

# HUMANIST VOICES: COLLECTION VII



Scott Douglas Jacobsen

# In-Sight Publishing

## **Humanist Voices: Collection VII**

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**Scott**

## **Humanist Voices**



# Interview with Dennis Pulido on Humanism

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

July 30, 2018

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** When it comes to religion or irreligion, what was family background in it?

**David Pulido:** I'm from a catholic family, in a mostly christian community.

**Jacobsen:** How does personal background feed into this as well?

**Pulido:** That is, how has religion influenced you, personally? I don't really think it has influenced me personally. But at the very least, I can empathize with people of faith and see things from their point of view so I don't get biased with my secular decision making.

**Jacobsen:** When did humanism become a practical reality for you?

**Pulido:** When I took a long vacation in the Philippines in 2014, I decided to help out the local street children and homeless people. My methods may not be perfect, but at least I try. That is when I realized I want to contribute somehow.

**Jacobsen:** What were some of your early involvements in the community?

**Pulido:** Pretty much when I was in that Philippine vacation in 2014.

**Jacobsen:** How does HAPI provide for the needs of the community in the Philippines?

**Pulido:** While HAPI provides charity work, which is done by various religious groups in the Philippines, it is clear that one of the biggest problems of the Philippines is how religion and superstition get in the way of real practical solutions, and I'm hoping HAPI is the means for the Philippine community to understand that.

**Jacobsen:** What makes a good humanist — so to speak?

**Pulido:** Someone who adheres to and lives the humanist lifestyle. A good humanist understands that we are all human beings and because we share space in this world, we are accountable for one another.

**Jacobsen:** How can people become involved in humanism?

**Pulido:** By having practical understanding of the problems and utilizing practical solutions.

**Jacobsen:** Who are some exemplars of humanism to you, in the Filipino/Filipina traditions?

**Pulido:** I can't really say I know anyone. Growing up in the Philippines, I admit I have become jaded and even pessimistic about the attitude of the Filipinos towards what really matters. I think this provides an opportunity for myself and others like me to be the exemplars for future generations.

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

**Pulido:** Thank you.

# Interview with Rizalina Guilatco Carr on Humanism

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

July 30, 2018

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** When it comes to religion or irreligion, what was family background in it?

**Rizalina Guilatco Carr:** I grew up in a very religious family, just like many of us who are from the Philippines. I studied in private Catholic schools.

**Jacobsen:** How does personal background feed into this as well? That is, how has religion influenced you, personally?

**Carr:** My mother kept on having children (10 that lived, plus 2 miscarriages and 1 that died in the first few days). She would always get post-partum depression. The sisters of my mother, when presented with the option of her having an abortion to keep her sanity, could only say to my mother, “Fear God!” Only my father’s sister, who was a nurse, wanted my mother to have her “tubes tied” to stop having more children. My family’s constant fear of the church and the eternal condemnation of hell was the source of my angst. I struggled to get answers on my own, until I read the books of Richard Dawkins and then met my atheist husband.

**Jacobsen:** When did humanism become a practical reality for you?

**Carr:** Having gone through a traumatic period in my personal life, I managed to survive it without calling on a god. (“No outside intelligence!”) My husband and I didn’t mind going into personal debt to achieve what we thought was the right way of helping those for whom we cared the most and who had the ability to succeed in life, given a chance.

**Jacobsen:** How did you find the humanist community?

**Carr:** Through Facebook, I found the humanist community.

**Jacobsen:** What were some of your early involvements in the community? Also, how do people tend to come to the humanist community and become involved early on in their work with it?

**Carr:** My only contact with the humanist community is through HAPI in Facebook, although my husband and I share that perspective. From an early age, I was always part of “community building.” It started in my first year of college, through the Leadership Training Course sponsored by our local YMCA. Then I joined a “service-based” sorority, and it opened my eyes as to the many ways we can contribute in our community. My involvement with our Filipino and Canadian community has continued through my 38 years in Vancouver, Canada.

My husband and I were co-founders of GO-MED, a non-religious, apolitical medical mission group that provides free needed surgeries for the poor in the Philippines and Peru.

**Jacobsen:** How does HAPI provide for the needs of the community in the Philippines?

**Carr:** I admire HAPI’s commitment of service and Motherland needs everyone’s effort to nation building. After all, Philippines is a Third World country. On a personal note, we also have our own projects and other charitable work that we personally fund.

**Jacobsen: What makes a good humanist — so to speak? Someone who adheres to and lives the humanist lifestyle.**

**Carr:** A good humanist conducts his/her behavior in an ethical way. While some want their advocacy known, there are also those who contribute quietly. When you have many resources available to you, kindness comes naturally. It is more difficult for people to follow ethical behaviors if their stomachs are growling and their loved ones are suffering.

**Jacobsen: How can people become involved in humanism?**

**Carr:** We must try to be inclusive. Secular beliefs should be accompanied by good deeds, or people will continue to believe that atheists are godless devils. If we give opportunities through employment and volunteerism, and offer collaboration with local communities, we can open bridges in bringing many people together. Everyone has something to offer.

**Jacobsen: Who are some exemplars of humanism to you, in the Filipino/Filipina traditions?**

**Carr:** The people I grew up with, are examples of “taking care of one another.” I hope I honor these traditions through the work and help that I am still doing. Marissa Torres Langseth’s courage in having a loud voice to bring people together and to help one another in a common goal. Her message and commitment should be spread around!

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

# Interview with Melanie Wilderman — Author, Faithiest

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

July 31, 2018

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** When it comes to your own background, how was religion or irreligion a part of it, especially in early life?

**Melanie Wilderman:** I'm born and raised in Oklahoma — have lived here my whole life. I was raised in a home where we went to church off and on, with some periods of steady church going, but the churches were pretty mild by Oklahoma standards. Two of the churches that stand out to me the most were a Lutheran church and a non denominational Christian church. I enjoyed Sunday school as a little kid, and I enjoyed being part of church choir and theatrical performances as a teenager, and going to some Christian summer camps. However, after I went to college and grew up a little, I questioned Christianity, and probably around age 22, I was able to say, I'm not a Christian, but it took a few more years for me to tell people truthfully that I didn't believe in any of it anymore. And there's a lot of people who probably still didn't know — that is unless they watched the play or read any of the press. Then they have likely figured it out.

**Jacobsen:** There was a real story as the inspiration for “Faithiest.” Who was the basis of it?  
**Jacobsen:** What was her story?

**Wilderman:** There was a clip on TV a few years back that gave me a moment of inspiration. It was after a tornado in Oklahoma and reporter Wolf Blitzer is talking to a young mother with her baby and he kind of pushes the point of if she is thanking God for being safe, and she finally says she's an atheist. Here's the clip: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0LP3Zs\\_V\\_BQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0LP3Zs_V_BQ) I remember thinking, oh that poor woman. She's going to take some shit living in Oklahoma. But I was also proud that she would say that on television in our very, very religious and conservative state. I always wondered if she regretted it or not.

However, the story is not about this particular woman. I don't know her other than things I have read about her on Facebook groups or Reddit or in news articles after that tornado. We haven't ever met, and the protagonist is not based on her life or personality or anything. There is only a similar moment to this clip in my play.

**Jacobsen:** How did you build this into the “Faithiest” narrative?

**Wilderman:** The Faithiest narrative is built more on the real-life friendship between me and my best friend of about 25 years. We are very different people, especially when it comes to religion. Her Christianity is very important to her, and I don't affiliate myself with any religion, nor would I say I believe in God. However, we have made our friendship work, and she is as important to me as a spouse or my parents. But this is a work of fiction, and while the inspiration comes from that one moment on television and my best friend, it's also inspired by my time living and working in a very small town in Oklahoma for eight years, from 2005–2013, and bits and pieces of stories other non believers have shared with me. And of course, some of it is just flat out made up.

**Jacobsen:** Where will this play be presented in its early play days?

**Wilderman:** It just finished a run in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma at a place called The Venue OKC. It ran July 20–29 with four showings. I hope to have it run again in Oklahoma City next year, and after that I will look to some bigger cities to pitch to. I’m linking you to a review from the show: <https://newsok.com/article/5602404/review-comedy-and-drama-balanced-well-in-faithiest>

And also, here is a preview article before the show began: <https://newsok.com/article/5601660/oklahoma-writer-goes-solo-to-produce-new-play-discussing-religion-and-friendship>

**Jacobsen: What have been the reactions to the play?**

**Wilderman:** The crowds who came out for it seemed to like it. A lot of people would stay afterward and talk to me, and I heard a lot of things like, “thank you for writing this,” and people telling me I balanced many viewpoints well in the show. It’s also fairly comedic at times, so a lot of people seemed to like the comedy element to perhaps temper the serious topic. But, I think people who wouldn’t like it just wouldn’t come to the show. A few of my family members who came are pretty religious, and I think they were uncomfortable, but I think they still love me! I did have at least two people come up to me who were quite emotional, tears in their eyes, saying this show was important to them. I think this reaction comes from people in conservative states in the U.S. feeling like they can’t talk openly about being atheist, agnostic, humanist, non religious, etc.

**Jacobsen: What other projects are coming down the pike?**

**Wilderman:** I am considering teaming up with another writer to work on a show that would be a series of monologues about anxiety and depression (but again, this would be tempered with a comedic tone). And the director from this show, Rodney Brazil, and I are thinking of putting together an evening of short 1-act plays from Oklahoma writers. And, my husband and I co-wrote a stage play in 2013 called Alcoholidays that has run three times in Oklahoma City since then. We are currently talking with theaters around the country to get that one on stage in a larger venue. Here’s info about that show:

<https://newsok.com/article/5464429/husband-and-wife-team-from-oklahoma-pen-funny-christmas-tale-with-alcoholidays>

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

# In Conversation with Claire Klingenberg — President, European Council of Skeptic Organizations

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 1, 2018

*Claire has a background in law and psychology, and is currently working on her degree in Religious Studies. She has been involved in the skeptic movement since 2013 as co-organizer of the Czech Paranormal Challenge. Since then, she has consulted on various projects, where woo & belief meets science. Claire has spoken at multiple science&skepticism conferences and events. She also organized the European Skeptics Congress 2017, and both years of the Czech March for Science.*

*Her current activities include chairing the European Council of Skeptical Organisations, running the “Don’t Be Fooled” project (which provides free critical thinking seminars to interested high schools), contributing to the Czech Religious Studies journal Dingir, as well as to their online news in religion website. In her free time, Claire visits various religious movements to understand better what draws people to certain beliefs.*

*Claire lives in Prague, Czech Republic, with her partner, and dog.*

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** Claire, what are the issues for young skeptics?

**Claire Klingenberg:** The issue for young skeptics is to find their passion in the movement and to find what they want to focus their skepticism on, or their skeptical work in.

It is to fight against the stereotypes because they are young and they might feel as if their opinions may not matter as much. They should realize that they need to get experience and get knowledge. Young skeptics should be given a platform to express where the focus is needed.

I think the skeptical movement has gotten much better at accepting younger voices and promoting younger voices, which attracts younger people to join.

**Jacobsen:** What are some other identifications that skeptic youth tend to gravitate towards, so if one is a humanist something like 90% of them or more will be atheists?

**Klingenberg:** I think that is also true of the skeptical movement. If you are a young skeptic, then you are most likely a young atheist, and a young humanist. If you are a humanist, then you are a supporter of LGBTQ communities and their rights.

You are usually politically progressive. Those things go, very much, together.

**Jacobsen:** If someone is young and takes on a view similar to an Einsteinian type of God, something equivalent to the laws of nature, at the same time they identify as skeptic or atheist, do they have harder time in the community with those who simply reject all forms or definitions of a God or gods including an Einsteinian one of some distant abstract found in the laws of nature?

**Klingenberg:** So, I am going to give a very unskeptical example here. At the QED, Question Explore Discover, a conference in Manchester, it is a wonderful conference by the way, they did a poll among the participants there.

“How many people here are atheists?” My eyeball assumption was that it was 90% were atheists. Maybe, 10% label themselves as agnostics. Some of them might believe or have this Einsteinian version of God or other versions.

The thing is most skeptical organizations can stay out of religion as long as religion stays out of science. For instance, even in the Czech Republic, we are an atheist country, a secular country, but we have a lot of Christians in our skeptical movement.

Their personal faith, as long as those do not interfere with skepticism and they do not apply that personal faith to the laws of nature, can be a non-issue. You might believe God was the one who set off the Big Bang.

There is a lot of discussion about what happened before the Big Bang: “So, why not?” Of course, it would be an issue if you said, “God created the world 6,000 years ago.” I do not think you would get very far in the skeptical movement.

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

# Interview with Michael Sherman, AICP, Vice Chair and International Liaison Officer — Humanist Alliance Philippines International

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 2, 2018

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** When it comes to religion or irreligion, what was your family background in it?

**Michael Sherman:** I was raised Roman Catholic in the American south. Mom was raised southern Baptist and dad was raised Catholic. So I actually had influences from both denominations; however, we attended Mass regularly and only went to Baptist church when we visited friends who were Baptist. I college I joined the Church of Jesus Christ of latter day saints (Mormons)

**Jacobsen:** How does personal background feed into this as well?

**Sherman:** My journey to humanism and agnosticism took a number of years. So as you will see by my answer to the first question I was involved in two cults, the Catholic Church and the Mormon Church. My move toward humanism was also influenced by a 3rd cult that I was involved in. This cult was called “Straight Incorporated (Straight).” Straight Inc. was a very controversial behavior modification program that touted itself as drug rehabilitation program for kids and young adults that promised to “fix” your child from drug use and to change any adolescent behavior that the parents did not like. (i.e. growing up in the 1960’s and 70’s) Straight was actually a money making organization that over its 17-year history brought in over \$100,000,000 paid for by parents and insurance companies. The “therapy” offered by Straight was totally provided by children and former clients who were themselves still children. There were almost no medical professionals working in the organization and those that were provided no therapy. Think of Lord of the Flies. The treatment methods that were used were modeled after North Korean thought reform and brainwashing techniques of American GI’s during the Korean War. This included housing us in large metal buildings up to 350 kids sitting in chairs for up to 20 hours a day, depriving us of sleep, food, water, medical care, schooling and any actual human care. We subjected to beatings, harassment, rape, group verbal attacks, endless group thought reform, constant singing and physical intimidation. Our minds were never or rarely left to think on our own. It is very difficult to explain how it was in the program unless a person actually witnessed or lived it. For the most part the organizations higher ups were Christians of some sort and while Christianity was not the main emphasis, we did sing Christian songs. (For more information on straight, please google “straight, inc.” This was my first questioning of religion and Christianity. I remember thinking if these people are Christians, why are they treating us like this?

I moved away from Mormonism and ultimately left the church as I began to study and learn more about the church, its leaders and its teaching. I am somewhat of a liberal/progressive and the Mormon Church definitely leans hard to the right and has strong authoritarian beliefs.

**Jacobsen:** How has religion influenced you (me) personally?



**Sherman:** I went through the motions as a child of being religious but I really can't say that it influenced me for the good. My parents taught me how to be a humanist by their examples; however, they did not call themselves humanists. Both my parents are practicing Christians. As an adult, religion has influenced my attitudes and beliefs in a way that has made me want to have nothing to do with it. I see in the American fundamentalist religions nothing that would want me to be a part of it and I see nothing of the teachings of their Christ. Although, I still read the Sermon on the Mount and have been able to glean some good from that. Sadly, the passages in those sermons are not practiced by many American Christians.

**Jacobsen: When did humanism become a practical reality for you?**

**Sherman:** I think I have been a humanist longer than I knew what defines a humanist. By education and practice I am a geographer and city planner. This career choice has allowed me to practice humanism daily. In the later parts of my career, much of my focus as a planner has been on grass-roots, bottoms up planning efforts like the development of neighborhood plans, development of community garden programs, outreach to minority communities and underserved areas. So humanism became a practical reality for me in 1987 at the start of my career as a city planner, although at that time, I had no idea what humanism was.

**Jacobsen: How did you find the humanist community?**

**Sherman:** I was officially introduced to humanism by social networking and the Humanist Alliance Philippines, International (HAPI)

**Jacobsen: What were some of your early involvements in the community?**

**Sherman:** My early involvement in the humanist community as a humanist took place in June 2016 when I attended the Asian Humanist Conference in Manila which was sponsored by HAPI.

**Jacobsen: How do people tend to come to the humanist community and become involved early on in their work with it?**

**Sherman:** Humanism fulfills a need for many people to do work for the betterment of humankind as well as for non-human animals. The humanists that I know are all in for humanism with a great passion. The members of HAPI and the groups / organizations that we align ourselves with are leading by example.

**Jacobsen: How does HAPI provide for the needs of the community in the Philippines?**

**Sherman:** Responding to that question could take all day as HAPI is the leading organization of humanist efforts in the Philippines. Our programs focus on the betterment of all people in the Republic of the Philippines. We do this through our Nutri-Camp (nutrition campaign), SHADE (Secular Humanist Advocacy Development & Education) program, ARK (Acts of Random Kindness) project and the way our members live their daily lives. Some of the most amazing and selfless humans I have met are members of HAPI.

**Jacobsen: What makes a good humanist?**

**Sherman:** The first thought that comes to my mind is a person who practices humility and kindness in their daily affairs. A person who recognizes that it is possible to do good in this world without a belief or need for a god or book of rules (bible). I think the optimal word here is "practices". Humanism is not only a belief system but also a way of acting and interacting with this world. Humanism is a belief system in action/

**Jacobsen: How can people become involved in humanism?**

**Sherman:** Start with being the change that you want to see in this world. Practice kindness. Practice humility. Follow the golden rule, treat others as you would want to be treated. Again, my belief is that humanism isn't just a way of thinking; humanism is a way of action, a way to live one's life. Also, I would recommend that someone interested in humanism find a group of like-minded people. Come visit our webpage. [www.hapihumanist.org](http://www.hapihumanist.org) We are always looking for new members who are interested in learning more about humanism and those who are confirmed humanists and practice a humanist lifestyle

**Jacobsen: How can people become involved in humanism?**

**Sherman:** Action. Be the change you want this world to be. Humanism starts with individuals.

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

## Interview with Joshua Ofiasa Villalobos — Member, Humanist Alliance Philippines International

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 3, 2018

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** What was family background in religion? What are your own story and educational background? How did you find humanism and HAPI?

**Joshua Ofiasa Villalobos:** Family Background in Religion. My parents and their parents were staunch Catholics. In fact, my grandmother use to pray for funerals in exchange of small amount of money.

And since I was born, i find myself being with her in every funeral where she use to offer her service. We do recite the ‘mysteries’ and ‘Our Father’ and ‘Hail Mary’ for a number of times in a single night of service.

When I turn 10, I discovered new religion for myself. It is called ‘born-again christian’ me and my older sister go to that church thrice or twice a week. And at age 11, I got baptized. Own Story. I was born on April 13, 2002.

I live in Bacolod City and I’ve also lived in Bantayan Island, which is the homeland of my mother. We are 5 in the family. My sister is 10 years older than me, while me and my brother has 8-year gap.

They both have their bachelor’s degrees, my sister in Elementary Education and my older brother in Marine Transportation. But both of them are still applying for the job that fits their educational achievements.

My father is a Janitor and a Messenger whose salary is not enough to cater our needs inside the house. While my mother is a housewife. She manages our very small ‘tiangge’ or sari sari store. We live in a squatter area near the river. Educational Background Since Grade 6, I have been active in the school organization.

In fact, that year I was elected as the SPG President and also graduated as Class Salutatorian. And on my 9th Grade, I joined the School Publication and other clubs such as Supreme Student Government(SSG), Youth for Environment in Schools-Organization (YES-O).

Here is the list of my participation in different organizations in the school this year: \*Ang Tanawing Marapara (official Filipino school publication of Bata National High School) -Editor-In-Chief/Punong Patnugot \*English Guild — President \*Supreme Student Government (the highest student-governing body of Bata NHS) — Senator \* Youth for Environment in Schools-Organization (YES-O) — Public Information Officer \*Citizenship Advancement Training- 1st Lieutenant, S4 Assistant, Supply and Logistics Officer \*Disaster Risk Reduction Management — Auditor.

**Jacobsen:** How did you find humanism and HAPI?

**Villalobos:** Honestly speaking, no filters and no dramas, I love HAPI. Since our first meeting, I have seen my life’s purpose and that’s to work with HAPI. Me and my friend, Glemir is very happy after our first meeting in HAPI.

Because the people are very witty, strong and kind at the same time the advocacy is very clear and the people are very happy to get along with. Before, even though we are leaders in our school, we don't have that self-esteem.

But HAPI-Bacolod taught us how to believe in ourselves. In 2–3 months as member of HAPI Junior and now elected Head, I think I have developed to be a better me. My colleagues also talk about how they enjoy HAPI. For me, HAPI is very serious in their main advocacy of promoting humanism.

**Jacobsen: How does the world see the Philippines from the outside under Duterte? How are humanists generally treated in the Philippines? How do Filipinos, in general, view humanists and the humanist community?**

**Villalobos:** Maybe some other people, especially those who are not Filipinos see the Philippines as a bloody place since the drug war has started. Maybe some of the people who are unaware of the killing scenarios here thinks that the Philippines is a beautiful place and it has many to offer in terms of it's delicacies, tourist-spots and welcoming community, I think that the world see Duterte as a dictator and a fascist.

**Jacobsen: How are humanists generally treated in the Philippines? How do Filipinos, in general, view humanists and the humanist community?**

**Villalobos:** Secular humanism or simply humanism is not known to the Filipino people yet. Honestly, If I didn't join or know HAPI, I wouldn't know the essence or meaning of humanism.

Since the Filipinos are known to be respectful, I think the humanist community is accepted and respected here in the Philippines.

**Jacobsen: When in the Philippines, and looking at the political situation, how does religion influence politics?**

**Villalobos:** Religion and belief greatly influence the politics here in the Philippines. Especially the Catholic community has been very active in joining or sharing their thoughts and stand at some certain issues here in the Philippines.

**Jacobsen: Why is religion such a large influence on the country? What are some of the main prejudices that the irreligious experience in the Philippines?**

**Villalobos:** Maybe because we are once colonized by the Spaniards and they've baptized our ancestors. Our beliefs and traditions were greatly influenced by Catholicism. Here in the Philippines, if you're irreligious, you're bad. If you don't believe in a god you're an evil. If you don't pray you go to hell [Laughing].

**Jacobsen: Any final thoughts or feelings in conclusion?**

**Villalobos:** Thank you for the opportunity, Scott! I am always here for another interview. I hope this might help HAPI, IHEYO, and other humanist community.

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

# **In Solidarity: Canadian Minister Stands Firm on Human Rights Stance With Saudi Arabia**

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen**

**August 6, 2018**

Canada is taking a firm stance in support of the human rights dissenters internationally. In this current case, we see the firm stance of — someone who I genuinely like — Chrystia Freeland, the Foreign Affairs Minister in the Federal Liberal Government of Canada.

The Freeland stated that Canada will not be backing down from its stance for the human rights and women's rights. Canadian values amount to internationalist values. Those ethics come from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights — arguably one of the most important human rights documents in the 20th century and into the early 21st century.

The minister emphasized that Canadian foreign policy will remain in line with the work of the international and the rights documents signed and ratified for decades. Those documents emphasizing the importance and relevance, and need to implement, human rights and women's rights.

Global Affairs Canada, through its Twitter account, 'tweeted,' "Canada is gravely concerned about additional arrests of civil society and women's rights activists in Saudi Arabia, including Samar Badawi. We urge the Saudi authorities to immediately release them and all other peaceful human rights activists."

The Canadian ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), Dennis Horak, was ordered by the Saudi foreign ministry to immediately leave the country (KSA). The foreign ministry of the KSA stated that the statement by Canadian representative organization was "unfortunate, reprehensible, and unacceptable in relations between states." (Welcome to the International Relations by Tweet Era.)

The Saudi government was in disagreement over the statement by the Canadian government because of what the KSA perceives as an attempt by a foreign UN Member State to influence its own internal politics.

From their government's point of view, it would be as if the KSA began to comment on the human rights situation within Canadian society, e.g. the treatment over the long-term into the present of the Indigenous peoples.

There are now sanctions in place, where this will cost about \$15-billion in arms deals. Those costs come from armored vehicles sent to the KSA. The outcome on this arms dealings situation is unknown at the present.

The Canadian ambassador only had 24 hours to leave Riyadh. The embassy of Canada in the KSA remains open and available for business. There is now fervent work, even zealous if you will pardon the phrase, to have thousands of Saudi scholarship students leave Canadian schools in order to take their classes in other countries.

There are about 16,000 students from Saudi Arabia in Canadian schools at the moment. However, Freeland retorted with the statement that the students are still permitted to be here

Now, the airline Saudia suspended flights to and from the city of Toronto. This is viewed favorably by people in the KSA, according to Middle East Affairs Analyst Bessma Momani. These efforts of sanctions and so on could be seen as positive backlash against Canada for raising human rights concerns. Any raising of human rights concerns in the Middle East is a concern to the countries' leaders in the region.

KSA has been becoming aggressive in the MENA region in general, trying to assert itself over the last few years. However, the posturing against Canada may remain something of note because it is easier to do this against a nation not in the region, so not as important to the Islamic theocratic regime.

The human rights organization Amnesty International stated that Samar Badawi, or the sister of the blogger Raif Badawi, has been detained. Also, a prominent female human rights activist, Nassima al-Sada has been taken in as well. There is an aggressive stance towards human rights activists and campaigners. They will be detained. They will be arrest and kept indefinitely.

It is because the regime does not want to have to deal with its own human rights violations, probably, in part, to do with the fact that in a theocratic state the transcendent moral ethic trumps any secular universalist ethic from the international community.

Freeland stated, "Ensaf is a Canadian citizen, she and her family, therefore merit special attention from the government of Canada and a lot of Canadian civil society has been speaking up for her."

The wife of Raif Badawi, Ensaf Haidar, lives in Sherbrooke, Quebec. She has been calling for the release of her husband for a long time, and now this extends to her sister as well.

This over time may have created the tension and, thus, the eventual international relations disagreement or "dispute" between Canada and the KSA.

## Ayaz Nizami Still Needs Help in Pakistan

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 7, 2018

Ayaz Nizami is the Vice President of the Atheist & Agnostic Alliance Pakistan. He is a blogger, who is now a political prisoner in Pakistan, of all places. He was arrested on March 24, 2017 based on the imaginary crime of ‘blasphemy.’

Those who want to enforce their faith over others to prevent criticism or ridicule will jail the dissenters. The dissenters do not have this ability. That form of asymmetry creates a nightmare for human rights activists, whether word or deed, and a dream tactic on the part of authoritarians to arrest political activists, such as Nizami.

He, at present, is facing the death penalty. This becomes a common phenomenon with the people inside of theocratic regimes subject to the whims of the powerful and the privileged.

The charge is the translation of materials in English to Urdu. The material was to be published. He founded a website, [realisticapproach.org](http://realisticapproach.org), which amounts to an irreligious Urdu website.

Then he served as the Vice President of the AAAP. I was days from interviewing him for Conatus News, and then heard of the news of his arrest. He was arrested around the time of a cracking down on social media content seen as blasphemous.

These crackdowns were by the Pakistani government. Then there was a hashtag, #hangayaznizami, after the arrest of Nizami. Then his material and social media account were shut down because of the purportedly controversial content (freedom of expression denied).

# Victory Against Non-Science

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 9, 2018

The Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) made an announcement.

The news came as a relief and sign of further hope for proper science and medicine to the humanist community in the United Kingdom. That is to say, the homeopathy remedies, according to the announcement, will no longer get their own brand of funding.

The homeopathic remedies may continue in some form within the private market; however, the public spending will not support the purported ‘remedies’ with the public funding any longer.

Evidence-based medicine expands beyond the work of Gordon Guyatt in Canada at McMaster University. It amounts to a method of empiricism, standards of evidence and transparency and peer review, and a philosophy of naturalism to come to the truth about the world — plus an ethic of doing no harm.

To waste money better spent on other things would amount to a harm, the work here is an important victory, though not pervasive enough for the funding of proper medicine in search of more modern cures and treatments with real evidence and efficacy.

CCG Clinical Chair, Dr Jonathan Hayes, said, “We are working hard to become an evidence-informed organisation because we need to make the best use of all resources to offer treatment and care to the widest range of people. The decision on homeopathy funding today is a step towards this and brings us in line with national guidelines.”



# Interview with John Miles — Member, Humanist Alliance Philippines International

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 11, 2018

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** When it comes to the Filipino community at large, what seems like some of the more prominent cases of individuals abusing religion for personal gain?

**John Miles:** Abusing religion? No, using the religion at its full extent, yes. Because religion limits human thinking. The drift occurs when the person starts ignoring logic and his instincts. Separation from his instinctual nature inevitably plunges civilized man into conflict between conscious and unconscious, spirit and nature, knowledge and faith. It controls how people thinks and in the end those one's on the top of it gains power.

I would like to share this message from Carl Sagan that got me in tears about his perspective of Earth, Space and Humanity as a whole: The Pale Blue Dot — <https://youtu.be/wupToqz1e2g>.

**Jacobsen:** How does the world see the Philippines from the outside under Duterte?

**Miles:** Working in an oil/gas industry and living abroad gives me a very narrow view of this subject. Frankly, I don't give a fuck.

**Jacobsen:** How are atheists generally treated in the Philippines?

**Miles:** Like the lowest kind of human being — my family struggled for years accepting the fact that I do not believe in any deities. I've struggled 2 years before that, trying to accept that I have been fooled my whole life of a lie. They tried their best to convince me and when they realized they can't. I was disowned for years. Just recently they started talking to me, and I am very happy for that.

People, not only in the Philippines see us as "Satan worshipers" not realizing we don't believe in Satan too. That shows the idiocracy of an individual and right after that, they change how they interact with me, so I learned fast when to shut my mouth and when to speak up.

**Jacobsen:** How can the non-religious overcome religious privilege, e.g., building a coalition and a solidarity movement?

**Miles:** The only way non-religious can overcome religious privileges is to take it away from them. Away from our government, away from our kids and away from our school system. But not take away their freedom of what to believe as long as they don't affect the factors that matters the most. When an individual believer is trying to change the law in line with his personal faith, that's where it should stop.

The more we educate children and give them the knowledge and freedom to question everything is the more our future will be a bit brighter without religion.

**Jacobsen:** When in the Philippines, and looking at the political situation, how does religion influence politics? How did you find humanism and HAPI?

**Miles:** Politics in the Philippines is greatly influenced by religion. Roman Catholics has a great role in Philippine's political agenda. And for this I am ashamed of my country. People that have ridiculous ideology should never have anything to do with government, or in real life in general.

Culture is important but it's time that we have to weigh things between nonsense religious activities to a more productive and viable or realistic things in life.

**Jacobsen: Why is religion such a large influence on the country? What are some of the main prejudices that the irreligious experience in the Philippines?**

**Miles:** Religion has a large influence to each region around the world, whatever religion it is. Religion controls how people think and in Philippines —

1. When you have been told "There is a God." all your life.
2. When religion has a big part on our culture. E.g. Television shows, celebrations, government decisions. Etc.
3. How people reacts and how they treat when they find out you're a non-believer.

It's pretty hard for people to think outside the box. Almost impossible, it's even unthinkable for a person to even consider the possibility that there is no God. Despite the fact that there is absolutely no evidence to such claims.

**Jacobsen: Any final thoughts or feelings in conclusion?**

**Miles:** I would like to share this quote from Neil deGrasse Tyson — "God is an ever-receding pocket of scientific ignorance that's getting smaller and smaller and smaller as time moves on."

I am a great believer of unity, love, values and truth. And we all should be. Although I validate my views of truth in accord with recent facts and evidence discovered by science; but until the claim of a deity or any other religious ideologies proven true: Religion has no say of how I live my life, no place in my family, not included of category how I choose my friends, and should NOT be welcomed in our society.

Thank you for this opportunity Scott.

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

# Interview with Shanaaz Gokool — CEO, Dying With Dignity

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 13, 2018

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** With respect to human rights activism and physician-assisted death access, for 18- to 35-year-olds, how can they become involved?

**Shanaaz Gokool:** Something I should have said in the previous interview, but I will say now is that we prefer the term either medical assistance in dying or assistance in dying. I will tell you why. Not just because “suicide” is inflammatory, but in Canada assistance in dying is a combination of two separate things.

Voluntary euthanasia where the IV administered medication will end your life or you can get a written prescription to take oral meds to take your own life. When you combine both, you get assisted dying because it is not just euthanasia in Canada — and it is not just assisted suicide. It is both.

As to your question, I like to clarify that for people. It is not factually correct to say one and not the other. That’s why assisted dying is a better term because it is neutral language and reflects what your options actually are and what your rights are.

You are entitled to either of those options. In terms of how people can get involved, many people are seeing loved ones that are dying. It is not necessarily assisted dying. It is not necessarily for people in specific age categories.

People who are older disproportionately die more than others just due to age. With that said, I think that we have started in Canada an independent witness program because in order to make a formal MAiD request.

You need two independent witnesses to witness and sign your request form. That is across the country, except in Quebec. They have different legislation. They don’t require the witness [Laughing]. But everywhere else, what we have found, it can be difficult to find independent witnesses for a variety of reasons.

Some want privacy. Some don’t know anybody. Sometimes, facilities are telling people and interpreting the legislation too restrictively, so that no one in the facility, if they are in long-term hospice or long-term care, can be an independent witness.

That isn’t true. As long as you are not providing direct personal healthcare and don’t own the facility, then you can be an independent witness, you cannot go forward with the request without witnesses.

Through Dying With Dignity Canada, we have about 150 volunteers...

**Jacobsen:** Wow.

**Gokool:** ...signed up to be witnesses all across the country. We continue to look for more because we can’t always meet the demand. We get requests from doctors, from health authorities, from hospitals, from hospices. The program is very well-known.

It is a tangible thing for people to do. We've got an agreement and a guide and training. It is usually a buddy system to get people to the point where they feel comfortable going out and doing this.

It is an incredibly profound volunteer type of work, but, at the end of day, we don't like the witnessing part of it. It is supposed to be a safeguard, but it is not a safeguard. But as long as it is in the legislation and as long as it creates a problem for access, then we will continue to support and grow that program. So, people don't have that problem as another barrier to access.

That is probably the most tangible way that people can go and be involved with our organization. We do advanced care planning training throughout the country. A number of our volunteers help coordinate events and do the training themselves.

We have actions on our website right now. The big one that we're focused on is forced transfers for medical assistance in dying. That is for when you are in the facility, usually a publicly funded facility where they have been able to opt out from providing on-site. We have a petition. People can write letters to their premiers and health ministers in their province and territory to let them know that forced transfers are cruel.

That they can cause so much suffering, physical and psychological — emotional — suffering. They are wasteful. They can be very wasteful. They add a certain amount of cost to something. We're talking about people who are very physically compromised. They shouldn't have to be forced out of one facility because they are trying to access their right to an assisted death.

There are petition signing and letter writing that people can do. I think the most important thing that people can do. You don't have to go to our website to do this, but people certainly can. You can have the conversation with friends and family and colleagues.

We have something called Digni-tea to help people have conversations around death and dying. They are not all about assisted dying, right? Often, they are about advanced care planning and what that looks like and making sure you have someone who will be your alternative decision-maker. So, the decision-maker, should you no longer be able to articulate your medical wishes or treatments or to stop treatment.

I think that the Carter Decision. I like to tell people that it unleashed a glacier.

When you are in a glacier's natural environment, you can't often see how fast their moving in the water, then one shows up on the coast of Newfoundland. That is what I think the Carter Decision has done for us in this country.

It has given us safe spaces to have all kinds of conversations around end of life care. There are all sorts of stories in the news about these issues and those become really important and helpful segues into having those difficult conversations.

I remember in the Fall of 2013. I didn't even know Dying With Dignity Canada existed as an organization. I was listening on the CBC to the story of Don Low, who was a well-known doctor here in Toronto especially during the SARS outbreak. He was pleading for assisted dying as he was dying with his brain tumor, having those conversations with my brothers at those times. Because it was in the news. There will always be a story somewhere.

That having people start engaging those conversation is really critical to helping us all prepare for the inevitable. And, making sure that our loved ones are prepared. I sat down about a year

and a half ago, maybe 2 years, with my mom and sister. We went through my mom's advanced care plan. I didn't know before I worked here to be honest. I helped to ensure my sister, who will be her substitute decision-maker, has a clear sense of what my mother wants.

She didn't before, but she is very grateful for that, even though she is my mom's main caregiver right now. I think that that doesn't seem like a way to get involved, but it is probably one of the most important things people can do.

If you have an individual or collectives en masse having these conversations, that is a good thing for them and their loved ones. It is a good thing for the cause of making sure that people can have dignity in their death.

# Interview with Reginald Gajete— Member, Humanist Alliance Philippines International

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 19, 2018

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** When it comes to the Filipino community at large, what seems like some of the more prominent cases of individuals abusing religion for personal gain?

**Reginald Gajete:** It's politics. The Philippines is mostly populated by religious conservatives, so using religion will definitely give you an edge especially during your campaign.

**Jacobsen:** How does the world see the Philippines from the outside under Duterte? How are atheists generally treated in the Philippines?

**Gajete:** From my standpoint, Philippines is on a radical paradigm shift under Duterte, there have been a lot of changes lately, some positive and some negative. I like to call it "The Birth of New Age Philippines" In general, atheists in the Philippines are still treated with disrespect and pity, but it's slowly changing, people are now embracing this concept.

**Jacobsen:** How can the non-religious overcome religious privilege, e.g., building a coalition and a solidarity movement?

**Gajete:** To be honest it's still a challenge. The best thing to do is not declare your disbelief and you'll be fine.

**Jacobsen:** When in the Philippines, and looking at the political situation, how does religion influence politics? How did you find humanism and HAPI?

**Gajete:** If a new bill is passed but it's not in line with the church's teachings, it won't be signed or it will take time to get it signed despite the social and economic benefits. One good example is the Reproductive Health Bill which was a big issue that took 14 years before it was finally signed. I think it's when I got bored with atheism, got fed up with the endless arguments and nothing is being resolved. Then I came across a website about humanism, read their articles and then I realized that this is what I wanted to do. Upon researching, I found out that there's no humanist organization in the Philippines.

That's when a good friend of mine contacted me about a new organization she's building, her name is Mrs. M or Marissa Torres Langseth. She asked me to lead the first chapter, so I said yes, then HAPI just kept growing and I'm so proud of what Ms. M's mission have become.

**Jacobsen:** Why is religion such a large influence on the country? What are some of the main prejudices that the irreligious experience in the Philippines?

**Gajete:** I think it's because religion is closely tied with the traditions and cultures in Philippines. If you tell anybody that you're irreligious then they'll conclude that you're immoral and evil, and then you'll lose credibility in every direction.

**Jacobsen:** Any final thoughts or feelings in conclusion?

**Gajete:** Thank you for giving me this wonderful opportunity. More power to you and your cause..

# On a Bishop and Waning Catholicism Due to Lack of Interest in Religion

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 23, 2018

According to Rome Reports, Cardinal Antonio Marto argued that the main issue for the religious is the actual lack of interest in religion. It was a short news article on the story of the cardinal and bishop, and his perspective on the waning interest in religion now.

Marto was the one who welcomed Pope Francis to Fatima — his city — in 2017 and the then-pope Benedict XVI in 2006. Coming from a family of deep faith, Marto knows the Roman Catholic religion and theology, and cultural and social life.

Marto was ordained as a priest with a doctorate in Theology with Benedict appointing him the bishop of Fatima, of the city. He was reluctant to take the position; however, the pope, at the time, wanted Marto to be the bishop.

As reported, “Fatima receives thousands of people from all continents every year. For this reason, it’s interesting to get his opinion about what should be the Church’s priority.” Marto is concerned about the state of the Church. This is someone with authority, education, and influence within the Roman Catholic Church from a Catholic news source.

“At this moment, the priority is to bring God to the hearts of men and women, and men and women to the heart of God, and this is part of the message of Fatima,” Marto opined, “This is because we live in a time of religious indifference. Our greatest enemy is not militant atheism but religious indifference. This indifference is fought with the joyful and convinced testimony of faithful Christians.”

The decline in the global interest in religion — though continued growth in the numbers — remains a concern for the individuals within the Roman Catholic Church including the hierarchs such as Marto.

The article concluded, “It’s this issue he hopes to continue working on as cardinal and theological bishop of Fatima one who finds rests by walking in the mountains or spending time with his family and friends.”

# Sin by Wifi

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 23, 2018

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

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

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

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

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

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



## “The Lock In” with Keith Lowell Jensen

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 23, 2018

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

Keith Lowell Jensen is an atheist and a stand-up comedian. In this video The Lock In, he discusses the odd intersection between God, atheism, and dating.

Check it out!

The clip is from his comedy special Bad Comedy For Bad People.

Here's the synopsis of the special:

*When Keith Lowell Jensen started a Twitter account for his daughter, he didn't expect @MaxTheTiger to gain an international audience. Then again, he probably never pictured having the “death talk” with li'l @MaxTheNecromancer as his small, ardent atheist tried to Lazarus a froglet. And even that one wasn't as odd as learning a thing or two from the comprehensive “sex talk” his wife and several organic, fair trade bananas laid on their nephew. On his latest release from Stand Up! Records, Jensen considers the ethics of incarceration and homelessness, presenting a vegan yet still modest proposal and explores the capitalist response to teen depression (mainly through mall sales of Joy Division shirts). He even reasons that, if we learned anything from the Civil Rights Movement and the music that grew alongside it, gay marriage's “slippery slope” is leading us to a better, kinder, future in which an aging, yet still wise and witty Jensen spends his dotage tending bonsai trees, building model railroads, and personally fellating all his male friends.*

# Atheists Faking Muslim Identity for Safety in Indonesia

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 23, 2018

According to Friendly Atheist, many atheists in Indonesia fear for their lives and so live under fake Muslim identities.

Indonesia has the largest population of Muslims in the world. The number of Muslims in standard statistics may be misleading because of the fear of reprisal from the community, the family, and even the state. If someone is in fear for their livelihood, then they may simply work to fit into the pack.

As reported, “Living a double life isn’t all that uncommon in Indonesia, where atheists live in fear of being sent to jail (or worse) thanks to fundamentalist religious groups. AFP profiled one of these atheists, identified only as “Luna Atmowijoyo,” about her de-conversion from Islam years ago.”

Atmowijoyo lives with her parents. But still, she wears an Islamic headscarf to simply fit into the family and so the community, and to avoid the backlash, potentially and likely, of her father. She was told to not have friendships with non-Muslims.

She is 30-years-old and still finds a lot of the simple things bother her. Atmowijoyo stated, “Like I couldn’t say Merry Christmas or Happy Waisak to people of other religions,” where other problems involved the treatment of homosexual males and females as in some way dysfunctional/abnormal.

The juxtaposition of the Quran and science were also problems. Then the idea entered her brain, that God may not exist. The reportage notes the Abrahamic faiths’ marginalization of the sexual orientation and gender identity minority communities.

It continued, “But for most of us, going public with that idea will lead to a loss of family or friends. It’s not a death sentence. In Indonesia, atheists who speak out about their beliefs risk their lives and freedom.”

The law of the land in Indonesia does not help, either. It has some purported stipulations about the freedom of expression. However, the freedom expression of speaking about a lack of a belief in God or gods becomes something that places an individual at risk of arrest or killing by the authorities.

The six religions recognized by Indonesia are Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and others. However, with over 90% of the population believing in Islam, the criticism of religion and a religious Theity, including the Islamic one especially, becomes potentially grounds for public and legal punishment.

It may even be a greater risk for a woman. In 2018, one student was charged for a Facebook post that made a comparison between Allah and some Greek gods, while also stating the Lord of the Rings is comparable in reality to the Quran.

Alexander Aan received 30 months in jail in 2012 for the posting of explicit material of the Prophet Mohammed while also declaring himself — Aan — an atheist. The government will not acknowledge any hypocrisy between allowing someone to be an atheist but only keeping it to themselves, under potential punishment with the force of law.

Abdurrahman Mas'ud, head of the research and development agency at the Ministry of Religion, explained, "Once somebody disseminates that idea, or the concept of atheism, that will be problematic."

The article concluded:

*Blasphemy laws are always going to be blasphemy laws. Nobody is falling for this "atheism is legal" nonsense, and there's a good reason some atheists are hiding their lack of faith from everyone in Indonesia. Without reforming the culture and the laws — with the help of believers who truly believe in free speech — nothing will get better in this area.*

# Richard Dawkins likes Cathedral Bells

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 23, 2018

According to [The Atlantic](#), Dr. Richard Dawkins spoke on a cultural taste for the bells of cathedrals and a distaste for the calls of ‘Allahu Akhbar.’

Dawkins tweeted an image of himself in Winchester, England on a Sunny day.

Richard Dawkins is at it again.

The famous atheist and bestselling author of *The God Delusion* tweeted on Monday a picture of himself sitting on a park bench and enjoying a sunny day in Winchester, England. For many people, this moment might have been a chance to just kick back and relax. But apparently not for Dawkins.

“Listening to the lovely bells of Winchester, one of our great mediaeval cathedrals,” he tweeted to his nearly 3 million followers. “So much nicer than the aggressive-sounding ‘Allahu Akhbar.’ Or is that just my cultural upbringing?”

Yes, actually, it is, replied thousands of people. Many flat-out accused him of racism, xenophobia, bigotry, or Islamophobia. News outlets from [The Independent](#) to [Newsweek](#) reported on the public outrage. Even by Dawkinsian standards of provocation, this latest statement felt to many like a shock.

In fact, however, it’s pretty common for native English speakers to perceive Arabic sounds as “aggressive.” So much so that American accent reduction coaches make money off Arabic-speakers by warning them that their native language “may cause [them] to sound harsh or aggressive.” Another adjective often applied to the language is “guttural.” Many people characterize German in the same way.

Sociolinguists, who study the ways people’s cultural beliefs affect their beliefs about various languages, say this is no coincidence.

“A lot of times people’s negative or positive attitudes about a particular group get transferred onto the language,” explained Christopher Lucas, a professor of Arabic linguistics at SOAS in London. “They start to believe that it’s just the linguistic content of the language that is the bearer of those features that they experience as negative or positive, when that is almost never the case in actuality. ... Sounds are just sounds. They don’t have any objective content that you can map onto specific emotional states.”

That’s not to say the perception of sound is entirely socially constructed. “There is some non-arbitrary link between sounds and the meanings people associate with them,” said Morgan Sonderegger, an associate professor of linguistics at McGill University. For instance, he said, it’s pretty well established that words with higher-sounding vowels tend to denote smaller objects, while words with lower-sounding vowels tend to denote bigger things; this is true cross-culturally. He cited a 2016 study that examined words from nearly two-thirds of the world’s languages and found that people everywhere often associate certain sounds with certain meanings. And an earlier cross-cultural experiment found that when people are shown a curvy shape and a jagged shape, and are asked which one is a boubba and which one is a kiki, they overwhelmingly associate the curvy shape with boubba and the jagged one with kiki. Sonderegger

noted, however, that although human beings do seem to have some built-in associations, even these are just “raw materials that can be overwritten by cultural biases.”

The linguist Vineeta Chand argues that there’s actually nothing inherent in the sounds of a language that make it more or less enticing. Instead, people tend to find a foreign language attractive when the group it’s associated with enjoys economic or sociocultural prestige — think of the popularity of French as “romantic.” And the linguist Guy Deutscher argues that people tend to find sounds or sound combinations grating when they appear rarely or not at all their own native language — like the consonant cluster lbstv in selbstverständlich, which is German for obvious.

Lucas added that he believes Dawkins’s “vague soup of negative ideas [about Islam] is bleeding into his transcription.” The author’s tweet refers to “Allahu Akhbar,” but the proper transliteration would be Akbar, because this Arabic word contains no kh sound (as opposed to, say, the word sheikh). “He’s transcribing it as if it’s a kh, and for people who are native speakers of a language that lacks a kh sound — like most dialects of English — that is very often felt to be a harsh, ugly sound. People here in the U.K., when you ask them what’s your opinion about German, will say ‘Oh, it’s ugly! You’ve got all these kh, kh, kh sounds.’ But there are many other languages with these sounds, like Dutch. And no one in my experience says that Dutch is ugly.”

Dawkins posted a new status on Twitter on Wednesday, after a barrage of intense media attention: “The call to prayer can be hauntingly beautiful, especially if the muezzin has a musical voice. My point is that ‘Allahu Akhbar’ is anything but beautiful when it is heard just before a suicide bomb goes off. That is when Islam is tragically hijacked by violence.”

The tweet, which seemed meant to defuse criticism from the left, reinforces the linguists’ point: The words sound “aggressive” to Dawkins, not because of some inherent acoustic harshness, because he associates them with suicide bombers.

Earlier this year, Dawkins made headlines for giving away free copies of *The God Delusion* to Muslims after discovering that millions of copies had been illegally downloaded in Arabic translation in Muslim-majority countries. Yet for the atheist provocateur, taking issue with the Arabic language seems to be something of a pattern. He did it in 2013, 2014, and 2015. His 2014 tweet is especially striking for its similarity to this week’s remarks: “I’ve read that Arabic is the most beautiful language,” Dawkins wrote then. “I questioned that aesthetically & was bizarrely accused of racism. So I deleted it.”

But Dawkins keeps repeating himself. And many of his followers seem content with that: His “Allahu Akbar” tweet collected more than 16,000 likes.

“The people who get away with simplistic ideas about languages are people who don’t speak them and haven’t lived the experience of those languages being used to express love and anger and hilarity and sadness,” Lucas said. “If you’ve been exposed to a language a lot, that pretty much guarantees you’re not going to have simplistic ideas about it.”

# Supreme Court of Canada Supports LGBTQ

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 23, 2018

According to Mondaq, there was a Supreme Court of Canada decision on June 15 2018 relevant to LGBTQ rights.

There was a landmark decision on the Canadian limits for their institutional religious freedoms. It amounted to the law school wanted by an Evangelical Christian University in Langley, British Columbia being rejected on legal grounds.

As reported, “The decisions concerned regulator rejections of a law school which required that students sign a covenant prohibiting any form of sexual activity outside of a marriage between a man and a woman.”

Two cases — Law Society of British Columbia v Trinity Western University and Trinity Western University v Law Society of Upper Canada — had the Supreme Court of Canada find both the Ontario and British law societies’ legal decisions to not accredit the law school came from a balanced place.

The law societies made the decision to not accredit the law school for Trinity Western University (TWU). The decision was said to have made a balance between the Law Societies’ mandates and religious freedom.

It continued, “TWU is a private post-secondary institution that provides education in an evangelical Christian environment. While LGBTQ students are not prohibited from attending TWU, all students are required to sign a covenant that prohibits any form of sexual activity outside of a marriage between a man and a woman.”

This limits students. With the covenant, the Law Societies made a vote. The vote determined a proper denial of the accreditation of the law school proposed by TWU. With extensive deliberations, it was decided that TWU was discriminatory against LGBTQ people.

“On judicial review, Ontario’s Divisional Court held that the Law Society of Ontario had properly exercised its statutory mandate to act in the public interest in refusing to grant accreditation to TWU’s proposed law school because its mandatory covenant was discriminatory,” the reportage stated.

The denial of the accreditation, apparently, violated the Section 2(a) religious right found in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The court was found to have made a proportionate and balanced decision on the equality rights and the Law Society of Ontario’s public interest mandate.

“In contrast, the British Columbia Court of Appeal reversed the Law Society of British Columbia’s decision not to approve TWU’s proposed law school. The court instead found that the decision’s effect on TWU’s religious rights was severe compared to the minimal impact on Law Society of British Columbia’s statutory public interest objectives,” the article said.

The appeal was then made to the SCC. The SCC made a staggering 7–2 decision to deny accreditation to the TWU law school. Most of the SCC found that the Law Societies violated the communal religious freedom of TWU.

However, with the Charter right invoked for the legal societies' decision, the SCC used a decision-making framework from some previous decisions. It was the Dore/Loyola framework. It was meant for the balance of the Charter rights and the statutory objectives.

Reportage continued, "The Supreme Court held that the Law Societies had balanced competing interests reasonably and proportionately. As with many administrative decisions, the decision under review did not need to be correct; it was only required to fall within a range of possible reasonable outcomes."

Two sides were present. The SCC ratiocinated that the religious rights of the TWU community were not limited based on the mandatory covenant because of this not being a requirement of the Christian environment.

The other was that the statutory public interest mandate is to prevent harm to LGBTQ students of law. It means a diverse bar with equal access and opportunities. The decision highlighted the balance between public interest and religious rights.

"In a minority concurring decision, Justice Rowe found that TWU's religious rights had not been engaged by the Law Societies' decisions. He argued that while religious rights protected individuals and faith communities' beliefs and practices," the article explained, "it did not protect their attempts to impose adherence to others who do not share their beliefs.<sup>[9]</sup> With no Charter right balanced against the Law Societies' public interest mandate, the decision to deny TWU accreditation was entirely reasonable."

There was another minority decision happening concomitantly. The Chief Justice McLachlin stated that the Dore/Loyola framework shall be applied. It was commentary from McLachlin on the freedom of association and the freedom of expression.

"She ultimately agreed, however, that the decision of the Law Societies was reasonable as they had a heightened duty to maintain equality and avoid condoning discrimination," the article stated, "In dissent, Justice Côté and Justice Brown argued that the Law Societies' statutory mandates did not include the governance of law schools."

There was further commentary by Justice Côté and Justice Brown about the mandatory covenant not being discriminatory. Their argument was that the covenant did not target LGBTQ people in particular and, therefore, this did not comprise any form of standard discrimination.

It, on the implications, continued to state, "The decision serves as a high-profile example of judicial review of administrative decisions engaging Charter rights. The Supreme Court declined to depart from the Dore/Loyola framework, despite criticism in some circles."

The SCC made balance with the statutory objectives and the religious rights within the context of the Dore/Loyola framework. The decision may show SCC deference to the statutory mandates of administrative bodies.

"The impact of these decisions extends beyond adjudging the quality of various legal tests. The number of interveners (23) across religious and human rights spectra illustrate how personally important these decisions were to groups across Canada," the article concluded, "As noted above, the Supreme Court focused on interests of diversity and equal access to the legal profession in reaching its conclusions. Many will view these decisions favourably as a continuation of the use of the Charter to advance the rights of LGBTQ Canadian citizens."

# **The New Mythologist and the New Atheist: A Neuroscientist and a Clinical Psychologist Dialogue on Truth**

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen**

**August 23, 2018**

According to Psychology Today, a practicing Canadian psychologist and an American neuroscientist discussed religious claims to truth.

The psychologist is Jordan Peterson. The neuroscientist is Sam Harris. It has been an ongoing debate with the New Atheists dominating in the 2000s. They were ascendant and debating the prominent Christian philosophers and theologians.

The 2010s see a different debate happening with many of the prominent New Atheists aging or deceased. The current debate between the two were about religion and true speech with a connection to myths and then also the world of rationality and science.

As reported, “What makes the debate so mercurial is that Peterson himself does not believe in traditional Christian claims such as the resurrection. Rather, he sees religious belief as a Darwinian adaptation that remains mostly unconscious.”

The orientation of Peterson is the potential for a spiritual reality with the truths from the religious myths. That is, human psychology and societal structures can be illuminated through the mythologies of times past.

One evolutionary biologist, Bret Weinstein, moderated some dialogues in Vancouver and Dublin. Then there was one with Douglas Murray as well. Harris and Peterson looked into the roots of religion and the ways in which this relates to truth.

“One illuminating way of thinking about religious belief, evoked in their second debate, involves a loaded gun. If we are taught to treat all guns as loaded, the argument goes, we will be safer in the long run,” the article explained, “Whether or not it is true that a particular gun is loaded or not does not matter — so long as we treat every gun as if it is loaded, we will be more likely to survive. A society that believes that every gun is loaded, then, is more likely to survive than a society which does not.”

Harris spoke the literal truth and the metaphorical truth. The latter as having utility within the world of fiction. Then these metaphorical truths can be more helpful than literal truth in some cases. The thought is that the society built on the assertion of human beings being built in the image of the creator of the universe is better for having a basic purpose.

Peterson argued for the utility of the Biblical stories within the framework of Darwinian evolution. That these stories must have survival significance.

“In his lectures and writings, Peterson describes the story of Cain and Abel as a warning against envy and resentment, and the Tower of Babel as a call for caution against centralized, totalizing systems. These stories, he argues, are ‘metaphorically true,’ even if they are literally false,” the article stated.



Harris pointed to some of the religious narratives containing some moral data. However, they can be useless too. Because these assume gods or a God. It becomes a “misapprehension of the causal structure of the cosmos.”

Peterson’s concern comes in the form of a secular ethic coming from preceding ethics; if we lose those preceding ones, then we lose ethical systems now. We need to know their origins. He directed attention to human and animal sacrifice. The idea is give something up now for later. He argues for this as the discovery of the future.

Harris argued for the utility of the narratives but without the belief in revelation or the supernatural in essence.

“Here, the debate reached a kind of impasse. Peterson insisted that because so much of our thinking is unconscious, and stories are our way of describing the behaviors that emerge from that unconscious processing, our old religious stories might have far more to teach us about ourselves than we can rationally discern on our own,” the article stated.

Harris argued this was an evasion on the part of Peterson. However, for the three discussions, the main conversation focused on the nature of the truth. Peterson, apparently, echoed the arguments of one Christian philosopher, Alvin Plantinga.

That the adaptively evolved faculties should be judged on the ability for greater survival of the organism. Harris views this as a stretch. That even, in one thought experiment, if humans died off as a species; our fundamental scientific and rational discoveries would still be true.

Peterson stated that if we die based on some ideas then, maybe, those ideas are not true.

The article concluded, “At the end of the debates, the fundamental question of religion and the human mind remains unsettled. But that doesn’t take the joy out of watching two scientists tear out the foundations of truth, morality and culture beneath their feet and try to put them back together again.”

# No Afterlife for Broken Computers

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 25, 2018

*I regard the brain as a computer which will stop working when its components fail.*

-Stephen Hawking

Genius is a rare combination of high intelligence, conscientiousness, and creativity. We lost one, recently. Stephen Hawking by recognized accomplishment of the scientific community, intellectual peers, and the public was widely recognized as a genius.

Hawking died on March 14 at the age of 76. For decades, he suffered from “amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS, a neurodegenerative disease.”

Colleagues, friends, family, and acquaintance, remembered him for mind-blowing books, theorization in theoretical physics about black holes, dancing with him, a wheelchair and permanent ability to only communicate through an electronically produced voice, and being a heroic scientist to many.

Hundreds were in line and mourned his death at the funeral. There was a tribute in Cambridge through graffiti for Hawking. Some publications have produced albums in tribute to Hawking’s legacy and life.

Due to the ALS, Hawking was bound to a wheelchair permanently for decades. Now, it is being put up for museum offers. Also, on the professional front, and intriguingly, even with all of the professional and public accolades for the accomplishments in theoretical physics; Hawking never won the Nobel Prize.

One US expert speculated that Hawking may have been suffering from other ailments as well, e.g., polio. He will be honored within the halls of the scientific community and for being an ambassador for science.

In one of his last appearances in a film setting, Hawking will be exploring the potential futures for humanity. In his gigantic intellectual and cultural wake, he leaves behind a wealth of great quotes for the general public, even the final gift of an Easter meal for the hungry.

Though dead, Hawking did not believe in an afterlife. He died an atheist.

# Humanism Day in India

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 27, 2018

Humanism Day was held through the Freethought Party of India (FPI) and the AMOFOI on the birthday of the former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. It is the 5th death anniversary of Dr. Narendra Dabholkar.

It was celebrated on August 20th to highlight the successes of science and the values of humanism. The General Secretary of the FPI noted Rajiv Gandhi was a great humanist and had a high level of lifelong dedication to the scientific perspective on the world discovered through the methodologies of science.

He had Sam Pitroda from the United States of America, a prominent telecom engineer, come to India in order to advance the telecommunications industries and kick-start the revolution in India.

## Interview with O'Neal de los Trinos — Member, Humanist Alliance Philippines International

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 27, 2018

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What was family background in religion? What are your own story and educational background? How did you find humanism and HAPI?**

**O'Neal de los Trinos:** I lived my youth steeped in two religious traditions: Roman Catholicism and Calvinist Protestantism. I was raised Catholic, became a Protestant in high school, and reverted to Catholicism in college (before becoming an atheist thereafter).

On my mother's side, life and family centered on the Roman Catholic Faith and its traditions: everyone in my extended family went to Sunday Mass together, and almost all adult members prayed the Rosary together once a week, as time permitted. All major religious festivities and activities were faithfully observed, with high regard accorded to introducing children to established Catholic practices and keeping alive enthusiasm for the Faith among adults.

On my father's side, Protestantism is the foundation upon which the religious life of the family is grounded. Though my paternal relatives are strict Methodists until now, my uncle's denomination — the Presbyterian Church — had a deeper impact on my religious formation as a teenager. In fact, I converted to Presbyterianism, given I initially found Calvinism, as expressed in the Presbyterian Faith, more coherent than Catholicism. At my young age, I was already more partial to logical coherence than any other consideration, a factor that later led to my reversion to Catholicism and eventual "deconversion" to atheism.

I went to a Protestant "Bible School" for one year after high school. It was an experience I always pleasantly look back to. In college, I majored in the Humanities (with specialization in the Humanities) at the University of Asia and the Pacific (UA&P). I opened my mind to different, opposing paradigms by which to view or interpret reality. I was naturally susceptible to religious skepticism. Suddenly, Thomas Aquinas no longer proved to be the exclusive authority on any issue relating to the big questions of life: appeal to an unmoved Mover no longer seemed inevitable when we ask about the origin of the universe. Descartes' epistemic doubt overturned experiential knowledge as the unarguable beginning point in natural theology, or in any discourse, for that matter. Kant's localization of "causes" in the human psyche undermined the causal transcendence of God. Accordingly, Hegel's elevation of the conscious mind as the ultimate arbiter of knowledge, and even "being" itself, compelled me to abandon divine revelation as the basis of pursuing absolute truth. Though Hegel's archaic model is admittedly flawed, at least, his general vision of an all-encompassing, comprehensive logical system by which to understand and discover knowledge proved to be the way I was most comfortable of pursuing. At first, I applied much effort in intellectually justifying my Catholic religion philosophically; after college, I realized it was a futile exercise. A self-consistent worldview founded upon reason and evidence required some honesty that eventually drove me to atheism. Since the center of my evolving worldview was the human mind, it was natural for me to make its good the ultimate good. Its perfection the ultimate goal of life. Hereafter, I embraced humanism as the closest label behind which I could anchor my ideas and beliefs.

As for HAPI, its lovely founder, Mrs. Marissa Langseth graciously introduced me to it via Facebook. My recollection is poor, but I believe my first encounter with her was through a different atheist group, PATAS, sometime in 2012. There was a heavy atmosphere of negativity among them. Eventually, Mrs. Langseth founded HAPI. It had a clearer, more elevated vision, i.e., to help build the human community and raise the dignity of its marginalized constituents. Of course, I still have misgivings about its overall agenda, in view of the very visible participation of the LGBTQ lobby; however, all things being equal, HAPI is the best among humanist groups in the country — it welcomes everyone, both theistic and otherwise, insofar as the person believes in the power and primacy of humanity.

**Jacobsen: How does the world see the Philippines from the outside under Duterte? How are humanists generally treated in the Philippines? How do Filipinos, in general, view humanists and the humanist community?**

**Trinos:** Strictly speaking, I cannot speak on behalf of outsiders with regard to their impression of the country under Duterte, but I have gathered enough feedback online and in international television news to give you a glimpse into this shared perception.

The Philippines is generally perceived to be a state overrun by anti-drug vigilante death squads operating at the behest of a belligerent semi-dictator whose loose, vulgar mouth makes President Trump seem like a Victorian gentleman taking his afternoon tea. Both liberals and establishment conservatives the world over detest the alleged excesses of our president. Whether this portrayal is accurate is not part of the question.

How are humanists viewed and treated in the Philippines? Generally, the terms “humanism” and “humanists” do not register in the popular collective psyche. Of course, I am referring to regular Filipinos — the type you see executing the latest dance craze as they see it on television, or strolling aimlessly around the mall to beat the tropical heat. Even the ones who occasionally wax eloquent with armchair speculation about the latest political issues prevalent in the country.

Encounter with the concept of “humanism” is limited to studies of Western history in high school or college, if there were any at all. Regrettably, just like any piece of knowledge that does not readily contribute to a high-income career, it is forgotten. In my country, knowledge is mostly not an end in itself; it is merely a tool for future wealth. Any other avenue that leads to wealth is equally meritorious; the quicker, the better. For this reason, television gameshows and pyramiding business schemes are extremely patronized throughout the archipelago. Frankly, most Filipinos have very little familiarity with the technical term, “humanism”. Humanists are all around, but hardly any ordinary person would be able to consciously distinguish humanists, as conventionally defined, from just about any religious person who likewise devotes his time to caring for humanity and pursuing knowledge that precludes appeal to theistic assumptions.

Nevertheless, there is one group for whom the term “humanism” enjoys currency: Evangelical born-againers. “Humanism” has had its reputation soiled in Evangelical circles where the term is associated with a disordered worship of the human potential in contrast to humble faith that puts God at the center. “Humanism” is occasionally mentioned in Evangelical pulpits as a trend indicative of a prideful rebellion against God. Since the Evangelical faith is growing in popularity, especially in urban localities, I can only expect resistance to the acceptance of humanists among the general public, in the event the term enters popular culture.

As far as my experience in the country can tell, Liberal arts students are the ones who are most equipped with a functional, appreciable grasp of “humanism” and what it entails. They know it when they see a genuine “humanist”. Among the relative few who associate with humanists and know what humanism truly is, there is admiration, to a generous degree.

The humanist community in the Philippines is at its nascent stage of growth. It is only becoming well aware of its need to make its identity established and its presence felt through charitable activities geared towards community development and education. Social media exposure also helps advance its online visibility in the wider world, in hopes that such will eventually make certain the positive acceptance of humanism and humanists in the public arena.

**Jacobsen: How can the non-religious overcome religious privilege, e.g., building a coalition and a solidarity movement? What are the areas of religious privilege within the Philippines?**

**Trinos:** The pervading cultural infrastructure in place do not allow for conditions that are conducive to the introduction of coalitions and movements that are straightforwardly “non-religious” or, as I interpret the use of the term in the question, “atheistic”. Whereas “humanism” has very limited foothold in the public consciousness, “atheism” is decidedly a divisive concept that connotes loose morality and even the wholesale abandonment of an ethical conscience. Atheists are people even serial killers and prostitutes in my country deride. Atheists are the untouchables. Declaring one’s atheism presents a definitive guarantee that one’s courtship or job application will not end in success.

I see no conceivable opportunity, at present, by which to promote a “non-religious” (atheistic) agenda to counteract the force of religious privilege. Atheists who are humanists must content themselves with promoting independent initiatives that primarily focus on community building, charity, education, and health that may be indirectly oriented towards a secular agenda but in no way threaten the status quo or the power of the Church. This is what HAPI is doing. Despite the fact millennial youth are more receptive and open to challenges against established religion and are even critical of some church leaders, they do not see a group directly promoting the denial of God at the expense of faith as a constructive force that deserves a permanent voice in public life.

In any case, with regard to the last part of this question, areas of religious privilege are public policies and legislation that favor the majority religion (declaration of holidays, limitations on family planning, and traffic rerouting schemes to accommodate religious festivities), bloc voting (some sects, at least) on the national and local level, and tax exemptions for religious institutions.

**Jacobsen: When in the Philippines, and looking at the political situation, how does religion influence politics?**

**Trinos:** Bloc voting is the most potent and direct means in the context of political appointment and implementation of public policy.

While the Catholic Church is, to a significant degree, not involved in this regard, another sect is: The Iglesia Ni Cristo. This is an indigenous church that wields political power of a scale that disproportionately exceeds its members’ representation in the general population. Politicians, both Catholic and Protestant, openly court the leader of this religion during the election season. This is a very dangerous phenomenon that most people take lightly. In this liberal democratic country, the Iglesia Ni Cristo (INC) is, for good or ill, labeled as a “king-maker”. Not even the president is principled enough to untangle its grip on power.

As things stand, in a democratic setting, a person's vote equals power. Therefore, more than mere endorsement, instructing members of a religion to cast their vote for a candidate endows the religious leader with political leverage by which to arrange deals and agreements. Once the anointed candidates win, they will not abandon their benefactor. Debt of gratitude is deeply ingrained in our culture. This religion, in the process, is assured of undue privileges and benefits that non-partisan churches or interest groups do not enjoy.

On the whole, politicians see association with Roman Catholicism and other mainstream Christian denominations as a practical route to maintaining a likable public image. Support of religious institutions is an investment with desirable returns in one's political career. Openly invoking God is a staple in congressional debates on legislations to be enacted. It is neither controversial nor shocking to see a senator or congressman quoting Scriptures to highlight his position. Separation of church and state is only embraced in legal theory; in practice, it is anything but.

**Jacobsen: Why is religion such a large influence on the country? What are some of the main prejudices that the irreligious experience in the Philippines?**

**Trinos:** Why is religion such a large influence in my country? Family. My country is blessed to have a family-centered social culture. It is not uncommon to see married children still living with their parents. Parents, regardless of social class or education, see raising their children strictly in the faith as their indispensable vocation and responsibility. Freedom of religion seems to apply only when a person already has a job and is no longer too dependent on his parents for his financial needs. This socio-religious culture is further solidified by the tendency of Filipinos to remain in their "safe zone" or in areas where they are most comfortable or familiar with. We are inherently not risk-takers or adventurers. Our curiosity geared towards the unknown is limited to just foreign food, more or less. Thus, Catholics remain Catholic, for the simple fact they were born in that religion.

The combination of this family culture and the general tendency to stay within the confines of what one is accustomed to strengthens the hold of religion in the mind. Once multiplied a million times over in many individuals, the result is a reliably irresistible force.

As for the prejudice, I have addressed that point in a previous question.

**Jacobsen: Any final thoughts or feelings in conclusion?**

**Trinos:** While I support the humanist movement, of which I am a part, I feel a segment of this movement embraces radical feminism that promotes the pro-choice agenda in the name of "female empowerment". I am convinced this is anti-humanism.

As a humanist, I believe every human being has a right to life, regardless of gender, race, and — yes — age (or phase in human life). I believe the unborn, in virtue of their human dignity, qualify as persons, and, therefore, have as much right to life as any human person living in the outside world. To deprive the unborn of this right to life amounts to the denial of their personhood, which forms the basis of that right in the first place. No human is a non-person; every human is a person. Indeed, the being produced at conception is a human through and through.

This right to life is not predicated upon properties that are characteristic of — but not necessarily essential to — human nature in some of its phases. Consciousness, sensation of pain, and

physical autonomy are not determinants that indicate whether a subject is entitled to the right to life, the absence of which do not make a person less deserving of the right thereof.

As a humanist, I believe all human life must be equally protected in all of its stages. It is my hope that the humanist movement will come through as a unified force, someday, for the preservation of the human race and the creation of a living atmosphere that optimizes individual freedom within its moral limits.



# The Renewal of Humanism: Ireland

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 28, 2018

The Irish Examiner described how the numbers of Irish citizens moving more towards the equality of the LGBTQ+ community with the general population.

Individual Irish citizens have been marking the important passages of life — births, deaths, marriages, and so on — with fewer and fewer religious rituals. Others have been moving to advance the interests of the humanist population in Ireland.

The Humanist Association of Ireland is one such organization. The secularization of Ireland is an, apparently, rapid shift from the prior decades.

10% of the Irish (2016) population identify with no religion, which was a 75%, approximately, increase in only 5 years — compared to the 2011 numbers.

Then there has been abortion and same-sex marriage referenda in the national, and international for that matter, news of Ireland. This represents the shift and rub for the Irish. The conflict between the traditional moral norms of the Christian churches and the secular values of modernity.

Irish people, as with many others, seem to favor freedom over tradition. Humanist marriages were legalized in 2012 and this promotes the visibility and wider acceptance of a humanist outlook on the world.

As noted at the outset, the Irish people, with a decrease in important life stages marked by religious ritual, have been moving towards the universalistic message of ritual found in the non-religious, or if you prefer, the neo-religious or post-supernaturalist-religious world.

This presages or may foretell the decline and diminishment of religious commitment for the 2020s in, otherwise, highly religious Ireland. This could portend a diversification of the belief and social acceptance landscape within the nation known for Protestant and Catholic bigotries and riots.

One Dr. Teresa Graham was contacted as a humanist celebrant from Tramore, who is also a counselling psychologist. Interestingly, she, in 2017 alone, conducted 75 weddings as the celebrant of the couple.

“There are those who come from different religious backgrounds, where it would be difficult to decide on a religious ceremony to suit both families,” Graham stated, “The demographic varies. Lots of couples are in their early thirties, although I’ve done a ceremony for hippies in their sixties: All the music was the Beatles and it was in a garden on a beautiful summer’s day, with flowery dresses and guitars. That was lovely.”

Akin to the more well-known rituals of the religious, we find the development of semi-standard phenomena within the humanist celebrant repertoire (I would assume given the reportage).

Graham works with music and some rehearsed passages alongside, what she calls, unity candles — where “each family lights a candle representing the families, and when the couple have taken their vows, they move the flames to a single candle.”

Graham found the humanist community the Humanist Association of Ireland after the inauguration of President Michael D. Higgins. Professor Anthony Grayling is the Vice-President of UK Humanists. Both have an interest in the human rights laid out by the United Nations and agreed upon by the international community. Graham, as with Grayling, prefers this outlook on life with human rights, compassion, reason, and science aligned for the greater good of all.

Grayling explained, “Humanism is a discussion about ethics, about how we should live and how we should behave... The key point about humanism is that it isn’t a set of do’s and don’ts and thou-shalt-nots, it is an invitation to treat other people with as much sympathy and generosity as we can muster, on the basis of our best understanding of human nature, which is a diverse and complex thing.”

Grayling views the atrocities by religious people throughout history amounts to the “religious mindset” in which faith and the promise of an afterlife in a heaven of some form excuses bad behaviour in this life.

He views this as an antithetical approach to the rational compassion ethics based on naturalism and science seen in humanism. The Humanist Association of Ireland has been working tirelessly to improve the state of secularization of the nation for 25 years.

Grayling remarked, “[The Catholic Church was] incredibly powerful. There were very large families and it was incredibly poor, and the grip of the church was incredibly tight... But in recent decades the change in atmosphere and the opening up of freedom that individuals have and the scepticism about the church has been remarkable to notice.”

# Interview with Marianne De Guzman Tucay — Member, Humanist Alliance Philippines International

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 28, 2018

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Was there any familial background in religion?**

**Marianne De Guzman Tucay:** If your asking if I was part of a religion. I was Catholic. I was starting to piece together some things weren't right in the book and felt that people take the Catholic Bible too seriously. Which is fine by me, people can believe whatever they want. But as an individual human being I felt that religion isn't for me.

I want to be able to let other people think on their own and be open minded to sciences and facts, education, and many things.

**Jacobsen: How did you find the non-religious community in the Philippines?**

**Tucay:** I was friends with Andrew Sheurich and directed me to Marissa Torres Langseth. She is one of a woman that I think that stands for humanism. She's head strong and her passion to think freely is now spreading out there. I think she is right and I understand. I understand the struggle in the Philippines and religion isn't answer to everything. I think that emotional and also mental health is important. That is something that all humans have to be aware. Is to love themselves internally first-emotionally and mentally. It's something that haven't been talked about but lately is coming about.

**Jacobsen: How are religion and politics mixed in the country there?**

**Tucay:** If you meant (Philippines) religion and politics should not be mixed. There is an establishment clause. It prohibits the endorsement of any religion by the government.

**Jacobsen: What is your own opinion on the functionality of religion?**

**Tucay:** It should be private practice and should not be out in public. If it's out in public, keep it to yourself and should not influence any doctrine laws. Nor should be shove on other people's faces and throat.

**Jacobsen: Is religion in general positive or negative for women's rights? How so? Any examples of the bigger positives and negatives?**

**Tucay:** It is both negative and positive. Positive: I used to work in a psych facility unit. It is interesting how people are different from one another and also different problems and depends on the person. I saw lost humans walking around lost in their own world and trapped themselves in a negative situation. Religion and God is a tool they need to cope. Religion and God are stepping tools to help them emotionally and find love in themselves-internally. But you can also find love in many different places not just religion or God but also through yourself for self improvement to boost your confidence. In general religion-God holds them together finding peace within themselves and a good practice in a positive way. Negative side: using religion and god for exploitation. It happens all the time and depending on who the people are. Religion is truly about business. This is why churches should pay taxes to help educate women not just women also MEN. It isn't about women's right also men's right to respect women, it's about

people who are in position of power-religion that are willing to recognize women as equal partner in both religion and society-they live in that means letting them work and in position of their family. Whether or not the rules within their religion help or hurt women are they fair to the woman. Sometimes yes but many times NO. I truly believe that men should step up the plate it's a two-way street.

**Jacobsen: When you reflect on the nature of the presentation of women and men in the narratives of the Bible and Quran, how are men and women portrayed?**

**Tucay:** The Christian, Catholic, and Quran have similarities. But I truly cannot speak for the Quran. I have learned from my Muslims friends. The attitude of these books are generally the same. The biggest difference between the new and old testament is the treatment of Mary the mother of Jesus as compared to many other women found in the Old and New Testament. In the old testament it's usually partnered with their husbands and often times used as lessons example Eve was the one the bit the apple of knowledge. Lott's wife was the one that turned around despite being told not to turn around looking back at the burning city. God turned her into a pillar of salt. The idea of submissive to their men is not a new idea. If you can change the Bible many times by humans I challenge them to change it.

**Jacobsen: What seems like a healthy relationship between religion and science?**

**Tucay:** It is not sciences job to prove religion or the existence of God. Sciences job is to observe the universe. Religion does not necessarily have a role in scientific discovery how ever let's give credit when credit is due. We had to use religion to observe scientific phenomenon the Greeks had many gods but explain many aspects that explains the many aspects of nature and humanity from we moved; polytheistic to monotheistic. We have one God to explain everything moving through your that process we have been able to take principles to establish in more definitive and understanding of the known universe via the other scientific method. We've taken much of the framework of what we learned using religious ideals and applied them so that they are universal and repeatable.

**Jacobsen: When you reflect on the situation i the Philippines and the non-religious community, how can the non-religious achieve greater legal and cultural equality?**

**Tucay:** well... it all start with the people and respecting other people's belief and some peoples non belief. And if we did strip away believe in the concept of non-believe we are still people. people don't disappear. So perhaps people need to look at it as if there was no God Because all you have to depend on is each other.

I like this one can I post it. :D

**Jacobsen: What are the main impediments to equality for the non-religious in the Philippines?**

**Tucay:** Christianity and Catholicism have deep roots in The Philippines and other countries. So it is understandable for people who lives in that society. To have difficulty tolerating in people who don't share those beliefs.

But the main thing is to think empathy one must understand that all people have degrees of belief. And that there are laws that may disproportionately affect those who are not religious and in this case it's all about how people treat each other.

**Jacobsen: How did you find HAPI? What are some of the better accomplishments of the organization?**

**Tucay:** Facebook have some great sources to find groups of people like HAPI. I first was recommending Marissa Torres Langseth and thought she was going to make me buys to those Mary Kay make up. I nearly did not add her but I am glad I did because I took upon understating her organization HAPI and how it can improve the lives of people if those people are open to free thinking. And as a free thinker you can accomplish a lot. Specially those children. I want people to be strong. I want kids to grow up as human beings to show empathy, love, happiness, and taking care of yourself as an individual human being.

I am glad HAPI exists.

**Jacobsen: Any ways for people in or out of the country to help the non-religious community?**

**Tucay:** I think respect is a two-way street and it helps atheists to understand people's religion because it will help them understand the culture and biases. And at the same time, religious people should also be open to exploring the possibility that there is no God, and we're it.

It's a scared idea for people who are religious and I can understand the apprehension. But if we truly want to believe that there is something bigger than ourselves we also have to accept. That there might be NOTHING. And that we are specs of the known universe. That this is our one chance to make an impact to live positively or negatively depending on what you want.

But please do live positively.

**Jacobsen: Any final thoughts and or conclusion?**

**Tucay:** In general, there is a moral imperative that could be followed regardless of belief or none belief and that is to be kind. Life is short be kind. I want to thank you for your time Scott. I hope that everyone live HAPI.

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

## **Interview with Mark Wilson Janeo— Member, Humanist Alliance Philippines International**

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen**

**August 29, 2018**

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen: What was family background in religion? What are your own story and educational background? How did you find humanism and HAPI?**

**Mark Wilson Janeo:** I'm a graduate of bachelor science in information technology. I'm currently working as a lead generation specialist in a small outbound call center here in Bacolod and I'm also an online seller. I sell second-hand band merchandise.

I was baptized as a catholic. My parents are very religious and active in our local parish. I really can't remember how old I am when I started to doubt the existence of god. When I was kid I'm fond of watching science and history documentaries, I think that triggered my curiosity.

I found HAPI from a friend that was in manila back then. He told me about the group and what it does. I was very interested to join. Back then I was a member of Filipino Freethinkers and most of us HAPI Bacolod pioneers. Ms. M told us to create a local chapter here in Bacolod and the rest is history. And so far, we are the most active chapter in the organization.

**Jacobsen: How does the world see the Philippines from the outside under Duterte? How are humanists generally treated in the Philippines? How do Filipinos, in general, view humanists and the humanist community?**

**Janeo:** They see the Philippines, a very bloody country under Duterte's administration. Duterte's drug war is like a double edge sword. Many criminals have been killed in the process and also innocent lives lost.

I think most of the Filipinos will probably believe about us (that are totally wrong):

- that we are devil worshippers
- we have no morals
- we are a bad influence to children
- miserable
- arrogant assholes

Some of us really face discrimination everyday. But as time goes by I think they will understand what we do and be more open minded.

**Jacobsen: How can the non-religious overcome religious privilege, e.g., building a coalition and a solidarity movement? What are the areas of religious privilege within the Philippines?**

**Janeo:** I think it's very hard to overcome religious privileges here. Because we have laws that at present support particular religions when this shouldn't be the situation. Also it's illegal to "offend religious feelings," which is what got Carlos Celdran in trouble. Some companies here hire people within a specific sect/religion which the owner is part of. Even our government funds or practices religious activities and functions when it shouldn't.

**Jacobsen: When in the Philippines, and looking at the political situation, how does religion influence politics?**

**Janeo:** Religion plays a key role when election comes. Politicians always ask for endorsement to the religious leaders. To gain more votes or to secure victory. Because some religions practice bloc voting, just like the Iglesia ni Cristo.

**Jacobsen: Why is religion such a large influence on the country? What are some of the main prejudices that the irreligious experience in the Philippines?**

**Janeo:** I think because of the influence of the Spaniards. They brought Christianity here and until now we are still the number 1 Christian country here in Asia.

Personally I have dealt with discrimination, below the belt insults, rejections and criticisms about my disbelief. Even some of my friends unfriended me in Facebook because I'm an atheist. I guess the main prejudice is they always link us with Satan. They think that we are immoral, miserable and most likely do bad things to people.

**Jacobsen: Any final thoughts or feelings in conclusion?**

**Janeo:** Thank you for this opportunity. Let the sound of reason shine, godless.

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

## Interview with Ceejay Deriada Pastrana — Lead Convener, Humanist Alliance Philippines International (Jr.)

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 29, 2018

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** What was family background in religion? What are your own story and educational background? How did you find humanism and HAPI?

**Ceejay Pastrana:** It's kind of expected to be inheriting the religion that your parents have by the time you are born and my parents happened to be Latter Day Saints, but that was until I was in first grade. We converted to Roman Catholicism and being a Mormon was never mentioned again. I recently asked my mother why that happened and she said to me that they were obliged to do something that was "not right". (She did not go into details as I noticed that she did not want to talk about it.) So, my family left for good. We were not really full-fledged Catholics either (religion was just not a topic in our house), or were against religion. We just realized the impracticality and illogicality of religion.

Since the beginning of my educational path, I attended a Catholic school and it was okay with me. As expected, we were made to recite prayers and sing chants. Again, it was okay with me. I was okay with everything as long as it does not affect or harm me in any way. I only have one principle and that is to "Do good and avoid evil." As biblical as it sounds, we cannot deny that it applies in all situations.

I've always devoted to doing things to help others and for the sake of helping only. I wanted to step my game up and widen my exposure. That was when I met the current Executive Director of Humanist Alliance Philippines, International (HAPI), Alvin John Ballares. He introduced "Humanism" to me and asked me to try out and attend a meeting of HAPI. I found my niche and I have been an active member of HAPI since then.

**Jacobsen:** How does the world see the Philippines from the outside under Duterte? How are humanists generally treated in the Philippines? How do Filipinos, in general, view humanists and the humanist community?

**Pastrana:** The world outside of the Philippines considers Duterte as the Filipino version of Trump. Should I be happy? Of course not. It is sad, but it's true. It is sad because not only that they consider him as Trump, but also the fact that he really is like Trump, a populist, saying only what the mass wants to hear (like some of the churches). This affects how humanists are viewed in the country. We see and foresee the truths and realities of life and it is not something that most people want to hear. They like to be blinded, to see only what they want to see.

Most Filipinos merge "humanism", "atheism", and "secularism" into one concept and automatically regard it as "evil". That is why I have to lay low for a while, while I am still in a Catholic school. People need to be enlightened about the terms mentioned earlier or just be taught not to be judgmental and not to assume stereotypes. You should not look at a person for what he or she is, but look at what he or she does.



**Jacobsen: How can the non-religious overcome religious privilege, e.g., building a coalition and a solidarity movement? What are the areas of religious privilege within the Philippines?**

**Pastrana:** I am handling the HAPI Jr. right now and we have projects such as conducting seminars to schools on education, leadership, environmental, etc. Whenever we try asking permission from the principal of the school, we usually don't mention "secularism". We try to be on the safe side as some people don't like the idea of secularism and, again, they tend to associate it with atheism which is a different concept.

Religious privilege does not only affect the non-religious ones, but also the ones with religion as well. I go to a college wherein they offer working scholarships to people who are Catholics and strictly Catholics only. It is sad to know that some students (with religion other than Catholic or none at all) who are less fortunate are doomed to suffer and embrace poverty because of this so-called "religious privilege".

**Jacobsen: When in the Philippines, and looking at the political situation, how does religion influence politics?**

**Pastrana:** Populism, an act of appealing to ordinary people. As I mentioned earlier, some politicians use this method to gain support as they try to say and promote what the people want to hear. Some, if not most, use religion in fishing out votes. They use this to their advantage knowing that the population of the Philippines comprise mostly of Roman Catholics.

**Jacobsen: Why is religion such a large influence on the country? What are some of the main prejudices that the irreligious experience in the Philippines?**

**Pastrana:** Even in the history of the country, religion is a major topic. The Spaniard used it to try and rule the Philippines. It contributed greatly to what the Philippines has become and that is why it is still a great influence on things today.

Some of the main prejudices that the irreligious experience in the Philippines is that they are called and assumed as a cult member or worst, a Satanist. People just want to believe what they want to believe and disregard anything that disturbs their comfort zone. We are all humans who are capable of feeling compassion. "Not all believers are good; not all non-believers are evil." Simple as that. Just because we are more realistically attached to the concrete world, does not mean we are bad either. We cannot live a closed life believing things we want to believe. The world and the universe are too big for our little-sheltered eyes.

**Jacobsen: Any final thoughts or feelings in conclusion?**

**Pastrana:** To conclude everything, just stick to the main principle — "Do good and avoid evil." Look at a person for what he or she does and not what he or she is. Do not cling on to the past; have a wondrous eye for the future. We, humans, are always hungry for answers. Question everything and don't let judgments cease your curiosity.

Being different doesn't mean drifting away. It is blending in while standing out.

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

# The Plight of Ex-Muslims with Waleed Al-Husseini

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

August 31, 2018

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** In the light of outspoken ex-Muslims being silenced, imprisoned, tortured, driven into exile, or murdered (not simply killed) by theocrats or the state or religious fundamentalist vigilantes, how do we support and protect them?

**Waleed Al-Husseini:** To support us there are many ways, listening to us, see our suffering in our country, and don't talk about Islamophobia, you see what happens to us, and we still fight and try to have our rights!

Let us talk about Islam more and more and when we talk about some issues don't say its rare! Because this is the way of thinking for the whole of the society, we need to talk about Islam and the crisis of Islam to make it accept us, supporting it, let's us do without labelling, all the religions were under criticism, why not Islam?

Today, all the non-believer's organization should support us with speaking about us and show our fight and support us within the UN and the governments by asking to stop blasphemy laws in Arabic and Islamic countries.

We need a huge collective to stop blasphemy laws, hope they will listen and try it!

**Jacobsen:** What laws and rights — such as the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights stating freedom of religion, freedom of belief, freedom of conscience, and freedom of expression (not simply freedom of speech) — protect ex-Muslims apart from solidarity from the international community.

**Al-Husseini:** No, they're not real laws for ex-Muslims, they talk about us in general; we need some laws like this. Because we lose our lives, we should have clear laws for ex-Muslims!

**Jacobsen:** What are some of the newer ex-Muslim organizations that need support, donations, skills, professional and activist networks, and coordination and cooperation of other non-religious organizations? The new ones without adequate resources.

**Al-Husseini:** We have some, and as you know this type of organization was started by Facebook, then when they have the members they make it and register it, that is the way, but until now we have many, and we try to make collectives for all of us. One day we will succeed.

**Jacobsen:** What have been some noteworthy news items about the ex-Muslim population — globally speaking — over the last 4–12 months?

**Al-Husseini:** We made one conference with ex-Muslims Norway. We speak about our stories and then about the dangers of Islamism in Europe!

It was a good one, especially the European situation that really is dangerous. We should find an effective way to fight Islamism, because of Islamization of society in the works!

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

## **Al-Amin Dagash Refugee Camp Needs Tarpaulins: Fundraiser by Bright Brains Institute**

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen**

**September 5, 2018**

There is a fundraiser ongoing for those who have been victims of the extremist group Boko Haram. It is for the Al-amin Dagash IDP Camp, in Maiduguri, Nigeria.

Many refugees remain, against their life plans, in dire circumstances and then stay open to the elements with poor housing provisions, because they are refugees. They live in huts with “thatched” roofing.

However, whenever the rain comes in, this causes leakages and problems for their quality of life, even in as terrible as circumstances as they are in post-Boko Haram.

One possible solution proposed, through the fundraiser, is the use of tarpaulin to prevent further leakages in the huts. If you can spare some finances to help these refugees, it would be greatly appreciated:

<https://brighterbrains.institute/clinics/tarpaulins-for-al-amin-dagash-refugee-camp>

# **Andrew Copson on New British Social Attitudes Survey**

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen**

**September 7, 2018**

One of the important figures of the non-religious community in the United Kingdom, Andrew Copson — Chief Executive of Humanists UK, talked about one of the most important British surveys, which is the British Social Attitudes Survey.

A recent, updated accounting of the attitudes of the British has been released to provide some information as to the views on a variety of social issues and topics of the British public.

Regarding the more important part of the survey and message from Copson, there remains a continual uptick in the number of individual British young adults who do not identify with the Church of England.

This reflects a decline in Christianity in a number of advanced industrial economies or countries. Copson reported that only 2% of young adults belong to the Church of England.

This is a “historic low.” He also is quick to identify an asymmetry in the proportion of the young adult population with this identification and then the representation of Christianity in a number of other areas of the nation.

He notes that one-third of the state schools are run by the Church and then Christian worship is an enforcement in every single state school. In political life, it is reflected there too. There are 26 bishops in the House of Lords.

Dr. Stephen Law, the famous philosopher, skeptic, and secular humanist, has stated this in the past as well. There is a non-religious majority now. However, they face a number of discriminations through such examples as those given. It seems imperative to work on the reduction and eventual elimination of them in due time, sooner rather than later.

Humanists UK and others, individuals and organizations, are working on the creation of a society more representative of the modern constituencies of the population — more secular, more non-religious, and more skeptical of religious institutions as the drivers of national life.

These are only some of the challenges which the non-religious majority face. We’re determined to tear down barriers and ensure equality in all walks of life.

# Claire Klingenberg on Heroes and Scooby-Doo

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

September 8, 2018

*Claire has a background in law and psychology, and is currently working on her degree in Religious Studies. She has been involved in the skeptic movement since 2013 as co-organizer of the Czech Paranormal Challenge. Since then, she has consulted on various projects, where woo and belief meet science. Claire has spoken at multiple science and skepticism conferences and events. She also organized the European Skeptics Congress in 2017, and both years of the Czech March for Science.*

*Her current activities include chairing the European Council of Skeptical Organisations, running the “Don’t Be Fooled” project (which provides free critical thinking seminars to interested high schools), contributing to the Czech Religious Studies journal Dingir, as well as to their news in religion website. In her free time, Claire visits various religious movements to understand better what draws people to certain beliefs.*

*Claire lives in Prague, Czech Republic, with her partner and dog.*

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Who are your heroes?**

**Claire Klingenberg:** In a broad sense, it is my mom [Laughing]. It is not very original, I know [Laughing]. In the atheist movement, it is Maryam Namazie.

**Jacobsen: Why Maryam Namazie?**

**Klingenberg:** Because of the unyielding pursuit of her message and of the work that she does, and how she manages to push her message, and be heard. Not being afraid too.

**Jacobsen: Who else?**

**Klingenberg:** Taslima Nasreen, she is an activist from Bangladesh. She left her home country for a couple of years because of the death threats that she was receiving, but she wants to return to work on her activism there.

She wants to spread activism there. She is one of the few women from that area who left her faith and country, even in spite threats to her safety. She is incredible.

Another incredible woman is Nina Sankari. She founded one of the Polish atheist groups. I got to know her quite well, personally.

She is a very, very tough and unyielding person. I love the way that she does not allow anyone to get away with anything, and how she is always on top of things — as well as her approach and dedication to her message.

**Jacobsen: Even if you look at not only the secular moment in particular, who are some of the brighter lights who provided a basis in logic and science to bolster a secular worldview?**

**Klingenberg:** The first one is not academic. It is Scooby-Doo [Laughing].

**Jacobsen: [Laughing].**

**Klingenberg:** [Laughing] I remember watching Scooby-Doo as a child. I think that bolsters critical thinking. You find out the monsters are not real. You find out there is always someone behind the mask.

**Jacobsen:** That is such a good point. That is so not trivial.

**Klingenberg:** It has shaped me a lot. Not much later, I started reading Nancy Drew. These detective stories were the first introduction to logic and analytical thinking. I found them crucial. It taught me to ask questions, especially to ask questions, be inquisitive, and be curious.

That later translated to other passions and studies. People would expect me to be saying Carl Sagan.

**Jacobsen:** [Laughing].

**Klingenberg:** But Scooby-Doo [Laughing] was one of my most forming experiences. That formed me for the rest of my life [Laughing].

**Jacobsen:** I find that interesting, if I may. If I look at the presentation of Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett, Neil deGrasse Tyson, Ann Druyan, Lawrence Krauss, Sean Carroll, and others, the main emphasis amounts to explicit science, technology, and, sometimes, logic and, sometimes, emotional appeal as the basis for argumentation.

The examples you gave are not trivial. Even though, we laughed. I find a seriousness there. The Scooby-Doo and Nancy Drew, it makes for a nice rhyme. At the same time, it makes for an indirect presentation of critical thinking.

Things may seem mysterious, but, at the end of the day, for the most part, are natural. If something is amiss, it is probably someone behind it. For a generation or two behind us, I would suspect Sherlock Holmes.

**Klingenberg:** I was going to mention him. When I was older, I read Sherlock Holmes. Of course, I read Hercule Poirot as well.

Later, when I started reading philosophers, my thinking was influenced by Charles Pierce, William James, and Chauncey Wright. Also, reading John Dewey and Bertrand Russell, but that was later on.

**Jacobsen:** I love that transition from Scooby-Doo, Nancy Drew, and Sherlock Holmes to that implicit appreciation for methodological analysis of a situation into the explicit process of discovery through science and the methodology of critical thinking through these other authors. It makes sense.

It is pretty close to ideal, probably.

**Klingenberg:** Yes, the whole field of Philosophy for Children, I found out about this field 4 or 5 years ago, works pretty much based on that. It shows how you can teach even kindergarten children critical thinking by reading to them and having them question what they hear.

When they ask questions, do not provide answers, just ask back and help them figure it out. I think that is a good way to get people skeptical from a young age. I think that the main focus of the skeptical movement is on adults and trying to change their, already established, thinking patterns. I believe we should focus more on approachable material for younger age groups.

I, personally, am working with teenagers. That is a challenge [Laughing] in and of itself. They already have patterns and trails of thinking, which already are difficult to deal with.

Reading to kids and having them actively participate in receiving information is crucial to make them into critical thinkers. However, television shows can be an effective way to spread tools of skeptical and critical thinking, too.

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

## **Interview with Dr. Gleb Tsipursky — Co-Founder, President and Co-Founder of the Pro-Truth Pledge and Intentional Insights**

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen**

**September 11, 2018**

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** We have talked about, in prior interviews, some things regarding bad science belief or incorrect evidentiary beliefs coming from the socio-political left, as well as the socio-political right.

We explored some of the work that you do through the Pro-Truth Pledge. These are important for critical thinking, science education, and skepticism. One of the areas with less skepticism than it probably deserves is the area of transhumanism.

It is something akin to the difference between science and science fiction. Where they use much of the bases of science and then extrapolate on what they're using as technological exponential curves to make speculative science claims with very short timelines, these seem fantastic in many regards.

**What are your thoughts on the substance of a lot of what is stated, insofar as you know?**

**Dr. Gleb Tsipursky:** A lot of my thoughts around this are similar to my thoughts around cold fusion is going to come around in 1970/1975/1980/1985 and so on. It is probably [Laughing] as far away as it was in 1970 or 1980, if it ever happens.

My thoughts: people who are involved in the field often tend to be very enthusiastic, optimistic, and passionate about it. It tends to cloud their judgment about it. There are a lot of aspects about transhumanism. I want to touch of AI, a little bit separately. It is a large separate topic.

Most of the things transhumanists envision as the future is much further away than they believe. Why is that? Science fiction influences a lot of them. Then there is this deductive, top-down, thinking. They think, "Oh, this thing should work. Therefore, it will work."

In reality, there will be a huge number of problems that will prevent things that they think should work in their heads from working in real life because life has a lot more complicating factors than the ideal environment in our words.

That is things that work in the lab [Laughing] often do not work in real life because real life, the real environment, is going to be highly different. The way I approach these questions and, maybe, for others to approach them is to place bets on the future, place bets on reality.

Someone says, "I think we will have fully-functioning bionic arms for people by 2025." Say, "Hey, do you want to make \$1,000 bet on this?" Or whatever money you want to use as your terminology, the person is willing to make the bet and stick to it.

Basically, have that person make a bet rather than make a prediction, a lot of people will make predictions about the future. They make a good living by making predictions that turn out to be false, but they are not held accountable for it.



I am a commentator, a talking head [Laughing], myself. Whenever I make predictions about the future, I encourage people to make bets with me about the future because I want to be held accountable. This is something that you should strongly encourage anyone who wants to make predictions about the future — have them make bets to hold them accountable for their predictions about the future.

**Jacobsen: Now, AI, what about it?**

**Tsipursky:** Artificial intelligence is somewhat a distinct topic. People are concerned about what will happen if we have an artificial intelligence that becomes quickly smarter than humans. It is a challenge. Because it is something that we have not faced before. It is not like cold fusion, bionic arms, or bionic brains.

It is not going to fundamentally change our society or reality in deep ways. Whereas, an artificial intelligence that grows smarter very quickly is not out of the realm of the imaginary. That is something that could change our societies in some really fundamental ways.

Also, I do not know how likely it is. It might be a small likelihood. But given the threat of this likelihood, we should be paying money and addressing it as something we might guard against going into the future, as opposed to bionic arms, bionic brains with uploads, and so on, which impact our daily lives less if it does work out.

**Jacobsen: What simply a system, an algorithm, or an AI, that is simply smarter than any large collective of people and begins to become very, very intelligent very, very fast but does not have any of that direction for its ‘willpower’?**

**Often, we are driven by emotions. We have certain desires. These guide us in a lot of our decisions a lot of the time. So, an AI that is like the frontal lobe taken out of the head. It just computes at any conceivable human task at superhuman capacities but it isn’t directed anywhere.**

**Tsipursky:** The big danger is if it is directed to a purpose antithetical to human interests. A very likely scenario is that some military will come up with some AI. Imagine that the Chinese military is the first to come up with a super, super, superhuman intelligent AI and the Chinese military directs it to take over all of the world’s computers for the benefits of China.

Where will we be if that takes places? If what happens where it computes things very quickly, that is the threat that I’m talking about. Or let’s say Apple comes up with that and states, “You must now transition all your computers to Apple products,” [Laughing]...

**Jacobsen: ...[Laughing]...**

**Tsipursky:** “And pay us for everything.” [Laughing] That is going to be a problem.

**Jacobsen: Not for Apple.**

**Tsipursky:** Not for Apple, not for Apple stockholders [Laughing], but for everybody else. This is why I think this is a specific issue with the transhumanist movement that does deserve some thoughtfulness and consideration, guarding against the possible misuse of AI that is antithetical to the interests of humanity as a whole.

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

# Interview with Bentley Davis — Founder, Reasonscore

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

September 11, 2018

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** Regarding critical thinking, what are some baseline things young adults should bear in mind?

**Bentley Davis:** Critical thinking is a superpower that gives you control over some things in the world and peace about the things you can not change. It helps you understand what is really going on. It takes work but it is worth it. Emotions are a critical part of critical thinking. Understanding emotions help you understand people's motivations.

**Jacobsen:** How can they use these skills and thought processes/analytic tools to process junk science, non-science, and pseudoscience from real science?

**Davis:** As you learn about rhetorical devices, language choices you learn when you need to look deeper before accepting the information you encounter. Looking for multiple opinions and evaluating their sources will guide you to the truth and reduce how often you are fooled by people trying to manipulate you (even if they have manipulated themselves).

**Jacobsen:** How does science and skepticism and fact-checking build into the app at [www.reasonscore.com](http://www.reasonscore.com)?

**Davis:** Reasonscore is a place to see other people's research on facts you encounter. You can see all the facts for and against a claim in one spot so you don't have to search through the whole internet. You can also add any additional facts you find that are missing. You can share it with others so they can quickly get up to speed on a topic.

**Jacobsen:** How can people get it?

**Davis:** Go to ReasonScore.com.

**Jacobsen:** What have been some of the feedback about it?

**Davis:** I don't have much feedback yet as it's pretty new.

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

## Interview with Agnes Vishnevkin, MBA — Co-Founder & Vice President of Intentional Insights and Pro-Truth Pledge

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

September 11, 2018

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** You are part of two important initiatives. One, you are the co-founder and vice president of Intentional Insights. Two, you are the co-founder of the Pro-Truth Pledge. There are important, along with others around the world, of critical thinking and science and evidence-based thinking.

**When it comes to young people and keeping an eye out for things that seem as if based on evidence, where there is the use of the language of science and evidence but aren't actually based on any, what are some hints or clues that they should keep in mind, whether in the presentation of the information or in the language used?**

**Agnes Vishnevkin:** That is a fantastic question, Scott. If folks want to know about the initiatives, they can check out [protruthpledge.org](http://protruthpledge.org) or [intentionalinsights.org](http://intentionalinsights.org). We talk about behavioral sciences and psychology, how they impact daily life and how they, sometimes, cause us to make decisions and have inaccurate beliefs.

When you are reading or hearing information, one thing to think, “Does it already play to your beliefs?” If I think, hypothetically, it is terrible to eat meat, and then someone says, “It is fine. Animals don’t suffer.” I say, “You’re wrong. I am opposed to it.” You are saying something opposed to my beliefs.

This involves something called Confirmation Bias. If something goes against my beliefs, I would be disinclined to believe it. It is important to guard against that. Do we have reasons? We should be prepared if it is only something comfortable to my current beliefs. That is one thing to be mindful of.

**Jacobsen:** I do not mean this as a question to impugn any organization as a whole. However, are there common societal institutions or organizations in which non-evidence-based propositions or statements about the world are put forth to young people more often than others — when, in fact, there is little to no support for some of those claims put forth to young people?

**Vishnevkin:** Yes, I think that young people. This can happen in a different variety of ways. I am not going to make guesses about all the different places. I would say to consider something that, for example, there are groups in which we are or are not a member of.

It is human to form ourselves into groups. The sense of belonging is deeply wired into our minds. Humans first evolved in the savannah. We lived in groups of 100–150 people. It was a simple world. We still have these in our brains and minds.

This strong desire to belong and a strong fear of rejection. It is a matter of life and death. That is why it is painful when we imagine being rejected. I think there are places in which we belong to certain organizations or to our family, or to any kind of group — where we would find it hard if we were rejected.

I would say that is one place to stay tuned. I am not saying the family is necessarily pushing any misinformation, but I would stay cautious in that case. Because it is hard for us to take information and say, “I do not agree with you. It is not according to science.” It is hard for us to do. Our emotions do not want to disagree with the groups with which we agree.

People who we like. We really tend to agree with them compared to people we dislike. We need to be mindful if our emotions are for or against someone. If it is for someone, we might believe something not science or evidence-based. These are some of the ways in which to protect ourselves. Our website at [intentionalinsights.org](http://intentionalinsights.org) has multiple blogs written, actually with young people in mind. We want to make sure this scientific knowledge is available for anyone.

I hope your readers find a bit of information at our blog.

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

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

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen**

**September 15, 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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## Conversation with Nacer Amari — Co-Founder, Prometheus Europe

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

September 20, 2018

*Nacer Amari is the Co-Founder of United Atheists of Europe and Co-Founder of Prometheus Europe. He is a Tunisian humanitarian activist who fled Tunisia six years ago because of death threats from Islamists. He is having financial difficulties to establish an association [www.prometheus-eu.com](http://www.prometheus-eu.com), where he endeavours to assist people who are threatened with the death penalty because of their critical views of Islam in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. We did a prior interview in [The Good Men Project](#) and [Canadian Atheist](#). You can view the donations page [here](#). Here we talk about Prometheus Europe and humanitarian activism.*

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** How did you become a Tunisian humanitarian activist?

**Nacer Amari:** It has been said; believing some lives have more value than others is the root of all evil in the world. The antidote to despair is solidarity, working to ensure that we all have peace, security, basic services, and opportunities, not because of the birth lottery of which country we are from, but because we are all human. Solidarity is more than charity — it includes trying to change the systems that produce suffering in the first place.

There is a lot of suffering in the world, none of us can do everything, but each of us can do one thing. We can all be humanitarians in a world that needs them more than ever.

This is how my journey in the humanitarian field started. I just loved the fact that we could share happy moments with suffering people.

**Jacobsen:** What were some of the integral parts of becoming one, at least six years ago?

**Amari:** While growing up, I was often isolated and lonely, I knew myself to be a compassionate person, but I didn't know there was another dimension to that. This is why I felt more attuned to the suffering of others.

There is a humanitarian impulse that one aspires to which needs to be valued, trying to alleviate the suffering of people in dire need, especially raped women, abused children and ex-Muslims at risk.

**Jacobsen:** What are some of the main issues for those who are committed to humanitarian activism and experience death threats?

**Amari:** The work of humanitarian activism has never been without risk (death threats, physical attacks, arbitrary arrests, etc.) and is regularly targeted in government crackdowns and heavily controlled online expression in several countries. The governments across the Middle East and North Africa repress the humanitarian activism both offline and online, in an attempt to prevent or punish reporting on human rights violations or other criticisms directed at them or their allies, often on the pretext that they are combatting “threats to national security”.

In order to change the status quo, humanitarian activists are challenging deeply ingrained discrimination and efforts to abrogate:

Women's rights.  
 LGBT rights.  
 Rights of minorities.  
 Freedom of expression.  
 Freedom of belief and conscience.

**Jacobsen: What is your main focus at the moment?**

**Amari:** Currently, my main focus is to formally register the association which I founded with my friends, and at the same time I'm looking for sponsorships, campaigns and Financials support.

**Jacobsen: You are in the process of founding an organization. What is the organization? What is its website? What are its mission and mandate?**

**Amari:** Prometheus Europe is a social organization that aims to promote secularism in the Islamic world and to provide help for those who risk their lives to get a chance to have a better future.

These courageous women and men are facing the most violent ideology in the history of mankind in order to make the world a better place for the next generations and that is why they deserve all our support. These freedom fighters are the most suitable people who know how to deal with Islam, and the more support they get, the more social change they can make and the faster changes will happen.

The Western world is facing the risk of expanding Islamism in Europe, and to be able to counter Islamism, the best thing we can do is to challenge the main idea of Islam in the very birthplace of this ideology, this is why empowering atheists or secular people in their own (Islamic) countries will reduce fanaticism and extremism there and the rest of the world. During this struggle, ex-Muslims face various types of discrimination, they can be subjected to violence, jail, execution or even assassination. We as activists try to do our best to save ex-Muslims who are at risk, and we will achieve our goals even faster with outsourced support.

In Europe and side by side with our European partners, it is our goal to implement strategic plans to counter Islamism providing the required knowledge, using the right tools and transforming our organization into an organized social movement.

**Jacobsen: How can people become involved in it? How can they donate time, skills, finances, professional networks, and so on?**

**Amari:** Donations help us come over any obstacles that we face while doing our activism, for example sometimes there are ex-Muslims at risk and they need financial help to flee their country. Sometimes the case is urgent and we need to get them out as soon as possible, without donations we are unable to save them.

Currently, there are four funds you can donate to:

- 1 — Core Fund — This fund is for our project itself. Donations will be used to improve the structure of the project and implement innovative strategic plans to take it to the next level.
- 2 — Atheist at Risk Fund — This fund is to save those at risk because of their atheism. Please see the buttons below.

3 — Team Personal Fund — This fund is to help the project founders personally. We would love to work full time on this project, but that's not achievable due to the responsibilities associated with the life of being a refugee. Please see get to know the founders.

Don't want to donate?

There are other ways to support us — you may support us by Sponsoring, donating products or joining us.

Our social media:

Website [www.prometheus-eu.com](http://www.prometheus-eu.com)

FB page [Prometheus Europa](#)

FB group [Prometheus — Europa](#)

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

# Interview with Muhammad Salman Khan on Trans and LGBTQI+ Community in Pakistan

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

September 23, 2018

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** When it comes to family background, was religion important in it?

**Muhammad Salman Khan:** Religion holds quite a lot of significance in the Pakistani society I live in, my family has always been moderately Muslim but still “Muslim”. Growing up it played a significant role in my life too, but not anymore. As far as my family is concerned now, it is a private matter and I’m quite fortunate to be blessed with a family where religion is never taken that seriously as compare to families of my around me.

**Jacobsen:** How did this influence personal upbringing?

**Khan:** Religion holds quite a lot of significance in the Pakistani society I live in, my family has always been moderately Muslim but still “Muslim”. Growing up it played a significant role in my life too, but not anymore. As far as my family is concerned now, it is a private matter and I’m quite fortunate to be blessed with a family where religion is never taken that seriously as compare to families of my around me. Growing up and still living in Pakistan, religion dictates every aspect of our culture and daily life. I have always struggled with my religious beliefs, there was a time when I was 18 when I was quite religious but that changed when I questioned the religion I was born in. I questioned it because I found many of its religious connotations as being somewhat too fundamentalist and extreme for my personal belief. I have always been a die-hard nature lover and staunch Darwinist; religion never gave me the answer to the origin of life that’s why I had to question it. I further wanted to know more about myself and the religion of my ancestors that’s why I did a brief comparative study of religions and was attracted to a more Sufi and dharmic interpretation of religion in my early 20s. In the meanwhile, I struggled to reconcile my faith with my sexuality this when I slowly and gradually gave up on it.

**Jacobsen:** What is the treatment of transgender people there?

**Khan:** Transgender community or the “Khawaja Serai” as they’re called in Urdu, is an ancient community that has been living in South Asia for thousands of years. Transgender community in South Asia were once held in a very high regard, they were considered as a blessed community and due to many superstitious views that people held the transgender were not only revered but people were afraid to even harm them. Unfortunately, in Pakistan quite a lot has changed, this year alone around more than 10 transwomen have been murdered and the law enforcement agencies/ ministry of human rights fails to implement measures to protect their lives. Pakistan has recently passed one of the most progressive legislation on trans rights and equality, but as activists we look forward to effective and fast forward implementation of this law across law enforcement agencies and government departments. The recent passage of the ‘Transgender Bill of Rights, 2018’ has been hailed as a significant victory by many human rights and LGBTQI activists who view this as a significant victory that can pave way for more sensitization and equality for all oppressed gender and sexual minorities in Pakistan.

**Jacobsen:** Do the restrictions and social punishments come from religious traditions? Those restrictions and social punishments against members of this minority community.

**Khan:** Much of the prejudice that the LGBTQI community faces stems from the religious traditions which ultimately shuns them from the mainstream society. I personally don't blame 'Islam' as a religion to cause this, the issue is its interpretation. Most religion have a varying degree of acceptance and tolerance for the LGBTQI community, especially when it comes to Abrahamic religions which aren't so tolerant and accepting. But around the world, we are seeing that religion is not taken up as source of inspiration for legislation that seeks to promote LGBT equality and rights. This is one of the reason why around the world, we are able to see legislation passed in rights of minorities e.g. LGBTQI community.

**Jacobsen: What happens during the coming out of someone in Pakistan? This tends to be a big moment in life for finding public acceptance for the sexual orientation and gender identity minority communities.**

**Khan:** For most gay men, coming out can be the most difficult moment of their lives. Many don't even chose to come out like in the way we see gay men come out in the West. The fear of being disowned, ostracized or worst killed by your family and society is just too real. Fortunately, I am blessed with a very small and not so conservative family, despite belonging to the middle class background I believe I'm quite fortunate that they aren't only accepting of me but are accepting of my sibling as a transwoman too. In Pakistan, even transwomen aren't mostly accepted by their family or the society they live in. Most are forced out of their homes at a very young age and many had to deal with sexual abuse at a very early age.

**Jacobsen: Who are some prominent activists? Why should people pay attention to them?**

**Khan:** Some of the most hard working and committed transgender activists that are always there for the community and I really feel deserve to be highlighted are following, Nisha Rao, Bindiya Rana, Aradhiya Khan from Karachi, Maavia Malik, Laila Naz, Jannat Ali from Lahore, Nayab Ali from Okara, Uzma Yaqoob and Bubbli Malik from Rawalpindi, Farzana and Nadra Khan from KPK.

**Jacobsen: What are the most extreme consequences for those who do not hear to the faith or the majority sexual orientation or gender identity? What are the least extreme consequences?**

**Khan:** The most extreme consequences for those who aren't belonging to mainstream cisgender and heterosexual narrative of Pakistani society is a life of discrimination, often we see in case of gay men even lesbians that they are forced into marriage, while transwomen being a more visible minority are discrimination for their gender identity, they face the threat of human trafficking and gender based violence also. The least, which is unfortunately quite prevalent and common is constant bullying, harassment and psychological trauma that many LGBTQI face in a deeply conservative, homophobic and transphobic society of Pakistan.

**Jacobsen: What are some effective activist efforts to garner more and more acceptance for this community?**

**Khan:** We are seeing that the collective effort of the transgender community was able to spearhead and pass the legislation for their rights from Pakistan's National Assembly. There is much positive reception of the transgender community in the media than ever before, a lot of work needs to be done but many transgender and queer activists are bringing forward much needed visibility and social change that are slowly but gradually changing the age old regressive views against the transgender community.

**Jacobsen:** Looking ahead, how can people donate time, money, skills, and professional networks to help this community inside of Pakistan and from outside of Pakistan into Pakistan?

**Khan:** LGBTQI allies at home and abroad are more than welcome to contribute their time and effort in support of the LGBTQI activists working at such great personal risks to their lives. I would like to see more LGBTQI activists and organization's from the neighboring countries and abroad come forward and initiate programs for cross cultural dialogue and strengthening capacity of LGBTQI human rights defenders from Pakistan.

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



# The Hardships of the Irreligious

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

September 27, 2018

***Nacer Amari** is the Co-Founder of United Atheists of Europe and Co-Founder of Prometheus Europe. He is a Tunisian humanitarian activist who fled Tunisia six years ago because of death threats from Islamists. He is having financial difficulties to establish an association [www.prometheus-eu.com](http://www.prometheus-eu.com), where he endeavours to assist people who are threatened with the death penalty because of their critical views of Islam in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. We did a prior interview in Project and Canadian Atheist. You can view the donations page [here](#). Here we begin a series from a European atheist perspective in an educational series, starting with the conversation of difficulties of the ex-religious in coming out or speaking out.*

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** When it comes to the difficulties of those ex-religious individuals coming into the more developed economies and the world, what are obstacles for them in their own theocratic countries?

**Nacer Amari:** Each country presents some other kind of problems for those of humanists, or those who are becoming generally called “unaffiliated” or those who just decide after getting enough knowledge about the world, that they see no further point to believe in the religion they were brought up with. Generally, lands that have no official division of church/mosque and state, pose a much greater challenge for those who revolt against an almost theocratic rule that religious “scholars” exercise in their country. Ex-religious individuals have not only to beware their own neighbours and — as it is common in traditionalistic societies — whole communities against general ostracism, but also fear of going too far against in many cases “unwritten” laws that state authorities are using to avoid too many changes and protests inside the country. So even if state laws are not explicitly stating anything against expressing publicly atheism — it can always become a problem for those who decide to do that, always with the use of some old and unused statute inside the law, even if it is just a pretext.

**Jacobsen:** What are the government’s and citizens’ reactions to prevent them from speaking out?

**Amari:** It again varies depending on the country, but generally speaking it follows always more or less same the schema. Firstly, speaking about such things is considered taboo and breaking such taboos with each year of growing up is harder. If someone expresses such statements before being considered “teenager” and still in the phase of being considered a child, he/she is then exposed to firstly blaming and shaming for small faith, later parents are using physical and emotional pressure to make a child comply with religious obligations. If lack of belief is expressed at later stage of upbringing, it is considered being “spoiled” by Western civilisation, or but not exclusively — being possessed by Iblis or by Jinns or by Satan and all other religious explanations are possibly used. It doesn’t matter if it lack of belief is caused by long and real studying of religious texts and historiography about the beginnings of certain religion, or by simply knowing and understanding more how does the world works and observation of incompetence of religious authorities to answer most simple questions that science asks. The answer is always the same — Western civilization influence, possession or — which is becoming more and more common in developing countries — treating it as part of an

undiagnosed mental illness. All that leads always individuals to think that they are the only ones who are lacking belief, not only in their own communities but sometimes in the whole world. That something is wrong with them, if nobody aside them is expressing such thoughts for the same reason — social ostracism. The only thing that can help to find oneself in such situations is simply finding someone who is more honest, at least in unofficial situations and talks, or — what is becoming more and more common — finding out that other people also think so thanks to the power of the internet, also thus helping certain individual to understand that not only he is not alone, but that government and society is based on not only a lie but on “hushing” all talk about this lie by force and by tabooisation

**Jacobsen: How can they find people to help them, in part? How can they more or less find their way?**

**Amari:** In current times the best way to find help or at least people to talk about certain ideas — is again — the internet, even to just enable connection between same-minded people inside the very same country.

**Jacobsen: What are the ways in which they can become powerful, bold voices to empower their own sense of courage and some bravery in others?**

**Amari:** It depends always from the personality of a certain person, also of the amount of civil bravery they want to express and the amount of risk they want to put into strengthening their voice. Ultimately — speaking openly on all social media sites — can become the most powerful way to influence others or cease this circle of tabooisation of this topic, thus helping to start a general debate in their own societies about religion. Sherif Gaber — openly declared atheist in Egypt — making high-quality short-clips on Youtube by mere speaking his mind is helping to bring down such taboos and with success. The most important voice is never those on the outside of religion-circles, but always those who were once inside, or at least come from a certain culture. The bold voice in their own language in their own community — can help much more than hundreds of voices outside of this community.

**Jacobsen: Once in another area of the world more accepting, comparatively speaking, of the secular and ex-religious, how can they find their new sense of identity and place?**

**Amari:** By comparing and deciding for themselves which society have better general rules and let an individual develop. They should take active choice and thus they may become bridges between different communities and by their newly found voice and freedom to express it — they may still through use of their native language — still speak to the community in which they were born. To become small, yet important “lanterns” that are just like in Europe of the 18th century — “bringing light of knowledge in the among corners still laying in the shadows”.

**Jacobsen: What can be obstacles from within this new situation for them, once more whether from the new government or the new set of the citizenry?**

**Amari:** They might be — at first — not understanding how those with the freedom to speak, are speaking sometimes exactly for institutions and ideas that caused individuals like them — to firstly run out of their own countries of origins (like sharia laws or use of niqab or acceptance of male-female divisions). But it is again the reason why such individuals are the most important link and voice in Western societies — to speak on behalf of societies of their origin and take the arguments from those who are trying to find similarities between racism and being just against political or/and religious ideologies.

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

# Humanism and Pastafarianism

Feng Chin Wen & Scott Douglas Jacobsen

September 27, 2018

## Introduction to Humanism

Humanism, no doubt, provides not only the denial of a few claims about the nature of the world and its operation but also gives a basis for consideration of the bountiful possibilities from modern science and in the ethical duties based on human compassion.

Our efforts as human beings relate to the basic ways in which we wish to work with one another for our collective benefit. It is about love, trust, commitment, fidelity, cooperation, rational decision-making, evidence, scientific and naturalistic viewpoints, and so on.

## Introduction to Pastafarianism

Some entry points to this philosophy can come from the parody religions including Pastafarianism. Those faith groups taking a spin on the formal religious or faith claims about the world and the proposition of a designer or an architect of the universe. One that we can see.

Their take is one of a noodle God that can be seen in all the different swervy, fractal manifestations of the natural world. It comes from the perception of the natural world and then a joke based on the widespread confirmation bias about seeing design in nature.

## Effective Change: Numbers Speak

I (Chin Wen) started to promote humanism and establish Taiwan Humanism Studio (THS) since 2015 Darwin Day by translation and writing of humanistic articles or videos. In that period, I mimicked the method of a popular science blog and wanted to attract more freethinkers to join. However, scientists have had several huge communities formed by academia in Taiwan and humanists don't. Therefore, there would not have a chance that anyone would join the studio automatically before the community has established. I started to focus on the community building and advertising work but the consequent is limited.

As we can see the figure which illustrates how many fans our facebook page has. During almost two years of development, we only have less than 500 fans. Even though we improved our advertising skill by using inspirational memes and quotations, it only could reach 1,500 fans. After our announcement to be Pastafarianism, it grew to 5000 in a few weeks. That's three times more than before! We have more than 8000 fans now and keep growing with more than 100 per week.

## The Age of Experience

Religions did have an educational function before. it taught literacy, moral, and other knowledge to pre-modern society. Even in the Industrial Era, religions still guide people's personal lives and ethical decisions. Therefore, humanists aim at debating with the churches on knowledge, moral and ethical issues.

However, the core of religion has changed. The New Religious movement and the Charismatic Movement religious competition of believers from theology to experience. People in the modern world struggle with psychological and emotional strain rather than physical struggles.

They are not interested to be a man who is desirable for gods. Instead, they want to enjoy the miracle to reduce the pressure from livelihood and improve work efficiency or self-achievement. If they have to listen to a lecture on the gods' love of the people and the way to achieve redemption, they feel the information is both tiring and useless. Religion is a place for mysticism and to feel a relief from the daily stress of living.

### **The “Entertainmentization” of Religion**

From now, humanists pay less attention to this social trend about — what might be called — entertainmentization of religion. How can we convince people to get rid of superstition if they just want some feeling and fun? Pastafarianism may be the nearest innovation for non-believers in this era. People can have fun, cosplay, and eat.

Pastafarianism is not only the strategy for advertisement but also reframing the concept of humanism.

Humanism is not a religion talking human as the god; it develops within human subjectivity to let people can determine their own destiny. For example, humanistic psychology aims for the development of human needs, capabilities and creativity rather than psychoanalysis and behaviourism. Humanism is not about what human should be but how human could be.

Pastafarianism deconstructs the concept of religion to disenchant the sanctity totally. Moreover, it's concerned with the basic need of human “physiology”, by boiling Pasta's holy body and eat it. It's not a different philosophy but an adjustment for the need for people.

### **The Next Steps**

The next religions will be a mixture of ultra-seriousness and super-playfulness. Pastafarianism will be akin to the form of the super-playful. Those super-serious ones can be seen in the technopians. These different manifestations of options for people who choose what works for them amount to a reflection of the decline of traditional religious structures and the rise of miniature groups and individualist forms of faith — for fun or science speculation.

## **Gulalai Ismail on Bail in Pakistan**

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen**

**October 15, 2018**

The former International Humanist and Ethical Youth Organisation, now Youth Humanists International, Secretary-General, and a current Humanists International Board Member, Gulalai Ismail, was arrested in Pakistan a few mornings ago.

She is a well-known humanist campaigner. Within the humanist community, she is an important frontrunner for the rights and equality of humanists. She spoke at the Conservative Party Conference in the UK.

But she left and arrived in Pakistan at the Islamabad airport. The Federal Investigation Agency arrested her on the spot. Now, she has been released on bail. However, the potential prosecutions are threatening.

Also, she is under a travel ban and, therefore, stuck in Pakistan as a result without the ability to leave. They also have her passport. Ismail remains an award-winning human rights defender. This is an important moment.

She co-founded an organization called Aware Girls. This is an organization devoted to women and girls. That is, it remains a women's and girls' rights organization run by Ismail. She is an impressive person.

In terms of the two most prescient rights initiatives of the early 21st century, Ismail continues to speak on them: the advancement and empowerment of women, and the peace-building. Indeed, she was named the 2014 International Humanist of the Year in 2014.

She is young, runs an important organization, and wins awards for her pursuit of human rights.

Andrew Copson, Chief Executive of Humanists UK and President of IHEU (or Humanists International), stated:

We are gravely concerned for our dear friend and colleague. Gulalai is a brave humanist and human rights activist, whose tireless efforts for peace and human rights have earned her respect around the world. Pakistan should be proud to have produced such a daughter and we urge the authorities to release her, return her passport, and restore her freedom to travel.

'We have written today to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Pakistan High Commission in London urging them to support Gulalai's urgent release and offer her the full protection of the law.

Humanists UK has written to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Pakistan High Commission in London with the statements urging for the removal of prosecution in addition for the rightful return of Ismail's ability to travel, e.g., removing the travel ban and returning her passport to her.

## Interview with Raghen Lucy — President, Minnesota State University, Mankato SSA & Council Member, National Leadership Council (SSA)

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

October 21, 2018

*“**Raghen Lucy** is a sophomore at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Growing up in Williston, North Dakota, she did not have an outlet to express her atheism and advocate for secularism until she got involved with the Secular Student Alliance in 2017. She was inspired to major in Philosophy, Politics & Economics and pursue a career in Constitutional Law by her favorite author and religious critic, Christopher Hitchens.*

*Raghen revived SSA Mavericks after several years of inactivity and finds great joy in serving as an ambassador for the secular cause in Minnesota. After completing her undergraduate program, Raghen is looking forward to attending law school and launching a career in Washington, D.C. She hopes to deal with legal cases regarding freedom of speech and religious liberty.”*

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** How did religion or irreligion influence early life?

**Raghen Lucy:** I was raised in a religious household, and this upbringing seemed unusual to me from an early age. My mother is Methodist, and my father is Catholic. I constantly struggled with confusion regarding this as a child, always asking myself, “Which parent is right? Can they both be right? Can they both be wrong? What does it mean if they are wrong?” I was forced to attend the Methodist Church throughout my early childhood, and the stories and lectures I was fed never stuck with me. I never once found myself truly convinced by anything my religious elders were trying to convince me of. This led to both internal and external turmoil in my early adolescent years that carried into my teens and still to this day. The secular activism I have been doing the past couple years has especially put a strain on my relationship with my parents, but this is something we are working through, and I feel I am growing closer to them because of it.

**Jacobsen:** You study at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Why specialize in politics, philosophy, and economics?

**Lucy:** I actually chose this university specifically because of the Philosophy, Politics & Economics (PPE) program. When I began reading the writings of the late Christopher Hitchens during my junior year of high school, I was immediately inspired to emulate the likes of his work. I did a quick Google search on his academic background, and found that he studied PPE at Oxford. Knowing that Oxford was probably out of my reach at the time, I searched for the closest university that offered the program, found MSU Mankato, and the rest is history. I love this program, as it provides me with a well-rounded insight into the relationship between the political, economic, and legal systems of our society. In addition, it is a perfect undergraduate degree for my future plans — to attend law school and hopefully become a Constitutional lawyer based in Washington, D.C.

**Jacobsen:** While being the president of the Secular Student Alliance at the same university, what are the difficulties on campus for a secular campus group?

**Lucy:** There is still an abundance of work to do in normalizing secularism around our area, and as a result, we have experienced some pushback. We are fortunate to have such a supportive Student Activities department — many SSA chapters, especially in southern and ultraconservative states, are not so lucky. We have experienced instances of our posters being ripped up, torn down, or covered up, laughs at our table in the student union, and verbal intimidation by a few religious authority figures on campus. I always remind myself that these are relatively mild cases of resistance, and to persevere, always treating others with respect and civility. Although normalizing secularism is often difficult, especially on a campus dominated by religious organizations, it is a meaningful and worthy project to undertake.

**Jacobsen: What are the tasks and responsibilities of the position, including delegation?**

**Lucy:** As president of my Secular Student Alliance chapter, I do almost everything from small tasks such as designing posters to more substantial tasks like organizing large-scale events. It takes quite a bit of behind-the-scenes groundwork to run any student organization, but my executive team and group members never fail to offer encouragement and assistance whenever possible. When I was awarded the Best New Chapter of the Year award at the national SSA conference this past summer, I was asked, “How did you do it?” to which I replied, “We did it.” Without the support of our members, faculty advisors, and national SSA staff, the group’s success would not be possible.

**Jacobsen: What is the ratio of secular organizations to religious organizations on the Minnesota State University, Mankato campus(es)?**

**Lucy:** The main reason I chose to launch the Secular Student Alliance was the complete lack of an organized secular presence on campus. Moving from the religious right-wing state of North Dakota, I assumed that a university in Minnesota would have a well-established secular presence, but I was disheartened to be so mistaken. Upon searching for a secular club I could join during the first few weeks of my freshman year (Fall of 2017), I found 21 religious and faith-based organizations, and nothing for non-religious students. This compelled me to start the chapter in the Spring of 2018. The Secular Student Alliance is currently the only secular organization at MSU Mankato, and I am so thrilled that we are continuing to grow and spread our message. We are also taking advantage of the unique opportunity we have to connect and collaborate with the several religious student organizations.

**Jacobsen: Also, you’re on the National Leadership Council for the Secular Student Alliance. What responsibilities in representation comes with this position?**

**Lucy:** The National Leadership Council is a select group of students and recent alumni who provide insight, guidance, and support to the national Secular Student Alliance staff. The SSA cares deeply about the ideas and concerns of its student leaders, and this group is a mechanism by which they can address and employ those suggestions. This is a vital part of the organization’s success, but I think the most important responsibility I have as an NLC member is offering support and advice to other student leaders. It is imperative that our hundreds of leaders across the country have a group of capable and experienced peers to relate to, gain perspective from, and voice concerns to. The students are the heart of the SSA, and we continuously aim to support each other in any way we can.

**Jacobsen: How can students become involved in the MSUM SSA?**

**Lucy:** The majority of participation in our organization involves attending meetings and engaging in group discussion. We discuss a wide array of topics, including the separation between state and church, theories regarding climate change and evolution, and the importance of normalizing secular identity. We plan to become more involved in volunteerism, human rights activism, and collaboration with religious student organizations. Anyone who would like to get involved can email me at [raghen.lucy@mnsu.edu](mailto:raghen.lucy@mnsu.edu) or stop by a meeting. Here is a link to our Facebook page, where we regularly advertise upcoming events: <https://www.facebook.com/ssamavericks/>.

**Jacobsen:** How can ambitious students create an SSA chapter or group on their campus?

**Lucy:** I was astonished by the warm welcome I immediately received from the SSA staff when starting a chapter. I first began the process by contacting Ryan Bell, SSA's National Organizing Manager. Ryan and other staff members have continuously supplied me with an invaluable plethora of resources and support. They understand how difficult it is to balance leadership obligations and academics, and make the process as accessible and step-by-step as possible. More information on creating a chapter can be found here: <https://secularstudents.org/start-a-chapter/>. Fun fact: a young lady beginning the 7th grade this year recently started the first middle school SSA chapter at Salt Lake City's Open Classroom!

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



## Interview with Aradhiya Khan — Pakistani Transgender Activist

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

October 22, 2018

*Edits by Muhammad Salman Khan*

*‘Aradhiya Khan’ who happens to be a 20-year-old student college student and transgender rights activist from Karachi, Pakistan.*

*Aradhiya has attended workshop citizen journalism, and different human rights, digital security, sexual rights trainings. She has voluntarily worked with different transgender organizations such as PECHRA Organization Sindh Transgender Welfare Network, HYPE Network (Rutgers WPF), Sub Rang society, and has also served as election’s observer of (Election Commission of Pakistan) and (FAFEN) Free and Fair Election Network of for the general elections of 2018.*

*She’s a passionate activist and student who is dedicated to work as a change maker, she wants to further advance her work and bring more visibility and representation the Pakistani transgender community by promoting equality and human rights in Pakistan.*

*Aradhiya’s work focuses on advocacy, social change action and sensitization public that empowers the transgender community by working against gender violence, transgender discrimination and sexual diseases in Pakistan.*

*In Pakistan, Aradhiya has actively campaigned against attacks transgender community and also highlighted the issue of transgender discrimination and violence on national and international media, e.g., Cutacut, Express Tribune & Al Jazeera. Also, she’s a peace ambassador for the #Kindness campaign of UNESCO.*

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** You have been interviewed in a number of publications. In particular, you have been interviewed on a bathroom controversy, LGBTQ+ issues, human rights concerns and as a sexual abuse survivor.

**Regarding the bathroom, and trans issues generally, how can society respect the human rights of trans individuals in society?**

**Aradhiya Khan:** As a Pakistani human right defender and an intersectionalist transgender activist, I work towards the emancipation of oppressed communities e.g. women, gender and ethnic minorities to fight for their human rights.

It is quite hard sometimes to stand up for something you believe in and for fighting for that too. I believe we only have one life to bring change; we can better contribute towards changing things and well-being of the people. There is nothing more important than caring about people, the environment, and even animals — I believe we must be selfless in our work and dedication.

Activism in Pakistan is a tough job and on an individual level, I’m doing everything on my own as a volunteer with many non-profit organizations. Highlighting issues in as a human rights defender and transgender rights advocate.

Growing up in Pakistan has been tough since I moved back from Abu Dhabi, the racism and discrimination faced here while growing up were at times too much to deal with. Similarly, working has been hard, getting jobs have been harder and even now I'm not an employed person.

All my work is on an individual level. I face much harassment for that. Even with my activism, I have been discriminated against and I continue to struggle with my education.

My message to the LGBTQI+ community of Pakistan and all over the world is a message of love. Love is what makes us who we really are. We should strive to promote love, acceptance and equality for all. We should support one another rather than discriminate each other in the LGBTQI+ community or someone's race, colour, or gender.

We must be proud of our gender identity, being an LGBTQ+ person in Pakistan is to love yourself. My message is to love yourself and accept yourself without any reservations.

We need love and support from our allies and our LGBTQI+ community. Without your love, it is impossible for us to embrace ourselves and live our lives with love and equality because my fight is for basic human rights for all.

As a transgender person, I'm very happy the transgender community in Pakistan is able to fight for their rights and empower everyone around them despite being marginalized and oppressed, we are moving forward as a community.

I blog my personal experiences on an individual level. I together with other LGBTQI+ community activists have always been highlighting issues of the transgender community of Pakistan. My brother, as a gay person and human rights defender, is also a journalist, who has written extensively on transgender rights.

We don't wish for immediate change to happen, even as a gay person my brother had a hard time to even find a positive role model or support in the country.

I seek to inspire people. As an activist, I highlight the issues of my community, in order to improve their quality of life and bring visibility to the transgender community.

**Jacobsen: With regards to the LGBTQ+ issues, what tends to be the mainstream problems for the community?**

**Khan:** The LGBT community has no acceptance here, despite the growing acceptance and visibility life is harder for the transgender community.

No one has the right to criticize people who have a different sexuality or gender identity. If someone is born gay, they are born like that and it was never a choice.

We live in a conservative, patriarchal, and hetero-normative society. People who are different are treated as 'foreign'. Those of us who are even trying to make a difference are harassed and discriminated. I'm constantly made fun of whenever I go out in the public and such behaviour is problematic.

I'm brave and confident with my identity and my work. But, sometimes, it is hard. I have a brother who is proud LGBTQI human rights defender. He is open about his sexuality and I'm as his sister to support him.

**Jacobsen: Also, what are some overlooked issues for the LGBTQ+ community in Pakistan?**

**Khan:** If you're talking about the whole spectrum, they are not visible. The transgender community compare to other LGBT spectrum members are more accepted due to our culture and traditions.

In Pakistan, lesbian and gay people are not that visible or even publically out. The transgender community has fought for decades for their rights and only recently were we able to pass a Bill to protect transgender rights.

Just this year, Chief Justice of Pakistan has announced to process CNIC (Computerized National Identity Cards) without any hurdles. I have my own now but still, there is a lot that needs to be done. One of which is to have reserved seats in the parliament.

Transgender community in Pakistan is getting much-needed visibility and acceptance as news anchors, models, entrepreneurs, singers, and much more. This is definitely empowering, but still, things are not as we please in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in the north where there have been high number of killings as compared to other regions of Pakistan.

Every year hundreds of transgender persons are being murdered there and there was an incident recently, where a transgender by the name of Nazo was brutally murdered in Peshawar.

She was shot to death and hacked into pieces. When I heard about the incident, I had tears in my eyes. Someone send me the pictures of Nazo on my Whatsapp. When I saw images of her body, I wasn't able to sleep that day!

Most transgender persons do not live with their family, they normally leave and live on their own with the transgender community. I'm quite blessed to be happily living with my family.

**Jacobsen: What have effective activist strategies for the implementation of the equal rights of trans Pakistani citizens?**

**Khan:** Only five years ago, the state of transgender community was in a dismal state. Only after decades of struggle were we able to achieve our rights.

Now we see 'Transgender protection bill' being passed by the National Assembly of Pakistan. Businesses are opening up and providing employment for the transgender community and even educational institutes are offering free courses.

People need to come and sit with the transgender community, they should not stereotype us or isolate us from mainstream society.

We are a marginalized community, the recent elections made history as we saw a record number of transgender activists were able to participate in elections the first time.

**Jacobsen: What still needs to be done for the trans Pakistani citizens to become equals in the society?**

**Khan:** The implementation of the bill is the need of the hour especially when it comes to issues of inheritance, jobs, education, discrimination/ harassment and healthcare all should be given top priority.

For the transgender community, our universities, schools and educational institutes should be more inclusive. Transgender persons must also be provided with free vocational training and skill development courses that provide jobs.

**Jacobsen:** Regarding #MeToo, it has spawned other movements and raised awareness of abuse of people by those with power over them or simply in intimate relationships, or in purported 'corrective' forms of rape, and others.

**How can begin to develop more empathy for the marginal in society who come forward to have compassion, respect, and work towards implantation of justice in the legal system?**

**Khan:** I'm an active advocate of the #MeToo movement, I still remember that I was interviewed for the harassment and abused I faced growing as a trans girl. I have to say first, I was quite scared and I did not know what the reaction of the public would be!

I was scared of sharing my experience on camera; I was just too camera shy but I wanted to be an inspiration and a role model for someone. But I wanted to share my story with the world so that people struggling with their lives can help themselves and through my interview, I'm empowering millions.

I feel much more empowered, capable, and inspiring; I can share my own story because I was not the person who did wrong. I was the survivor. Something was not wrong with me. I did nothing wrong.

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

## **Interview with Paterson Galupe — Member, Humanist Alliance Philippines International**

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen**

**October 23, 2018**

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** If you reflect on early life and upbringing, what was the pivot point into a non-religious worldview? What about a humanist view of the world?

**Paterson Galupe:** Although I was born, raised and indoctrinated into evangelical Christianity as a child, my parents were neglectful in their duty to nurture us and left us stumbling about and bought their accompaniment with money, i felt that there was truly no external guiding force that led me to my eventual disenchantment from religion it was a slow process of denial, acknowledgement and acceptance and took 30 odd years! Humanism is the expression of my empathy and love for fellow humans as I see my firebrand atheism was not enough to change the minds of my facebook friends.

**Jacobsen:** How did you come to find the HAPI community?

**Galupe:** After learning about secular humanism, I wanted to somehow organize with likeminded atheists. Gladly, I met HAPI. I found HAPI through Facebook search as I felt the need to connect with humanist groups closest to me.

**Jacobsen:** What do you consider some of the better moments of the HAPI communal development, as it has grown more over the years?

**Galupe:** I am just new to HAPI, just over 4 months. The website provides a list of their activities that focused mainly on charity events and information outreach about humanism and very little about positive atheism in general. In my view, positive atheism is needed to become a true humanist.

**Jacobsen:** What does secular community look like to you? How can the non-religious communities flourish better?

**Galupe:** A secular community is where both the religious and atheists live together in harmony bereft of the enforcement of religious dogma in state affairs. As far as I know, there are no atheist alliances or groups in the nation today. Non-religious communities can flourish better by being able to support one another. HAPI would be an excellent group to establish the first nationwide humanist atheist alliance.

**Jacobsen:** What have been the benefits of being in the HAPI community for you?

**Galupe:** A clear line of communication with other HAPI members who are interested in promoting atheism and humanism.

**Jacobsen:** What are some of the main catalysts for the development of a humanist community? Is it encroachment of the religious into secular affairs? Is it the lack of community in some facets of the atheist population? And so on.

**Galupe:** It is both. Being the 4th most religious nation in the world, the average population has now degraded to engage in tribalism. As of today, there is no non-religious community in the country as organized as HAPI which is still in a barebones stage.

**Jacobsen: How can people become involved with the HAPI community?**

**Galupe:** I have always been enamoured by the methods of Mr. David Silverman, former head of American Atheists, and how he had always espoused Firebrand atheism. So, if I were to actually have the time or effort to lead, I would model HAPI to his methodology. I would promote an information drive using local regional dialects and the main language, in Filipino, on social media to espouse atheism and humanism that question religion as the sole worldview in the Philippines today. So, as long as we stay in social media, we will remain an anonymous group which what I call, “the social media trap”, from which I believe is where HAPI is at now. With thousands of fake accounts trolling it’s “likers” and “followers” list.

To move forward, we need to establish the Filipino language (with the option to switch to local dialects) based online forum or website with regional hosts or moderators for the said website that contains current events from international humanist groups to let them know that this local humanist group has worldwide support.

Sadly, the lack of intelligence and the huge population of the religious masses means we definitely need to promote counter-apologetics, logical reasoning and centralize all the information revolving around philosophical or metaphysical naturalism and/or scientific materialism as the ideal worldview that promotes better wellbeing. This, in turn, will promote humanist values as an exit to religious dogma with a call for action as the central message to spread enlightenment to the masses. And if possible, provide legal services to victims of abuses committed by clergymen.

This website must also contain Firebrand atheism and street epistemology so closeted and open atheists will also be able to enlighten close friends and family who are moderate or even fundamental theists with concise and precise fact-based answers and links to promote positive atheism. Theists are also happily welcome to the said website to enlighten them as well with a Q&A introduction to the most common questions about atheism and humanism without any political biases yet promote nationalism and the need for a secular government.

Next step is media exposure. A figurehead/s is necessary for people to look up to.

The final step should be student secular humanist groups in secular universities. Forget about the universities controlled by the religious groups, they will automatically revoke the formation of such groups as they see it as a real threat to their supremacy.

In order to truly be able to increase the number of Filipino humanists, we should then focus on the younger generation who are empathic than their elder siblings as this society prioritizes in respecting elders and promotes ancestral worship and are forced into quasi-slavery conditions especially with children who suffer from elder members of the family who have sociopathic or narcissistic tendencies. This, in turn, will serve as the entry point of atheism and humanism in every single religious Filipino household.

Based on my personal experience, the moderate population of the religious remain to be in a highly non-combative stance. But, it will be able to build stronger relationships with open humanists and invite other atheists into the fold who need to act to create change and be able to play an active part for humanism.

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

# Interview with Muhammad Mubarak Bala— Nigerian Humanist

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

October 23, 2018

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** You are an atheist. You have been imprisoned for it. Nonetheless, the atheist community, in particular, and the secular demographics, in general, continue to grow in Nigeria. What was the experience in the psychiatric ward?

**Muhammad Mubarak Bala:** Atheism continues to grow, largely because, many have seen practically how religions, especially Islam applies with the activities of Boko Haram locally, and Internationally by other Jihadists. They have now reconciled the Jihads of Muhammad and today's jihad.

Also, there is the coming out of hitherto closeted atheists and agnostics from both religions dominant around here, which aided by the internet and our commitment as well as achievements, gives courage and sense of community.

The therapy was weaning me off delusion, from saying the name of Muhammad without adding Sallallahu Alayhi wa sallam, (The SAW or PBUH you normally see after Muhammad's name) as demanded by Islam, to Denying the 'history' of Adam and Eve. I kid you not. These are just a few of many. I laughed so much, that they believed I was possessed also by imagined demons.

**Jacobsen:** What was the 'therapy' or 'treatment' given to you?

**Bala:** I was drugged, by force. With drugs that were administered to psychotic and schizophrenic patients. Also, I was sedated which made me weak to fight back.

Of the drugs given to me, were also found to be for epileptic patients. I was never epileptic. But it induced a lot of weird feelings that almost drove me crazy. I was there for 18 days. I tried to keep calm, earn their trust after, so I could be trusted with the drugs to take by myself, which I hid or threw away.

An intervention and change of the doctor gave me a clean bill of health, as was done 6 months prior, by another doctor of the same hospital. But the offending doctor kept his license. I was not able to claim any right or compensation as I was on the run for most of the years that followed. Hunted by mobs and terrorists, after Boko Haram leader threatened me.

**Jacobsen:** What were you thinking and feeling while trapped there?

**Bala:** I was planning my escape. Many thoughts came to mind, especially as informant alerted me that family meetings held planned to relocate me to a place where I cannot communicate with the outside world, an Islamic rehab center on the borders between Nigeria and the Niger Republic.

I had used spoons to open the roof through the ceiling, for possible escape when pressure and rescue failed. I knew my legs would break if I fell off the roof but I was very afraid. After the incidence, my mother told me grew hair was all over my head, in the span of the three weeks. It was a real danger.

**Jacobsen:** Since leaving, how common is taking in atheists to the wards?

**Bala:** Not that we know of. We certainly lost a friend though, in another state, exposed by his wife as an apostate. We pleaded with him to leave the city to our side, his job would not allow.

A few months later, he died from ‘motorcycle accident’ and before we could organize anything, investigation or reports, he has been buried, as according to Islamic rites. There is most probably foul play.

Another victim, had family threaten him with same, but my case as an instance, discouraged them. They opted for preaching and prayers, and exorcism. Many others are threatened more with the social boycott or financial sanctions which made them tow back in line.

Within us though, we aid each other with jobs and financial aid, as well as security as best as we could. The challenges are many, but we still thrive.

**Jacobsen: What is being done to prevent this criminal activity, of demonizing the secular?**

**Bala:** Our presence in the society, having a voice and a representation, especially when we act in more moral responsibility than many theists, keep us safe, and rule out misrepresentation.

**Jacobsen: What seems like the more exciting project for 2018/19 of the atheist and secular community in Nigeria?**

**Bala:** We have registered many humanist and atheistic organizations nationally and locally. Many are also in the process. This allowed us to organize and plan conventions and national cohesion conferences within ourselves and with our societies both in the north and south, sandwiched between Christians and Muslims.

We have other plans for secular political parties in the future, if not strong enough to field candidates, at least enter into alliances and endorsements. Or just simply making a presence in our nation as a symbolic gesture that we indeed exist.

**Jacobsen: How can individuals support the atheist community in Nigeria? What are the more pressing concerns now?**

**Bala:** Many have supported me in the earlier years when I was most vulnerable. Now, we have organized and supported ourselves. Just last week, a sponsor, spared a few hundred thousand naira, thousands in dollars, to support members of our community with soft loans.

International humanist organizations have supported most of our annual and regional conventions. Also, many efforts to register or run our activities were supported by international bodies, augmented by our efforts with what we among ourselves could muster, even amidst the economic crunch the country plunged into.

Yet, there still are many projects we intended to do but have limited capacity and funding to do. These may still be open for others who aim to help with these projects, some of which we carried out last and this year, some yet to be completed. A few of these helped by Hank Pellissier of the Humanist Brighter Brains Institute from the US.

**Jacobsen: How can individual atheists trapped in fundamentalist families or communities escape or get out in a healthy way, as this can come with risks to life and livelihood?**

**Bala:** Many that even came out in the past, have had to recant and ‘repent’ after feeling the brunt of the social and family backlash. I, on one hand, had lost my job twice, lost a lot of property from home and salaries skipped, but fought back to get it, at least some of it, even helped by



rational people even from the Muslim community, due to the obviousness of the nature of victimization.

Many others faced the same, which is why we have a limited number of voices especially in the north keeping to their stance, as opposed to southern Nigeria.

Many others opt to leave the country entirely, but given the right-wing tendencies of the safer western societies, they have reconsidered.

My survival has inspired many, to be who they are, and say what they can, and be free social and morally. With all I have lost, I also gained in changing the narrative, from an obvious death sentence when one dares to challenge dogma, to a game of options, survival and obstacles hurdled across.

We hope to change the society and ultimately the world, if not by weaning humanity off delusion, then at least make a stand, that there were some, who stood against the winds and lasted.

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

**Bala:** Thank you too, it is my pleasure.

## Interview with Muriel McGregor — Former President, SSA (Utah State University)

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

October 24, 2018

*Muriel was born and raised in Logan, Utah. She studied History and French at Utah State University. During that time, she had an enlightenment and left the religion she was raised in — Mormonism. She taught French at a middle school for a few years before going back to get her Masters in Political Science. She founded the Secular Student Alliance Club at Utah State University and has worked to build a secular community in the area. She is an atheist, a lover of knowledge and deep discussions, and an avid runner.*

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** Was religion part of early family life?

**Muriel McGregor:** I was raised as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) in Utah. Not only was religion an integral part of my home life, but it permeated the culture at large. My good-standing and success with my family and community were directly related to me doing everything the LDS Church told me to do.

This caused me to have severe cognitive dissonance. Internally, I loved to ask questions, seek information, and dream big. Outwardly, however, I had to go along with the set expectations that 1) I shouldn't ask questions, but be naturally faithful, 2) I should engage in "womanly pursuits" like home-making and tending children, and 3) my life goal should be to get married as soon as possible and have as many children as I could.

After being exposed to different viewpoints while at Utah State University as well as to historical information available on the internet, I was eventually able to leave the mental stranglehold Mormonism had on me and formally leave the LDS Church (You become a member at 8 when you're baptized. This prompts a record of you at Church Headquarters; in order to no longer be considered a member, you have to request that your name is removed and get your Bishop and Stake President to approve it).

**Jacobsen:** When did you find the larger secular community?

**McGregor:** After leaving Mormonism, I struggled to find a community. I tried hanging out with other post-Mormons but found that the conversation was usually negative. I tried hanging out with more liberal people but found that I was more conservative than most of them in many ways. Meanwhile, I had come to identify as an atheist — in the sense that I grounded my life on empirical evidence gleaned from science and logical arguments.

So, when I went back to do my masters at Utah State University, I founded the Secular Student Alliance Club. It started out small but has gradually grown and become a desperately needed secular community for non-religious students. I have made some of my best and closest friends via the SSA.

**Jacobsen:** What seems like the importance of secular work on campuses?

**McGregor:** Research shows that a growing number of students identify as non-religious. Traditionally, organized religion has played a large role in providing immediate social networks, emotional support, life guidance, opportunities for service, etc. When a non-religious student

comes to a college campus, if a secular club isn't there, then they can struggle to find other places to fill that support-network gap. This can lead to many students feeling isolated, lonely, and even depressed. Consequently, a community-centred secular club can meet these needs that organized religion often does.

**Jacobsen: How did you find the SSA? How did you become involved in it?**

**McGregor:** I remember wanting to start a secular club when I went back to do my masters. I did some research — USU used to have a club called USU Reason, but it hadn't been inactive for several years. I don't exactly remember how, but I learned about the national organization called the Secular Student Alliance. It seemed like a great opportunity to affiliate our campus group with them — not only would we get free stuff, but it would also connect us with a support team as well as other campus secular clubs. So I registered our club and the rest is history.

**Jacobsen: What is your current role at the SSA through Utah State University? Is the experience in Mormon state unique for the SSA work?**

**McGregor:** This year I am advising the club. After starting the club, I was the president of it for 2 years, then the next year I was over service/activism while I gave another person the opportunity to be president. This year, there's a new president with the old president guiding them. I have stepped back significantly in order to allow new leadership the opportunity to step up; but they know they can always ask me questions.

Definitely. A lot of our club members are leaving or have left Mormonism. They need a community that is going to befriend them, give them advice, and support them through tough times. These club members frequently deal with familial issues and a sense of isolation as a result of coming out secular. Moreover, they now have to process through religious baggage and figure out who they want to be as an independent person. This can all be extremely tough when your family doesn't support you, Mormonism is all you've ever known, and you're trying to keep up in school. For students who were never Mormon, they are so happy to find a secular community in an area where religion frequently feels omnipresent.

**Jacobsen: What tasks and responsibilities come with the position?**

**McGregor:** As an advisor, I monitor the plans of the club. When need is, I make suggestions, provide information, and/or remind them to work on something. In the past, as club president, I planned, advertised for, and implemented all our activities/events. As the service/activism chair, I oversaw several fundraiser parties and collaborative activities with other campus clubs.

**Jacobsen: How can students become involved with the Utah State University SSA or the national SSA?**

**McGregor:** Great question! For the national SSA, they can to <https://secularstudents.org/> to see if their campus has a chapter. If it does, then they can connect with the contact info provided. If their campus does not have a club and they want to start one, then they can start one on the SSA website. Next, they need to create a club at their university (different campuses have different rules, procedures, etc.). The SSA provides help information for what to do after — planning activities, advertising, etc. For the USU SSA chapter, the best way to join is to find our group on facebook (USU Secular Student Alliance) or email us at [ususecularstudents@gmail.com](mailto:ususecularstudents@gmail.com).

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

# Dr. Sven van de Wetering on Psychology, Policy, and Fatherhood

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

October 25, 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 blind spots of everyone, epistemologies of psychology, public policy, and social science.*

**Scott Douglas Jacobsen:** What tends to be the blind spot of the academic world? Why is this the case?

**Professor Sven van de Wetering:** We all have blind spots. Many of which get us into fairly big trouble, but I would have to say the biggest one is that we are so enamoured of logic and evidence.

Where we tend to ignore the criteria by which people outside academia judge the truth of propositions, criteria like emotional resonance, I believe logic and evidence are usually much more useful criteria for truth than emotional resonance (though there are exceptions, and we are not vigilant about those).

However, the fact of the matter: we try to use those criteria and much of the rest of the world does not leads to some fairly spectacular breakdowns in communication. A lot of us seem to think that coming across as condescending assholes is an acceptable price to pay for improving our odds of being right.

The political consequences of that misunderstanding are now playing out in the United States. I do not think they are at all trivial. Another blind spot adversely affecting not only our communication but also our odds of getting things right is our assumption that universal or nearly universal generalizations are useful epistemological devices in almost all domains.

This is probably more of an issue for the sciences and social sciences than it is for the humanities. In psychology, this often manifests itself in researchers doing studies on first-year undergraduate students in some Western country (often the United States), then writing about the results as if they were universally applicable to all human beings.

In those rare cases in which such generalizations have been tested cross-culturally, it has usually been found that these populations are less typical of humanity as a whole than any other population that has ever been studied.

People from this population have been described as WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) to highlight the inappropriateness of generalizing from studies done on this population.

**Jacobsen: What does learning the implicit epistemologies of psychology, e.g., statistics and methodology, teach a university-educated person compared to someone without this education?**

**van de Wetering:** It teaches them how to join that inner circle of WEIRD people, for good or for ill. On the positive side, it does give them some valuable tools for assessing the validity of evidence, especially evidence for generalizations; on the negative side, it also puts them on the wrong side of the communications barrier I was talking about earlier.

If they absorb these lessons well, I hope it also gives them a certain amount of intellectual humility, but I am not sure how often that part of the lesson takes.

**Jacobsen: How can the public policy be better informed by the science?**

**van de Wetering:** Bismarck once famously commented that laws are like sausages; it is better not to watch them being made. In the case of public policy where some scientific knowledge is an input (which is a step in the right direction), the best public policy from a purely scientific point of view gets gradually distorted by political horse trading.

So, by the time it becomes law, it may be almost useless. Radically changing the political process is not easy to do and, therefore, the best that is achievable is to hope for science to exert some influence over policies at every stage of their development, not at the beginning.

Given that politicians do listen to their constituents, probably the best thing we could do is improve the quality of public science education, so that the politicians' constituents do not quietly accept policy modifications that go against what is thought to be best on a purely scientific basis.

This is probably a pipe dream. Science is hard. Our culture does not seem to be good at motivating people to do hard things that do not have immediate payoffs.

**Jacobsen: As a social scientist, what are some areas in which public policy, provincially or federally, does not reflect the best psychological science?**

**van de Wetering:** Speaking not as a social scientist but a father of a child on the autism spectrum with an intellectual disability, I am horrified to discover that the level of support for such children drops very dramatically after they turn 19.

This is not totally contrary to science, which does say that getting it right in childhood does greatly reduce problems in adulthood. But the degree of decline in support needs is much less than the policy seems to imply.

I do not think this massive drop off in funding is due to a misunderstanding of the science. I suspect it has more to do with the fact that little kids with intellectual disabilities are often cute, and, therefore, funding for them is a relatively easy sell, politically; whereas adults with

intellectual disabilities are often substantially less cute, and, therefore, easier to ignore, politically.

The other provincial policy that drives me crazy is the relative degree of funding for education and for health. Education has been underfunded in this province for so long that we do not even know what normal funding looks like.

And yet, failure to invest in education is going to have far more adverse effects on our future than failure to invest in health, which is, as far as I can tell, not happening to nearly the same degree.

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

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