the work of Dark Lord Down Under (Not Australia, or New Zealand).

This can make and has made American political life fraught with fraudulent claimants and charlatans, lunatics and fringe-crazies who have gone mainstream, and opportunists and corrupt bigots.

Sanders said, "Religious freedom in this country is part of our Constitution, and all of us agree with that. And you have many different religions, and people have the right, in this country, to practice the religion that they believe in. But we also have a separation between religion and state. We know how dangerous it is, historically, for governments to get deeply involved with

religion... Let's not confuse and merge religion and state. That is not what our Founding Fathers wanted, and they were right."

In that, Americans harbor the right to religion, but this "to religion" also implies its complement of "from religion." This second, not secondary, part or complement provides the basis for the non-theists, the a-religious, to simply live their lives in peace and security as the religious live much of their lives in safety and freedom; ironically, though, it is the religious who feel afraid of the non-religious but then are the ones who impose their own faith-based worldview and life on the non-religious: life backward.

Sanders stated, in an interview with Jimmy Kimmel, a lack of belief in a God inasmuch as Kimmel may believe in it. As he explained, "I am who I am, and what I believe in and what my spirituality is about is that we're all in this together. I think it is not a good thing to believe as human beings we can turn our backs on the suffering of other people."

As he said in the presidential campaign, the problems do not come from the heavens or He on High but, rather, from the decisions — good or bad — made by individual human beings *en masse*.

(Dis-)Honest Propaganda for a Modern World Harking for an Old, and Otherworldly, One

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 1, 2019

If you want to restrict the fundamental human rights of women, then you have to do this within a context of ruining many of their lives, livelihoods, and futures as well; and if you want to do this with a religious (read: political) motivation, then the first step is a misinformation campaign spread through the land with the appointment of a judge setting the Supreme Court of the United States to a safe temperature for fundamentalist religious causes.

The Hill reported on the financing of an anti-abortion film. As an important adjunct to the entire conversation here: with some knowledge of the statistics from reliable and unbiased organizations, and of rights from the United Nations and mainstream rights organizations, legal, safe, and equitable access to abortion reduces the number of abortions, complications from abortions, and respects the personal bodily autonomy of women and who get them.

The CEO of MyPillow, who support President Donald Trump in the United States, funded an anti-abortion film. That is to say, based on well-known information and rights known about outside of the public relations of the American media system, there is support for anti-abortion films, which, if taken seriously by individual women, will, by implication, be more likely to induce more pain, suffering, and despair than otherwise — on average, even though some individual stories may abound expressing no regret. Individual stories are not necessarily the point where the statistics tell an entirely different story.

Now, the film is reported to be distributed on a national level through a Christian movie studio. Of course, it is not stated, explicitly, the brand of movie studio, in terms of the sect of Christianity. The film is called *Unplanned* with a premise of a young woman who resigns from a Planned Parenthood clinic in order to renounce any practice of abortion with the Chuck Konzelman of the *Hollywood Report*, on Pure Flix Studios, stating, “We had other offers but felt they would be our strongest partner because of the great success we’ve had together in the past.”

The trailer for the movie — part of a genre in the secular community, or some of the a-religious community, known as God-Awful Movies, not bad — apparently, described Planned Parenthood as if a juggernaut, as “one of the most powerful organizations on the planet.”

The script for the God awful film was written, by the account in the article, by those who had written the scripts for the films *God’s Not Dead* and *God’s Not Dead 2*. Within this newer genre, the extension from assertions of Christianity’s God active in the world into reproductive rights continues to orient the religious right in America further into its own perceived culture war and political struggle.

By logical implication of a religious struggle into the arena of rights restrictions on women through culture and politics, this defines the basis of theocracy.

Chiggity Czech Yourself Before You Wreck Yourself

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 2, 2019

Much unlike the Central European and Eastern European neighbours of the Czechs, these Europeans do not adhere, much, to a belief in a divine all-powerful overlord.

Pew Research, based on their — well — research, explains how the Czech Republic simply harbors a different internal belief system dynamic compared to other nationalities within Central and Eastern Europe.

Let's make this quicker and less painful than the standard Pew Research article, within the categorization of a religion, we can identify a specific religious group; those, commonly, found in Central or Eastern Europe.

But we can also see the ways in the Czechs simply retain a unique sensibility in their lack of compatibility with the rest of the region, where there were 18 other countries surveyed in the region. That makes this all the more interesting, as 18 countries approximates 10% of the entire set of the world's nations.

In that, this is a good size comparison in a region of the world steeped in religion; while yet, a country stands firm against these fundamentalisms found within its own borders. This can lead to some interesting questions about the applicability and import of a faith to the functioning of a society.

Because, as far as I know, the Czech Republic has not collapsed upon its mass of non-belief. This, once more, is in stark contrast to the belief in a God and a religious affiliation marking the majority of the countries in Eastern and Central Europe.

By the numbers, boys, we have 72% of Czechs not identifying with a religious group in addition to 46% simply describing their religion as “nothing in particular,” thus marking something akin to the SBNRs or the spiritual but not religious cohorts found in New Age and loosely-and-inconsistently rationalistic circles in North America.

Then 25% of Czechs identify as atheist. This is a marker of something highly unusual for most nations of the world, except for, perhaps, mainland China with an extraordinarily high number of atheists within its own borders. Given the world's population dynamics and trends, and current demographics, the reality of faith-based reasoning is inescapable, because these provide comfort, solace, reasons for community, and easy answers to the complicated structure of the universe and the human world.

In more general terms, 66% of Czechs do not believe in a God; this does not mean atheism, but, in fact, a brand of atheism. It comes down to an axiom of the non-existence of absolute or total atheism in the form of a pantheist describing that which exists, or the real or reality, or even simply the natural world discovered by empiricism, as their God, and, therefore, an absolute atheist, being in denial of all gods, unable, logically speaking, to deny that which exists, is real, or is reality, or even just the natural world discovered by empiricism (the last one not necessarily to be mocked as this reflected Einstein's view of a god in many respects). An absolute atheist posits an existence without any gods; whereas, a single instance of a definable god would simply

make this notion of an absolute atheist in a logical and philosophical sense moot, as was just shown, Q.E.D. Of course, emotional reasons may or cognitive limitations may stall this realization.

Hence, with this general lack of belief in a God, we can see the general form of a lack of belief in the existence of the higher powers in the universe constituting, probably, given the surrounding nations being Christian, the Abrahamic versions of a god seen in Yahweh and God. Compared to the 66% of Czechs who do not believe in God, we can see the 29% who do believe in God. This split grows wider as time moves forward more.

If you have time to examine some of the images in the link more, we can see the obvious differentials in the beliefs compared to Poland, Latvia, Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, Russia, Moldova, Serbia, Croatia, Georgia, and so on. The former Eastern Bloc, important to note, was absolutely dominated by an atheist dogma in the Soviet Union for much of the 20th century with the Czech Republic being a outlier in these regards, in the modern period. In either case, we can have stated-based fundamentalisms in secular ideologies or religious fundamentalisms in theocracies.

Indeed, we can see the emergence of many of these tendencies in the ways in which the common traits are men at the top and absolutisms. To properly reduce the incidences, severity, and probability of these occurring, we need honest assessment of traits and precursors. The median belief in God in the region is 86%, which, in fact, may reflect a relatively common international level of belief. The number of those who do not have a religious affiliation or a belief in God simply are those who are the international minority and have been for a long time — and will remain so, based on some extrapolations, for the 21st century. The flavors of atheism, as with the flavors of theism and pantheism, and so on, will vary slightly, as being born into a faith is, probably, the strongest predictor of remaining within a faith. Atheism only went public, vocal, and marginally communal in the light of internet.

Religious affiliation and a belief in some higher — shouldn't that be greater? — power, usually magical, is the vast majority of the peoples within Central and Eastern Europe. With the large numbers of the religiously unaffiliated with the Czech Republic, one of the more intriguing facts about the developments within the nation are the ways that this impacts child-rearing: parents raise their kids unaffiliated. Obviously, any fair parenting, for the sake of the future of the child, should incorporate a factual and knowledge-based account of religion rather than simply endorsement down the generations without justification, as this permits the development of the critical faculties of the students in spite of their eventual adherence or non-adherence to a faith tradition in the end.

Based on the reportage, the ground prediction for the foreseeable future is one where the Czechs simply do not adhere to a faith or religion, or a belief in a traditional God. Apparently, what tends to come with traditional views on the nature of social relations and cultural life is a belief in a god or an adherence to a religious affiliation, in this, we can note the direct relationship between a belief in a god and, probably, a direct linkage to the ways in which the attributes of this god reflects those values considered most important in community — even down to reflection of the ways in which the individuals look within the society reflexively, almost, mirroring the images of the gods themselves: collective ethnic anthropomorphization of the gods.

These lessened or attenuated, even defunct, religious practices build a society in which there is a reduction in the level of conservatism, where the religious institutions and signifiers of belief become purveyors of the traditionalism seen in most of the population in this region of the world.

This extends into social attitudes, too, as explained, “For example, Czechs have among the highest levels of support for legal abortion (84%) and same-sex marriage (65%) in the region. Similarly, they are the most likely to say they *never* attend religious services (55%) or pray (68%).” In other words, this spectrum of spiritual practices and religious affiliation shifts inversely with level of lack of belief in a God. This provides some intriguing general statements about the nature of belief not only in the Czech Republic, but, by implication, the ways in which Czechs and non-Czechs in Eastern and Central Europe belief in a god or have religious affiliation will link to their social attitudes. However, a belief in the soul or fate may retain its appeal for many Czechs, in spite some of the former tentative findings or conclusions.

But even with this lack of religiosity, in numbers and in beliefs and practices, the Czechs view religious affiliation with a pragmatic eye, as it is seen to strengthen social bonds and morals within societies — not just the Czech society.

“Why is There Something Rather Than Nothing?” Sorry, Wrong Question.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 2, 2019

One of the perennial buggaboos of formal theology for centuries and in several traditions right into the present remains the belief in a powerful argument, in which the notion of a nothing — even in a nuanced consideration of different flavors of nothing — becomes contrasted with the something around us: indeed, why is there something rather than nothing?

This notion reflects a longstanding tradition of the Abrahamic traditions, in particular, and in modern theology in general, which creates the foundation for a respectability politique within the community of literate theologians and believers. However, this argument, more than 2,000 years in the making, harbours some false assumptions for a number of reasons, but this form of argumentation for the existence of a god requires a something emergent from nothing.

A nothing without an ability of self-actuation, where a nothing in this manner must then pivot into another conceptualization of a being or some thing with the property of aseity, of self-existence, of an existence without any formal requirement of contingency. In a manner of speaking, this specific form of nothing would lack the trait of self-actuation, which remains different than another definition of a nothing, perhaps seen in some Chinese philosophical concepts, with things simply being, just emerging, and, thus, inheriting, by the nature of their being, the property of aseity.

The nothing seen in some modern physics explanations looks to a way in which radiation, time, space, and matter define a material model of something and then the negation of these — non-radiation, non-time, non-space, and non-matter — would define a proper non-universe or non-physical structure, i.e., a nothing defined as an opposition of the something seen in cosmology and physics.

But these can be arcane, and incorrect in some ways, and the issue can be boiled down into another formulation with the notion of a something as the total set of possible existing things, in reality and in principle, and then this becoming the complete set of possible instantiations of somethings and arrangements of the things in those somethings. The set of a true nothing would, in essence, amount to an absolute negation of this infinity of arrangements, with nothing as the complement of true infinity. One being the opposite of another in an abstract or platonic, or mathematical and logical, sense.

This becomes a possible set of nothings as 1, or a nothing and not many nothings, and a possible set of somethings as infinite, which comes back to the original question: why is there something rather than nothing? If we look into the formulation of a something as infinite and a nothing as 1, in terms of possible states, then this implies a particular ratio of infinite to 1, of somethings to nothing. A Probability Argument for Existence Over Non-Existence, let's call it, it becomes overwhelmingly obvious; we have been working on false premises. It is not “why is there something rather than nothing?” The true question: why wouldn't there be something? In the light of the overwhelming odds in favor of something, this exists as a near fundamental fact of the nature of the world with the implication of a something as the far more likely option than a

nothing while the original theological question implying a form of nothing as default and the proper question, posed above, implicating a default of something.

If nothing was default, it would need the explanation; but then, we wouldn't be here to ask the question in the first place. However, we are here, and here to ask the proper question: why wouldn't there be something?

Dropping Out Where It Counts

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 2, 2019

According to *WSMV News 4*, there is a trend of students who go to college and then not dropping out of college — except, maybe the young men these days — and, in fact, the churches.

Thus, this becomes Christian, mainly, phenomenon. Now, in general and internationally, if an individual, including oneself, is born into a particular faith, then this individual will not leave the faith, more than probable.

This same analysis can, probably, apply, to some extent, to those born in secular or non-religious communities. In terms of the reportage, Lifeway's Scott McConnell, in a study, found 2 out of 3 students who begin going to college will then stop attending church.

Of course, there will be a continual gradient with the reduction in those who simply attend less, and for a variety of different reasons, including that school or college, especially, is a huge drain on time for the students involved in these endeavours.

But we can find the ways in which the reasons were incorporated into the research with 55 reasons, and then the top 5 were included. McConnell looks for solutions for the church dropout. Not a bad thing in many contexts, especially when no other easy social situation exists for the student.

But in other cases, the kids, as with much of history, are simply forced into it; how is this a fair situation for the faithful? Is faith coerced or chosen, or reasoned and selected? Apparently, McConnell misses the mark here.

But the survey is interesting, nonetheless. McConnell states, "Work responsibilities and moving away are two of the top five reasons people don't stay involved in a church... We need to have our priorities straight As church attendees that showing the love of Christ has got to be more important than our opinion on what you're wearing as a young person or who you're hanging out with."

McConnell on an important and nuanced point of social responsibility pines that adults need to look into how they can invest in young people within the church; of course, this should be extended in general. In general, without an extensive linkage across generations, cultures die.

"When they get the message that politics is more important than the church's message of redemption that's when they say I can find better answers to life's problems somewhere else," McConnell explained.

In some sense, this is true. But this asserts the veracity in rising from the dead Original Sin, and the like. One could, not in some imaginary world but, in a realistic world seen today enact a progressive stance for acting on conscience for others and oneself, regardless of the likelihood of a youth entering church or not.

On Breaking of the Heart, on a Rock for Health: Dear Diary, and Academic Journal

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 2, 2019

Based on some reportage from WebMD, to be taken with skepticism, but, nonetheless, research has looked into an issue of those who happen to suffer from the extreme stress associated from heavy breakage of the heart, in metaphorical terms, with, for example, the cases of the death of pet, loss of a great job or a promotion at work, or the loss of a true loved one or even one who may be called a soulmate.

As explained, "...[It is a] relatively rare condition, they are finding that it's not only caused by the loss of a loved one. Medical treatments, job loss, and other major life stressors have been linked to the condition."

The syndrome is known as takotsubo cardiomyopathy with a central effect on women more than men. More research, as always, can be preferred, as this can provide more information as to the health issues surrounding takotsubo cardiomyopathy.

Now, this 'broken heart syndrome' does have some medical literature behind it, and a legitimate medical title and condition to back it up. The medical literature is sparse on it.

But case studies are hugely helpful if the data is sparse.

"Earlier this year, Canadian researchers reported a case of broken heart syndrome in a 63-year-old woman on treatments for metastatic breast cancer," the reportage stated, "Over a 6-year period, researchers from MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston found 30 patients having cancer treatment fit the criteria for broken heart syndrome."

With chest pain in some cancer patients, this should be considered a possibility, apparently. The literal, biological happenstance of the condition is when the left ventricle in the heart of the patient weakens and then this can lead to pain and, even, shortness of breath for the patient.

It is reversible and temporary. One wonders if this could, in fact, and as per the fables (or not, possibly), lead to the death of an individual with an already weak heart and then undergoing this form of medical condition.

Happily, 95% of patients who get the condition will recover within one or two months.

From Shepherd to Sheep in a Lie-n Minute: The Power of Christ Does Not Compel You

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 2, 2019

In the calm and collectedness provided in the cool, irrationality created by fundamentalist interpretations, practices, and mental states from religions, the normal responses to properly terrifying and horrifying instances can lead to specifically terrible actions against the misinformed about the world through the infused, delirium of certainty provided by fundamentalist religious faith.

Within some of the easy lies given by religion, one can be driven to ideas or notions of invulnerability, of immortality, of incorporeality, of absolute knowledge or at least all that one needs to know in the light of the revelations of Christ in the purported holy text, where these can create problematic outcomes for adherents and leaders.

As with one Christian church leader, who, unfortunately, went to prove his faithfulness to his Lord and thinking that this Lord would save him from a lion. He went into the presence of a lion.

The lion immediately began to maul the arm and buttocks of the man. The man had run towards the pride of lions, but the Christian leader thought that his purported Lord had power over the animals of the Earth.

Alec Ndiwane, the purported Zion Church prophet, was attacked by the pride of during a safari trip where he was bold enough to assume divine intervention on his bold behalf.

The pride of lions were minding their own business eating an impala when Ndiwane charged into the dining fray of the lions. As the reality of the Lord not coming to save him, Ndiwane tried to flee back to the car from the safari trip. The lions caught up with the fleeing Ndiwane and then bit his behind.

He was saved, in the end, but he was not saved by his Saviour. A game range firing shots was the saving grace for this ecstatician. He was sent to a hospital to heal wounds and such.

It's the End of Your Rationality as You Know It

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 2, 2019

Friendly Atheist worked on some of the more intriguing news items late last month with one being the occurrence of the Blood Moon, or the Super Blood Wolf Moon, also known as a Turles attack again Vegerot.

A pastor Paul Begley, in the news previously over commentary on the sexual assault allegations against Brett Kavanaugh as “the darkest hour in the last 150 years,” stated that the Bible is his authority and the end of the world is nigh.

“God is ready to show us that He is in control, and these are the last days... very significant sign, according to the Bible,” Begley stated.

He stated this within the context of President Donald Trump being born on a blood moon on June 14, 1946, which is, apparently, 700 days before Israel was declared a nation.

Begley continued, “Did President Trump just stumble into this situation?... Well, he’s the president that decides to go ahead and declare that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel, and then moves the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem and dedicates it on May 14, 2018, the exact 70th anniversary of Israel as a nation.”

He argues for this a prophetic sign for the end times asserted in the Bible. However, the more probable response or answer is simply, “No.”

Springs Springing

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 3, 2019

From several media sources and into the modern self-involvement and, in fact, collective action as well, we find a continual outgrowth of anonymous and nonymous activism with the intention of the development of rapid societal shifts based on obvious and known injustices, where, in normal circumstances, if the shift is not to something greatly better, then rapid changes may seem more dubious and uncertain as their inevitable negatives coinciding with the positives.

We come to a few questions about the nature of social media here. But we do not even need to ask questions in general inasmuch as look at the concrete specifics of the ongoing case here in the world with, for example, the recent Saudi woman, Rahaf al-Qunun, who sought asylum and earned it in Canada, which, unlike most cases, acquired more support than previously thought possible.

This has begun to spark another movement. It works off the 2006 Tarana Burke #MeToo campaign taken into the mainstream via Alyssa Milano in the Winter of 2017. This movement led to important shifts in social interactions and, more significantly, direct conversations about the nature of the treatment of women, often, by men, especially those in power.

Another shift to play on this, as per the al-Qunun reference, is from the prominent and respected ex-Muslim activist Maryam Namazie in coordination with Sadia Hameed. Both Namazie and Hameed work from the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain. In a recent set of activist reportage, they spoke to the needs of several ex-Muslims.

Al-Qunun, in her case, was fleeing family abuse, as far as we know, and then she barricaded herself in a Thailand hotel room. Not only her family but also the Saudi authorities worked to return al-Qunun to her homeland. But as an ex-Muslim, the consequences could be severe.

Now, the reportage, often, notes the commonality of the narrative of al-Qunun. With these stories as plentiful and problematic, we can see reason for the emphasis on the safe communications platforms, i.e., those with the possibility of an anonymous “coming out” of sorts. These #MeToo hashtags have been important for the health and wellness of women.

But also, there is an important note about the ways in which the adaptation can help those in need, including #SaveBasma and others.

Namazie and Hameed state:

Unfortunately, Rahaf’s plight is a reality for countless ex-Muslims, atheists, women and LGBT fleeing Sharia or “honour”-related violence condoned by Islamic states and movements. In more than ten countries, being ex-Muslim, atheist, or LGBT are even punishable by death. In these countries, being a free woman is a crime. Despite these harsh realities, countless asylum seekers in Britain and the west as well as refugee claimants in places like Turkey continue to be detained, refused protection despite evidence of persecution, mistreated and deported.

They are important women voices, or simply voices, in the work of providing protection for ex-Muslims, which remains about the respect to freedom of belief, freedom of religion, and freedom of conscience implying a “from” in place of the “of” here. If this happens in non-religious

households in children who want to become religious, this becomes the same rights-based principle of thinking; it is not about atheism or religion, or any other ideological stance about the nature of the world and the human beings' relation to it.

It is about the fundamental right to choose one's path in life in the best interests of the person as defined by the person, akin to respect for the rights and traditions of the world's Indigenous populations all over the world. The hashtags raise awareness, working from the bottom up or via grassroots, provide the option for relative anonymity, give a platform for mass social action through consciousness raising into practice, and can be enough to put pressure on international agencies for the safety prominent cases. This raises the overall profile of not simply the individual but the person who the collectives who are having their rights threatened or even violated via family, tradition, or the state.

Some other cases mentioned in the report are Marwa Mastouri, Shawon Syed Isteak Hossain, Mohamed Aly, Aftab Ahmed, Fasahat Hasan Rizvi, Basma, Arsalan Nejati, Iman Soleymani Amiri, Amir and Mina Kalateh, and others. These are the voices behind the #RefugeeToo campaign following in the successes of the #MeToo campaign, which can put pressure on governments and the UNHCR to put pressure on governments in more dire and trying circumstances than most of us experience. Not only for them, but those who come after them.

Burning Down the House in the Hopes to Vacuum a Phantasmagorical Lint Ball

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 4, 2019

According to *CNN*, there was some reportage on the recent work, following in a longer wake of arguments against gender studies, of Viktor Orban and others decrying the work of gender theorists and others.

In the context of an ongoing and Western backlash against critical studies — granted, often, in overly complicated structures and language — of assumed structures and identities, the work to root out what are perceived as radicals, who may ask critical questions, may stage minor protests irregularly, may complain about individual educators or facets of society, and so on, comes tied to an even more extreme radicalism with those harboring much of the power entrusted to them by the public with the outright threats to defund universities, destroy disciplines and not one life but sets of them, construct artificial intelligence programs to find purported threats bound in language mirroring the academic disciplines of those they decry, sue over a mean word, and so on, right into the present case of Orban.

Orban, the Hungarian Prime Minister, went about banning the gender studies programs because the “Government’s standpoint is that people are born either male or female,” said one governmental spokesperson, “and we do not consider it acceptable for us to talk about socially-constructed genders, rather than biological sexes.”

It amounts to a compounded misunderstanding and then with the real consequences to the lives of a profession, professionals, and trainees inside of an entire nation-state. Who are the radicals and the extremists, exactly? It seems rather clear with moves like this.

As reported, “The Hungarian government issued a decree last Friday to revoke accreditation and funding for gender studies programs at the two universities that offer them in Hungary.” This translates as the ban.

But, even worse, Central European University in Budapest explained that the government gave no formal explanation, except, presumably, the public news statement about the revoking or removal of the accreditation for the gender studies Master’s and Ph.D. programs there.

The Department of Gender Studies at Central European University stated, “In solidarity with Hungarian colleagues, we oppose this latest infringement on academic autonomy in the country... In the face of political moves such as this recent decision that mischaracterize and question the academic legitimacy of Gender Studies, we stress that the concept of gender, as a fundamental component of the human experience, has proven its importance in and across many areas of academic research.”

That seems correct. It was an infringement on academic freedom; even though, those most vocal about single minor instances of academic freedom denial or attenuation seem utterly silent on this case. It is akin to the silence from these self-same individuals on the instances of the likes of Dr. Norman Finkelstein’s denial of tenure at DePaul University, which is simply a textbook extreme case of a singular and formidable individual who had their academic life obliterated in a rapid period.

Here, though, we have a sense of this within the entirety of the country. How many professionals? How many departments? How many budgets in universities? How much time wasted and careers stalled? Why do governmental ideologues, the true ones with life-changing power, work in such a manner when strongman ideologues with a misunderstanding, or none, of a discipline begin to make decisions about the applicability of the field's theories to the general public?

If a Young Earth Creationist entered into the fray of Hungarian politics, took prime ministerial leadership, and then had the same ignorance, gall, and power, they could cry only Mankind, specifically men from dirt/mud, as the sole pinnacle of God's good Creation and the heathen evolutionists ought to simply get their socially-constructed ideologies out of the classrooms and, therefore, could ban it, as a governmental decree without formal explanation to any of the departments; this could be done. Should it be done? Is it academically honest? Is it in the line of the Enlightenment for critical inquiry or working to improve the tools of a field rather than staging childish antics trying to undermine them while also breaking standard ethical conduct and norms while also not expecting any consequences — and then having a litany of apologists for brazen academic misconduct, or engaging in political assaults on the public through the banishment of the discipline?

These assaults of academic inquiry could be applied to economic departments with pseudoeconomic philosophies that have destroyed whole economies. Should these be banished entirely or simply improved and rigorously debated in an academic manner? Everyone knows the answer here. Why is there one standard there but not in the former case? It would appear to be ideologues chasing the phantasmagora, for the most part, of their own fears and then projected onto what they deem their opponents for one reason or another to give personal rationale and sway to do as they wish — as, in another case, with the breaking of academic ethical norms and research codes of conduct, work to ban fields, sue opponents without platforms or legal defenses to manage it, and so on, as true ideologues and fundamentalists do. The whole situation is backward; and, I suspect, they know it, at some level.

There may not be a total success, but as recent as January the reportage has not been totally positive on the front of it, from the perspective of many of the students. This is the power of the state assaulting public institutions; this is the imposition of state-based ideology onto academic institutions, often backed by fundamentalist religious ideologies and, in this context, very often fundamentalist Christian patriarchal structures — in a proper definition, with the quiet, likely, attempt to impose traditional values on the culture and roles on men and women, in particular women.

If we look at the mass of strongmen around, we can note the majority, if not all, are men. Those whom power and consumption know no limits, whose lack of consideration for others may know no bottom. It is an assault on postsecondary institutions; also, it is a crackdown on democratic institutions at the same time, of which the European Parliament, to its credit, has voted to punish Orban.

The decree “calls into question the Hungarian government's commitment to the principles of democracy which are the bedrock of European states,” The Political Studies Association stated, “Gender Studies is an integral part of understanding the complexities of social interaction, the impact of policy, the dynamics of the economy and the extent of abuse of personal and political power.”

Proportional Response

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 4, 2019

According to the *BBC*, President Barham Saleh of Iraq responded to President Donald Trump of the United States over the desire to continue United States military activity in Iraq in order to watch Iran.

Trump spoke of the possibility of an “incredible” base used by American military troops to fight against the Islamic State jihadists and fighters. The reason reported, “Because I want to be looking a little bit at Iran.”

One could posit the equivalent case for the Americans, as a hypothetical, in which President Saleh argues for the construction of an “incredible” base in Washington or, maybe, New York: ‘Because I [Saleh] want to be looking a little bit at Canada.’

This would be the same mentality. It would also reflect the attitudinal and power difference dynamics between the two countries and their respective leaders — Iraq and America. Because one leader does not take on this arrogance and one country does not dare impose itself in this way.

President Saleh, correctly, pointed out that the United States 1) did not ask for the permission to construct an “incredible” base in Iraq to keep an eye on Iran and to fight the Islamic State, but also 2) should stick to fighting terrorism — full stop — and not use ulterior motives — keeping an eye on Iran “a little bit” — as a pretext to build unrequested military bases in the country. This logic could, very likely, be extended into the entire region. Were the other UN Member States asked for permission to construct “incredible” military bases? Were the reasons straightforward or simply linked to ulterior motives?

As reported on the authorized number of US personnel permitted into Iraq, the *BBC* stated, “There are an 5,000 estimated US military personnel in Iraq authorised to train, advise and assist Iraqi security forces in their fight against IS, which has not fully controlled any territory in the country for more than a year.”

Now, the US has withdrawn 2,000 US troops for deployment in a Kurdish-led alliance. These will move from Syria to the Al Asad Airbase in the Anbar province of Iraq. Not only watching Iran but also protecting Israel in the process, this is another central purpose. One can ask what will happen to the Kurdish troops left behind without the support of the United States.

President Trump argues Iran is the leader in state sponsored terrorism and the one that wants to acquire nuclear weapons. Trump was inquired about wanting to attack Iran.

He stated, “All I want to do is be able to watch... If there’s trouble, if somebody is looking to do nuclear weapons or other things, we’re going to know it before they do.”

President Saleh gave a steady and rational response to the litany of provocations in action and word of the American president, saying, “Don’t overburden Iraq with your own issues... The US is a major power... but do not pursue your own policy priorities. We live here.”

Also, noting, the US-Iraq Strategic Framework Agreement (2008) stipulated Washington would not use Iraq “as a launching or transit point for attacks against other countries.” End of

conversation, if watching is the purpose, and if this could lead to easy attacks, and if this was not requested or permitted by the Iraqi leadership, why pursue it?

A New Gay Science, or, Rather, An Honorable In Memoriam of a Persecuted Homosexual Computer Scientist

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 4, 2019

Homosexuals have been demonized, misunderstood, killed, maimed, brutalized, imprisoned, dropped off buildings and towers, burned, whipped, scorned in word and deed, kept from schools and jobs, been unable to marry those that they love, to build lives for themselves, to enjoy the same fundamental rights and freedoms of others, and to live freely and openly as their true dynamic selves to grow and live as others do throughout the world; people hated not for what crimes they may or may not do, but for who they are, homosexuals, and because of who they love, their same sex.

An important *in memoriam* is of the late Alan Turing who died prematurely and for criminally abusive reasons. He was a British Scientist during World War II and was known as among those rare individuals in particular fields only coming along once every generation or every other generation — akin to a Witten in physics, an Atwood in writing, or a Pryor in comedy.

In his own personal, private life, his sexual orientation was the love of other men; he was a homosexual, a gay man. The Second World War, many claim, ended due to Alan Turing cracking the infamous German Enigma codes. The Brighter Brains Institute is working for the development of a Richard Dawkins classroom.

But also, there is a focus on the development of an Alan Turing Science laboratory in Kanungu, Uganda at its new humanist school. This is a heartwarming and important development for a humanist community and for the general development of humanistic values for the next generations internationally, which, in reality and in true shorthand, is simply an affirmation of the human rights affirmed in international rights documents linked to the scientific method to develop proper understanding of that which we can affirm with our senses.

The new laboratory will be \$500. There is a funding page. One important note is the fact that the artificial intelligence and computer science community is growing in Uganda based on the basic metric of the greater need for it, not simply internationally, in universities including Makerere University in Kampala.

Turing, by many metrics, has been considered the father of the “theoretical computer science and artificial intelligence” revolutions. But on top of this, we can note that he was heavily discriminated against for his own nature, for his homosexuality. It was a formal crime in the United Kingdom. Turing, himself — always feels redundant, was convicted for “gross indecency.”

As with any stigma, we can see the ways in which the stigma and discrimination can lead to such immense self-hatred and self-esteem issues, even among the intellectually unprecedented in their field and formidable in intellect, as to make them want to kill themselves and, in fact, complete the act. As per the proper keeping of history, Turing was vindicated, in some sense, as a “historical pariah” of the LGBT community — or the LGBTQ2IA+ community (as it’s known

where I live, in British Columbia). Approximately 4% of the population, a hero to a historically and presently demonized collective and, in particular, the second letter in the initialism.

The Freethinker report concluded, “He was granted a rare posthumous royal pardon by Queen Elizabeth in 2013 after a public campaign. Turing inspired the highly-acclaimed bio-pic *The Imitation Game*, released in 2014. If you would like to help fund the new laboratory, follow this link.”

Blasphemy Law, Blasphemy Law, Blasphemy Law: Beetlejuice Nowhere to be Found, or Beetlejustified or Beetlejustice

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 4, 2019

As accurately stated by a lawyer by training and leading secular light, Robyn Blumner, at the United Nations not too long ago, the repetition of blasphemy laws around the world and the repeated use of pseudo-justified laws has real effects on the lives of secular activists, feminists opposing patriarchal religious structures and practices, and simply those wanting to make a satire against specific religious tenets, even improperly and ignorantly.

Blasphemy laws abound in the world. This is even in the West that is, incorrectly, assumed universally enlightened and aligned with the full spread of fundamental rights and freedoms enshrined in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* from December 10, 1948. There are several countries that continue — repeat, continue — to issue death penalties for those who renounce a formal religion.

Around several nations in the world, we can see the still-in-place blasphemy laws. If we take, for example, simply these cases of blasphemy laws, there are about 1/4 of the world's countries or territories circa 2014 that have some form of blasphemy law. Let's be perfectly clear, these protect religious sensibilities and not non-religious sensibilities; the secular are left out of this, and the secular and the questioning religious citizens of these countries and territories will be the ones to have this law imposed against them without an equivalently harsh law applied towards the religious who may offend questioning religious or secular sensibilities.

Ireland had its referendum to remove its blasphemy law that was seen as outdated, and then was repealed. Canada worked towards and, eventually, remove its own blasphemy law in late 2018. Denmark got rid of its own, after 334 years in place. Then there are several, probably, including Indonesia's that are being requested by human rights groups to remove or repeal in order, presumably, to have more free and fair societies, as, noted before, these amount to religious privileges.

In no way, as a simply rationalistic consideration, are blasphemy laws justified, for one, why would a deity who can do anything and knows everything, including everyone's inner heart, need the help of the state, the law, legal associations, religious groups, or the murderous mind of a fanatic? Isn't the notion of the divine requiring help blasphemous in and of itself, as if one can substitute themselves for their deity's will— Yahweh's, God's, Allah, Ahura Mazda's, or otherwise?

Isn't this a bias, as described before, against the secular — as in non-religious or even irreligious — and an *a priori* benefit for the religious over the non-religious? If there was a law that an African cannot insult a European, would this not mean an *a priori* benefit for the Europeans over the Africans? Is this not as unfair, especially with legal force and even, potentially, the death penalty behind it? We all know the answer.

I suspect the religious leaders know full well, but I also suspect that they do not want to remove or repeal this law in a country or set of them multinationally because, by implication, this would

mean the immediate removal of their legal and governmental privilege, a removal or repeal of their religious privilege linked to the blasphemy law — no one can criticize you.

Whether from the consideration of traditional or derived attributes of the divine, or from an equality and, thus, human rights angle, these are simply unjustified and a source of much injustice, for centuries, around the world and throughout time.

Love and Submission Sitting in a Tree... P-E-A-C-E Treaty

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 5, 2019

In recent news, and important mind you, there was a meeting of enormously relevant to their respective communities and influential international personalities, and authorities, within the religious world; the Roman Catholic Christian Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad el-Tayeb, met in a historic moment in relations between some of the Christian and some of the Muslim global communities.

This is good news. These are rapidly growing and large faiths with significant leaders considered major representatives or, at least, important intellectual lights in their respective traditions meeting in Abu Dhabi with the, on the one hand, an important public relations representation with the print media coverage and the photography and, on the other hand, the theological import of two powerful religious figures with a history of opposition meeting together.

This can change individual relationships among those who, more often than not, live life and die without being prominently known and, sometimes, known at all, but these acts by leaders can change their lives and embolden them — the lesser-known people of the world — to make individual changes to reflect gatherings such as those at Abu Dhabi. You may disagree with either or both of the theologies. You may detest actions by the religions in their history. But on the ground, these meetings can have impacts, which is worth some modicum of praise.

There was a document signed, which will be, probably, covered in some of the next articles. It was signed by both Francis and el-Tayeb. The preface stipulates, according to reportage, states, “Faith leads a believer to see in the other a brother or sister to be supported and loved.”

As reported, “The document opens with a series of invocations: the Pope and the Grand Imam speak ‘in the name of God who has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity,’ ‘in the name of innocent human life that God has forbidden to kill,’ ‘in the name of the poor,’ ‘orphans, widows, refugees, exiles... and all victims of wars’ and ‘persecution.’ Al-Azhar, together with the Catholic Church, ‘declare the adoption of a culture of dialogue as the path; mutual cooperation as the code of conduct; reciprocal understanding as the method and standard.’”

Not bad, a document of reconciliation, mutual devotion to their God, and working to help the least among us. Even if not a outright document with force, it can, at a minimum, retain its quality as an encouragement. Would you rather no encouragement or the encouragement? People have the right to their religions and their beliefs, working within and not against this current respects rights and can increase what most ethical and rational individuals desire: peace and security advanced throughout the world, whether in religious-transcendent or secular-universalist language.

“Viva il Papa!” as the love poured out from adoring crowds of people number in the tens of thousands with an estimate as many as 180,000 in the United Arab Emirates for the first papal Mass in the Arabian Peninsula, where this was a call for the Christians of the region — a minority, no doubt — and of the Muslims to seek greater understanding in the region.

As reported, “It was considered to be the largest display of public worship by Christians on the peninsula, the birthplace of Islam. A large, golden-hued cross on an all-white stage provided a simple and profound backdrop.”

Catholics from over 100 countries came to the Mass at Zayed Sports City Stadium, just think about that. An incredible feat of those who simply worship this man and what, more properly, what he represents in their minds.

el-Tayeb and Francis urged followers to find, once more, “the values of peace, justice, goodness, beauty, human fraternity and coexistence” in addition to affirming their own beliefs in “that among the most important causes of the crises of the modern world are a desensitized human conscience, a distancing from religious values and a prevailing individualism accompanied by materialistic philosophies.”

Some of this seems rather correct. The need for things of value beyond the mere monetary remain important: love and companionship, solidarity and fidelity, and so on. The Grand Imam and the Roman Catholic Pope consider this a form of “moral deterioration.” What they conclude from this in other regards could be taken as derogatory, saying, “...moral deterioration that influences international action and a weakening of spiritual values and responsibility... to fall either into a vortex of atheistic, agnostic or religious extremism, or into blind and fanatic extremism.”

They are viewing these as signs of a brewing Third World War fought in a “piecemeal” manner. Aside from some of those statements, the directly relatable ones to every religious stripe and political denomination speak to the need to redistribute the inordinate wealth held in too many of the ultra-riches’ — how ever few of them — coffers, who hoard as if Smaug guarding the Arkenstone.

Many poor, infirm, and deceased individuals are being created because of these inequalities, which, as with most of the reasonableness of the general global population, the majority of the planet’s inhabitants have a problem with now, because they can note the direct impacts, if not in their own families then, in their own communities and societies. The religious leaders are affirming the importance of dealing with this; that is, they are making incredibly important statements for their communities to work on common problems ravaging the majority of the world’s population, akin to the mass of refugees and migrants around the world.

The affirmation of the importance of the family. This reflects much of the United Nations affirming the salience of the family as a fundamental unit of society. This is an international value. As with the non-parochial and particularistic values of multiple mainstream — read: majority — faiths, the values remain universally found throughout them, as with those found within universalistic in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and associated documents for decades since its instantiation following the creation and growth of the United Nations. All seem bound to some form of Golden Rule.

More modern understandings, properly speaking, they work within an understanding of the source of human consciousness as intrinsic to being a human organism; something Chomsky brought into the mainstream with the Universal Grammar and the Generative Grammar, as in a naturalistic and organic emergence of capacities with implied constraints to co-emerge/co-develop with those developments. In some sense, with an increase comprehension of information processing and the brain as an information processor, and thus the mind as a result of information processing through time, the Golden Rule, properly speaking, could be placed more within a context of an

informational golden rule. One in which consciousness becomes the defining factor here, rather than the ordered molecular structure of a crystal or the disorganized one of an ordinary rock.

But even without these considerations, we can, obviously, see the obvious and direct implications of these statements for their constituents numbering, at least, over 1 billion individuals. One can disagree with the basic claims of the religions while still working for the advancement of common values, as a pragmatic matter; peace is better than war, as we all know.

Some of the other positive notions or statements that they stipulated together were the need to ensure religions never declare “war, hateful attitudes, hostility and extremism, nor must they incite violence or the shedding of blood.” Of those particulars that most would, probably, agree on, be the condemnation of genocide, terrorism, displacement by force, and human trafficking”; whereas, other items that retain more modernized questionable areas are “abortion and euthanasia,” of which much of the secular community agrees with but the religious communities, at least those represented by Francis and el-Tayeb, may disagree on to a significant extent. One reason being the idea of ownership of one’s body by God and not oneself and so not being able to end it, as in the case of euthanasia. Another is abortion with some of the similar concerns about bodily autonomy, when life starts, and so on. But there is, nonetheless, a broad set of stipulated points that many would agree with here.

There also opined, “We thus call upon all concerned to stop using religions to incite hatred, violence, extremism and blind fanaticism, and to refrain from using the name of God to justify acts of murder, exile, terrorism and oppression... God, the Almighty, has no need to be defended by anyone and does not want His name to be used to terrorize people.” This seems reasonable. Why does the most powerful entity in the entirety of existence, for now and forever, require the help of limited — in time, in space, in mental abilities — creatures who may or may not be followers? God, if he/she/it exists, helps — or if the gods exist they help — those who help themselves, apparently; the Grand Imam and the Roman Catholic Christian Pope mirror this, too. The statement covered a variety of topics including freedoms, rights, worship, terrorism, and so on.

The article concluded, “Al-Azhar and the Catholic Church ask that this Document become the object of research and reflection in all schools, universities and institutes of formation... [a] sign of the closeness between East and West, between North and South.”

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“We’re very pleased that the RCOG and FRSH have responded to our call for guidance from them on abortion in schools, and strongly urge all schools to adopt an evidence-based approach to teaching about abortion that is free from religious dogma,” Humanists UK Education Campaigns Manager, Ruth Wareham, opined, “We are alarmed that, despite the passing of nearly seven years since Humanists UK first raised concerns about anti-choice groups like Lovewise spreading misinformation, young people are still being subjected to deeply problematic messages about abortion in schools.”

People of Means Should Focus More on People of Poverty

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 5, 2019

Professional billionaire, Howard Schultz, recently, made a statement that ruffled some feathers, plucked others, and raised the attention of some.

He spoke of the need to not name billionaires “billionaires,” or, one may presume, millionaires “millionaires,” but, rather, billionaires “people of means.”

This is an interesting twist of the conversation had for some time about economic inequality and its ill-effects because of the detriment to the infrastructure and social health of nations, especially with the needed services of the non-billionaire or non-millionaire classes, also known as the “people of poverty.”

As with the rise of the Occupy movement or the variety of new anti-poverty campaigns and the statements about the great destruction to democratic and social institutions derived or following from massive income inequality, the attempt to shift the titling into the notion of “people of means” simply is not only a terrible painting over the pain and misery of millions but also the lack of focus of those more in need, in more dire circumstances, and completely apart from those billionaires wanting to be known as people of means — who want to be seen as part of the common people but just cannot given the massive disparity in their ways of life, treatment by others, and general life trajectories to the top of the wealthiest.

“People of means” is comical. But people of poverty or the poor are not, nor are the circumstances of the penurious and struggling around the world, especially in comparison to billionaires like Howard Schultz.

Secularize the World

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 5, 2019

In a call by a London-based writer, who I did not know about but instantly like, Salam Sarhan, has called for the world to set forth for the non-meddling of religion in politics, he views the corrosive effects of religion as a presence throughout human history and a factor in the sustaining of global conflicts right into the present.

He sees the political use of religion as a bad. He sees the theocratic revolution in Iran as a detriment for not only Iran but also the region for more than four decades. Then he further, rightly, criticizes the attacks in the Middle East based on American-led invasions in 2003 continuing right into the present.

He notes the increased takeover by theocratic tendencies in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Syria, Turkey, and Yemen. He went through a litany of cases. Then he went to task on Western nations with some individuals and social groups who are pining for a theocratic takeover.

As Sarhan stated, “There is now a need to move towards an international consensus to prevent any invocation of religion — from mainstream as well as extremist religious groups — to support national and political agendas. It is time for a campaign to create an international treaty to ban the political use of religion. The campaign can start by attracting the support of influential public figures to mobilise a global movement, leading later to the publication and dissemination of a formal treaty to exert pressure on states that perpetrate such abuses.”

An international document could be set — as with those for dealing with violence against women, with the recognition of common humanity in human rights recognition, with the right to safe and orderly migration as with the recent compact — for dealing with the political use of religion. We could work as an international community, as per the noble and courageous call of Sarhan for an international document for secularism, secular values, and the advancement of the long-time goals of the secularists around the world: the removal of religion in politics, whether symbolic, legal, or otherwise.

“This would remove a key recruitment technique by which the naive and vulnerable are attracted to their ranks — namely, through the false allegation that there is a war being carried out against their faith,” Sarhan continued.

This could be a force by which to advancement the true meaning of freedom of religion and freedom of belief; this could be a force for the freedom from religion and freedom from belief, or of religion and of belief, in which believers could become nonbelievers and nonbelievers could become believers without imposition from the outside — unfairly, unjustly, and, often, with little pretext.

He proposes a concrete step with an NGO for the putting of pressure on governments to halt or reverse government-based appeals or endorsements of religion by the state. Often, the battle is secularists and ordinary religious people versus fundamentalists in multiple contexts. Sarhan went on with the proposal of an “International Treaty to Ban the Political Use of Religion.” along the lines of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

He saw this as a framework for the reduction and elimination of the abuses of religion in politics for a further respect for human rights. “Endorsement of the treaty by powerful countries would help to tip the balance in favour of more moderate, tolerant ideals. It would be a step towards bringing outlier states back to the majority world consensus, similar to events following the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the UN General Assembly in December 1948,” Sarhan opined, “It could also lead to the establishment of a global monitoring service for raising awareness of the abuses of religion in politics, providing media organisations and other interested parties with credible, trustworthy statistics and facts about such abuses. There are very few countries that would hesitate to endorse such a treaty — including those who can be implicated in such acts, but consistently deny using religion as a political tool.”

By Golly Ms. Molly, Gone, Mrs. Lawrence

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 6, 2019

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Fallout of an Unprepared Mind, and Nation

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 6, 2019

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

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

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

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

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

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

“The US government’s spending on nuclear-weapons research and response has dropped drastically over the past few decades — as has the number of health workers with training in radiation medicine and management,” *Nature* reports, “According to a 2017 study¹ by Dallas, more than half of emergency medical workers in the United States and Japan have no training in treating radiation victims.”

Malignant Design: A Factor in Evolution

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 7, 2019

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

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

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

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

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

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

International Coalition of Ex-Muslims

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 7, 2019

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

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

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

And why not?

Humanism's New Christketeer: One for All and All for One

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 7, 2019

In *Angelus*, only one day ago, on February 6, 2019, at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.; a lecture was given as the Hispanic Innovators of the Faith Lecture.

Interesting title, and theme, and, in fact, content, the speech turned into text looks at the Spanish missionaries who “made important contributions to the humanist traditions in the West,”

Archbishop José H. Gomez said.

He went to speak about the Dominicans in particular with reference to “Antonio de Montesinos and Bartolomé de las Casas, the Franciscan St. Junípero Serra, and the great bishop of Michoacán, the Servant of God Vasco de Quiroga, among others.”

Setting aside the definitions of God implied or the purported servanthood status, we can see a merger within the intellectual traditions across what may seem on the surface a great divide, but may, in fact, be rather close together.

Those specific Dominican missionaries worked for the “humanity and rights of indigenous peoples,” where fighting for the rights and the recognition of the common humanity is the part standing out to me — rather than the emphasis on unprovables, outside of personal experiential assertions, such as the Incarnation and the like.

In fact, as far back as 1511, there was a denunciation of the colonial powers for the mistreatment or “abuse” of the natives in addition to the theft of the gold.

Apparently, Antonio de Montesinos stated, “Tell me, by what right or justice do you keep these Indians in such a cruel and horrible servitude? ... And what care do you take that they should be instructed in religion? Are these not men? Have they not rational souls? Are you not bound to love them as you love yourself?”

This is powerful stuff, and important in obliterating a notion of an institution seen as monolithic. It is in the tradition of breakaways, revolutionaries to an extent, within the tradition, which, in fact, is returning to the core message of the Gospels.

To those outside of these traditions, the followers and sub-leaders may not pay much attention to the outside conversations and arguments, and dialogues outside of their philosophical and theological framework; it simply doesn't matter that much to many of them, probably, or, at least, less than the continued maintenance of community.

But within the community of the faithful, these rediscoveries and reiterations of messages closer to the core of the Gospels than pillaging and looting and violence against the Indigenous populations is important, because this can strike a stronger chord in the language of the faithful within these traditions of those who may have devoted their entire lives to this enterprise.

Montesino posed other questions including the nature of being a human being, the obligations to neighbours, and the location of God and Christ in all. These latter concerns seem far less concrete

and humanistic than the first two dealing with the nature of the human being and the relations of that human being to other human beings, once the nature is better known.

The Church, broadly speaking, does not seem to be going anywhere anytime soon, but the members, as individual human beings, and the leaders, too, are in a sort of identity crisis about where to move the faith with the massive set of problems facing the world and, thus, their constituencies and fellows but also internally with the sex scandals and the like.

Archbishop Gomez opined, “I come at these questions, not as an historian or scholar, but as a pastor of souls. And as a pastor, I am worried about the directions our society is taking. I think our way of life is making it harder for people to find God and to know the meaning of their lives. I want to try to understand why and what that means.”

Gomez looked at the ways in which there is, and I agree, a crisis of the definition of human nature with a wide spread of definitions, often conflicting, even within communities, and leading to vast isolation of those communities with one another. Those rifts can create social strife and lead to a form of unhealthy angst and even anomie.

“By “crisis of man,” I mean a crisis of human nature. Men and women. All of us. And the crisis I see today is this: In our society, we no longer seem to share any coherent or common understanding about what it means to be a human being,” Gomez explained, “As I see it, this problem is rooted in our society’s broader loss of the awareness of God. If the questions are: Who are we? Why are we here? And what should we be living for? I don’t think we know the answers anymore.”

Those fundamental questions about the nature of human beings in the world, and of the world. The root of human nature and the bottom of the stuff of the universe. What are we? What is it? Now, there may be widespread disagreements on the subject matter of euthanasia and abortion, which is fine.

The prevention of personal autonomy by religious institutions, structures, theologies, and leadership is a scandal and a long-term fight. But the fundamental point is simply a correct observation, as seen in the crisis of identity seen around the world. This was pointed out in an interview with a colleague several years ago to me, who is a psychiatrist.

But with the point on human trafficking, certainly, I can agree with the need to tackle this pressing issue. This has to be among the easiest ethical questions with an answer in modern history. People are being trafficked and, often, into sexual and other slavery. It is simply grotesque dehumanization of other people and should be stopped.

Gomez reported:

But I think we also see this crisis reflected in other areas that might not be so immediately obvious — for instance, in the clashes of identity politics and the persistence of racist thinking in our society.

We see it reflected in the worldwide debates over migrants and refugees; in the widespread confusion about gender and human sexuality; and in the dramatic decline in birthrates throughout the West. I would even argue that this crisis underlies the opioid epidemic and the alarming rates of mental illness, loneliness, and suicide in our country.

The noteworthy point here is the decline in birthrates. Indeed, the Roman Catholic Christian Church has been a vanguard in wanting to maintain dominant culture in nation-states through the

persistent adherence to what they deem a culture of life, which is vague, and a focus on the values of family, which is valid, and of higher birth rates, especially in the context of the widespread decline of a replacement host population of many European, North American, and East Asian societies. The advanced industrial societies have this problem more than others.

But their solutions will restrict the fundamental rights and freedoms of women; of course, leaders want to solve the problem of the non-replacement rate — 2.1 — birth rates, look at Singapore and Japan, but the ways in which to work towards solving this is not to restrict women but, in fact, to begin to empower more than they have been in the past with maternity leave — and concomitant paternity leave for fathers, not simply symbolic, as in endorsed and supported — and various other measures for them to be able to not fear for their jobs and standard of living if they were to leave a job.

The restriction of women's lives and the violation of their fundamental rights and freedoms would work, as it has in the past with robust empirical evidence, but it will also lead to more problems than robust, long-term solutions. On a more reflective and historically troubling, and correct note, Gomez stated:

People have been talking about a “crisis of man” since at least the end of the Second World War.

We forget that in the last century, millions were killed, whole generations lost — in Soviet gulags and Nazi death camps, in the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in genocides in nearly every part of the world.

Out of this dark time of slaughter and suffering, came new existential questions. Not only about the “silence” of God, but also about man's inhumanity to man.

Humanity became its own worst monsters and greatest — desperate — heroes. The world in ruins and struggling to come to grips with the savagery stemming from Caucasians or barbaric behaviour of the Europeans. The coming to grips with the dual extreme natures of human beings meshed into one, and exemplified in the atrocities committed during the world wars.

Gomez seems incorrect to call the products of these “murderous ideologies,” as in the products of atheist humanisms. It simply doesn't follow, as much as he would like to think, where this just demarcates his own buying into the prejudices of the day. In a manner of speaking, this is simply a smear. These were fundamentalist state ideologies akin to the evils perpetrated by fundamentalist religious ideologies. We can see precursors or prototypes of these re-emerging in the current moment. But this language is neither helpful nor entirely correct, so, with all due respect Mr. Gomez, wrong angle.

Gomez, as he moves further into the speech, represents a series of views simply leaning toward what may best be called theocratic in orientation with the lament over waning Christian influence in political and economic life. Religion in politics is theocratic. No doubt about it, the process of secularization, of which he references, in fact, leans the dial more towards equality for the non-religious with the religious in this respect.

“Just recently, questions were raised about judicial nominees who belong to the Knights of Columbus. We see ongoing lawsuits aimed at Christian companies and charities, trying to force them to operate in ways that violate their conscience,” Gomez opined, “That is why the U.S. bishops have made defending religious liberty a key priority. If we are not free to order our lives and institutions according to God's Word, then we are not free to live a truly human life.”

Which is precisely wrong, the freedom is to live free from it, for others, as Christians are freely living for themselves; Gomez's lamentation simply reflects the loss of the ability, slowly but potentially surely, to impose Christian institutions and authority on other citizens within societies through political institutions. He just misses this.

On the notion of a transcendent reality to human beings, above and beyond the naturalistic, Gomez makes some nuanced, but probably fundamentally flawed, points about de-sacralization of society. Something in this harbours a great deal of truth and, truly, a deep one, but, other things just don't seem to exist to me.

He states, "I think it is obvious to all of us that we live now in a highly secularized society that has no need for God. For all intents and purposes, we live as if God does not exist. We think we do not need God to help us run the economy or the government. We can plan and engineer everything for ourselves. We are totally self-sufficient. We think we can rely on politics or science and technology to solve every problem and answer every question."

The engineered lives that we live are a sentiment of sadness for him. A perspective of a loss of connection with the divine, with one's soul, with God and Christ Almighty. Any independence from this religious hierarchy and authority becomes damn blasphemous if I may say so.

But he does strike a chord, on the point of a deep truth. A fact of our societies becoming entirely beholden to a consumer culture with simply, more and more, materialistic values bound by a desire for stuff, with even human beings seen as commodities with human capital or potential to be a benefit to the economy rather than human beings endowed with certain inalienable or fundamental rights and freedoms.

As one can expect in these homilies or sermons, there will be the epithets, typically. We part ways in the views of science and discoveries of the world. In many ways, there, still, is the value and commitment to visions of beauty and truth with science providing a robust naturalistic truth — facts of the world. Certainly, there are irrational beliefs, but they're not contained in the beliefs about beauty and truth as, in some fundamental sense, these can be apprehended.

"We are losing our religious dimension, the sacred character of our personality — the truth that we are spiritual creatures made in God's image, born with an inner desire to seek truth and transcendence, a desire that God alone can satisfy," Gomez stated.

In some ways, it depends on the definition of religion. If simply some spiritual way for some edificative purpose, then, yes, human beings, certainly, are religious critters of a sort, but they are not these in the senses most often determined to be the case with standard theology as some supernaturally developed organism with an impermanent spirit.

The next commentary simply remarks, at length, on the Incarnation, the Trinity, and so on. It is, more or less, a nonstarter. But the move towards a new humanism is the final commentary by Gomez and, in fact, quite noteworthy.

Gomez said, "Because Christ humbled himself to share in our humanity, we now have this amazing possibility of sharing in his divinity... Friends, this is the beautiful vision of the human person that we are called to proclaim in our time. The new evangelization calls for a new humanism — built on the truth of the Incarnation, the truth of the human person as the *imago Dei*."

Even without the image of this Incarnation within the theology, the import of living as a humanistic community can be important with the emphasis on a Christian ethic aligned with this. One can argue for an Incarnation, for which there is precisely zero evidence, but one can also argue for an image that one wants to emulate. The supernatural continues to fail as a hypothesis; whereas, the metaphysical and imagistic seem more plausible in different frames of reference, and the naturalistic is very well attested now.

As a concluding quote from Gomez, who is an intelligent and sincere person, “The task of this new humanism means renewing our theology and exegesis, deepening our understanding of the mystery of the Incarnation. It means going deeper in our Christology and Mariology, and in our Christian anthropology. It also means philosophical renewal — thinking in new ways about metaphysics and epistemology and the crucial relationships of faith and reason and truth and freedom.”

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

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

February 10, 2019

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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