

A stylized illustration of a person in a green field under a dark blue sky. The person is shown from the back, walking towards the horizon. They are wearing a dark blue long-sleeved shirt and light-colored pants. The ground is a solid green color. The sky is dark blue with several yellow stars and a purple planet with a pink ring in the upper right corner. The overall style is minimalist and modern.

NEWS INTERVENTION: ASSEMBLAGE 4

SCOTT DOUGLAS JACOBSEN

In-Sight Publishing

News Intervention: Assemblage 4

IN-SIGHT PUBLISHING

Publisher since 2014

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

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

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Independent Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

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

Names: Jacobsen, Scott Douglas author

Title: News Intervention: Assemblage 4 / Scott Douglas Jacobsen

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

Identifiers: None (epub).

Subjects: | BISAC: PHILOSOPHY / General (PHI000000)

Classification: LCC (None) | DDC (None)

p. cm.

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

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Designed and implemented by Scott Douglas Jacobsen

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Acknowledgements

I express gratitude to Vivek Sinha for the invitation to become a part of *News Intervention* early in its production and the opportunity to work as a Contributor and as an Assistant Editor. Sinha reached out after the book review by a colleague of a text by him. We talked about the plans, the vision, and the mission of the outlet. The rest remains history with sufficient guidance for the general direction of the publication into the future. Some of the articles amount more to ‘think piece’ essays, which makes one worry about the logical implication of other written pieces. Jokes aside, I feel honored to contribute to *News Intervention*. Also, for the previous assemblage interviewees and the current, I appreciate the time for the interview and conveyance of expert knowledge.

Scott

NEWS INTERVENTION

Philosophical and Historical Foundations of American Secularism 6 – African-American History/Black History is American History

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

October 14, 2019

Dr. Herb Silverman is the Founder of the Secular Coalition for America, the Founder of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry, and the Founder of the Atheist/Humanist Alliance student group at the College of Charleston. He authored Complex variables (1975), Candidate Without a Prayer: An Autobiography of a Jewish Atheist in the Bible Belt (2012) and An Atheist Stranger in a Strange Religious Land: Selected Writings from the Bible Belt (2017). He co-authored The Fundamentals of Extremism: The Christian Right in America (2003) with Kimberley Blaker and Edward S. Buckner, Complex Variables with Applications (2007) with Saminathan Ponnusamy, and Short Reflections on Secularism (2019).

Here we talk about African-American and American History.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: African-American history, akin to the creation of Native American history after the creation of The United States of America, is American history. Certainly, as far as I can tell, it is a distinct facet of American history, making American history a pluralistic affair. Nonetheless, as we covered some of the Native American pre-American and American history in the US, let's cover some African-American secular history.

Certainly, we can see several prominent and respected black freethinkers in the United States tackling on-the-grounds issues and others now. They did not emerge out of the aether. What is the history of freethought in America? How did some of this link to other freethought movements in America? Who were the important players? How did these individuals provide a context in which the African-American community could free themselves from the shackles of fundamentalist ideologies? At the same time, how did the church give some refuge for them?

Dr. Herb Silverman: I should first acknowledge some positives for African-American churches. Aside from giving people hope, they have often been a center for civil rights activism and a place that blacks could gather in large numbers without being harassed. I live in Charleston, South Carolina, just three blocks from Mother Emmanuel AME church, now internationally known because nine African Americans were murdered there by white nationalist Dylann Roof. This church was once a secret meeting place for African-Americans who wanted to end slavery at a time when laws in Charleston banned all-black church gatherings.

Some slaveowners and white Christian ministers in the nineteenth century read biblical verses to slaves as part of the worship services they allowed them to attend. They wanted to show that the Bible condones and supports slavery. The biblical curse of Ham (Genesis 9:25), one of the sons of Noah, was for Ham to be a servant to his brothers. This curse was used to justify slavery of black Americans on the ground that black Americans were descendants of Ham.

Other biblical justifications for slavery and why slaves should obey their masters include:

(1 Peter 2:18) Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.

(Ephesians 6:5) Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and sincerity of heart, just as you would Christ.

(Colossians 3:22) Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.

(Titus 2:9) Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them.

And here's how they thought they were showing mercy to slaves, because of possible punishment to the slave owner: (Exodus 21:20-21) When a man strikes his male or female slave with a rod so hard that the slave dies under his hand, he shall be punished. If, however, the slave survives for a day or two, he is not to be punished, since the slave is his own property.

The experience of slavery and the degradations of proslavery Christians led some enslaved blacks to varieties of unbelief. The most influential African American at that time was Frederick Douglass, who devoted his time, talent, and boundless energy to ending slavery and gaining equal rights for African Americans. After escaping from slavery in Maryland, he became a national leader of the abolitionist movement in Massachusetts and New York, noted for his oratory and incisive antislavery writings. He was described by abolitionists as a living counter-example to arguments of slaveholders that slaves lacked the intellectual capacity to function as independent American citizens.

Of his escape from slavery, Douglass said, "I prayed for twenty years but received no answer until I prayed with my legs." He said of pro-slavery Christian clergymen: "Welcome infidelity! Welcome atheism! Welcome anything! In preference to the gospel as preached by those divines! They convert the very name of religion into a barbarous cruelty."

Frederick Douglass was a good friend of the agnostic orator Robert Green Ingersoll. Douglass once remarked that Ingersoll and Abraham Lincoln were the only white men in whose company "he could be without feeling he was regarded as inferior to them."

Believing that all people are equal, Douglass supported the women's suffrage movement in addition to black emancipation. In 1848, he spoke at the Woman's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York, which sparked the nineteenth-century woman's suffrage movement. Douglass was the only male to speak at the convention, drawing parallels between black men and American women as equally disenfranchised.

Here are a few other African American leaders who were also freethinkers:

W. E. B. Du Bois was a historian, civil rights activist, and a founder of the NAACP. His books include *The Souls of Black Folk* and *Black Reconstruction in America*. When he became head of the department at historically black Atlanta University in Georgia, the engagement was held up because he refused to lead a prayer. He also said, "I refused to join any church or sign any church creed."

James Baldwin was an American novelist, playwright, and activist. He described himself as not religious. Baldwin accused Christianity of "reinforcing the system of American slavery by palliating the pangs of oppression and delaying salvation until a promised

afterlife.” He wrote, “If the concept of God has any use, it is to make us larger, freer, and more loving. If God can’t do that, it’s time we got rid of him.”

Yosef Ben-Jochannan was an American writer and historian, author of 49 books. He said, “The churches can’t help the people when the chips are down because their interest is with the power structure.” He added, “The black man has called upon Jesus Christ for so many years in America, and now he starts calling on Mohammed, and there are many who are calling on Moses, and in no time within this period has the black man’s situation changed, nor has the black man any freedom. It is obvious that someone didn’t hear his call or isn’t interested in that call, either Jesus, Mohammad, or Moses.”

Alice Walker, civil rights activist and author of *The Color Purple*, said, “The only reason you want to go to heaven is that you have been driven out of your mind and off your land.” She also said, “All people deserve to worship a God who also worships them. A God that made them, and likes them. That is why Nature, Mother Earth, is such a good choice. Never will Nature require that you cut off some part of your body to please It; never will Mother Earth find anything wrong with your natural way.”

Actress Butterfly McQueen, who played an enslaved maidservant in *Gone with the Wind*, was an atheist, saying in 1989, “As my ancestors are free from slavery, I am free from the slavery of religion.”

Though Martin Luther King, Jr. was religious, he advocated for the separation of religion and government, and supported the Supreme Court’s decision to prohibit government-sponsored prayer in public schools. He also said, “I would be the last to condemn the thousands of sincere and dedicated people outside the churches who have labored unselfishly through various humanitarian movements to cure the world of social evils, for I would rather a man be a committed humanist than an uncommitted Christian.”

Bayard Rustin, who helped organize freedom rides, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and King’s March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, was an atheist. So was A. Philip Randolph, who also helped organize the March on Washington, where King gave his “I have a dream” speech. Randolph said, “We consider prayer as nothing more than a fervent wish; consequently, the merit and worth of a prayer depend upon what the fervent wish is.”

Other black freethinkers who also played significant roles in the Civil Rights movement include leaders James Forman, Eldridge Cleaver, and Stokely Carmichael, all of whom rejected Christianity.

Anthony Pinn is the author/editor of over 30 books, including numerous volumes related to African American humanism. He received the 1999 African American Humanist Award from the Council for Secular Humanism and the 2006 award for Harvard University Humanist Chaplaincy Humanist of the Year.

And, of course, there is Neal deGrasse Tyson, well-known astrophysicist and science popularizer. He calls himself an agnostic, and said, “There is no common ground between science and religion. Religion only starts where scientific knowledge ends.”

In 1989, Norm Allen Jr. founded African Americans for Humanism, the first explicitly secular organization for blacks. Then came Black Atheists of America and Black Nonbelievers Inc., as well as local groups such as Black Skeptics of Los Angeles. Black atheists today are not content

to personally reject religion, but instead have a goal of spreading freethought to the broader black community. For example, author Sikivu Hutchinson and Mandisa Thomas, founder of Black Nonbelievers, argue that religion hurts the black community by promoting sexism, patriarchy, and homophobia.

In addition to denying the existence of God, encouraging the teaching of evolution in schools and fighting for the separation of church and state, black atheists want to find solutions to practical problems. Many have embraced Black Lives Matter, a secular movement unaffiliated with black religious institutions and ideology. They look for ways to improve the situation for blacks, and also to promote a more just, democratic, and less racist American society.

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

Philosophical and Historical Foundations of American Secularism 7 – Presidents and Religious Affiliation

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

October 17, 2019

Dr. Herb Silverman is the Founder of the Secular Coalition for America, the Founder of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry, and the Founder of the Atheist/Humanist Alliance student group at the College of Charleston. He authored Complex variables (1975), Candidate Without a Prayer: An Autobiography of a Jewish Atheist in the Bible Belt (2012) and An Atheist Stranger in a Strange Religious Land: Selected Writings from the Bible Belt (2017). He co-authored The Fundamentals of Extremism: The Christian Right in America (2003) with Kimberley Blaker and Edward S. Buckner, Complex Variables with Applications (2007) with Saminathan Ponnusamy, and Short Reflections on Secularism (2019).

Here we talk about American freethinker, or not, presidents.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Over time, I have heard or more often read repeated mumblings and murmurings from some American freethinkers of the possibility of major leaders, including presidents, of the United States being closet atheists or agnostics. However, most of the former presidents lived in even more religious times than America now. In that social climate, they remained quiet because citizens – a hunk of them – vote via political affiliation in association with religion.

If a Christian candidate, and open about it, a large sector of Americans seem to vote for them, as a Christian, as a Christian seen as a good person, and so on. How has the secular and philosophical landscape of Americans been influenced, impacted, by the voting records on religion? How many presidents, statistically, in American history were or are, probably, atheists or agnostics? What would be the fate of an open atheist or agnostic president for their political life? I recall the retort if you won the governorship, “Demand a recount!”

Dr. Herb Silverman: Religious beliefs of American presidents are difficult to determine, perhaps indeterminable. We can learn what they profess to believe and what church they attend, but I am often skeptical about what they truly believe. Let’s look at the last two presidents, Barack Obama and Donald Trump, both of whom are professed Christians.

Barack Obama had an atheist father and was raised by a secular humanist mother whose values he embraced. He used to say he was an agnostic, but he became a Christian when he ran for public office. At least Obama embraces some positive values of Christianity, like concern for immigrants and the poor, caring about your neighbor, honesty, and respect for the environment.

What Christian principles does Donald Trump embrace, unless you consider it Christian to nominate judges put forth by conservative white evangelicals? I know he disagrees with Luke 6:29: “If someone slaps you on the cheek, offer your other cheek.” I couldn’t find a biblical passage that says, “Slap him back ten times harder.” Nor does Trump follow Luke 14:1: “He who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Many of us wish Trump would heed Proverbs 12:15: “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.”

Trump refused to disclose his tax returns because he claims they are under audit. He added, “Maybe I get audited so much because I’m a strong Christian.” Really? How much faith does that statement require? I think Donald Trump is an atheist because I can’t picture him believing in a power higher than himself. On the other hand, Trump might think that he is a god.

Given that presidents are usually smart and thoughtful people, I would think that quite a few who called themselves Christians did not believe most of the doctrines of their faith. There are at least 18 non-Christian presidents: George Washington (Deist), John Adams (Unitarian), Thomas Jefferson (Deist), James Madison (Deist), James Monroe (Deist), John Quincy Adams (Unitarian), John Tyler (Deist), Millard Fillmore (Unitarian), Abraham Lincoln (probably Deist), William Howard Taft (Unitarian), Dwight D. Eisenhower (no church until he became president). Many Unitarians also considered themselves Deists. Unaffiliated presidents are Ulysses S. Grant, William Henry Harrison, Andrew Johnson, and Rutherford B. Hayes. Probable nonbelievers include Martin Van Buren, Zachary Taylor, and Chester A. Arthur. If you include Quakers as non-Christian (which many Christians do), we can add Herbert Hoover and Richard Nixon.

Should the religious beliefs of a politician matter? They should if the person’s religious faith interferes with the duties and oath of office. I like what John F. Kennedy, the only Catholic president, said during his campaign: “I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute.” And Kennedy governed as if he were an atheist, which I suspect he might have been because it appeared that he did nothing more than follow certain rituals. While I would like to see President Trump impeached and convicted, I worry about his successor. It would be Christian fundamentalist VP Mike Pence. At the Republican national convention, Pence said, “I’m a Christian, a conservative, and a Republican in that order.” This sounds like he would govern by imposing some of his unconstitutional Christian values on the rest of us.

When now-Senator Jamie Raskin (D-MD) testified at a Maryland State Senate hearing in 2006 in support of gay marriage, Republican State Senator Nancy Jacobs said: “Mr. Raskin, my Bible says marriage is only between a man and a woman. What do you have to say about that?” Raskin replied: “Senator, when you took your oath of office, you placed your hand on the Bible and swore to uphold the Constitution. You did not place your hand on the Constitution and swear to uphold the Bible.”

I would much rather see a non-religious American president than a religious one, who might pledge his or her highest allegiance to religion instead of to the oath of office. Religious conviction must never interfere with the purely secular responsibilities associated with holding the highest office in America.

While politicians are reluctant to come out of the closet as atheists, there have been some non-religious gains. A Congressional Freethought Caucus was formed in 2018. This was a milestone for nonreligious Americans in our continual struggle for inclusion in the political process and recognition as a constituency. The Caucus promotes public policy formed on the basis of reason, science, and moral values. It protects the secular character of our government by adhering to the strict separation of church and state. It opposes discrimination against atheists, agnostics, humanists, seekers, religious and nonreligious persons, and champions the value of freedom of thought and conscience worldwide. The Caucus also provides a forum for members of Congress to discuss their moral frameworks, ethical values, and personal religious journeys. The Caucus started with four members, and now has twelve, with more likely to join.

For people who want to contribute financially to local and national candidates who support secular values, there is now a Freethought Equality Fund PAC, which helps increase the number of nonreligious Americans running for public office. See <http://freethoughtequalityfund.net>

Scientific advancement isn't just making people question God. It's also connecting those who question. There are many atheist, agnostic, and humanist groups, along with Internet discussion groups and Meetups. "Nones," those with no religious affiliation, is the fastest growing "religious" group in America, especially among younger Americans. The latest survey shows that over 23 percent of Americans are "Nones," a higher percentage than for either Catholics or evangelicals.

In August 2019, the Democratic National Committee passed a resolution acknowledging the "value, ethical soundness, and importance" of non-religious Americans. The resolution mentioned that we advocate for rational public policy based on sound science and universal humanistic values. In addition, Sarah Levin, Director of Governmental Affairs of the Secular Coalition for America, was recently elected as a Co-Chair of the DNC Interfaith Council (not representing the nonpartisan Secular Coalition). In 2020, Democrats will need all the votes they can get, and they understand that they have more to gain by embracing the growing number of secular Americans than worrying about who might complain if they do.

There have been at least seven democratically-elected world leaders who have been atheists: Julia Gillard, former Prime Minister of Australia; Alexis Tsipras, Prime Minister of Greece; Francois Hollande, President of France; Zoran Milanovic, Prime Minister of Croatia; John Key, Prime Minister of New Zealand; Elio di Rupo, former Prime Minister of Belgium; Milos Zeman, President of the Czech Republic. Perhaps in the not-too-distant future we will have an American president who is an open atheist. Skeptical? Did you really expect to see a black American president in your lifetime?

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

Philosophical and Historical Foundations of American Secularism 8 – Minority Religions and the American Nation-State

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

October 22, 2019

Dr. Herb Silverman is the Founder of the Secular Coalition for America, the Founder of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry, and the Founder of the Atheist/Humanist Alliance student group at the College of Charleston. He authored Complex variables (1975), Candidate Without a Prayer: An Autobiography of a Jewish Atheist in the Bible Belt (2012) and An Atheist Stranger in a Strange Religious Land: Selected Writings from the Bible Belt (2017). He co-authored The Fundamentals of Extremism: The Christian Right in America (2003) with Kimberley Blaker and Edward S. Buckner, Complex Variables with Applications (2007) with Saminathan Ponnusamy, and Short Reflections on Secularism (2019).

Here we talk about minority religions and the American nation-state.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Christian mythology pervades so much of the American landscape in the present day. It does the same for much of the long-term history of the United States too. Our references in the series look at mostly Christians, deists, pantheists, or the indigenous, whether the leadership or the population. Numerous minority religious belief systems exist in America today.

Many minority religions existed in America in the past. They have had interactions with the dominant religion and must have influenced the secular and freethought community over time. Islam and Judaism have had impacts on the political and social landscape of the United States of America. What have been impactful or important minority religions in the development of religion in America?

How have those religions been positive for secularism in America? How have those religions been negative for secularism in America? What has been the interplay between the dominant religion, minority religions, and the secular and freethought communities in the ongoing struggle for motion towards the proposed ideals of the United States with equality for all – in this case equality for the religious and the non-religious, the secular and the non-secular, or the naturalists and the supernaturalists?

Dr. Herb Silverman: Religious freedom, guaranteed by the United States Constitution, allows individuals to practice and promote any religion or no religion without government interference. Our founders supported freedom of religion because they understood that such religious diversity would help our new country avoid the kinds of wars that had plagued Europe, where hundreds of thousands of people had been tortured and killed over religious differences.

I view the existence of many minority religions as a “blessing.” Christians are wrong when they claim America is a Christian nation. It’s a Christian nation in the same way that America is a white nation. The majority of Americans are both white and Christian. However, America is not now, nor has it ever officially been, a white nation or a Christian nation.

One of my favorite minority religions is the Satanic Temple. Its members are mostly atheists. These Satanists might be having a little fun with the name, but their primary purpose is to promote secularism. They hit on a clever name to get publicity for promoting rational thought and separation of religion and government. But these “Satanists” especially trouble some religious believers because the name engages in their own religious narrative. The Satanic Temple has gained international attention for asserting equal rights for Satanists when other religious privileges have been granted, primarily to Christians. They have successfully applied for equal representation when religious monuments are placed on public property, opposed religious exemption and legal protection against laws that unscientifically restrict women’s reproductive autonomy, exposed fraudulent harmful pseudo-scientific practitioners and claims in mental health care, and they have applied to hold clubs alongside other religious after school clubs in schools besieged by proselytizing organizations.

In addition to being an atheist, a humanist, an agnostic, a freethinker, and other labels (depending on definitions), I’m also a Jew. The definition of a Jew is a person born of a Jewish mother. There is no requirement for a Jew to believe anything special. Many, if not most, Jews in America are atheists. I am a member of the Society for Humanistic Judaism, a nontheistic religion with atheist rabbis. Other religions consistent with being an atheist include Buddhism and Hinduism. Some Buddhists and Hindus believe in reincarnation, but that is not a requirement.

Many of us non-religious types like to collaborate with religious people to achieve common goals. An added bonus is that negative stereotypes might change when religious people and atheists get to know each other better. I’ve participated in a number of interfaith dialogues, though I would prefer a different term (perhaps “interfaith and values”). I think it’s terrific when interfaith groups invite atheists to join and work with them. These interfaith dialogues have mostly been with progressive religionists who are comfortable engaging with people of other faiths and none. They can more easily collaborate with us on good works than with conservative religionists, whose primary interest in those outside their narrow belief system is to proselytize. These interfaith religious believers seem to value behavior more than belief, and find in their holy books an obligation to advocate for social justice. The more conservative religious believers tend to place belief above behavior, and think of this life as preparation for an imagined afterlife.

Aside from deciding who allegedly goes to heaven, there have been countless claims by so-called experts about the specifics of an afterlife. How do we determine who the experts are? The number of experts on any given topic is inversely proportional to the evidence available on that topic. And by that criterion, we are all experts on the afterlife because there is absolutely no evidence for its existence. Anyone can make up stuff about heaven or quote stuff from books made up by others.

I think there is a lot of value even in religions I dislike because they help us maintain a pluralistic society. I’ll mention just two of many.

First, Islam. Given the high-profile atrocities committed by some Muslims in the name of their religion, a number of Americans oppose giving complete religious freedom to Muslims. They point to passages in the Quran that can be interpreted to justify atrocious acts. But the same can be said about passages in the Hebrew and Christian Bibles. If you can find an interpretation in one holy book to justify an atrocity, then you can likely find a comparable interpretation and justification in the other holy books. These include genocide, holy wars, slavery, misogyny,

death for crimes like blasphemy, homosexuality and worshipping the wrong god or even the right god in the wrong way. We need to distinguish between peaceful religious believers and those who are inspired by their holy books to commit atrocities. It becomes Islamophobia when we lump all Muslims into the same category.

Pope Francis once said that faith and violence are incompatible. Not if you read a comprehensive history of religion, including the history of the Catholic Church. Ironically, conservative Christians who seem most worried about Sharia agree with more tenets of Sharia law than do atheists like me. Sharia opposes abortion, contraceptives, and sex education, considers being gay a sin, has little tolerance for other religions, and treats women as subservient to men while claiming women are privileged within the religion.

I don't much care for the beliefs of Mormons, now called Latter Day Saints, especially their effective political opposition to same-sex marriage, opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment and to physician assisted suicide. For nearly 150 years, the Mormon Church had taught that all blacks were cursed, which was why a black Mormon male could not become an LDS priest or enter the Mormon Temple. In 1978, LDS President Spencer W. Kimball claimed that God had removed the curse on blacks and that worthy black men could now become priests.

One amusing story about Mormons is that they baptize dead people. Many Jews, myself excluded, are upset that Mormons have sometimes focused on Jewish Holocaust victims (perhaps even my dead relatives) for posthumous baptism. This practice, however ludicrous, is fine with me. It does no harm to my deceased relatives or to me. In fact, I take this as an expression of good will, much like, "I'll pray for you." I believe in its positive sentiment, if not its efficacy.

In a debate I had in North Carolina with well-known Christian apologist William Lane Craig, I asked him during the debate what he thought of a different resurrection story believed by many Christians. After Jesus died, but before he went to heaven, Jesus stopped in the United States. This story was chiseled on gold plates in Egyptian hieroglyphics and buried in Palmyra, New York. In 1827, the angel Moroni led Joseph Smith to the gold plates and a magic stone. When Smith put the magic stone into his hat and buried his face in the hat, he was able to translate the plates into English. I asked Craig if he believed the Book of Mormon was true, and if he thought Mormons were Christians. Craig didn't respond during the debate. But after the debate, I asked Craig if he thought Mormons were real Christians, and he said, "No. They are a cult."

The word "cult" is not well defined. Christianity was once a cult of Judaism that eventually had enough members to rise to the status of sect. It became a separate religion when they added their own holy book, the New Testament. The difference between a religion and a cult seems to be the number of adherents. I once saw a cartoon showing a bearded guru at a table on the sidewalk holding a sign-up sheet. A giant thermometer in the cartoon marked off increasingly larger categories of religion, starting at the bottom with "handful of wackos," and moving up the thermometer with "bunch of nuts," "cult," "faction," "sect," and at the top— "mainstream religion." The poster next to the guru read, "Join us and help us reach our goal!"

Sen. Mitt Romney, a Mormon, once said, "The most unusual thing in my church is that we believe there was once a flood upon the earth, and that a man took a boat and put two of each animal inside the boat, and saved humanity." Romney essentially said that his holy book is no more preposterous than other holy books. I think he has a point.

I'm just pleased that we tolerate all kinds of beliefs, as long as they are not forced on those who are not devotees or harm minors. I support the 1971 Supreme Court decision in the three-pronged "Lemon Test," named after the lead plaintiff Alton Lemon. It says that government action must have a secular legislative purpose, must not have the primary effect of either advancing or inhibiting religion, and must not result in an excessive entanglement with religion.

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

Philosophical and Historical Foundations of American Secularism 9 – The British

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

November 1, 2019

Dr. Herb Silverman is the Founder of the Secular Coalition for America, the Founder of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry, and the Founder of the Atheist/Humanist Alliance student group at the College of Charleston. He authored Complex variables (1975), Candidate Without a Prayer: An Autobiography of a Jewish Atheist in the Bible Belt (2012) and An Atheist Stranger in a Strange Religious Land: Selected Writings from the Bible Belt (2017). He co-authored The Fundamentals of Extremism: The Christian Right in America (2003) with Kimberley Blaker and Edward S. Buckner, Complex Variables with Applications (2007) with Saminathan Ponnusamy, and Short Reflections on Secularism (2019).

Here we talk about the British and the Americans, and the American Revolutionary War.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: The British Empire produced some of the prominent Western philosophers, empiricists, and others. Obviously, the Americans and the British had a strained relationship for some time. What were some of the statements and ideas of the freethinkers on the American and the British sides during the American Revolutionary War? What were the different reactions to the American Revolution of the 13 colonies and the British Empire? What happened to the secular, men and women, during this time of war – common in American history?

Dr. Herb Silverman: The term freethinker emerged towards the end of the 17th century in England to describe people who stood in opposition to Christian churches and literal belief in the Bible. These people believed that they could understand the world through consideration of nature. In the United States, freethought was an anti-Christian and anti-clerical movement to make an individual politically and spiritually free to decide for himself on religious matters.

John Toland, an Irish philosopher and freethinker in the 18th century, was the first person called a freethinker (by George Berkeley, a Bishop in Ireland). Toland wrote over a hundred books, mostly dedicated to criticizing ecclesiastical institutions. In *Christianity Not Mysterious*, the book for which he is best known, Toland challenged not just the authority of the established church, but all inherited and unquestioned authority. Because of this book, he was prosecuted by a grand jury in London. The Parliament of Ireland proposed that he should be burnt at the stake, and in his absence three copies of the book were burnt by the public hangman.

British deists and freethinkers including John Toland, Anthony Collins, and Matthew Tindal focused on the human roots of Judaism, Christianity, Islam and ancient Paganism. They advocated tolerance and freedom of thought and fought against the influence of Christian doctrine on political and social life. They also denied the supernatural foundations of Christianity and analyzed the Bible with the aim to promote the free search for truth. They helped bring about Enlightenment views of religion and the secularization of Europe.

John Locke, who was British, inspired both the American and French revolutions. His arguments concerning liberty and the social contract motivated written works by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, and other founding fathers of the United States. One of

Locke's passages is reproduced verbatim in the Declaration of Independence, the reference to a "long train of abuses." Thomas Jefferson wrote, "Bacon, Locke, and Newton. I consider them as the three greatest men that have ever lived."

Locke's theory of the "social contract" influenced the belief of many founders that the right of the people to overthrow their leaders was one of the "natural rights" of man. He also argued that all humans were created equally free, and governments therefore needed the "consent of the governed." Many scholars trace the phrase "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" in the American Declaration of Independence to Locke's theory of natural rights. At the time of the American revolution, the belief that rights came from God was widespread. British citizens believed in the divine right of kings.

Unlike many American founders, Locke was not a deist or a freethinker. He was a theist who accepted the cosmological (first cause) argument for the existence of God. Had Locke been born in our time, he might well have been an atheist.

Locke also had a strong influence on the French deist Voltaire, who called him "le sage Locke." Voltaire's major contribution to our founding fathers was his tireless quest for civil rights and his support for freedom of religion as well as separation of church and state. Voltaire's reasoning may be summed up in his well-known saying, "Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities." But my favorite quote of Voltaire is, "I have never made but one prayer to God, a very short one: 'O Lord make my enemies ridiculous.' And God granted it."

Many Americans at the time of the Revolution were attracted to "secular millennialism," a belief that we would someday be transformed into a utopian world of peace, justice, prosperity, and fellowship. The focus is on "worldly" transformation as opposed to "other-worldly" promises of spiritual salvation after death. Such predictions of America's destiny came from people like Thomas Paine and his enormously influential pamphlet *Common Sense*. The pamphlet's millennial-style passages include "We have it in our power to begin the world over again." Paine added, "The birthday of a new world is at hand." In Paine's view this new world would be far from theocracy, grounded not on ecclesiastical authority, but on the principles of a democratic republic and equal rights.

While religious ideology was an important inspiration for many Americans, the military of the new American nation had no religious policy. Soldiers mostly appeared to have been indifferent to the religious consequence of the Revolutionary War. The war was over the birth of a new nation, rather than a new nation-with-church. Both the British and American sides tried to recruit Americans from every background for their cause. For many Americans, the ecclesiastical tyranny of tax-supported religious establishments was another form of oppression they were fighting against.

The American Revolution hurt the Church of England in America more than any other denomination because the King of England was the head of that church. Anglican priests in America swore allegiance to the King. The Book of Common Prayer offered prayers asking God to give the king victory over all his enemies. In 1776, the King's enemies were American soldiers and loyalty to that church could be construed as treason. So, Anglicans in America revised The Book of Common Prayer to conform to political realities, eliminating allegiance to the king.

The Franco-American Alliance brought thousands of French troops onto American soil, exposing American soldiers to advanced forms of freethinking and anticlericalism. The American Declaration of Independence, Bill of Rights, and Constitution of the United States also inspired the French revolutionaries of 1789, offering an example of liberty for the world and an example for modern constitutional democracies. The French Revolution motivated people to put irreligious ideas of the Enlightenment into practice and later extended beyond France to other European countries, and to the American colonies. For Americans at that time, irreligion more often took deistic rather than an atheistic form.

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

Ask Dr. Faizal 1 – The Classical and Quantum Understandings of the World

Mir Faizal and Scott Douglas Jacobsen

November 13, 2019

Dr. Mir Faizal is an Adjunct Professor in Physics and Astronomy at the University of Lethbridge and a Visiting Professor in Irving K. Barber School of Arts and Sciences at the University of British Columbia – Okanagan.

Here we start the cosmology educational series on the differences between the classical and the quantum worlds.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: We have heard terms like classical physics and quantum physics. What do these terms mean in simple words, and what is the difference between them?

Dr. Mir Faizal: We have evolved at a certain scale, and our intuitive understanding of the world is also limited to that scale. Now common sense is the expression of this intuitive understanding of the world in languages like English or French. If this intuitive understanding of the world is expressed in mathematics, we naturally will obtain a mathematical description of common sense. This mathematical description of our intuitive understanding is called classical physics. However, there is no fundamental reason why such a description will hold at a different scale. In fact, now we have known that the classical description does not hold at very small scales, and common sense seems also to break at such a scale. It is hard to accurately describe the world at such a small scale using languages like English or French, as these languages have not been evolved to describe the world at such a scale. However, it is still possible to mathematically describe the world at such a small scale, and this mathematical description of a small scale is called quantum physics. Even though it is not possible to describe the world at such a small scale in common language, it is possible to use analogies to understand physics at such small scales.

Jacobsen: We see the world around us, and know how it behaves, and this forms a basis for our common sense. You mentioned that our common sense breaks in quantum mechanical. Can you give some examples of such a breaking of common sense in quantum mechanics?

Faizal: Let us start by a simple example, to understand how the common sense breaks in the quantum mechanism. If there are two paths between your home and your office, and you are travelling between them, you can take any one of these two path at one time. However, you will infer that it is impossible to take both these paths at the same time. Even if you are really tiny, you cannot take two paths at the same time. The main reason for this is that it is impossible for you to be present at two different places at the same time. This seems to be something that you know from common sense. However, this description of the world does not hold at much smaller scales. In quantum mechanics, you go to your office from both those paths. In fact, you will take all the possible paths between your home and office, and we have to mathematically sum these path to describe your behaviour of going between your home and office. This is actually how things are calculated for quantum mechanical particles. This description of quantum mechanics (where a particle takes all possible path between two points) is called the Feynman path integral approach.

Jacobsen: We have seen people commute between their home and office. In fact, as more simple system, we have seen a stone fall down, and it does not appear to take many paths between two points. We have also never seen a particle present at two places at the same time. How does the quantum mechanical fit with these observations?

Faizal: In quantum mechanics, as soon as someone makes a measurement on some object, it instantaneously collapses to just one of those paths. Now it is possible to calculate the chance of an object to be collapse to a certain path in quantum mechanics. For large enough objects, this almost coincides with the path that the object is expected to take based on classical mechanics. However, as the objects gets smaller, the deviations between the two paths becomes significant. It may be noted to calculate the position of an object at any point in future, you need to know about two things. You need to know where that object is present at a given time, and you need to know how fast it is travelling in a certain direction. If you know both these things, then you can know where that object will be present in future. However, in quantum mechanics, it is impossible to measure both the position of a particle and how fast it is travelling, at the same time. Thus, in quantum mechanics it is not possible to accurately measure the position of a particle in future. What we can measure is the chance for a particle to be present at a certain point in time. So, in quantum mechanics causality is also only probabilistically true. As it is impossible to obtain certain knowledge of cause, the effects can be only probabilistically predicted.

Jacobsen: It is possible to exactly predict the future position of a particle by improving our technology and inventing better devices?

Faizal: Technological development cannot be used to predict the future position of a particle beyond what is allowed by quantum mechanics. This is because for such quantum system certain knowledge is actually not present in nature, and so we can only get probabilistic knowledge of such system. This is the main difference between the classical and quantum description of the world. In classical mechanics, at least in principle, it is possible to know the behaviour of a particle with certainty. In other world, the world is totally deterministic in classical mechanics. It might be difficult to exactly calculate such a behaviour, but such a knowledge exists in nature. In fact, even in classical mechanics, we usually use probability to describe the world. This is the basis of statistical mechanics. However, such a use of probability is epistemological as certain knowledge exists at an ontological level in classical physics. It is just very difficult for us to obtain such knowledge accurately for many systems. However, in quantum mechanics there is an ontological use probability as certain knowledge is absent at an ontological level from nature.

Jacobsen: Can you give a simple analogy of this difference to make it easy to understand?

Faizal: Let us again use a simple example to understand this difference. Someone is going to a coffee shop, and he usually likes to drink coffee but sometime orders tea. As it is a coffee shop they keep running out of tea. Now if it is known that he takes tea about twenty times in hundred days, then you can calculate the chance of him drinking tea of coffee. You cannot predict accurately what he will take on a given day, as such a knowledge is not present in this system. However, knowing what he is more likely to order, you can predict his behaviour over a large number of visits. So, for the next ten days you can save two tea bag for him. This is an example of an ontological absence of knowledge, and this is how probabilities work in quantum mechanics. Now consider another example, in a group of ten people, two of them like tea and the rest like coffee. Also they have a rule that they will not visit the coffee shop more than once in

ten days. Now if you do not bother to ask them who like tea and who likes coffee, and just know how they behave in a group, you can again predict the probability of them drinking tea. However, in this case, the knowledge exists in form a hidden variable, which you did not bother to measure. This is an example of an epistemological absence of knowledge, and this is how probabilities work in statistical mechanics.

Jacobsen: I can understand that certain knowledge of the particle is not present, but where is the particle actually present.

Faizal: The particle is present at every possible point it can occupy, till it is measured. However, when it is measured, it instantaneously collapses to a single point, and we can measure the chance of it collapsing to a certain point. This is an important feature of quantum mechanics. In classical mechanics, two different contradictions cannot be simultaneously existing. In quantum mechanics, all possibilities simultaneously exist, till they are measured. However, when they are measured, only one of them is instantaneously observed, and the system ceases to exist in the other possibilities. This principle has been illustrated by the famous thought experiment of Schrodinger's cat, in which a cat is killed by a quantum mechanical process. There are two possibilities, as the cat can be dead and alive. Now if the system is not observed, then the cat can exist in a state being dead and alive at the same time. As soon as an observation is made, the system instantaneously collapses to one of the two possibilities, so the cat is actually observed to be dead or alive. However, if no observation is made, the cat is in a state of being dead and alive at the same time.

Jacobsen: Can these quantum effects be observed in our daily life?

Faizal: A important requirement of quantum mechanics is that it should coincide with the classical physics at our scale, for all the system that have been described using classical mechanics. This means these quantum effects become so small at our scale that they can be neglected, and cannot be observed. There are few phenomena like superconductivity and superfluidity where quantum effects can change the behaviour of certain system at large scale. However, most quantum mechanical effect, which break common sense, can be neglected at our scale, and the world at our scale can described by classical mechanics. It is possible that there are some systems, where other quantum effects become important even at large scale, and their behaviour is very different from the behaviour predicted from classical mechanics.

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

Faizal: My pleasure.

‘Ayaz Nizami’ Needs Far More Attention

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

November 15, 2019

‘Ayaz Nizami’ is a part of a hashtag. #FreeAyazNizami, others, against him, posted a hashtag #HangAyazNizami, i.e., calls for the hanging of a public human rights activist., as reported in 2017.

He is the Vice President of Atheist & Agnostic Alliance Pakistan. He was placed in an anti-terrorism cell. ‘Nizami’ is an ex-Muslim and has been punished for organizing as one in Pakistan.

This case and its concomitant issues need more coverage and wider activism, as this has been over two years ongoing in terms of imprisonment of him. Obviously, the alias name was for self-protection, as with others who utilize fake names in order to hide identity for safety and livelihood.

As previously reported, “Who is Ayaz, though? He is a religious scholar and ex-Muslim. He pursued religious training after standard, mainstream education. He was admitted to an Islamic studies school. He began to doubt the authenticity of the claims of his faith at the time. I suspect that not being an easy thing to undergo or endure, especially being part of an orthodox religious family. Even with the doubts, he accomplished accreditation in the Islamic studies. He was not only a religious scholar in general, but an Islamic scholar in particular.”

This was part of a larger wave, and an ongoing one, of charges against bloggers and writers. ‘Nizami’ has expertise in Tafseer and the principles of it. Tafseer is the tradition of providing explanations for the purportedly holy Quran. He has an expertise in the Hadith and its principles. It is the words, actions, and implicit approvals of Muhammad.

Furthermore, ‘Nizami’ holds expertise in Fiqh and its principles, as well as philosophy and logic, and the Arabic language. Fiqh is the Islamic Jurisprudence. He has a wide range of expertise and knowledge on the religion, on Islam, and can be a powerful ally in the world of those who may wish to leave the religion. The Atheist & Agnostic Alliance Pakistan is the organization of Fauzia Ilyas and ‘Ayaz Nizami.’

Mr. Nizami stated the religious creations seen here. They are not from above, the divine, another transcendent realm, or an otherworldly place that can engrave the messages of the Theity upon the hearts and minds of the prophets.

No, “[They are] a mere creation of the human brain and are a bi-product of culture and civilisations in the world especially the Middle East,” Mr. Nizami said, where he wants to “educate and enlighten his fellow countrymen and share his findings with them.”

This mission can be a basis for human rights activism and secularization of the nation-state in the midst of a troublesome setup. Problem: his communication, with me—and presumably others, went dark.

As noted at the time:

It seemed suspicious. The common knowledge in the educated secular community is bloggers with critiques of religion or religious patriarchs, or practices, can be killed, given lashings, or stigmatised and ostracised in their communities.

So the answer to the latter two questions: no, and no. Answer to the former query: as far as I can tell, he existed as a non-believer, especially an ex-Muslim, with self-confidence rather than acculturated diffidence and spoke out on religion and Islam, and with highly educated, scholarly authority in the relevant subject matter. It was taken as terrorism and blasphemy.

Whether or not the statements are true or not, and whether or not you're religious or not—and especially if you're religious take the parable of the hypocrite and the Golden Rule into account, ask, “Should someone be imprisoned on blasphemy or terrorism charges—even threatened with a hashtag hanging campaign (#HangAyazNizami) based on belief, in particular non-belief, in the public arena?”

There were comments with the #HangAyazNizami hashtag on social media with calls for hanging him in a variety of forms. Some of these went alongside a claim of “fuck with freedom of speech” from Sardar Waqar, an admission with “call us terrorist or extremist or whatever by Daniyal Ahmed, that first “he must be drag in the streets” prior to the proposed justice of hanging by Nida Ahmed, and so on.

These claims of violence over doubts and founding a non-religious organization—one for atheists and agnostics—seems fundamentally unjust, unfair, and the root of the attitudes of religious privileges within societies to openly call for violence with no reprisals in kind other than requests for respect for freedom of expression and reversal of arbitrary imprisonment.

I think the original query from over two years ago still stands:

At root, some subset of Pakistani Muslims are offended, and some non-Muslims. But does this justify the sentiments and the very real consequences on the life of Mr. Nizami? No, and take the footnote about the hypocrite and the Golden Rule into account, I get it.

But if in his situation, if something you did was that offensive, would others be justified in imprisoning or threatening to hang you? I feel offence at the offence around Mr. Nizami. Does this justify blasphemy charges and imprisonment, and public threats of hanging? No, and I would not condone it, as I do not condone the same for the offence—which from that perspective, I can feel sympathy for—felt by some Pakistani Muslims, and others.

These are environments for cyber-dissidents. These are the lives some will live. Some will be killed. Others imprisoned for years or even life. Still others, they will not see the light of day due to mob justice, as we found in some of the cases of the Bangladeshi bloggers. This is the world in which the Internet provides a space for freedom of expression and a furtherance of the destruction and emaciation of the lives and livelihoods, respectively, of those in difficult circumstances. Lives of the arbitrary precarity of health and wellbeing. This can be stopped. It has to start one at a time, to show how these cases can pass, how the authoritarian efforts and regimes are, in fact, fragile, and, therefore, can be overcome.

This is why ‘Ayaz Nizami’ deserves a whole lot more attention now and into the future until he is released.

Philosophical and Historical Foundations of American Secularism 10 – Women’s Freethought from the Founding

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

October 12, 2019

Dr. Herb Silverman is the Founder of the Secular Coalition for America, the Founder of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry, and the Founder of the Atheist/Humanist Alliance student group at the College of Charleston. He authored Complex variables (1975), Candidate Without a Prayer: An Autobiography of a Jewish Atheist in the Bible Belt (2012) and An Atheist Stranger in a Strange Religious Land: Selected Writings from the Bible Belt (2017). He co-authored The Fundamentals of Extremism: The Christian Right in America (2003) with Kimberley Blaker and Edward S. Buckner, Complex Variables with Applications (2007) with Saminathan Ponnusamy, and Short Reflections on Secularism (2019).

Here we talk about the British and the Americans, and the American Revolutionary War.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: One of the groups of people who received more universalized rights as persons within the United States apart from the aristocratic, white, wealthy, slave-owning males were white women. What were some of the firmaments of women’s anger at the injustices? Who were some of the original movers of this anger into positive action and progressive change? How has women’s anger been a catalytic force for women’s self-empowerment? Also, how has women’s anger been an unacknowledged, potentially, force for other positive movements for greater societal provision of equal rights and treatment to all constituents of the United States of America?

Dr. Herb Silverman: White women certainly had more rights than black slaves, but I don’t think women in general have ever been privileged. There are even some parallels between how women and enslaved people were treated. Both were expected to be passive, cooperative, and obedient to their master-husbands.

Next to my wife Sharon, my favorite women are Sarah and Angelina Grimké, sisters from Charleston, South Carolina, who lived in the 18th century and deserve to be better known than they are. Their father, Judge John Grimké, was a strong advocate of slavery and of the subordination of women. He had hundreds of slaves, and served as chief judge of the South Carolina Supreme Court. Though raised with slaves, the Grimké sisters grew to despise slavery after witnessing its cruel effects at a young age.

In 1836 Angelina wrote her Appeal to the Christian Women of the South, imploring white southern women to embrace the antislavery cause. She said, “I know you do not make the laws, but I also know that you are the wives and mothers, the sisters and daughters of those who do; and if you really suppose you can do nothing to overthrow slavery, you are greatly mistaken.” Her writing drew the ire of many southerners. By the late 1830s, Sarah and Angelina were known not only as abolitionists but also as proponents of women’s rights.

The Grimké sisters left the South in the 1820s and moved to Philadelphia, where I was born, and became Quakers. At a time when it was not considered respectable (even in the North) for women to speak before mixed audiences of men and women, Sarah and Angelina boldly spoke

out against slavery at public meetings. Some male abolitionists, like Frederick Douglass, supported the right of women to speak and participate equally with men in antislavery activities.

The Grimké sisters grew up in a Charleston house built in 1789, three blocks away from where I now live. In 2015, the Friends of the Library at the College of Charleston (where I was a math professor) unveiled a much-deserved historical marker outside the Grimké home.

The Grimké sisters were good friends with Elizabeth Cady Stanton, an abolitionist and a leading figure of the early women's rights movement. Her Declaration of Sentiments, presented at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, parallels the American Declaration of Independence, but with women included. It asserts that both men and women are endowed with unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It explains how women are oppressed by the government and a patriarchal society. Stanton calls for women's suffrage as well as participation and representation in the government. She also refers to women's lack of property rights, and inequality in divorce law, education, and employment opportunities. The document insists that women be full citizens, granted all the rights and privileges that are granted to men. The Seneca Falls Convention marked the start of the women's rights movement in the United States.

Suffragette Susan B. Anthony was a good friend and collaborator with Elizabeth Cady Stanton. However, even though Anthony was an agnostic, she didn't like Stanton's open criticism of religion because she feared it would lose supporters for the suffragette movement. In particular, Anthony was displeased with Stanton's publication of *The Woman's Bible*, which was justifiably critical of religion. Stanton said, "The Bible and the church have been the greatest stumbling blocks in the emancipation of women," and "Surely the immutable laws of the universe can teach more impressive lessons than the holy books of all the religions on earth." Stanton also said, "I have endeavored to dissipate religious superstitions from the minds of women, and base their faith on science and reason, where I found for myself at last that peace and comfort I could never find in the Bible and the church."

After a 72-year battle for women's suffrage, women finally got the vote in 1920 with the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution. Women fighting for equality during the early part of the twentieth century focused on political equality. Yet to come were issues like workplace inequality, gender pay gap, sexual harassment, violence against women, and #MeToo. Wifehood and motherhood are no longer regarded as women's most significant professions. Women now have more educational opportunities than ever before. Nurse and teacher (and maybe Catholic nun, if you consider this a profession) used to be pretty much the only professional positions open to women. In 1900, women earned only 19 percent of bachelor's degrees. Since 1980, women have surpassed men in the number of bachelor's degrees conferred annually in the United States.

Regarding the question of women's anger, women have been socialized to suppress anger and even question whether their anger is justified. A case can be made that getting angry might first be necessary before being motivated to work for change. People don't change the world by being apathetic; they do it by getting angry and refusing to take injustice any more. Anger can be used constructively by women (and men) to fight intolerance and discrimination. Recently, female anger at Donald Trump's 2016 presidential win spurred historic numbers of women to run for public office in 2018 and today.

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

Philosophical and Historical Foundations of American Secularism 11 – Gibraltarians: Climbing to the Top from the Top

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

November 21, 2019

Dr. Herb Silverman is the Founder of the Secular Coalition for America, the Founder of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry, and the Founder of the Atheist/Humanist Alliance student group at the College of Charleston. He authored Complex variables (1975), Candidate Without a Prayer: An Autobiography of a Jewish Atheist in the Bible Belt (2012) and An Atheist Stranger in a Strange Religious Land: Selected Writings from the Bible Belt (2017). He co-authored The Fundamentals of Extremism: The Christian Right in America (2003) with Kimberley Blaker and Edward S. Buckner, Complex Variables with Applications (2007) with Saminathan Ponnusamy, and Short Reflections on Secularism (2019).

Here we talk about the nature of democracy, polyarchy, plutocracy, and the founding and present of the United States.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: In the context of the classism and racism found from the founding of The United States of America, one of the more salient facts in alignment with these titles for generalized analyses of the nature of American democracy amounts to the limit of democratic norms in place, where America was not a ‘democracy’ at the founding inasmuch as a plutocratic polyarchy. White, aristocratic, land-owning, slave-owning, formally educated, and males-as-men running the show from the top down.

The road upwards for wanting to be free was rather easier for those climbing to the holy ground of more power and privilege found at the Temple Mount at the top of the societal mountain. How have these threads of racist assumptions and classist assertions re-asserted themselves generation after generation in American society in which some aspects of the plutocratic polyarchy have been beaten back while others remain?

In a manner of speaking, we can scorn some aspects of the founding – and their ongoing legacy – while praising numerous American ideals and progressive developments over time for a wider ethical consideration into a broader moral tribal consideration. How have secular and humanistic ideas been tendencies in thought in American history with greater emancipation and better opportunities for all, at times and over time?

Dr. Herb Silverman: You refer to America as a plutocratic polyarchy at its founding. Let’s first define our terms.

A “plutocracy” is a government ruled or controlled by people of great wealth and income, while “polyarchy” means “rule by many,” and is a government ruled by more than one person (in your case, people of great wealth). A polyarchy may or may not be a democracy. A democracy is a government by all the citizenry who choose their leaders by voting for them in elections.

The founding fathers chose not to have a democracy. Some favoured a democratic popular vote for the president while others argued that Congress should pick the president. Their compromise is known as the Electoral College, a small number of people selected by the masses to vote for

president because the founders did not trust the population at large to make the right choice. In modern practice, the Electoral College is a formality. Most electors are loyal members of the party that selected them, and wind up voting for that party. The Electoral College was also part of a compromise to satisfy small states. Each state had at least as many electoral votes as they had representatives in Congress, which means that no state could have less than three votes. In a small state like Wyoming, each elector represents 70,000 votes, while in California each elector represents 179,000 votes. The Electoral College was not the only Constitutional limitation on direct democracy. States were permitted to ban women entirely. Slaves, of course, were not allowed to vote. However, there was a controversial “three-fifths compromise,” in which black slaves would be counted as three-fifths of a person for the purpose of allocating representatives and electors. This compromise was made to ensure that Southern states would ratify the Constitution. After the Civil War (1861-1865), the 14th Amendment to the Constitution in 1868 abolished the three-fifths rule and granted former male slaves the right to vote, while the 19th Amendment (1920) gave women the right to vote.

While America is not now as much a plutocratic polyarchy as at its founding, a case can be made that we are more of a plutocratic polyarchy today than in years past. The wealthiest one percent of American households now own 40 percent of the country’s wealth. The top 0.1 percent own about 25 percent, which is more than the bottom 90 percent owns. This was not the case under President Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1908), known as the “trust-buster” for preventing or eliminating monopolies and corporate trusts. He applied the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890 to break up the largest railroad monopoly, Northern Securities Company, and regulated the largest oil company, Standard Oil. He also broke up other monopolies. Roosevelt said, “We had come to the stage where for our people what was needed was a real democracy; and of all forms of tyranny, the least attractive and the most vulgar is the tyranny of mere wealth, the tyranny of a plutocracy.” Today, most Americans are entitled to vote, but there has been intimidation by those in power against voting by poor people, African-Americans, and immigrants. Many eligible people don’t vote because they think that their vote doesn’t matter. It’s true that most Americans have little influence over the policies our government adopts, especially those at the lower end of the income spectrum who are effectively disenfranchised. Congressional representatives pay little or no attention to their opinions. Moving up the income ladder, influence increases slowly, but it’s only at the very top that it has a real impact (plutocracy). Politicians of both parties receive substantial financial support from corporations, whose leaders demand that politicians reciprocate with favourable policies, including tax breaks that help increase the donors’ wealth.

As far as secular and humanistic ideas, I think secular humanists have always been on the side of the better angels of our nature. Humanists have opposed racism and misogyny in America. On the other hand, some people who say we need to “Make America Great Again” hearken to the days of white privilege when they could discriminate against those of a different race and those who had non-Christian religious beliefs or no religious beliefs. They would also like to use their privilege to take away rights from gays and lesbians. Secular humanists are fighting against a plutocracy of powerful white evangelicals who want to turn America into a Christian nation, instead of the secular nation we are. White evangelicals represent the base supporters of our Republican president. I know some atheists and humanists who consider themselves Republicans, but I have yet to meet one who supports President Donald Trump.

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

Philosophical and Historical Foundations of American Secularism 12 – Lessons From an Elder: Coming Into One's Own

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

December 2, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: You – and as a term of endearment and affection, for me, at least – exist as an elder within the freethought community, where you harbour a certain general affability, acquired wisdom, and perceptiveness on issues relevant to all ages of the freethought communities.

You have a secure place in America freethinker history. What is lost with age? What is gained with age? How does this change over time develop an understanding richer in practical wisdom and perceptiveness via the experience of the times of the founders of the United States and the leaders of the different social reform movements in American history?

People in their time but not of it, in the sense of a widened vision of the possibilities of human relations. I intend this as a collective reflection on some of the writings in this series so far, in order to transition into other items of historical import to the philosophical and historical foundations of American secularism.

Dr. Herb Silverman: Thank you for saying I have a secure place in American freethinker history. If true, it would be because I did two things.

First, I ran for Governor of South Carolina in 1990 to challenge the state constitution prohibition against atheists holding public office. I didn't become governor, of course, but in 1997 the South Carolina Supreme Court ruled unanimously in my favor, nullifying the anti-atheist clause in the South Carolina Constitution. Credit for my Supreme Court victory belongs to my ACLU lawyers. I was just having fun giving campaign talks and writing about my experiences.

Second, during my legal battle, I learned about and joined several national atheist and humanist organizations that all promoted causes I supported, like separation of religion and government and increasing visibility of and respect for freethinkers. However, each organization was doing its own thing without recognizing or cooperating with worthwhile efforts of like-minded groups. I thought that these diverse organizations would accomplish more by showing strength in numbers and working together on those issues to bring about cultural and political change. So in 2002, I helped form the Secular Coalition for America and became its founding president.

The Secular Coalition started with 4 and now has 19 national secular organizations as members, covering the full spectrum of our movement. It also represents hundreds of local secular communities. It was the first organization to hire a lobbyist to take our issues to Congress.

Working with allies in the faith community, the Secular Coalition combines the power of grassroots activism with professional lobbying to impact laws and policies governing separation of religion and government.

You asked what is gained by age. Being involved with secular organizations for close to 30 years has given me institutional memory. When I hear suggestions about something we might try, I can often point to having tried that before and the outcome.

You also asked what is lost with age. On this, I am an expert. I'm 77 years old and like to think I can do whatever I used to be able to do, but I have contrary physical and mental evidence. Aside from age, longevity in a leader can become problematic. "Founder's syndrome" occurs when leaders view themselves as irreplaceable. I've seen many good leaders outstay their welcome. For an organization to flourish, a high priority for a leader should be to make him or herself replaceable. Atheists, above all, recognize that organizations have no "dear leaders" who communicate to us through a supernatural being. We pride ourselves on being independent, and we recognize the fallibility of all. Not to sound like a vampire, but new blood is good.

I think I managed to avoid founder's syndrome at the Secular Coalition for America. I sought and encouraged active participants and talented replacements. I'm now happily retired as SCA president, but was asked to continue to serve for a while on its Board of Directors.

Looking back at the history of the freethought movement, changes in communication have been mammoth. At the time of the founders and early social reform movements in the United States, social media consisted of books, pamphlets, and word-of-mouth. Today, people can instantly reach each other around the world through online communication. Word travels fast, but so does miscommunication, lately known as fake news (some of it intentional). Both atheists and religious fundamentalists are able to spread information as never before, but of course they differ on what they consider to be "fake news."

Speaking of fake news, the influence of religion at the highest levels of government has never been stronger than under President Donald Trump. He has appointed more than 150 judges, most of whom seem hostile to the separation of religion and government. He has ordered every department in the executive branch to work on faith-based partnerships, signing an executive order creating the "White House Faith and Opportunity Initiative," an office that undermines religious freedom by giving taxpayer money to religious groups and allowing them to discriminate, with little accountability and no transparency.

Not only are Trump's cabinet members very religious, but they also seem to oppose the separation of religion and government. Ben Carson, the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, referred to the separation of church and state as "crap" prompted by "political correctness." Attorney General William Barr said, "The separation of church and state is for losers, liberals, and America-hating atheists."

Christian Nationalists and evangelicals, with Trump's blessing, have introduced legislation to teach the Bible in schools, display religious mottos in schools, discriminate in foster care and adoption, pass religious refusal in healthcare, and promote anti-science religious teachings. Whatever you think about Trump wanting to build a wall between Mexico and the United States, we must not let him tear down the wall between church and state.

Nonetheless, I'm cautiously optimistic about our future. It is up to secularists working with all who favor separation of religion and government to counter the influence of religion in government. The secular movement is growing, both formally through secular organizations and informally through "nones," those who don't subscribe to any faith. The "nones" are the fastest growing "religion" in the United States, especially among young people. Many "nones" broke

from conservative religion because it is anti-LGBTQ, anti-women's rights, and anti-science. Pedophilia has also discouraged people from maintaining their church affiliation.

Based on surveys, the United States is becoming less religious every year. This is finally being reflected in politics. A Congressional Freethought Caucus, formed in 2018 with 4 members, promotes evidence-based public policy and is a forum for secular members of Congress. It now has 12 open members, with more likely to join. There has also been a 900% increase in the number of state legislators who identify with the atheist and humanist community (from 5 in 2016 to over 50 today).

And finally, thanks to the Secular Coalition of America and their Director of Governmental Affairs, Sarah Levin, the Democratic National Committee (DNC) this year embraced American nonbelievers for the first time, adopting a resolution that recognizes their contributions to society. At nearly one quarter of the total U.S. population, nonreligious Americans represent a sizeable voting bloc. This resolution marks the first time a major U.S. political party has specifically courted religiously unaffiliated people across the nation.

The resolution says that the DNC recognizes the value, ethical soundness, and importance of the religiously unaffiliated demographic, a group of Americans who contribute in innumerable ways to the arts, sciences, medicine, business, law, the military, their communities, the success of the Party and prosperity of the Nation; and that religiously unaffiliated Americans are a group that, as much as any other, advocates for rational public policy based on sound science and universal humanistic values and should be represented, included, and heard by the Party.

And looking to the future of freethought, I hope that one day every political party at every governmental level will adopt similar resolutions.

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

Philosophical and Historical Foundations of American Secularism 13 – Everyday Bigotry and Prejudice: The Freethinkers Beneath the Spokespersons, Between the Headlines, and Below Equal Human Status

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

December 7, 2019

Dr. Herb Silverman is the Founder of the Secular Coalition for America, the Founder of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry, and the Founder of the Atheist/Humanist Alliance student group at the College of Charleston. He authored Complex variables (1975), Candidate Without a Prayer: An Autobiography of a Jewish Atheist in the Bible Belt (2012) and An Atheist Stranger in a Strange Religious Land: Selected Writings from the Bible Belt (2017). He co-authored The Fundamentals of Extremism: The Christian Right in America (2003) with Kimberley Blaker and Edward S. Buckner, Complex Variables with Applications (2007) with Saminathan Ponnusamy, and Short Reflections on Secularism (2019).

Here we talk about fundamentalists.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: In interaction with some of the literalist believers in the obscure and obscurantist fundamentalists of the Christian faith, one can gather a sense of feeling unheard in the midst of the conversation. These come from the university students to the professoriate, even into the higher-order leadership – not as character analysis, but as a way of thinking as simply thought in mechanical (rote) form.

In that, facts are scorned. Basic human compassion is thwarted for attempts at conversion in the hopes of a hereafter. Unreason is raised above or over reason. Attempts to correct misconception or illogic, or denial of baseless (faith) claims, gets the retort, “You lie. Those are complete lies” (because anything not of Christianity comes from the Devil, who comes to believers and unbelievers alike, supposedly, as the “father of lies”). Thus, anything one does or says gets met with suspicion, as, basically, essentialization of distrust in the individual (you).

These modes of unthought truly warp human mentation – to me – for the worse, much worse – leaving aside the six Jesuit intellectuals, and other similars, murdered for working for peace: Ignacio Ellacuria Beas Coechea, S.J., Ignacio Martín-Baró, S.J., Segundo Montes, S.J., Juan Ramón Moreno, S.J., Joaquín López y López, S.J., and Amando López, S.J.

In Canadian society, we have a number of religious – Christian – universities and colleges, including Columbia Bible College, Heritage College & Seminary, Horizon College & Seminary, Prairie, Providence University College, Redeemer University College, Rocky Mountain College, St. Stephen’s University, Trinity Western University, Tyndale University College, Tyndale University College & Seminary, and Vanguard College.

These institutions of higher Christian learning espouse principles found at the start of this nation’s population dans l’ensemble. If not ‘by and large’ in some part, then, by and large, forced or coerced onto them in good time. One of these institutions, at least, harbours a

previously mandatory covenant for all. Now, only mandatory for staff and optional for students.

That is to say, an obvious – though not stated in this fashion – mechanism for the prevention of critical inquiry and scrutiny of the acts and thoughts within the institution to the institutional representatives or to the external community surrounding it. A clear operation of control through signage of the community pact because, apparently, the first two divine covenants did not suffice for the community of the faithful.

Similar to the United States of America, its history, as noted by you, jumps forward, bumps back, while showing a trendline towards a wider circle of inclusion and separation between religion and government with the current Trump Administration period as a bump back.

All these prior sessions dealt with sectors without much status or consideration as people – simply as “unpeople” – in American law and policymaking, except over time. Marie Alena Castle – a late writing partner on some articles – whose commentary was on point and on time noted the center of the current battle exists in women’s bodies, reproductive systems, and their autonomous choices in either matter.

What can build bridges of communication between fundamentalist religious believers and freethinkers? What underlies the ideational trance of not even listening to the other side by literalist interpreters of faiths? How many religious institutions exist in America? What political influence comes from them? How do the institutions of higher learning ground themselves in religious belief in the history of the United States and continue to exert control over the minds of the young? Why women’s bodies – ‘because the Bible tells them so,’ as Annie Laurie Gaylor might state the matter? How have these forms of misogyny, control of the rebellious positive curiosity and inquisitiveness of the young, and politicking played out and converged in the current American political imbroglio?

Dr. Herb Silverman: You ask how we can talk to Christian fundamentalists when their worldview is so different from ours and they don’t accept evidence. I’ve found that we can’t reason people out of a belief that they didn’t come to through reason, but we still might be able to find some points of agreement.

For instance, I might start with “Love your neighbor,” and point out varieties of the Golden Rule from Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and Confucianism that predate Jesus. Another thing we could probably agree on is that all other faiths are wrong. I do say that every educated person should read the Bible, because it’s an important part of our culture. I also mention some secular books worth reading. If I’m asked for biblical quotes I like, I can mention Matthew 7:16: “By your fruits you shall know them.” I also like John 8:32: “The truth will set you free,” which it did when I became an atheist. If they tell me that they support blasphemy laws, I say I might, too, if the offended deity personally files charges.

It helps in discussions with Christian fundamentalists to treat them with kindness and respect. We should assume that they believe what they say, even if it sounds like nonsense. I ignore personal attacks and stick with the issues. Usually the best I can hope for in talking to committed Christian fundamentalists is that some of their stereotypes about atheists will change and they will think I’m a nice guy with a sense of humor (even though I’m going to hell). Since I came to atheism by following what I consider to be a sensible evidence-based path, it doesn’t much matter to me whether others adopt my position, but I understand why it’s important for Christian

fundamentalists to try to convert me: Eternal life is at stake. And for many of them, that's more important than life itself. I find such a worldview odd at best.

That worldview can also be dangerous if conversion is forced on others. This brings us to your question about women's bodies. The Bible was written thousands of years ago by misogynistic men. The punishment for a man who raped a virgin woman was that the man should pay her father 50 shekels and that she must marry her rapist because she is now damaged goods (Deut. 22:28). There are also passages in the Christian Bible about women not having authority over a man, that the man is head of the household, that women are created for man, and much more. Some Christians live this way, but have been unsuccessful in making it the law of our land. Unfortunately, they have been somewhat successful promoting their political issues. This includes in some places denying women contraceptives and the right to choose. Though the Bible is silent on abortion, preventing women from having this right has become the top issue for Christian fundamentalists, who also try to pass biblically-based laws against LGBT rights.

You asked about religious colleges and universities in the United States. There are many throughout the nation. In my home state of South Carolina, Furman University was founded in 1826 as a Baptist university, but has become more diverse, not requiring students or faculty to hold specific religious views. In 1992, Furman separated from the Southern Baptist Convention in order to exert more control over their institution. On the other hand, in Charleston, my home city, Charleston Southern University (formerly called Baptist College) is decidedly Christian, where it integrates faith with learning, and is in good standing with the Southern Baptist Convention. Its faculty are required to sign an oath of belief. In 2004, I debated a professor from that institution on the existence of God, though the debate was not allowed on their campus. The professor later invited me to speak to his class, but the invitation was rescinded because his administration refused to allow me on campus. So much for academic freedom.

Many religious schools have decent academic programs, but quite a few don't. Even worse, some have political agendas, including the well-known Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. Its president, Jerry Falwell Jr., considers it immoral for evangelicals to not support President Trump, adding that Trump could do nothing to lose his support.

I'll close with some questions I get from Christian fundamentalists, along with my answers.

Why do you hate God? I don't hate God any more than I hate the Tooth Fairy, and I didn't become an atheist because something bad happened to me. I became an atheist because I find no evidence for any gods.

What is the purpose of life? I don't need to believe in a god to find a purpose. There may not be a purpose of life, but we can find many purposes in life.

Why be moral? Personal responsibility is a good conservative principle. We should not give credit to a deity for our accomplishments or blame satanic forces when we behave badly. We should take personal responsibility for our actions. I try to live my life to its fullest — it's the only life I have, and I hope to make a positive difference because it's the right thing to do, not because of future rewards or punishment.

Why do you think science is more reliable than religion? Because we know how to distinguish good scientific ideas from bad ones. Scientists start out not knowing the answer and go wherever the evidence leads them. Science relies on experimenting, testing, and questioning assumptions critically until a consensus is reached, and even that is always open to revision in light of later

evidence. This is why scientific truths are the same in Saudi Arabia, the United States, Israel, and India — countries with very different religious beliefs.

Don't you worry that Heaven and Hell might be real and that you will be going to Hell? Here are questions I have for you about Heaven and Hell. Why is faith not only important, but perhaps the deciding factor about who winds up in Heaven or Hell? What moral purpose does eternal torture serve? If we have free will on Earth, will we have free will in Heaven? If so, might we sin and go from Heaven to Hell? If not, will we be heavenly robots? If God can make us sinless in Heaven, why didn't he create us sinless on Earth? Can you be blissfully happy in Heaven knowing that some of your loved ones are being tortured in Hell? And what do you do for an eternity in Heaven without getting bored? Wouldn't a loving God who wants us all to go to Heaven make it unambiguously clear how to get there?

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

North American Science, Skepticism, and Secular Humanism 1 – Proportion Premises to Findings: or, Extraordinary Claims Require Extraordinary Evidence

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

December 11, 2019

James A. Haught was born on Feb. 20, 1932, in a small West Virginia farm town that had no electricity or paved streets. He graduated from a rural high school with 13 students in the senior class. He came to Charleston, worked as a delivery boy, then became a teen-age apprentice printer at the Charleston Daily Mail in 1951. Developing a yen to be a reporter, he volunteered to work without pay in the Daily Mail newsroom on his days off to learn the trade. This arrangement continued several months, until The Charleston Gazette offered a full-time news job in 1953. He has been at the Gazette ever since—except for a few months in 1959 when he was press aide to Sen. Robert Byrd.

During his six decades in newspaper life, he has been police reporter, religion columnist, feature writer and night city editor; then he was investigative reporter for 13 years, and his work led to several corruption convictions. In 1983 he was named associate editor, and in 1992 he became editor. In 2015, as The Gazette combined with the Daily Mail, he assumed the title of editor emeritus, but still works full-time.

*He writes nearly 400 Gazette editorials a year, plus personal columns and news articles. Haught has won two dozen national newswriting awards, and is author of 11 books and 120 magazine essays. About 50 of his columns have been distributed by national syndicates. He also is a senior editor of Free Inquiry magazine. He is listed in *Who's Who in America*, *Who's Who in the World*, *Contemporary Authors* and *2000 Outstanding Intellectuals of the 21st Century*. He has four children, 12 grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren. For years, Jim has enjoyed hiking with Kanawha Trail Club, participating in a philosophy group, and taking grandchildren swimming off his old sailboat. He is a longtime member of Charleston's Unitarian Universalist Congregation. Haught continues working full-time in his 80s.*

Here we talk about the proportioning of claims to the evidence.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: As these portions of the blog, not the news or the political commentary, of the News Intervention publication devote themselves, mostly, to educational projects, and as the editorial responsibility, for me, exists in North America and in science issues, this educational series will cover a historical and current perspective on the convergence of three areas: science, skepticism, and secular humanism, as you have a long history in these traditions.

Traditions better equipped collectively to provide more accurate images or pictures of the world than many other ones on offer in the current paradigms frozen in forgone centuries. Antiquated epistemologies and false ontologies forced ignorantly from one generation to the next as The True Way and The Truth (epistemology and ontology) rather than

something within a sea of competing ways of knowing and things known of lesser and greater quality relative to one another, in the goal of ascertainment of the truths of reality.

Let's start with some of the basic Humean notions taken by the late astrophysicist Dr. Carl Sagan and others – including members of the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry or Skeptical Inquirer – in the form of evaluation of the most extreme claims about the nature of the world – mystical-magical claims about the world as opposed to technical-natural ones. Where did the phrase “extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence” originate in content and in phraseology?

Jim Haught: Back in the 1700s, Scottish skeptic David Hume wrote that miracle claims cannot be believed, because they lack enough trustworthy evidence. In 1808, Thomas Jefferson wrote in a letter: “A thousand phenomena present themselves daily which we cannot explain, but where facts are suggested, bearing no analogy to the laws of nature as yet known to us, their verity needs proofs proportioned to their difficulty.” In 1814, Laplace reportedly said that “we ought to examine [inexplicable claims] with an attention all the more scrupulous as it appears more difficult to admit them.” In 1899, Theodore Flournoy contended that “the weight of evidence for an extraordinary claim must be proportioned to its strangeness.” In the 1970s, Science magazine editor Philip Abelson reportedly was first to use the phrase: “extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.” Science hero Carl Sagan gave it wide popularity in his Cosmos television series, and it became known as “the Sagan Standard.”

Jacobsen: How does this best reflect a scientific, skeptical, and secular humanistic perspective about the world?

Haught: It simply means: Don't swallow bizarre stories — supernatural stories — without solid proof to support them.

Jacobsen: How does that view differ markedly from the religious and supernaturalist perspective on the nature of reality writ big?

Haught: Religion depends upon blind acceptance of magic tales supposed revealed by some prophet or ancient scripture — without any evidence whatsoever. This approach is unacceptable to intelligent, modern, scientific-minded people.

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

Haught: Keep the faith, baby.

Nature: Light stored in new memory devices by scientists

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

December 11, 2019

Scientists, in a December 6, 2019, report in Nature on the finding of the ability to transmit information in a silicon chip, not simply traditionally with electrons but, with photons.

The “light signals” or photons were “squeezed” or transmitted through the silicon chip in order to “read and write data,” i.e., to process information as photons in place of electrons.

Information defined as a change in state from one to another with the change as a selection reduction to one state over an array of possible other previous choices.

The hypothesis is such that with these developments; there will be an increase in the rapidity of the processing of the information in silicon circuits based on the speed of light, of c .

Conventional computers with the same software but with photons trapped and run through the circuitry would process the information far faster than simply electrons in the same traditional silicon circuits.

The light mechanism used is pushing, so to speak, photons through fibre-optic cables as carriers of information, which is much faster than electrons and, in fact, the fastest speed known in the universe – outside of the literal expansion of space at the same time as the light is travelling, but this simply changes the referential frame of the speed.

Light has a large wavelength. There is commentary in the short article on the utilization of both forms of information transfer – electron and proton – in order to transmit the information in a traditional electronic circuit, which remains an impressive proposition.

As reported, “Harish Bhaskaran at the University of Oxford, UK, and his colleagues designed a tiny dual-signal data-storage device. Both electrical and light signals can be used to read data stored on the device, as well as to write information on it.”

The size of the device is important based on the type of information processing proposed by the physicists, the researcher, here. With the compression of the light pulse, it is separate into “miniscule channels running between gold electrodes and silicon–nitride components. A computer memory cell made of a germanium-based compound sits at the channels’ intersection. Either electrical pulses delivered through the gold electrodes or light pulses focused by the channels can change the device’s ‘state’, allowing for data storage.”

In short, channelization or separate streams of the pulses of light made from the singular input with the separate channelizations changing the state of the circuit and, in turn, changing the state for data storage. It is a differentiation for the creation of information, which is stored.

Source: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-03740-9>.

Canada: Division over role of religion in Canadian society

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

December 17, 2019

Canadians remain mixed in their views on the role of religion in society based on a new study by the Angus Reid Institute. One-third of Canadian citizens want to see a more secular nation. The study, though, was conducted in partnership with Cardus, which is a Christian think-tank.

6 in 10 Canadians find the freedom of religion a virtue in Canadian society. That which contributes to the society rather than detracts from it. Only 1 in 10 citizens in Canada think the opposite.

The research presented some other interesting findings about Canadians. Presumably, this is in line with other research on Canadians and the nature of religion as more of a private than a public matter. Indeed, as stated, "...a premium placed on freedom of religion exists alongside limitations as to how far that faith should extend in public life."

4 in 10 Canadians disagree with the claim of faith improving equality and human rights. Indeed, this may seem paradoxical or counterintuitive. However, the traditional demographic categories of age, gender, and political persuasion do not count as the major deciding factors in the differentials of responses to the questions in the survey.

As reported, "The Angus Reid Institute used 17 different variables to categorize Canadians across a Public Faith Index to create three groups: The Public Faith Proponents, the Uncertain and the Public Faith Opponents."

Each grouping had a different idea of the role of faith in public life while having a consistently diverse set of backgrounds, including in the aforementioned variable categories. The Angus Reid research is important because of the insight into the nature of the questions on religion in Canadian society moving further into the 21st century.

What do Canadians think about faith? What do Canadians feel about religion? How should these thoughts and emotions influence the nature of public policy and political life in Canadian society? All important questions, where all this research can become a point of further information on the matter.

Approximately equal numbers were found within the Public Faith Proponents and the Public Faith Opponents, i.e., a split on an important subject matter to Canadians. Still, 3 in 10 Canadians remain on the fence. From October 24 to November 1, 2019, a representative randomize sample survey was conducted on 2,057 Canadian adults who are Angus Reid Forum members. There may be a self-selection effect there.

This sample size produces a margin of error of 2 percentage points, plus or minus, 19 times out of 20. Half of Canadian citizens belief the faith communities as a practical reality harbour a mixed outcome – good and bad – to Canadian society. 1 in 5 Canadians believe Canada keeps the faith and values talk from the public arena with a further 1 out of 3 seeing room for their faith and values expressed in the public sphere.

Philosophical and Historical Foundations of American Secularism 14 – Constitutionally Wrought Freethought

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

December 17, 2019

Dr. Herb Silverman is the Founder of the Secular Coalition for America, the Founder of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry, and the Founder of the Atheist/Humanist Alliance student group at the College of Charleston. He authored Complex variables (1975), Candidate Without a Prayer: An Autobiography of a Jewish Atheist in the Bible Belt (2012) and An Atheist Stranger in a Strange Religious Land: Selected Writings from the Bible Belt (2017). He co-authored The Fundamentals of Extremism: The Christian Right in America (2003) with Kimberley Blaker and Edward S. Buckner, Complex Variables with Applications (2007) with Saminathan Ponnusamy, and Short Reflections on Secularism (2019).

Here we talk about the American Constitution.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: When we look at the well-made human document called the American Constitution, some questions arise for the freethought community, potentially, or, at least, some in it. What parts before amendments best exemplify freethought and secularism? What amendments improve upon the original document in terms of the specific content of secularism and the freethinking ability of individual citizens?

Dr. Herb Silverman: The framers of the United States Constitution wanted no part of the religious intolerance, holy wars, and bloodshed they saw in Europe. In declaring independence from England, Americans also rejected the claim by kings, crowned by bishops, that they had been vested with a God-given authority to rule through “divine right.”

The U.S. framers wisely established the first government in history to separate religion and government. They formed a secular nation whose authority rests with “We the People” (the first three words of the U.S. Constitution) and not with “Thou the Deity.” They created a Constitution in which the government acknowledged no gods, the better to ensure freedom of conscience. We the people are free to worship one, many, or no gods. As Thomas Jefferson said, “It does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg.”

There are only two references to religion in the U.S. Constitution, and both are exclusionary. One is in Article 6: “No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.” I know Article 6 quite well. When I discovered in 1990 that our South Carolina state constitution prohibited atheists from holding public office, an obvious violation of Article 6, I challenged that provision in the state constitution by running for governor as “the candidate without a prayer.” In 1997 I won a unanimous decision in the South Carolina Supreme Court, invalidating the unconstitutional provision and recognizing that atheists have the right to hold public office in South Carolina.

The other exclusionary mention of religion is in the First Amendment to the Bill of Rights: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free

exercise thereof.” This guarantees the right to practice any religion or no religion. The federal government cannot favor one religion over another, or believers over non-believers. No one’s religious liberty is threatened when the wall of separation between religion and government is kept strong.

As wonderful as the U.S. Constitution is, no American would call it an infallible document, as some claim about the Bible. The framers understood the need for future changes in the Constitution, and set forth mechanisms for change through amendments. Scientific and humanistic advances make it desirable to incorporate new information and adjust our worldview and behavior. The Constitution condoned slavery until the 13th Amendment ended it in 1865. Women were not granted the right to vote until 1920 when the 19th Amendment passed. On the other hand, the unamended Bible written by misogynistic men condones slavery. You will also not find any support in the Bible for respecting people who have different or no religious beliefs.

While the U.S. federal government was never considered to be a Christian nation, initially there was no prohibition against states establishing their own state churches. Some early state constitutions limited public office to Christians—or even to the correct Christian denomination. Such provisions represented a more intolerant time in our history. States with government-favored religions gradually began moving toward separating religion and government. The 14th Amendment, passed in 1868, ended state-sponsored religion.

Those who claim the United States is a Christian nation need to read the Constitution. You will not find the words Christian, Jesus, or God in it. Our framers were careful and thoughtful writers. Had they wanted a Christian nation, it seems highly unlikely that they would somehow have forgotten to include their Christian intentions in the supreme law of the land. In 1797, the Treaty of Tripoli was ratified unanimously by the United States Senate. This trade treaty stated in part: “The government of the United States is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion.” I wonder what part of “not” those who believe we are a Christian nation don’t understand.

Nevertheless, Christian-nation advocates continually try chipping away the “secular,” often with symbols like “In God We Trust” and “One Nation Under God.” They also try to legislate the posting of the Ten Commandments on public buildings. Most Americans believe that the Ten Commandments are among the finest guidelines for a virtuous life. Interestingly, hardly anyone can actually state them all. So I will, along with my commentary.

The First Commandment, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me,” conflicts with the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution that guarantees freedom of religion—the right to worship one, several, or no gods. The next three Commandments (no graven images, not taking God’s name in vain, keeping the Sabbath day holy) refer to specific kinds of worship directed toward a God who punishes several generations of children if their fathers do not worship appropriately. These first four commandments are religious edicts that have nothing to do with moral or ethical behavior. They describe how to worship and pay homage to a jealous and vindictive God.

The Fifth Commandment, about honoring parents, should not be so unconditional as to condone child abuse. There is no commandment about parents honoring their children or treating them humanely.

The next four commandments (proscriptions against murder, adultery, stealing, and lying) obviously have merit, and existed in cultures long before these commandments appeared in Exodus 20. Yet even these are open to interpretation. Is abortion murder? What about

euthanasia? War? Capital punishment? Reasonable people can disagree and respect other opinions, unless convinced they are acting as God's messenger.

The Tenth Commandment, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, wife, slaves, ox, donkey, or any other property," condones slavery and treating women as property.

The Ten Commandments, meant to be the cornerstone of an ethical and moral life, are notable for what they omit. Why not condemn slavery, racism, sexual assault, child and spouse abuse, and torture? Most people could come up with a better set of rules to live by.

I propose a simple solution that both honors our democratic principles and reminds us of the curbs on governmental abuse of power. Why don't we display our American Bill of Rights on public buildings? We would still be posting ten, and we Americans can all support and celebrate these ten. Or can we?

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

Canada: Minor Economic Shrinkage in October, 2019

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

December 25, 2019

As reported by the CBC News, the economic of Canada reduced by a tenth of one percent in October of 2019.

The economic condition for Canadians remains quite strong with the 10th largest economy in the world, according to Business Insider. Not only this, its oil reserves may exceed the Middle East. (However, this may become less relevant into the future with the rather rapid and predicted transition into renewable energy sources in the 2020s, 2030s, and further into the future.

With a shrinkage of the real Gross Domestic Product of GDP of the Canadian economy, based on reportage by Statistics Canada, this will be the first decline in the last 8 months of either economic stabilization, as in July, or growth, as see in, for example, May, June, August, and September with growth percentages of 0.3%, 0.2%, 0.1%, and 0.1%.

The economy, how ever slight, appears to show a several month slowing of the growth rate of the economy. The projection was a 0.0% growth rate of the Canadian economy in October in September. This did not play out.

With the manufacturing sector in Canada down for the 4th time in 5 months, this impacted the growth of the Canadian economy.

As reported, “The United Auto Workers (UAW) strike in the U.S. caused Canada to scale back production contributing to the decline. Retail trade declined 1.1 per cent—it’s largest decline in three years, while wholesale trade declined one per cent.”

However, oil production increased by 0.1% and real estate by 0.7%. So, we had a rapid growth in real estate, minor growth in oil production, and an overall decrease in the economy where a prediction was for a halted economy for October.

Philosophical and Historical Foundations of American Secularism 15 – Scientific Skepticism and the Emergence of Modern Secularism

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

December 25, 2019

Dr. Herb Silverman is the Founder of the Secular Coalition for America, the Founder of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry, and the Founder of the Atheist/Humanist Alliance student group at the College of Charleston. He authored Complex variables (1975), Candidate Without a Prayer: An Autobiography of a Jewish Atheist in the Bible Belt (2012) and An Atheist Stranger in a Strange Religious Land: Selected Writings from the Bible Belt (2017). He co-authored The Fundamentals of Extremism: The Christian Right in America (2003) with Kimberley Blaker and Edward S. Buckner, Complex Variables with Applications (2007) with Saminathan Ponnusamy, and Short Reflections on Secularism (2019).

Here we talk about scientific skepticism and modern secularism.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Some of the pillars of American freethought have been individuals including H.L. Mencken, Carl Sagan, Paul Kurtz, or Martin Gardner, or in the everyday world of needed problem-solving in Parade Magazine with Marilyn (Mach) Vos Savant.

Whether in the acerbic and sardonic writings of Mencken or in the ordinary American household language of Vos Savant, the wide-ranging philosophizing by Gardner or Kurtz, or the popularization of advanced scientific concepts to a lay audience in the case of Sagan, a delivery of wide-ranging scientific skepticism as a retort to the wide-spread irrationalism in American life.

How have some of the larger figures of American scientific skepticism been helpful in providing another area of critical thinking for the public against common supernaturalisms? How have those, in turn, helped the cause of furtherance of secularism in the United States?

Dr. Herb Silverman: You mention famous American freethought individuals, some of whom might be acerbic, sardonic, read by ordinary Americans, philosophers, popularizers of science, or debunkers of irrationalism. I think all such people are useful to a freethought movement because they often represent different constituencies. I'm a "big tent" atheist who welcomes all to come out of their atheist closets to help normalize freethought in America.

I'll describe my personal journey to atheism with four examples.

As a youngster, I was influenced by the movie The Wizard of Oz, where the gatekeeper told Dorothy that nobody had ever seen the great Wizard. Dorothy replied, "Then how do you know he exists?" The curtain is later pulled back to reveal that the "Wizard" is an elderly man operating machinery and speaking into a microphone. So the Wizard didn't exist, and Dorothy was on her own. That sounded to me a lot like what I was beginning to think of God.

I was also influenced by the Bible. I "knew" as a trusting child that the Bible was God's word. But after many of my biblical questions went unanswered, I became an example of what Isaac Asimov observed, "Properly read, the Bible is the most potent force for atheism ever conceived."

At age 16, in 1958, I hadn't told anyone that I no longer believed in God, thinking I might be the only one in this country with that opinion. Then I discovered Bertrand Russell's Why I Am Not a Christian in the public library. I felt better about myself after learning that Russell was more than just not a Christian. He was as many "nots" as I was, and brave enough to say so. Russell transformed the lives of many in my generation. For the first time we heard articulate arguments that confirmed and gave voice to our own skepticism and doubts. Even some true believers were led on a thoughtful journey toward altered religious states. Learning that Russell was a logician and mathematician at least partially inspired me to become a mathematician.

When I read George Orwell's 1984, I thought the character "Big Brother" appeared to be an omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, authoritarian figure who demanded absolute obedience. I didn't know at the time that Orwell was an atheist. Here's what Orwell said about Big Brother: "In 1984, the concept of Big Brother is a parody of God. You never see him, but the fact of him is drilled into people's minds so that they become robots, almost. Plus, if you speak bad against Big Brother, it's a Thoughtcrime."

You also asked why there might now be more critical thinkers in America, helping to further the cause of secularism in the United States.

In "The Last Taboo: Why America Needs Atheism," published in the New Republic in 1996, Wendy Kaminer wrote, "Atheists generate about as much sympathy as pedophiles. But, while pedophilia may at least be characterized as a disease, atheism is a choice, a willful rejection of beliefs to which vast majorities of people cling." I have one slight disagreement: Atheism is not a "choice." For me, the only choice is whether to be open about my atheism or pretend to believe in a deity for which there is not a scintilla of evidence.

The situation in the United States has improved significantly since Kaminer's piece appeared twenty-three years ago. Much has been written about atheism, including best-selling books by Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett, Susan Jacoby, and others. A number of popular blogs now promote atheism and secularism. In the Internet age, people hear about many worldviews, not just the one in which they were raised. Every new national survey shows a rapid increase of atheists, agnostics, and those who claim no religious affiliation (called "nones"). Many "nones" broke from conservative religion because it is anti-LGBTQ, anti-women's rights, and anti-science. Pedophilia has also discouraged people from maintaining their church affiliation.

Fivethirtyeight, which takes its name from the number of electors in the U.S. electoral college, is a website that focuses on opinion poll analysis. A recent piece, "Millennials Are Leaving Religion and Not Coming Back," pointed out that 40 percent of millennials are religiously unaffiliated. And there's mounting evidence that today's younger generations may be leaving religion for good. Changing views about the relationship between morality and religion also appear to have convinced many young parents that religious institutions are simply irrelevant or unnecessary for their children. A majority (57 percent) of millennials agree that religious people are generally less tolerant of others, compared to only 37 percent of Baby Boomers.

The Christian conservative movement warns about a rising tide of secularism, but the strong association between religion and the Republican Party may be fueling this divide. And as more members of the Democratic Party become secular, the rift between secular liberals and religious conservatives will be exacerbated. I'm hoping we will return to the day when Republicans identify as economic conservatives who want less government interference, rather than identify

with the Christian religion as so many now do. I would still be a Democrat, but at least I'd understand that the Republican Party had a legitimate point-of-view.

When it comes to voting, 60 percent of Americans say they prefer a candidate who believes in God and only 6% say they prefer a candidate who doesn't. However, this preference for candidates who believe in God nearly disappears when policy positions are included in the question. The percent who say they would vote for a well-qualified atheist has steadily risen from 18 percent in 1958 to 58 percent in 2015. The Congressional Freethought Caucus, formed in 2018 with 4 members, is a forum for secular members of Congress who promote evidence-based public policy. It now has 12 open members, with more likely to join. There are also more than 50 state legislators who identify with the atheist and humanist community.

While our community is growing rapidly, we are still severely underrepresented in politics. We need to encourage more members of our freethought community to run for public office, and also encourage elected officials to acknowledge their nonbelief. Here are some of our important issues: protecting a strict separation of religion and government, addressing climate change, advancing human rights and civil liberties (including disparities in incarceration rates, easy access to register to vote, women's rights), health and safety (vaccines, death with dignity), and promoting religious freedom abroad (opposing blasphemy and apostasy laws). We need our atheist and humanist community to become more visible and welcomed by participants in the electoral arena. I hope for a day when every political party at every governmental level will embrace our constituency.

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

Canada: Interview with Pastor Josh Loeve – Lead Pastor, Centre Church

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

December 26, 2019

Pastor Josh Loeve is the Lead Pastor of Centre Church. Here we talk about Christianity, Centre Church, and more about Canadian society and religious faith.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: So, let's start on a fundamental issue within Christian doctrine or theology across denominations, what is the truth and the orientation around that within a Christian context for Centre Church and yourself? In other words, what is truth? How does your church live this out?

Pastor Josh Loeve: What is truth? Let's talk about this in the religious sense, the Christian sense, we see, ultimately, Jesus is embodying Grace and Truth. When I speak about grace in the context of the church, I would speak of the person of Jesus.

In terms of science and all of that, I don't know if I will touch on all that. In the context of Christianity, it is the death and resurrection of Jesus, and forgiveness of sin. To me, it is the highest truth.

That is what Christianity is, basically, hinging on: Did Jesus die? Did he rise again? If no resurrection, then there is no Christianity. So, really, the truth hinges on that pivotal part of history.

For me, when we speak of truth and the Christian landscape, that is what we are talking about.

Jacobsen: In Centre Church, what are the theological implications of this? What are the implications for community?

Loeve: Wow – those are huge questions [Laughing].

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

Loeve: The implications for the community are huge. Our purpose in the community is to lead people into a life centered on Jesus. The implications of that truth is that we believe when a person centers their life on Jesus and are forgiven.

Things like shame go away. There is a community of putting Christ at the center of our lives or first in our lives. We put him first. We model his life. What that means, it affects the relationships that we have; it affects the way we interact with the community around us.

It affects the way that we use our money and lead our homes. It affects every area of our lives. The implication of that truth is that we extend forgiveness, as this is a great gift. So, we are generous to the world around us.

From that position of centering Jesus on our life, we are able to model that out to other people of the grace that He extended and gave to others. It has implications in every area.

I could exhaust that list. For me, it has implications in every area.

Jacobsen: If we are looking at an ordinary Sunday service, how is this fundamental basis of theology and scriptural reading built into the things that are spoken about in an ordinary service? Also, the in-between things and the before and after of a service.

As anyone who has gone to a church or been part of a church community knows.

Loeve: I know there is a high emphasis on Sunday service. But what do the other 6 days of the look like? How that impacts our Sunday service and that truth, it is that everything that we do on weekend service is about Jesus.

Again, it hinges on the death and resurrection of Jesus. So, every Sunday, we give people an opportunity to hear that message. We challenge people to live out that reality. So, Jesus is the central theme of all of our services.

In particular, the sermons on a weekend. He is the central message of the sermons. We have a commitment to connect the Message of Jesus to those who have never heard the Message, or those who are seeking, starting, or returning.

Someone seeking answers for God that we want to get everything out of the way as to what Jesus looks like. Those who are wanting to start again. They are starting a journey with Jesus again. We want to empower them.

Or those who are returning. Those who want to return after 20, 30, 40 years. That is the implication. We want to bring that to as many people as possible.

At Centre Church, the focus is on people who are seeking, starting, or returning.

Jacobsen: Within Centre Church, what are some other derivative fundamentals of the faith for the community and you?

Loeve: Fundamentals, we have some values that we have built. These are biblical values. That we rely on. One of them is authentic community. So, I will work that into the community.

Centre Church is small groups. We meet in homes throughout the week to discuss the weekend's message or different books about the Bible and contextualizing scripture. Things like that.

Then we have another values intent on discipleship. Discipleship is this process of helping people to grow to be more like Jesus. We need that through our serving teams.

We are a portable church. On a week, we have about 40 to 45 volunteers who do everything from run the kids' classes to set up the environment as we are a portable church, to leading us in music, or to production teams, and small group leaders.

So, that is our intentional discipleship. Through that, we want people to serve each other, as Jesus served others. Those are 2 of our values out of 5. We live through those values.

Jacobsen: For many churches leaders in North America, they lament the lack of men within the church. How was this manifested in some of the churches that you've seen in the Lower Mainland [Ed. British Columbia, Canada]?

Loeve: Personally, I am not looking at those stats. I am not lamenting those things. We have a healthy contingency of both men and women in our church.

We empower both men and women into positions of leadership. So, we're not trying to – or I am not trying to – be more edgy, cynical, or abrasive to bring more men into the doors of a Sunday service.

We believe God calls people into church through invitations to our church. I don't think that I am lamenting. As a matter of fact, I think we see mostly men who are coming through the doors looking for purpose, looking for meaning, and addressing the truths about who God is.

Since day 1, we are a 4-and-a-half-year-old church. Not once have I thought, "Gosh, I wish we had more men here."

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

Loeve: But we are having a healthy contingency of men and women. It is really exciting. It is really on God and on us. He has brought the right people through the door to connect with us.

I cannot speak to other churches. I do not really hear that discourse happening amongst other pastors. I think there is a lot of pastors who have seen an influx in Cloverdale into their churches. They are having to lead and pastor them.

Not once have I said, "Are they men? Or are they women?" [Laughing]

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

Loeve: I felt people are coming through the doors looking for meaning and purpose and wondering who God is. I think there is a lot of people in process who belong to different churches.

Jacobsen: There are a lot of different definitions of God. There are many, many gods on offer. What definition of a god or God makes most sense to you – either emotional appeal or philosophical solidity to you?

Loeve: I believe in the Trinitarian God of the Bible. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, one God in three persons. I hold to the biblical text in terms of my view of who God is, and, in terms of the emotional appeal, when I was 17-years-old; I had a profound about something we spoke about in our earlier [Ed. pre-interview] conversation.

I had a transcendent experience with God. That was in a much more charismatic church than we are today. There was emotion attached to that. But, for me, I look at the biblical text, "Who is God defined there?"

A lot of my perspectives of who God is and the fleshing out of who God is, is defined by the biblical text, which is, as I said, the Trinitarian God.

Jacobsen: What have been atheist and theist counters to those? How do you respond to them?

Loeve: I think in terms of an atheistic response to that. I have heard a lot of criticism against my beliefs. But one of the things, too, is that part of the Christian perspective is that God is the one who opens up the eyes and ears of those around us while we carry the Message.

Our responsibility is to carry the Message. Yes, there are many different countering messages against the person of Jesus or against the death & the resurrection, against the validity of the Bible, and the list goes on, and on, and on.

So, we can wrestle with them and Christians still wrestle with those questions. To me, though, it rests on the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. When it comes to criticism against the Bible, I bring it back, "What about the resurrection of Jesus?"

We can take a historical perspective and in Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in the New Testament. To me, if a critique outside of that, as a first conversation, typically, I start here because Christianity hinges on the Resurrection.

I focus on it, as Christianity hinges on it. That is the “truth” that we talked about in the beginning of this. It affects all of our churches. It is the truth that Christianity hinges on. Again, I, generally, field criticism around that.

I think that’s what people really should be having conversations around.

Jacobsen: How do you make a split between sacred and secular values in Canada now?

Loeve: A lot of the Christian worldview was a part of Canada, as it was formed as a nation. So, yes, the lines are, definitely, blurred. I think what I can say about that. We love the benefits of the Judeo-Christian worldview, but just don’t love all the things about it.

I think there is still a lot of benefits. Some of those benefits are focused on the family, the sovereignty of the individual. These are Christian values that come out of that worldview. I think that’s, maybe, one of those sacred values that had become one of the benefits for the secular community.

Where I think there is a great contrast between the secular and the sacred is in general belief in God, often, I see this in the idea of hope for the future, where people place their hope. Seculars tend to place hope in science and human determination.

The sacred is placing their hope in a God who controls the universe. So, it is where we place our hope, where we place our trust, it is one of the areas. The idea of hope with competing values of sacred and secular.

There are a lot of different areas where relationally. I see this often. There is a separation between sacred and secular, whether divorce and remarriage, or views around sexual orientation. This is where we see secular and sacred competing with each other as well.

Jacobsen: Within the domain of the sacred, there are the formally or the anti-divine within most Christian theologies. Those have to do with things like angels and fallen angels, and demons, and the Devil, and so on.

How does this fit into your general framework for understanding the world? For example, if you’re taking into account a God who controls the world, maintains and manifests the world, what of these other forces more or less counter to that?

Loeve: First of all, I would say, “Yes.” You are, in some ways, explaining a supernatural world that interacts with our world. I don’t know all specific examples in how that plays out. I think C.S. Lewis tried to play a little bit with that in *The Screwtape Letters*.

In terms of “hell,” for instance, a lot of people question whether hell is a literal place. I think for most of us as human beings; hell is a real place of suffering, cancer, relational separation. So, I would say that we see some of that evil itself. We see the effects of evil.

We see the effects of good. However specifically each one of those interacts with the world around us, I am not really sure. However, that is one of the effects of evil on the world. I do see the effects of good in the world.

I can share story after story of the effects Jesus has had on people in our church. That would be the divine interacting with the natural world. I don't know, specifically when and how all those moments happen.

I do know good exists. I do know evil exists. I do see them interacting with our world. In terms of how, I know we talked earlier in our conversation about if this is just a figment of our imaginations as human beings. I would say, "Human beings can be quite evil, quite malicious, to one another. But I do think there is a driving force behind evil and a driving force behind the good."

I think that's what we are obsessed with as a culture. I think that's why Avengers, Marvel comics, and Star Wars, and all this stuff.

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

Loeve: We are so fascinated by it because we love that story. We love and we hate it at the same time.

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

Loeve: I always find that fascinating. Why do we want the good to win? I do think that these ideas are not just constructs of the human imagination. They seem to have permeated – the ideas of good and evil – thought, and have permeated cultural norms.

I think there is a cause for that. That morality was placed in human beings, which is a Christian perspective. God created the world and created human beings with that type of moral compass, and gave option and allowance to evil.

Jacobsen: What one or two examples, as a closer to the conversation today, come to mind in terms of this, as per the argument, of the intervention of the divine or the supernatural into the natural, or the anti-divine or the demonic into the natural?

Loeve: [Laughing] an example that comes to mind is a couple that came to our church a few years back. He was struggling with addiction. Their marriage was done. She came to church. Her friend invited her. It happened to be the church in an elementary school.

She was a teacher at the elementary school and felt comfortable enough to come. She was, as far as I know, not an agnostic and would probably identify as an atheist. She connected with Canada Service with the sermon preached on the Sunday morning, and felt the love and support of the community.

She said, "I have not met people who have loved and supported me this way before." We began to mention the Message of Jesus to her. Her husband came a couple weeks later. She was mad about it. Because this was her thing.

But when you're going through a separation, [Laughing] you're not always wanting to see the other person.

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

Loeve: But he heard the Message and began to get over some of his addictions. They did begin to move back together. They have been part of the community for 2 years. They are part of a small group and serve on a team.

I am going to have the privilege of marrying them.

Jacobsen: Congratulations.

Loeve: When I look at all these events that had to happen, and all the different components, the right timing and the church being in a school that had to be comfortable for her to come. I look at all these events.

It is hard for me to say, “I cannot deny God having a hand in that.” I can hardly pick a Netflix show.

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

Loeve: Yet, I see this relationship rise from the dead. This is where I see the effects of the divine and Jesus working in our church, and in the people or the lives of the people within our church.

Jacobsen: Any recommended authors, speakers, or organizations?

Loeve: Yes, I really enjoy Ravi Zacharias. I appreciate his choice to what we call Apologetics and Christianity. He is answering the questions rather than debating or speaking at people. Ravi Zacharias is one of those people.

There is a local pastor in the area who wrote The Problem of God named Mark Clark. I think he is a very smart guy. He grew up in an atheist home and had a radical transformation with Jesus. Village Church is the name of that church.

Jacobsen: It is a fast growing one.

Loeve: He is abrasive. He’s solid in his doctrine, but he just loves people as well. I think that’s just a great guy. I would probably recommend some of his resources. Those two guys in terms of Apologetics and talking about atheists, what we’re talking about right now, too.

There are a lot of others, like William Lane Craig [Laughing]. He is another guy out there. He is a pretty interesting guy. But that is just within the Apologetics landscape.

Jacobsen: Any final feelings or thoughts in conclusion based on the conversation today?

Loeve: If someone is reading this, and if they are truly searching for answers, I think there are places to wrestle with competing opinions and beliefs. There are churches that can be places of refuge, and not just places of opposition.

I think it is really important in these conversations. I don’t think the church is as closed to conversations and questions as they are pegged as. I work at Centre Church. I know a lot of other churches, where there is a lot of good dialogue and pastors willing to step up to answer the questions.

I would encourage people reading this or listening to it. To know that there are places that pastors are willing to have conversations like this, to hear different and competing opinions and ideas, there’s also just places where we would love to pray and walk alongside people.

I think more than being right and wrong. There’s also an element of being human together. We can find solidarity together. I want people to know that there are places where they can come and wrestle with life’s big questions.

There are a lot of pastors wrestling with these.

Jacobsen: Thank you very much for the opportunity and your time, Pastor Josh.

Good Cop, Bad Cop 1 on Religion in American Politics

Scott Douglas Jacobsen and Rick Rosner

March 4, 2020

Conducted December 31, 2019.

Rick Rosner: Right now, religion is most prevalent in America where it is being abused. Where Evangelicals largely support Trump because they support his agenda, I don't know if it mostly revolves around getting rid of Roe v Wade, which would make abortion illegal throughout the United States. That is the most prevalent issue.

If you look at the history of abortion, then it didn't become a moral issue. Until, it was harnessed to become a political issue. For most of the 19th century, it was largely accepted. It wasn't a moral issue, as long as you did it before quickening, which is when you can feel the fetus moving around. The issue in the 19th century was not a moral one, but many of the ways that induced abortion killed the mom.

So, when abortion started getting outlawed, it was to try and stop people from dying from trying to get an abortion. It wasn't because people had moral objections. Even the Catholic Church tacitly accepted abortions with the belief being that the ensoulment of the fetus didn't happen until many weeks after conception, so, it is not like there's always been a feeling among Christians or aborting a fetus is killing a human being with a soul.

That is a fairly recent development. It was a belief that came to the fore after 1880, which speaks to it being a political thing. It is not like we became more moral about this issue in 1880. It is something tangled up with getting people riled up to vote Republican. There are plenty of other things that religion does in the United States that aren't cynical and are helpful.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Some of the worst aspects of American freedom comes in the form of abusing sincere religious belief for discriminatory policies. Arrogant, simple-minded sloganeering intended to manipulate real sensibilities and feelings in ordinary believers. The overt extension of this is the Christian Right in the United States. Looking South across the border, we have some of the issues in Canada. But it's just not the same in extent or kind. American fundamentalist is another beast. It is primarily political and secondarily spiritual (moral lessons and ritualism).

Rosner: I would guess that, demographically, the U.S. is more Christian, probably has a higher percentage of the population calling themselves Christians, than any other demographic of the country. Certainly, in terms of raw numbers, you have more people calling themselves Christians than about anybody else. That means Christians are demographically exploitable through appeals to their Christianity.

It also means that terrible forms of manipulation can be successfully done in super Christian parts of the country, like science denial. The more scientifically literate and oriented a population is; the less cynical politicians can get away with manipulating people with ridiculous arguments. One argument that popped up, the ridiculous argument that popped up, throughout 2018 and 2019 was that democrats, liberals, want abortion to be legal and at will. All the way to birth and even after birth.

Jacobsen: [Laughing].

Rosner: It was a setup. Republicans would present legislation that forced Democrats to veto or not support it, because it prohibited children born with devastating and fatal congenital and genetic defects. That they had to be given all the lifesaving procedures that a kid with a reasonable expectation of living a normal life would be given. In other words, the Democrats didn't want to pass legislation or support legislation that would force doctors to keep a baby born without a brain on life support indefinitely.

Maybe, 1/10th of 1% of kids are born with anencephaly. They lack a brain. They have enough of the brainstem to keep them breathing, sometimes, for a variety of reasons. In that case and other similar catastrophic cases of birth defects, the most compassionate and the least wasteful of medical resources is to let babies, who will die in a couple of days anyway, live out their limited 1 or 2 day or couple hour lifespans without putting them on respirators

Obviously, in the case of kids born without brains, you would want to do whatever it takes, e.g., CT scans, ultrasounds, etc., to confirm that these are babies without brains. Once that is confirmed, often, babies born like this look normal. Even behave somewhat normally, in that, babies don't have large behavioural repertoires anyway. You would want the parents to have the chance to hold the baby.

You do not want to limit doctors in what they can do with babies who won't make it. Republicans have been construing this as simply letting people abort babies, even after birth, because the babies are inconvenient. This is super stupid and has been promulgated by Republicans. It is believed by a significant segment of Republican voters.

Scientific ignorance makes voters manipulatable by stupid arguments.

Jacobsen: And what about the infusion of Evangelical Christianity as a political force in America. Your current president was impeached, President Trump, or has been but is in the processing stage of it. His Vice President is Mike Pence, who has spoken out against abortion and evolution. He wants Creationism all throughout the education system and abortion banned outright. These are coming from a concerted effort of mostly white Evangelical Christians to impose their religious values on the secular state. I find this boorish and against the whole tradition of American admirable secularism and science education.

Rosner: For instance, it is in several states, including California, that have made it illegal to practice conversion therapy – 'pray away the gay.' Therapists who promote the idea that you can take somebody who is gay and turn them not gay via psychological therapy, which leads to all sorts of misery. Republicans argue a) that you can do that, where people don't have to be gay and b) that legislation around priests and rabbis, or anyone who people talk to about being gay, might be subject to being arrested, which is horse shit.

If somebody is 11, or 14, or 25, or 40, and wants to speak to a clergyperson, saying, "I think I'm gay." They are wondering how to proceed with their life. Of course, you would want to talk to someone whose job it is to help people guide and make decisions with their lives. That is not praying away the gay. That is simply talking about being gay or the aspect of this person as gay.

Pence was Governor of Indiana. Indiana passed one of the statutes that got North Carolina in all sorts of trouble, saying that people did not have to perform services for gay people if

doing so went against their religious beliefs. With the standard example being, under statutes like this, bakeries do not have to bake cakes for gay weddings. In the case of Indiana, the statute pissed off enough people and was threatening to fuck up business enough in the state that they fairly quickly rescinded it.

Pence, also, presided over a resurgence in people being infected by HIV in Indiana. I don't know all the details. It was related to, maybe, getting rid of a needle exchange program and rooted in his disapproval of gayness. Pence's wife teaches at a school that doesn't let gay people on the staff and may not allow gay people in the student body. It is the stuff that smaller, more advanced countries; I tend to go to the Nordic countries.

They tend to be models of people believing reasonably. Countries that would say this stuff is bullshit.

You go!

Jacobsen: You mentioned poor countries. In poor countries, this happens a lot more. There are studies looking at the positive relationship between the more religiosity and the more poverty, and the reverse for less religiosity and wealth, at a national level. It is more of a ritual rather than a need for social services in different contexts.

Rosner: What science does is provide on Earth, things that we hope God would provide: health, longer lives, etc. Science takes over for God whose action tends to be random and unevenly distributed, whose benefits tend to be unevenly distributed, and not provably linked to prayer.

Jacobsen: That's one issue. It will poorer countries, so localized generally. In richer countries, the trade will be linked up. So, okay, we have to deal with the most powerful country in the history of the world with an ignoramus in charge and a religious fundamentalist base who believe in this as a flawed and bad person who God is working through, nonetheless. This is magical thinking. And it's tens of millions of Americans. It is giving justification around the world for ignorant charlatans and political strongmen to re-affirm and re-entrench themselves. It's being used to restrict women's bodily autonomy, harm LGBTI persons, and encourage a rhetoric and a culture of hate and discrimination. What is the way forward, Rick?

Rosner: American religion has changed from the 1940s until now from the benign belief to the strident un-Christian Christianity. Evangelical Christianity has been tethered to political activity. But there are other forms of American Christianity that are more spiritual, more mystical, and are more linked to a feeling or a Golden Rule. Unitarianism or Reform Judaism, where the spiritual dictates or the rules of the religion are relaxed [Ed. Rick follows Reform Judaism], I grew up under Reform Judaism in Colorado.

There is not as strong a Jewish culture as in the big cities, as in America's big cities. [Ed. as he has noted before, Reform Jews do not know specifically what they are supposed to believe in any specific context] Although, there are Reform Jews who know their dogma. Most do not. Non-Evangelicals in America are linked with a loathing of Trump and a loathing of what Evangelicals have become.

So, it will take a long time for people to become, if Christianity is ever cleaned up and becomes less corrupt, less corrupt. It will take time, even if this happens, for non-Evangelicals to trust them. Republicans have been engaging in anti-democratic practices,

scheming to hold political advantage. Although, on issues not supported by a majority of Americans, that's what I got on religion and America.

High range testing (HRT) should be taken with honest skepticism grounded in the limited empirical development of the field at present, even in spite of honest and sincere efforts. If a higher general intelligence score, then the greater the variability in, and margin of error in, the general intelligence scores because of the greater rarity in the population.

Rick Rosner: "According to some semi-reputable sources gathered in a listing here, Rick G. Rosner may have among America's, North America's, and the world's highest measured IQs at or above 190 (S.D. 15)/196 (S.D. 16) based on several high range test performances created by Christopher Harding, Jason Betts, Paul Cooijmans, and Ronald Hoeflin. He earned 12 years of college credit in less than a year and graduated with the equivalent of 8 majors. He has received 8 Writers Guild Awards and Emmy nominations, and was titled 2013 North American Genius of the Year by The World Genius Directory with the main "Genius" listing here.

He has written for Remote Control, Crank Yankers, The Man Show, The Emmys, The Grammys, and Jimmy Kimmel Live!. He worked as a bouncer, a nude art model, a roller-skating waiter, and a stripper. In a television commercial, Domino's Pizza named him the "World's Smartest Man." The commercial was taken off the air after Subway sandwiches issued a cease-and-desist. He was named "Best Bouncer" in the Denver Area, Colorado, by Westwood Magazine.

Rosner spent much of the late Disco Era as an undercover high school student. In addition, he spent 25 years as a bar bouncer and American fake ID-catcher, and 25+ years as a stripper, and nearly 30 years as a writer for more than 2,500 hours of network television. Errol Morris featured Rosner in the interview series entitled First Person, where some of this history was covered by Morris. He came in second, or lost, on Jeopardy!, sued Who Wants to Be a Millionaire? over a flawed question and lost the lawsuit. He won one game and lost one game on Are You Smarter Than a Drunk Person? (He was drunk). Finally, he spent 37+ years working on a time-invariant variation of the Big Bang Theory.

Currently, Rosner sits tweeting in a bathrobe (winter) or a towel (summer). He lives in Los Angeles, California with his wife, dog, and goldfish. He and his wife have a daughter. You can send him money or questions at LanceVersusRick@Gmail.Com, or a direct message via Twitter, or find him on LinkedIn, or see him on YouTube."

Like Manna from Heaven, Even God Bleeds from the Pen: or, words for The Word, A Gift to and from the Godless

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

April 29, 2020

Some of the most brutal, insane, and unjust systems of ethics and jurisprudence can be found in the fundamentalist or selective literalist interpretations of the religious, often as commanded and perceived by men, if you haven't noticed, or in the pseudoscientific justifications for supernaturalistic perspectives on the world deemed holy and grounded in purported transcendent texts and a supposedly Divine Holy Father in the Highest. A conceived Heavenly Father with a thin skin who hates while desiring retribution on Earth, including capital punishment for insults to the transcendent(ly fragile) ego. Freud, Hume, Hobbes, and Durkheim seem substantially correct over and over again in the historical record right into the present on the religious conceptualizations of a divine figure projected outward, abstracted as a précis of the worst facets of manly identity, as when men held/hold the majority power in societies and the God becomes a Father, a Lord, or a King, or even Lord of Lords, King of Kings, or Heavenly Father – in short, a man, and a rather ordinary one in spite of the grandiose titles – with the typical foibles and follies of men including pride, anger, vanity, and a desire for physical violence as a form of purification through retribution for the perceived insult. Thus, one can extrapolate the humourless, thin-skinned, and vengeful hypothetical Theity as one reflecting the individual and collective psychologies of some groups of men who deem themselves the bearers of the truth of some religions. A recent case arose once more in the modern record, as happened with a small group of self-identified Muslims who, presumably, claim to stand representative of all Muslims for all time, all interpretations, everywhere and always. Muslim friends and colleagues, and former Muslim friends and colleagues, would, probably, disown said individuals as non-representative of ordinary believers, in general, with only some exceptions, but the trend would probably be clear. So, why stand so tall on a charge so big with consequences so infinitely great to an individual humanist with evidence so small?

Mubarak Bala is the President of the Humanist Association of Nigeria who uses the freedom of expression to its full provided constitutionally within Nigeria and internationally within the global system of rights and law via the United Nations. Individuals who utilize these rights deserve to express themselves without fear or terror of reprisal because of the impacts on individual readers or listeners. Recently, he was charged and hauled off to jail by two Kaduna police officers. He was arrested on the afternoon of 28 April 2020 in Kaduna, Northern Nigeria, by two police officers who did not wear uniforms at the time while engaging in the arrest at the residence of Bala. All of this reeks of unethical and unprofessional law enforcement conduct, as a start to this absurdist comedy of errors against Bala. Currently, he is detained at Gbabasawa police station in Kaduna. Some local sources speculate the police detainment comes from a charge of blasphemy against him. The main claim stated “provocative and annoying” statements publicly on social media by Bala towards Muslims, specifically. If this is the case, and if some Islamic ethics incorporates the Golden Rule, then the Golden Rule can be applied here. Muhammad Sani Tahir on Facebook stated, “People like Mubarak Bala aren't supposed to be on Social media, he has no regard for any Religion and the exalted beings we hold so dear in

our minds.” This sounds provocative and annoying to some non-religious people, potentially. Shall we lay a criminal complaint? Halima Sa’adiya Umar started a Change.Org campaign stating:

Mubarak is blaspheming against the religion of Islam. He should practice his atheism and let Muslims be! “For you is your religion and for me is my religion”

His utterances are capable of causing unrest which could cause religious and social upheaval in the country.

Facebook is meant to promote & encourage relationships, allowing his kind to be on the platform is catastrophic. Freedom of expression is not synonymous to hate speech that can cause mayhem in Nigeria.

A petition with a goal of 25,000 online people and, at the time of publication of this article almost 17,000 signatures in its first 12 hours. This seems provocative and annoying. Once more, shall we make a charge? Unrest and upheaval based on words denigrates one’s own sect of one community, so as to reduce their humanity; in that, Umar asserts this claim with the implicatory obligation to point out the obvious and embarrassing logical consequence of the statements about “utterances” ‘causing’ irrational actions by her particular Muslim community (not all Nigerian Muslims, which one would gather from reading this blanket statement). The implied statement is followers of Islam within the circle for Umar cannot handle themselves; with some opinions or expressed ideas counter to the assertions of the faith, they can’t help themselves in enacting “unrest” and “religious and social upheaval in the country.” How offensive to the dignity and humanity of some followers of Islam, individual Muslims, my personal belief is individual Nigerian Muslims are every bit as capable of critical inquiry and have the capacity for rational thought and reaction to freely expressed opinions and ideas as much as anyone else of any other ethnicity, nationality, or religion. I find the implication of the statements by Umar about followers of Islam beyond provocative and annoying: dehumanizing. Shall we make a criminal complaint here too?

“Provocative and annoying” as the main statements here because several lawyers petitioned the Kano state with the explicit charge for the prosecution of Bala for the perceived insult of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad. One should note, Muhammad is dead; thus, why not have Prophet Muhammad make his own case and attend a day in court for himself rather than purported representatives on Earth now – only some of whom making the claim at the moment? Duly noting, of course, only the living can feel the insult, which means a small grouping of self-identified Muslims in Nigeria under the auspices of the likes of the lawyers from S.S. Umar & Co. (Barristers, Solicitors and Property Consultants at No. 328, Opp. Alhamsad Towers, Zoo Road, Kano), Halima Sa’adiya Umar (uncertain as to any relation to the former), and Muhammad Sani Tahir, who make far more provocative and annoying utterances; all the while ignoring the real social “unrest” and “religious and social upheaval” seen in those making a mockery of well-meaning Muslims throughout Nigeria in the cases of Boko Haram with thousands killed and hundreds of thousands displaced. The charge of insulting a dead man is spurious, inasmuch as one can claim to represent the knowledge of the insult of Nelson Mandela, Jesus Christ, Edward Teller, Kwame Nkrumah, Joseph Stalin, or Albert Einstein. As Dr. Leo Igwe reported in Humanist Voices, Canadian Atheist, and NewsGhana as, more or less, facsimiles:

S. S. Umar signed the petition. And this is how one Yusuf Jnr (@MrZage) commented on the petition on his tweeter account: “Some group of lawyers finally write a petition against that animal Mubarak Bala”. He described Mubarak as ‘an animal’...

... All of us at the Humanist Association of Nigeria are deeply worried by the arrest and detention of our president, Mubarak Bala. Mubarak Bala will likely be handed over to the Kano state police command, that will prosecute him for blasphemy, a crime that carries a death sentence under sharia law. We urge the Inspector General of Police, the governor of Kaduna, Mallam Elrufai to ensure his immediate release.

Once more, “Animal,” does this seem “provocative and annoying” to anyone else? Similar reportage came from – so far – Barry Duke of The Freethinker, Hemant Mehta of Friendly Atheist, The Will Nigeria, Sahara Reporters, Center for Inquiry (issued a statement), the International Association of Atheists, West Africa Reporters, Politics Nigeria, Roasted Amala, and InfoDigest. S.S. Umar & Co. charged Bala with “publically insulting Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) on his Facebook page contrary to Section 210 of the Penal Code of Kano State and Section 26(1)(c) of the Cybercrimes (Prohibitions, Prevention, Etc.) Act of 2015.”

Cybercrimes (Prohibitions, Prevention, Etc.) Act of 2015 Section 26(1)(c) states:

26. (1) Any person who with intent –

(c) insults publicly through a computer system or network–

(i) persons for the reason that they belong to a group distinguished by race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin, as well as religion, if used as a pretext for any of these factors; or

(ii) a group of persons which is distinguished by any of these characteristics;

Section 210 of the (Shari'a) Penal Code of Kano State states:

Whoever by any means publicly insults or seeks to incite contempt of any religion in such a manner as to be likely to lead to a breach of the peace, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years or with fine or with both.

They invoked Section 4 of the Police Act 1967, which states:

4. General duties of the police The police shall be employed for the prevention and detection of crime, the apprehension of offenders, the preservation of law and order, the protection of life and property and the due enforcement of all laws and regulations with which they are directly charged, and shall perform such military duties within or outside Nigeria as may be required of them by, or under the authority of this or any other Act. [1979 No. 23.]

With the charge on April 27 2020 by Umar S.S. & Co., they proclaim to know this individual, Bala, committed crimes and made a charge of the public complaining of possible state complicity in the ‘crime’ by Bala based on the Facebook posts; while, at the same time, the public claimed, based on the filed complaint of S.S. Umar & Co., if the insults were directed at a politician rather than Islamic Prophet Muhammad, then the state and the police would act differently. Couple things, Muhammad is dead; politicians are alive. Also, the state did act and within 24 hours with the finding of Bala, unprofessionally (out of uniform) gathering Bala, and then jailing him. Thus, it’s precisely the opposite; it would appear the state acted in

complicity with the demands of the religious. In a time when blasphemy laws continue to disappear around the world, for the largest and most populated African state, it is a singular crime to single out the non-religious with a law premised on the existence of a Theity capable of insult, especially when many members of Nigerian society do not believe in it. Section 210 of the Penal Code on secular consistency grounds should not exist at all. It should not exist in a pluralistic, secular, and democratic state. Even more so, a representative of the God who is dead and cannot speak for their self requiring flawed human beings to represent someone who the believers in the faith consider a highly morally advanced if not perfect former member of the human species. Who says they've got the picture right? Who says that they can speak for all Muslims and for the correct reading of Islam – let alone the final Prophet, the inerrant holy text called the Quran, or Allah Himself? Is this not, in and of itself, a blasphemous act – to put oneself in a place so as to claim to speak for Allah and all of his people?

Nonetheless, Bala has the right to express himself. S.S. Umar & Co., even admit to this right for Bala. Readers and listeners – who choose and chose to read and listen to him – do not have the right to be non-offended by him (and appear to know the track record of Bala and should expect to be offended based on the differences of opinion, which makes the whole situation all the more confusing and idiotic), or to threaten jail-time based on hurt sentiments, or, even further, demand the death penalty for said offenses deemed by the holy men who claim to know the emotions, heart, and mind of the God offended by such existences and statements of ex-Muslims and humanists as Mubarak Bala. When one claims the offense of a God, or Allah, or a purported messenger, one does not acquire the legal right to proclaim to speak on behalf of this Theity or behalf of all of the religious people and communities, and leaders, who identify under the same title because they were probably not as offended as you, even not offended at all.

If someone does not want to hear or read something, then you do not have to see or hear it. In fact, in an era of autonomy and free delivery of information via the Internet, the choice before every individual human being becomes to engage in something or not, barring cases of coercion or force. In these instances, given the fact of the freedom to choose not to listen to the freedom of expression used by Bala, it's less as to what Bala stated and more, obviously, to the 'crime' of existing, on the first count as an ex-Muslim and a public humanist and non-believer, and for speaking openly about it, on the second count. That's the real 'crime'; that's the real reason for continuing to read and listen to him because it's a public monitoring of him to find points to score for the purposes of silencing or ending his actual existence, as one can gleam from the public threat of violence, reprisal, and numerous death threats over a significant period of time right into the present. That's xenophobia. Taken together, it's the fact of existing and articulating opinions at odds with some of the religious orthodoxy in the nation. Indeed, not the entire nation, as many Muslims do not care a smidgen for these things, Muslims aren't a bloc and small collections of individuals making criminal charges cannot claim to represent all of Islam, all Muslims, or the sentiments of individuals who do not believe in Islam, or have left Islam, while understanding the prejudice and bigotry faced by many Muslims in the modern world; in fact, the last point makes the charge with the potential for the death penalty application more tragic, as it becomes one group feeling prejudice from others to some degree with issuance from some in its communities demanding the harshest form of punishment known: death. Who chose to make some followers of some bits of Islam the arbiters of life or death of someone? Of course, a self-selected group of the easily offended.

As someone without a formal religion, I worked for an Ismaili Muslim who ran the Almas Jiwani Foundation, formerly UN Women Canada, on the Board for three years, my stances were known and almost never an issue for Ms. Jiwani during most of the three years working for the organization, as we worked on a unified interest in women's rights as part and parcel of human rights (not separate or distinct from one another, as the separation would imply something of a classification of the rights for women as not human rights and, thus, not incorporate women as human beings, as Margaret Atwood, importantly, reminds us). We're talking extensive research, work with her, even writing draft speeches, including for one Miss Universe Canada before. Muslims and Islam cannot be perceived or conceived as a bloc akin to the numerous sects, sometimes warring, of Christianity cannot be perceived or conceived as a bloc in any reasonable manner, except on fundamentals. One cannot deny the Resurrection in Christianity, as there would be no redeeming of the sins of Mankind in their theologies; one cannot rewrite the Quran in Islam, as this is the literal language and Word of Allah. Other than those, we can have some wiggle room within Christianity with rewrites and with Islam in reinterpretations of the wording that cannot be changed, as in a poetic reorientation of the textual analysis, as has been and continues to be done throughout the world.

On the issue of rights and back to the libretto, Bala maintains the full right of state and international community to speak openly with personal views on a fundamental level. When we examine the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999), the stipulations become explicit, clear, and articulated in line with the use of the freedom to expression by Bala with Chapter IV Fundamental Rights 39. (1) Right to freedom of expression and the press stating, "Every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference." One can see the echoes in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 19 stating, "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers." Individuals in the international community retain the right to "freedom of opinion and expression... without interference to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers," where Bala utilized blog posts and Facebook posts to engage in freely expressing personal ideas and opinions. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria continued in the same articulation of the right to impart opinions and ideas "without interference." Hence, Bala utilized posts in online media for freely expressing personal opinions and ideas. Even ignorant ideas, which Bala's aren't, I once knew a sailor of a Chief Skugaid in Canadian society who believed in the (Immanuel Velikovsky) Velikovskyan discredited and embarrassingly ignorant cosmology; a nice, polite, and genteel person who happened to be wildly wrong with almost offensively, stunningly incorrect views of the world. I do not claim the right to lay a criminal charge over offense and then to have the possibility of the individual brought to death in some manner.

I hold the right to publicly disagree with the gentleman. Thus, a basis for civil discourse and the foundation for civil society grounds itself in this fundamental agreement of a civil discourse barring open threats to violence or livelihood, as has happened to Mubarak Bala with clear examples in the historical record in 2014 on the part of some of the fundamentalist religious community in Nigeria. Furthermore, other rights stand on the side of Bala in the international rights and national law stipulations of Nigeria society. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Chapter IV Fundamental Rights 38. (1) Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion states, "Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion,

including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.” The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Article 18 states, “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.” In short, there’s no question on the freedom of belief and conscience, and religion and expression.

Article 45 of the Constitution, where S.S. Umar & Co. only make vague statements as to the invalidation of the right to freedoms of Bala because Article 45 is a huge statement and, states:

45. (1) Nothing in sections 37, 38, 39, 40 and 41 of this Constitution shall invalidate any law that is reasonably justifiable in a democratic society

(a) in the interest of defence, public safety, public order, public morality or public health; or

(b) for the purpose of protecting the rights and freedom or other persons

(2) An act of the National Assembly shall not be invalidated by reason only that it provides for the taking, during periods of emergency, of measures that derogate from the provisions of section 33 or 35 of this Constitution; but no such measures shall be taken in pursuance of any such act during any period of emergency save to the extent that those measures are reasonably justifiable for the purpose of dealing with the situation that exists during that period of emergency:

Provided that nothing in this section shall authorise any derogation from the provisions of section 33 of this Constitution, except in respect of death resulting from acts of war or authorise any derogation from the provisions of section 36(8) of this Constitution.

(3) In this section, a “period of emergency” means any period during which there is in force a Proclamation of a state of emergency declared by the President in exercise of the powers conferred on him under section 305 of this Constitution.

If you want to place a charge, especially when said charge may lead to the risk of someone’s life or make their life forfeit to the glee of enemies and onlookers, then, at least, make a careful analysis of the last straw in the charge. One may point to the S.S. Umar & Co. charge about xenophobia and racism. However, if one is a white Muslim rather than a black Muslim, or a European-Caucasian Muslim compared to an African Muslim, is the religion or the ethnicity the race here? It’s a confused argument and, therefore, illegitimate. Islam as a race is as much a legitimate idea as atheism is a race. On xenophobia, as charged, can one point to the numerous death threats, hurled insults, hatred, claims of violence, etc., at Bala as individuated xenophobia en masse? If one can claim it, then the charges should be placed in the exact opposite direction towards, in fact, a stronger case with a collective of the living rather than a single claim of one religious hierarch as a terrorist who is deceased.

So, what do we have here? Bala made a conscience and belief choice to become free from Islam and other religious indoctrination/impositions based on the freedom to have no belief and no religion and, thus, make a conscientious objection to partaking in the belief structure and practices of one religion and, in turn, all religions. Bala, in the world based on the United Nations, and in Nigeria based on its Constitution, maintains the right to freedom of belief away

from religion, freedom from religion as one of non-religion, freedom of conscience so as to make a moral choice regarding the two aforementioned matters, and the freedom to expression of the opinions and ideas against the religions and beliefs without interference. The statement merely amalgamates and unites the rights into a singular statement in support of Bala rather than not. Bear in mind, the entirety of the presentation here amounts to standard rights and law stipulations for the individuals who happen to disagree with the wider strand of human societies while having the desire to live in democratic and free societies. With the individuals who speak out and express themselves openly and articulately, as Bala, the claim for the ability to jail without just warrant and have them, potentially, killed based on a purported blasphemy charge brings other factors of a society into question.

Note, Bala is the President of the Humanist Association of Nigeria with the power of words alone. In more clear-cut cases of doing bad public relations to the image of Islam, we can see Abu Mohammed Abubakar bin Mohammad al-Sheikawi, who is the leader of the Nigerian militant group proclaiming itself Islamic, Boko Haram, under al-Sheikawi's leadership. Who is doing worse damage to the image of Islam and to the lives of non-Muslims and Muslims alike? Does the focus on Bala make for a perverse form of extreme hypocrisy? Of course, the fundamental basis of words as the problem rather than acts of murder, rape, and enslavement becomes the ethical difference making the moral actual. Boko Haram has killed tens of thousands and displaced more than 2,000,000 people; whereas, Bala made ironic or flat, frank statements of personal opinion about the religious 'Prophet' and the supposed holy origin of the text. All claims by individuals on social media have been dealt with in the above arguments, as simply inadequate, illogical, public incitement and declarations of violence, and open xenophobia against the non-religious, and spurious claims to religious legitimacy as if speaking for all Muslims or Islam as if a bloc interpretation or reading for all time, all places, and all peoples, including all Nigerian Muslims. Non-religious and religious alike should stand behind the legitimate claim to freedom of belief, freedom of religion, freedom of conscience, and freedom of expression of Bala because, as the violation of the right of one person in one place is a violation of all people's rights everywhere as, we do not know when one our other communities' leaders or group of peoples may fall under similar undue pressure and illegitimate punishment and charges. Either we stand together; or, we abandon the principles upon which free, democratic, pluralistic, and prosperous societies are constructed, and, thus, collapse together. There's a lot of talk about saving the world qua the world and for human beings as of late for good scientific and survival reasons; however, I argue the future remains built on principles and values, which express themselves in the societies constructed now and into the future, where the maintenance and survival of the natural world and humanity qua the natural world and humanity becomes of utmost importance, but only alongside principles and values expressed in the actualized lives of global citizenry and the international society that make a humanity worth surviving and an Earth worth saving.

Humanist Canada calls for release of Nigerian Humanist President

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 6, 2020

VANCOUVER, British Columbia – May 5, 2020 – PRLog — Canadian Humanists are supporting calls from Humanists International to have Mubarak Bala released from a Nigerian jail. Bala, who is president of the Humanist Association of Nigeria, was arrested by Nigerian police April 28 following a complaint he had insulted the prophet Mohammed in a social media post. Bala, who is a former Muslim, has been arrested without formal charges. Bala's lawyer has not been allowed access to his client.

"The right to be charged within 24 hours of arrest and the right to legal counsel are enshrined in Nigerian law. In addition, we would request: if Mr. Bala is charged with a crime, then the charge is, or those charges are, heard in a secular as opposed to a Islamic court, as he is a humanist, atheist, and former Muslim," said Scott Jacobsen, international rights spokesman for Humanist Canada. Humanist Canada Vice-President, Lloyd Robertson, said Canadians can support Mr Bala's defence campaign organized by Humanists International by visiting:

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/free-mubarak-bala>.

Conversation with Hari Parekh on the Hidden Population of Abuse Victims, Apostates

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 9, 2020

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: So, you've published an article in a peer-reviewed journal called *The Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. The paper is titled "Apostates a Hidden Population of Abuse Victims." First, to define terms, what is an apostate? How is abuse defined?

Hari Parekh: An 'apostate' is the term used to describe people within religious families who once identified as religious or with a belief in God and have, now, ceased to believe in the existence of a God, gods, or having a religious faith or belief and now identify as non-religious. Each person has their reasons for embarking on this journey – completing this journey from religious to non-religious, and identifying as an apostate is not an easy journey, and it appears to not be the end of the struggles defined within an individual's journey. Given the strong feelings families can have about the rejection of their shared faith, this can cause further complications for the apostate themselves. As such, this study aimed to inform the academic community and wider society of the possible victimisation that some apostates may face within religious households. We were looking at areas such as assault, serious assault, psychological abuse, as measured by the Conflict Tactics Scale by Straus et al (1996). The differences between the terms are highlighted in the paper – the variances within assault and serious assault can be the difference between being pushed against a wall or being threatened with death, for example. Adding to this, psychological abuse includes coercive control, stress, depression, suicidal ideation, for example. This study identifies that there is a higher risk of people being abused as a result of identifying as an apostate. Sadly, the study also identifies how victims do not have trust in their law enforcement officers to understand their plight.

Jacobsen: The study, itself, is not a meta-analysis. It is a single study with 228 people, 102 men-119 women. Why was the survey supported through Faith to Faithless?

Parekh: The study could not be a meta-analysis because it is the first of its kind! It is the first time that the academic community, and the non-religious community, can point to a piece of scientific evidence and say, "Here's the evidence to show what is likely to happen to apostates within religious households." Hopefully, this study is the catalyst for further studies, to look into the issue of abuse faced by apostates, and has the propensity to inform non-academic services such as governments and organisations such as the United Nations to raise awareness of the plight of apostates. The reason for the support of Faith to Faithless, initially? It was luck. I left my religious faith during my undergraduate degree at the University of Northampton. My experiences were positive as my parents have not wavered in supporting me, despite my decision. I consider myself to be an apostate-anomaly, being someone lucky enough to not have suffered the extremities and the abuse that participants have experienced within the study, for example. I worked with co-founders, Aliyah Saleem and Imtiaz Shams, at the time, and I was exposed to how much abuse people received as a result of leaving their faith. I formed my Master's thesis around this issue because there was no other study highlighting this abuse within the academic sphere. I said to my supervisor, "We need to provide victims with a voice to show the academic community that we are failing victims."

Jacobsen: For those who do not know the names Imtiaz Shams and Aliyah Saleem, what is their place in Humanists UK?

Parekh: They founded Faith to Faithless. It later became the apostasy service of Humanists UK, to support people who leave their religious faith. They are both amazing in their own right, do Google them! I support and work with such amazing people to raise awareness of apostasy as well.

Jacobsen: Why the gap in the research, in the academic community, i.e., not being able to do a metanalysis because of insufficient studies to take any data?

Parekh: There are academics such as Hunsberger (1983) and Hezbrun (1999) that touched upon the difficulties of apostasy, and even recently with Dr Simon Cottee. But, it's so difficult to provide the academic community with an insight into the abuse of apostates, when most are hidden, and consequently do not want to upset the balance of their household. An individual who is doubting their religious faith has so many factors to contemplate on: whether they will leave or not, whether they will tell anybody or not, or whether they will publicly declare their apostasy or not, to name a few. The consequences of each scenario can be devastating, and such are the difficulties of apostasy. Several prominent activists have spent their life to inform society of the experiences of people who have left their religious faith. One would have hoped that the work of such activists would have culminated in further academic interest. However, this is the first opportunity for such activists to have academic evidence to solidify their work.

Again, the gap in the research might relate to many factors. First, it is one of the more nuanced and niche areas, whereby, if you're not aware of the community or of this occurring in itself, then it's not understood nor does it factor into the conversation of public opinion – again, a hidden population remains hidden until it gains recognition. Secondly, the role of religion and religious communities, and the way this organised structure can work for people suggests that it can provide a supportive, stable, and secure foundation to people's lives. For the many, religious faith can provide a good foundational basis for one's life; the concern grows for people who do not hold a similar perspective. Third, the political relationship that religious communities are likely to have upheld, such as bishops being in the House of Lords in the UK, strengthens the view that the role of religious communities, or the ideas of the religious, are less likely to be scrutinised as a result. Fourth, the nature of academia is not easy – we remain unclear as to whether there have been countless pieces of research submitted for publication that have not met the standards required? This is a common occurrence within academia. It is a common occurrence in academia anyways. That's the point. If several activists are speaking of people going through the experiences, one of the major criticisms of the activists is no one has had the evidence to show it exists. How do you reach people, where you don't know who, what, or how they are? How do you do that from a scientific viewpoint? It is a minefield in itself. The study was sent worldwide – we finally have a starting point to refer to.

Jacobsen: What were the general findings?

Parekh: The general findings are quite interesting to be fair. First, out of the 228 participants, we categorised them initially by the religious faith they identified with since birth. Despite having participants from faiths such as Hinduism, Judaism, and more, as they were not statistically significant they could not be utilised within the study. As such, we focused primarily on people identifying from Christian and Muslim faiths and people identifying as non-religious. From our participants, what we found was that those that identified as religious from birth were

less likely to be religious now. For example, out of the 130 people that identified as Christian, only 12 people currently identify as Christian; of the 68 people that identified as Muslim, only 4 people currently identify as Muslim, and of the 18 people that were initially non-religious, 204 people currently identify as non-religious. So, we saw an increase of 1,033% in people identifying as non-religious and a 91-94% decrease in people identifying as religious. This appears similar to the trends we are seeing in society – the decrease in the number of people going to Church each week in the UK, and the rise in the number of people identifying as non-religious within the UK census also appears to support the data in this study.

Second, we used the Conflict Tactics scale by Straus and colleagues to understand the levels of violence and abuse that victims have experienced. The terms of assault, serious assault, and psychological abuse were significant for Muslim-apostates more so than Christian-apostates. Due to these terms being interrelated to each other, we categorised this as assault within the study. Interestingly, even though, we had lesser people from a Muslim heritage background take part in the study, they were more likely to experience such levels of violence and assault. It was really interesting, in itself, and the outcome of the study suggests a higher likelihood to be a victim as a result. Furthermore, there was no significant difference in negotiation. It was peculiar with the levels of violence. With negotiation, it suggests either that households are attempting to understand why their family member within the household would leave the religious faith? Yet, as there is a difficulty in being able to negotiate that stance, and trying to determine the consequences of having a family member that is not religious within the household and community, it appears difficult for households to reach a conclusion that maintains the household's order.

Third, out of the 154 people who were assaulted, only 9 people reported their assault to the police, which is only 5.8%. Then out of the 71 people who said why they did not report it, 44% believed that reporting this would be disrespectful to family dynamics and a betrayal of the family. 27% said that they thought the police would be unable to help them. 10% reported being threatened about the perceived repercussions by the family and community for reporting their abuse. So, here are victims openly stating, they could be at risk.

Jacobsen: Some Muslim scholars and others in the public arena and may look at the terms “honour” and “violence” with internal concern to their community as human rights violations in interpersonal violence or domestic violence as dishonourable as a culture. So, it would be termed “honour violence,” but they would see this as dishonour or dishonourable violence. How is the construct of honour construed in the household with a religion in which honour is played out in an IPV or a DV setting?

Parekh: It is a really serious and important issue to raise that the study aims to not generalise everybody within a Muslim or Christian household, in stating that “hi! All your beliefs lead to abuse and violence!” That would be wrong, and suggesting a link would be incorrect. People are human at the end of the day. Many people within religious faiths argue the factors highlighted within honour-based violence is completely against the fundamentals and the principles within the faith itself. That is a fair statement to make, however, this is not a simple issue. Honour-based violence by its nature is hidden and perpetrated by the people who are related to you, formed attachments with you, and this has the potential to cause further distress for the victim too. By its nature, it is targeted, specifically, at women and girls. With apostate-abuse, gender is not a factor. Its very nature is based on coercive control and collusion, acceptance, and silence within the family. For example, by making sure it does not leave the four walls of the religious

household. The notion of honour, therefore, relates strongly with shame and guilt. Paul Gilbert and Jasvinder Sanghera's research identified the amount of guilt and shame involved within honour-abuse and also reported how hidden this abuse is. The concerns regarding apostate-abuse have similarities with the abuse faced by victims of domestic violence, LGBTQ+ abuse, forced marriage and female genital mutilation. These are the same nuances we're tackling. The level of shame means that abuse would be hidden so much more.

Jacobsen: Would one public service announcement or concern come in the form of anti-Muslim bigotry or anti-Christian bigotry utilizing some of this research in very obviously skewed ways to cast aspersions and stereotypes at the communities? Where the research is not looking at violence as a global phenomenon and problem, but one a form of violence with that cultural and religious flavour.

Parekh: That's the concern Vincent Egan and I did have and do continue to have when I was doing my Master's thesis. Publishing this piece of research too, we were looking at how this would be reflected, how people would interpret and understand it, moving forwards. That's the thing in itself. Yes, the organisations helping to find people – Faith to Faithless, Peter Tatchell Foundation, Humanists UK, Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain – are very much involved in the non-religious communities and can provide opportunities to find people that are hidden. The research aims to identify that people are abusing people by using the veil of religion, culture, and tradition as a rationale, and this is not a good thing! Abuse is abuse. In talking about this research, as long as I am clear that the fundamental principle is not to demonise and, basically, negatively impact religious people or organizations. It is trying to bring awareness to a worldwide audience that there is abuse happening, and we are missing it. In conversations with people, I have found that there are people who are disgusted by people using their religious faith to manipulate and abuse people in that way. I think that's a very strong argument for this. Yes, anyone can look at any research and manipulate it in a way that makes things suit an agenda of hate, which might not be favourable to those who created the initial study. However, as long as people read it clearly, we are saying, "We are not demonizing the religious faith. We are demonizing the way people use religious faith to abuse people. And by doing so, we are creating a hidden population of people who can't be reached out to." As people become more aware of the research, we can begin to openly talk about the issues of people being abused as a result. By not talking about this abuse, we would perpetuate the argument that this practice is okay and justified. We cannot – having even one person abused is a failure.

Jacobsen: What are the next steps for research?

Parekh: Having carried out the first study of its kind, there are several next steps for this research area. Firstly, we wanted to inform the academic community that apostate-abuse is occurring, and as such, we used categorised terms to categorise the religious faith of participants. For example, there are many denominations within Christianity and Islam that, future research should look at seeing whether those denominations vary the level of risk an apostate is likely to face. Secondly, we would need to gather data that also looks at financial abuse, sexual abuse, and despite gathering data on psychological abuse, we would still need to gather data on the specifics within such an umbrella term. Thirdly, further research is needed on the implications of apostate-abuse per continent, per region, per country, and how the criminal justice systems can accommodate this crime within their legal frameworks – this might also require further research into the devastating effects of blasphemy laws on the victim, such as Asia Bibi and recently with Mubarak Bala. Fourthly, research on how local law enforcement can improve their perception

amongst victims that they would be unable to support victims would be an essential area for research – using a focus group to understand how police forces can improve their practice would be essential. Fifthly, looking into how larger organisations can apply this to their practice – such as how the United Nations or Amnesty International deems abuse and how they support individual nations too would be an investigative piece of research. Sixthly, working with religious organisations and religious communities to de-threaten the notion of apostasy may be one of the most significant areas from this study! That’s quite a lot, but the opportunities are pretty endless.

Jacobsen: If we look at the ways in which academics can use analytic techniques to find relatively objective findings of the research in interpretation, there are internal views from a subjective perspective, in other words, of individuals within the research by yourself and Egan. In other words, those coming out of a religion internally to their mind while living in a home with IPV or DV ongoing, or at some point happening, having attitudes about it. What do they attribute these acts to?

Parekh: Looking at the personal responses by people who participated in the study, really provides a true reflection of their experiences; we have tried to provide a fair opportunity to provide the reader with an appreciation of the comments made by participants. The concerns of participants initially began with being concerned with not believing in the same religious faith or God that the household believes in. And, the consequences of this ranged between being asked to leave the family home, being ex-communicated from the home, facing threats of violence daily, to being beaten and receiving threats of being killed as a result. Using a religious faith as a rationale for abusing another human being is an expression of wanting to remain correct and right. When human beings begin to believe that they are correct, then this creates a concern, as history has shown. When a family member decides to become an apostate, this increases the chances of other family members feeling rejected – because their belief is more than just a belief in itself, but also embedded into their identity formation and sense of self. So, any challenge to that is a personal challenge, and such increases the chances of causing a personal threat reaction. I think the religious belief in itself might be used as a validation to all of the reason why. But again, we’re still looking at the behaviour of the person to abuse somebody else. So, that’s what we’re seeing. We’re seeing people threatened to be killed or abused in one way or another because of them not agreeing or accepting the same religious belief or faith as a family. I think the concern, therefore, is the view that just because you don’t believe nor agree with the belief of the family; you are not part of the family anymore is absurd. The personality of the person, the experiences, the attachments to family members; this is not a complete list, but all of these factors make us human. Having a difference of perspective does not change the person that the family have created. Being abused for having a difference of perspective is no different from blaming a person for being human – this is why we have a brain that can think! Being abused for thinking is extreme. Being human means we are fallible, and we need to appreciate that factor.

Jacobsen: Hari, thank you for the opportunity and your time.

Parekh: Any time Scott!

Hari Parekh, has worked in the field of psychology for over four years. He obtained his BA (Hons) degree in Psychology and Criminology at the University of Northampton in 2015, and his MSc in Forensic and Criminological Psychology at the University of Nottingham in 2016. He has worked for the student sector of Humanists UK, holding roles of President and President

Emeritus. Following this, he is the current European Chair for Young Humanists International, and the Volunteers Manager for Faith to Faithless. He is consistently invited to universities to talk about the psychological difficulties relating to apostasy.

Extended Conversation with Angelos Sofocleous on the Context Now

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 9, 2020

Angelos Sofocleous, M.A. is a Philosophy Ph.D. student at University of York who works as an Interviews Editor at The Definite Article, Deputy Science Editor at Nouse Philosophy, and the Editor-in-Chief at Secular Nation Magazine. Here we talk more in-depth about updates since December, 2018 on the fallout of the reactions to a tweet and an article.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: We've written a decent amount together. In fact, we have seen a development of secularism in Greece and in its education, and some of the aspects of personal and professional history for you (bumpy). Mario Zucconi quoted you and I in EU Influence Beyond Conditionality: Turkey Plus/Minus the EU. One of the most recent, relevant developments came in the form of firing or considered resignation from several positions as editor or leader followed by some opprobrium in public. You were President-Elect for Humanist Students, which has a triplet setup for incumbent and leaving presidents. Recently, you were a hated person. Some stood by you. Some still hate you. What was the feeling in the interlude since the last interview in 2018?

Angelos Sofocleous: Let me first start with a recollection of what had happened, for reminding those who were following the case when it happened, and informing those who will hear about the incidents for the first time.

On August 21st 2018, I retweeted a tweet reading "RT if women don't have penises". The original tweet was accompanied by an article from The Spectator titled "Is it a crime to say 'women don't have penises'?" The retweet was part of other statements and articles that I had written about sex, gender, and the transgender movement which included certain criticisms of the movement as well as suggestions on how it can be improved so that society can achieve overcoming sex and gender stereotypes. Through my statements, I also wished to express and support the view that humans are a dimorphic species; that is, a human being can be a male or female, allowing for certain cases of intersex individuals who, however, seem to be unrepresented, underrepresented or even misrepresented by the transgender movement.

Despite me deleting the retweet a day after, I was forced to resign from the position of President-Elect of Humanists UK, and a few days later I was fired by Ry Lo and Sebastián Sánchez-Schilling from the position of Assistant Editor of Critique, Durham University Philosophy Society's journal, and by Anastasia Maseychik from the position of Editor of The Bubble, a Durham University magazine. These dismissals were found to be 'unfair and undemocratic' by Durham Students' Union as they did not follow the procedures outlined by Durham Students' Union, did not give me an opportunity to explain my views, did not gather a vote of no confidence from their members, and did not give me an opportunity to appeal the decision. Durham Students' Union called for the journal and the magazine to apologize. The SU too, as did the magazine, but I have not yet received an apology from the journal.

As I noted in my resignation statement from Humanists UK "[my] views were taken to be 'transphobic' by individuals who cannot tolerate any criticism, either of their movement or their ideas, and are unable to engage in a civilized conversation on issues they disagree on. These are

individuals who think they hold the absolute right to determine which ideas can be discussed and what language can be used in a public forum.”

“Living in a free society and being present and active in a public forum means that one often witnesses comments that she may judge as offensive, divisive, or derogatory. Living in a democracy means that one will often offend and get offended. That’s the price one pays for being a member of a democracy and not existing into her own bubble.”

The incident with the Durham University Philosophy Society journal was cited in the Supreme Court of the United States case *R.G. & G.R. Harris Funeral Homes, INC., V. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and Aimee Stephens*. The Supreme Court explicitly says:

“In the U.K., Angelos Sofocleous was dismissed from Durham University’s philosophy journal *Critique* because he used his social media account to share another individual’s comment noting that “women don’t have penises.”

[...] As this Court rightly stated in *Barnett*, “[i]f there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion, or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein.” This Court should adhere to that same principle today, and refuse to compel the *R.G. and G.R. Harris Funeral Homes*, or anyone else, to believe that men can be women.”

My deleted retweet was not taken favourably by Durham University’s Philosophy Department either. Following the incidents, I was bullied and harassed by Dr Clare Mac Cumhaill, an academic at the Department. Dr Mac Cumhaill had called me in her office and told me I had no freedom of speech for my views, was illegally in possession of my Bachelor’s grades which she used to belittle me, threatened me with expulsion from the University, falsely accused me of misgendering someone on Twitter, and other equally appalling and unfounded accusations. Prof Sophie Gibb, then Head of Department, was dismissive of my allegations and did not act according to the rules and regulations, and Prof Stephen Mumford, current Head of Department, recently issued a non-apology saying “I am sorry that you feel we fell short in your case.” after a complaint of mine against Dr Mac Cumhaill and the Department was upheld following an investigation by the University’s Student Conduct office.

Such an apology is by no means an apology for various reasons:

- a) An apology is not honest or heartfelt if it’s communicated via a third party. The mere fact that this was sent to the Student Conduct Office which then sent it to me leaves me doubting whether the Philosophy Department understood what they did wrong and why they needed to apologize. It feels as if Stephen Mumford, the Head of Department (HoD) was forced to issue the apology.
- b) There was no reason for Stephen Mumford to mention that “While your complaint was not upheld”, other than out of spite and wanting to stress that the Department did nothing wrong, regardless of the fact that they did not follow procedure and acted against both University and Department rules and regulations, and included a number of lies and inaccuracies in their statement to the complaint and review investigators which I am exposing as I further appeal my case.

This is particularly weird to me as in my culture such a thing would never happen. An apology will never be communicated via a third party but directly to the person to whom

you are apologizing or publicly so that the parties involved have assured each other that the issue is settled and that the apology has been received as intended.

c) “I am sorry that you feel that we fell short in your case”. This is a clear usage of a gaslighting technique and victim blaming. Stephen Mumford shifts the blame from the Department to me, essentially saying that the problem is not that they fell short in my case but my feeling that they fell short in my case. “I am sorry that we fell short in your case” is the appropriate response. To put it bluntly to make this point clear – “I am sorry I raped you” and “I am sorry about how you felt after I raped you” communicate two entirely different things, the latter alleviating any blame from the perpetrator.

d) The letter puts a lot of emphasis on the need of the Department to process things quicker. That was the least of my concerns regarding the harassment and bullying I received and I am surprised the Department is putting so much focus on that. The point of my initial complaint and the review request was about harassment and bullying. Regardless of the fact that this took a lot of time and that the Department allegedly decided to issue an apology to me 12 months ago (which was never communicated and I question whether such a decision was even taken), there are far more important issues with my complaint, some of which are of legal nature.

e) The complaint was not from, or on behalf of, the academic against whom I initiated the complaint. My complaint was primarily against the academic and only secondarily against the Department.

Due to the inadequacy of Durham University and Durham University Philosophy Department to deal with this case adequately and with respect, as well as the horrible and evil behaviour I experienced from Claire Mac Cumhaill, I am now appealing the outcome of my complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator and also seeking legal advice due to the severity of the harassment incident and what this has caused me.

You said in your question that I was “a hated person”. This was indeed true – I faced a lot of hatred on Twitter and other social media, as well as in Durham University. This is also a symptom of depression – feeling that everyone hates you, that everyone wants to hurt you. In my case though it was not just an unjustified feeling of mine, but something true as I was experiencing, on a daily basis, people telling me how much they hated me or expressing hatred in their own vile ways. What for? For a deleted retweet.

There is this quote: ‘If you have haters, you must be doing something right’. This is by no means a rule as it can be easily misapplied and we can think of cases where this is not true. However, for a lot of time before the ‘women don’t have penises’ incident, although I was involved in activist circles and was publicly expressing my views on a variety of topics, I did not have any haters, I had never received a death threat, no one was disagreeing with me, and no one was exposing me publicly. Because of this, I felt I was doing something wrong. The fact that these things weren’t happening did not show that I was right in what I was saying, rather that I had not done enough to get outside my bubble and my comfort circle. You aren’t much of an activist or an opinion writer if you are only active within your own circles – you have to get out.

Once people started hating me, I realized I was doing something right – not that my ideas were right but that I was getting outside my bubble. A good analogy would be that I was previously within fans of my own football team and I felt comfortable and safe being in between them, but

now I had gotten into the playing field, ready to get into an ideological battle with individuals who disagreed with me.

However, we don't necessarily need to think of debate as two sides which are polar opposites of each other. Philosophy is the quest to truth and in a philosophical debate all sides should strive to build onto each other's argument to reach a truth or a consensus.

Being hated is the price one pays for striving to be a public figure or expressing their opinions publicly. If you imagine you are speaking at an audience of a thousand individuals for years on a variety of topics, it is extremely unlikely if not impossible that there will not be something which offends someone or is hurtful to someone. Your job as a public figure is not to make everyone feel comfortable – we are not in kindergarten. Rather, your aim is to spark conversation and debate and give food for thought to individuals as well as the opportunity to challenge you.

Do your own thing. Haters will hate you anyway.

Jacobsen: Looking back, what were the long-term effects of these to your mental and emotional well-being?

Sofocleous: I fell into major depression. The backlash of that single retweet was immense. I would never have thought that I would make national news because I said “women don't have penises”. It was so comical but at the same time it was something that had a huge negative effect on me. I felt that my whole life and my future in journalism and academia was collapsing.

What pushed me into depression was certainly the actions of Andrew Copson and Hannah Timson from Humanists UK, Ry Lo and Sebastián Sánchez-Schilling from Critique, and Anastasia Maseychik from The Bubble. And of course the compliance of Prof Sophie Gibb and Prof Stephen Mumford to me experiencing severe distress, bullying and harassment within their own Department. However, it was Claire Mac Cumhaill's bullying and harassment that pushed me into depression.

No person who has not experienced depression can understand what depression is like. When you experience depression, you feel surrounded by a black fog, losing all connection to yourself, other people, and the world. The world of depression is gray, colourless, with no meaning or hope. You feel immense guilt all the time, as well as that everyone hates you.

Everything takes an incredible amount of effort to be done. Getting out of bed, making a cup of tea, getting in the shower; it's all a struggle. You feel unable to concentrate on or pay attention to anything and focusing on getting things done seems impossible.

The weeks after I was bullied and harassed by Claire Mac Cumhaill in her office, the gas system at my house stopped working. I couldn't even make the effort of informing the landlord or telephoning the gas company. I ended up washing dishes in the shower, which had an electric boiler, and slept feeling the cold of Durham, even though fixing the gas system was just a phone call away. The bathroom light was faulty too and wouldn't turn on. It was a special light, not one which I could find at a supermarket. I showered with my phone light for weeks until I managed to make the effort to inform my landlord that the bathroom light needed to be replaced.

Every time I went out; to the grocery store, to an event, to the library, to a lecture – I felt this fog around me and was unable to pay attention to anyone or anything people were telling me. I felt that people hated me and that everyone knew about the incidents and turned themselves against

me. This is the world of depression, a place which I wouldn't wish my worst enemy to experience.

The incident with Clare Mac Cumhaill took place in October 2018. I only lasted for two more months in Durham and left in early December 2018 due to the fact that I couldn't continue belonging in a Department in which I felt I was hated and marginalized. I continued my studies as normal as I could do work from home. I only returned to Durham in February 2018, to complete a module I had during that term, and in August 2018, to complete my dissertation.

In September 2019 I contacted Clare, expressing to her how horrible I felt after the meeting we had and how her actions have pushed me into depression. Not only she denied any of my allegations, but she did not even have the slightest courage or decency to apologize for what had happened.

Now, this is very strange to me due to the fact that, in my culture, if someone tells you that you have done something that made them feel horribly bad, you apologize even if you don't feel you have done anything wrong. This is the kindness and respect for fellow human beings that I'm talking about. If you tell me that I did something that hurt you, I will apologize, even if I think that I did nothing wrong or acted with good intentions (as Clare claimed). An individual who does not respond to another's bad emotional situation which she caused is nothing else than wicked.

Nevertheless, I also learned a lot of lessons: People can be vile and evil – some people want to see you suffer and get joy from seeing you suffer. Some people like to experience *schadenfreude* in its most absolute form. There were people that were emailing my University to expel me. How can any human being wish that for another individual? One would have thought that with the development of modern civilization and democracy we would get rid of the animal inside us, but that will never happen.

We will always organize ourselves in tribes and form mobs to attack members of the other tribe. The only thing that has changed is that instead of these happening in the fields with real weapons, it takes place over the Internet with keyboards.

Twitter will be an excellent tool for future historians in understanding the toxicity of human nature.

Also, it was a good coincidence that while I was experiencing depression, I was attending the "Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences" class. Phenomenology is the branch of philosophy that studies subjective experiences of emotions of people. The seminar leader, Dr Benedict Smith, was excellent and the topic particularly interesting and exciting. Some of the classes were about the phenomenology of mental illnesses, one of them on the phenomenology of depression. I researched more and more into the phenomenology of depression as this helped me better understand my condition and also found comfort realizing that other individuals had the potential of understanding what I was feeling. One of the things you will find if you look at narratives of people who have experienced depression is the disappointment and loss of hope due to the feeling that no one is able to understand what depression is like. Indeed, it is not something one can fully describe – that's why we are using these metaphors which are close to what we are feeling (emptiness, black fog, colourless, gray, numb) but can never accurately depict it.

Due to the fact that I became interested in the phenomenology of depression, I chose to complete my dissertation on that particular area and now I'm pursuing a PhD which focuses on the

phenomenology of depression. I would like to take the opportunity to thank those who pushed me into depression because without them I wouldn't be pursuing a PhD in this extremely interesting area of philosophy.

Jacobsen: Some happenings in the interim, too, included the restriction, in some manner, on freedom of expression, as reported by Dan Fisher in "Terror Tactics Triumph, Silence Freedom of Speech at Bristol University." What happened?

Sofocleous: Correct. Because of the incidents following my retweet, the Bristol Free Speech Society had invited me to be a speaker at their panel discussion event in February 2019, in which three panelists would discuss freedom of speech, each having a different approach.

While the event was scheduled to take place, less than a week before the event, Bristol Students' Union contacted the Bristol Free Speech Society informing them that I was disinvited as a speaker saying that I was no longer allowed to be present on the panel amidst 'security concerns'. Bristol SU never said what those security concerns were nor how they were justified. My appearance on the panel was announced weeks before the event but no student society, organization, or individual student had protested against my participation or had called for me to be disinvited.

The Bristol SU was merely succumbing to the global paranoia that currently takes place in universities in which people get de-platformed and disinvited from giving speeches or participating in conferences just because they might offend someone.

It is funny to me how the act of speaking or voicing your opinion can be a 'security concern'. The neo-liberal will immediately reply to this: Yes, but what about Hitler? He was voicing hateful, and obviously wrong, opinions.

The neo-liberal is correct. Hitler was, in fact, voicing deeply hateful and divisive opinions which were wrong beyond doubt. However, if we think that we would get rid of Nazism simply by banning the Nazi party or by fining or putting Hitler and his peers in prison for hate speech we would be very wrong.

We would be very wrong because we would ignore the system through which Nazism arose and developed. No hateful idea appears out of nowhere. We should treat a dangerous and hateful idea like a virus. Now, with the emergence of a global pandemic, the virus analogy is as timely as ever.

Dangerous ideas are viruses. But they cannot be treated in the same way as we treat biological viruses.

One would think that we need to restrict the idea to a certain area in society in a way that it cannot spread through society, as we would do with a biological virus. The thing with viruses is that they are not able to organise themselves in a way which is similar to how human societies organise. A virus can simply be marginalised to a certain part of the body where it affects healthy cells at a minimum level, and subsequently be exterminated. The viruses themselves are not going to organise and fight back to the healthy part of the body.

Think about how the majority of countries deal with the coronavirus. They impose a lockdown, and citizens in those countries face legal consequences if they do not isolate themselves at home. In order for a biological virus to be fought, people need to be isolated so that the virus does not spread and those who have the virus are strictly isolated so that they do not spread it onto others.

Take the island of Spinalonga in Greece, for example. Spinalonga served as a leper colony. People with leprosy were sent there to be treated and to not infect the healthy population of Greece. The illness is restricted within a geographical area and is controlled.

However, we cannot do the same with a social virus. If you decide to marginalize or isolate individuals who follow a hateful ideology, those individuals still have the opportunity to fight back against ideologically healthy individuals. The fact that YouTube or Facebook bans individuals with unscientific or hateful ideas may restrict their ideas from spreading, but it does nothing to prevent those ideologies from emerging through other parts of society or in real life. White supremacists and fascists will still find ways to organize themselves and infiltrate society.

What is important to note here is that by attempting to punish individuals or making an ideology illegal, we are not reaching the root of the problem. It is as if we discover that a particular disease stems from unhealthy practices (eating certain kinds of animals, in the COVID-19 case) and yet we continue those practices. We need not simply try to eliminate coronavirus cases or find a vaccine, but to examine why and how the virus emerged in the first place, and once we identify the reason(s), we fight so that we create a society which does not have those kinds of threats.

In a similar manner, a hateful and divisive ideology is part of the system in which it exists. It comes from how children are educated, from biased history books, from false family narratives, from the agenda of political parties. If we want to kill a beast we must find it in its lair and not in the wild.

With a social virus, the antibodies can be developed beforehand through education. Education is for social viruses what a vaccine is for biological viruses. If enough individuals are taught logic, rational thinking, how to respect other people, how to argue with others, how to be kind toward each other, how to value human life and show admiration toward anything alive, including nature, then society will develop 'herd immunity' toward any hateful or divisive ideas.

So, with the above thoughts in mind, I decided to attend the scheduled event of Bristol Free Speech Society as an audience member. The event organizers were planning on holding the event without me as a panel member. However, as soon as some members of the audience realized that I was present, they called for me to appear on the panel.

The President of the Bristol Free Speech Society, listening to people's demands, asked whether there is anyone from the audience who objected to me being on the panel.

No even one person from an audience of 200 people had any objection in me being present on the panel. All committee members of the Society favoured me being on the panel, as well as the other panel members. As responsible adults who can take matters into their own hands, people showed their power and decided that there was no risk associated with me being on the panel.

Bristol SU had acted in a patronizing manner, treating its own students like children who have the need to be disciplined and do not know to judge for themselves whether they want to listen to certain views or not.

The event went on as normal and everyone treated each other with respect and kindness, as human beings do when they grow up in a civil environment in which they learn to challenge and not cancel each other's ideas. Universities and Student Unions so often succumb to the tiny minority of students who think they have the right to dictate what is discussed in a public forum and have the privilege to feel offended by little and unimportant things.

Being de-platformed from an event on free speech is the absolute example of the current state of universities in the UK. You can't get more ironic than that.

Jacobsen: Following from the previous question, why were you considered a security risk within the confines of the event? This may relate to legitimate reasons of uncivil, violent protests from the left or the right, or from illegitimate reasons for the perception of words as violence when done in a controlled panel setting in which the topic, the speakers, and the time and place are known well ahead of time, i.e., if you don't like it, then don't go to it.

Sofocleous: It is everyone's right to protest against the appearance of any individual who has been invited to speak at any institution, private or public. What individuals cannot do is restrict that individual from speaking or trying to 'de-platform' them.

This is the beauty of being a citizen of a democratic country. You have the right to listen to all kinds of opinions and views, challenge them, ridicule them, follow them, unfollow them, without any one forcing you to believe one thing or another. When a dangerous idea appears, you challenge it and attack it publicly with reason and evidence and attack it to its core.

The fact that people from all over the political spectrum might respond to certain people speaking with violence is a huge problem. We have witnessed people entering lecture rooms or conference venues and disrupting an otherwise peaceful talk. If they disagree with what the speaker is saying, they can sit in a civil manner amongst the audience, take notes, form their questions, and then challenge the speaker during the Q&A and demonstrate in front of everyone why the speaker is so obviously wrong.

We must not succumb to people who use violence as their form of protest in these circumstances. Any historical period in which ideas were silenced or censored is a dark period. We should not let that happen again.

There were no legitimate reasons for uncivil or violent protests to take place due to me participating in the panel.

I am not a criminal, I have done nothing to justify such an abhorrent behaviour by the Bristol SU, and their stance only adds to confirming the already troubled state of free speech in UK universities.

And if there were legitimate reasons for uncivil or violent protests, this is not something that should concern the panel members, but this is the Bristol SU's problem. If someone is offended because I speak my views on freedom of speech, then they might consider isolating themselves at home and not accessing social media because they are the kind of people that will get offended by anything. And not only they will get offended by anything but they will tell you to stop talking because they are offended.

If Bristol SU was worried that there would be protests at the event, then they should have given themselves enough time to assure police presence at the event. They had not cited security concerns until the last minute which puts their motives and aims into question.

There were never any legitimate reasons for there being any protests at the event and Bristol SU's reaction was wholly unjustifiable.

Jacobsen: David Verry in "[Banned speaker joins panel to speak at Bristol free speech event](#)" stated, "Sofocleous complaining that the 'authoritarian' SU had 'de-platformed'...SU had asked for a delay." Reading this reportage by Verry, the language of

“delay” seems too downplayed and “authoritarian” seems overplayed. With some time to reflect on the event, what seems like the correct orientation for the interpretation of the events’ proceedings?

Sofocleous: There was no reason for the SU to ask for the event to be delayed. The fact that they waited until the last minute to ask for the delay shows that they were ill-intentioned and not interested in providing a space in which ideas and views could be presented and challenged, but rather they wanted to present the event as a threat to everyone involved and to the University.

Bristol SU did, in fact, act in an authoritarian and patronizing manner. Students at the University of Bristol, one of the best universities in the country, are bright enough to decide for themselves whether they want to attend an event or not and whether they want to follow an idea they listen to or not.

As I told you earlier, there were no protests at the event, or any disruption caused by any student. This is what happens when responsible, civil, and kind adults decide to discuss an issue. They will respect the other’s opinion and will challenge it publicly. They won’t be scared of the idea or try to marginalize it. As I supported, marginalizing ideas or isolating individuals who hold them is not conducive to battling those ideas and making them disappear from society.

Let’s finally get this straight: You will never get everyone to agree with you. So the best thing you can do is learn to argue and debate. Violence is not the answer.

We talked before about the individuals who will read the tweet – “Women’ don’t have penises” – while others will skim the article, and fewer will read the entire set of the arguments into the view for you, including on Keingenderism. Lucy Connolly in UNILAD, in an article entitled “Student Who Said ‘Women Don’t Have Penises’ Was Barred From Free Speech Debate,” recounted the statement by the Bristol Free Speech Society:

We are saddened to inform you that due to Student Union bureaucracy we have been forced to cancel the invitation we extended to Angelos Sofocleous to be on our panel discussion on free speech. We have given the SU plenty of notice for this event. But they felt it proper to cancel his attendance in the last minute, citing “security concerns”. For context, Angelos is a full time student at Durham University who lives amongst students on campus. We leave it to the public to reach their own conclusions with regards to the SU’s intentions.

Jacobsen: Taking a generous view, what were the positive intentions of the SU and the Bristol Free Speech Society? I state a “generous view” because I would assume individuals within the BFSS or the SU would argue for good intentions or working for the greater good insofar as they deem it, see it.

Sofocleous: The Bristol Free Speech Society, being a student society which is affiliated to the Bristol Students’ Union, is bound to follow certain rules and regulations of the SU. Societies in most UK universities must submit a speakers’ list to their SU for approval when they are hosting a guest speaker. This is also what the Bristol Free Speech Society had done on this occasion. Because of my retweet, Bristol SU decided that I was a security threat and called for my de-platforming and for the event to be postponed.

Bristol Free Speech Society acted in accordance with the SU’s rules and regulations. Me being amongst the audience members was not something that went against the rules and regulations, nor my eventual participation on the panel. SUs cannot decide for their students. If more than

200 students decided that they wanted to see me on the panel, then Bristol SU saying no to that would be nothing else than patronizing and disrespectful to its own students.

Bristol SU wanted to obviously avoid any protests taking place at the event and within its premises. They also wanted to protect their students from supposedly dangerous ideas.

Nevertheless, I fail to see the relation between words and violence. Certainly, people might call for violence with their words, and that's a crime. But, as I said earlier, any comments that are misrepresentative or derogatory toward certain groups cannot be dealt with simply by censoring or de-platforming. When someone utters deeply xenophobic or racist insults this is just the result of an ill political, educational, societal, family system. If we want to change the situation, we need to attack the system, not merely the individual who is a victim of the system.

SUs and Universities should be champions of free speech, not the ones who will suppress it.

Obviously, in their terms, they were acting in good intention and protecting the greater good. However, this behaviour is no different from the behaviour of religious fundamentalists who send death threats to people or authoritarian regimes who get rid of their opponents.

Religious fundamentalists and authoritarian regimes, too, act in good intentions, in their terms, and say that they protect the greater good.

However, I fail to see how any individual or organization which de-platforms or censors anyone can act for the greater good. This is not to say that they are evil – to say that would be a false dichotomy. They are just not acting for the greater good. Period.

Jacobsen: What were the negative consequences of the aforementioned “positive intentions”? I ask because this goes back to the old aphorism on good intentions leading to bad consequences.

Sofocleous: As I said, I don't think these individuals or organizations are evil or they want to hurt people with their censorship. But what they are doing goes against any notion of democracy and freedom. It doesn't have to be about intentions – because they have neither good nor bad intentions.

They just want to satisfy the tiny minority of students who might get offended. But, of course, it is impossible to find a topic which won't insult or offend someone. Israel-Palestine, global warming, veganism, colonialism, capitalism, communism, transgender issues, homosexuality – it's impossible to pick a topic in each of these that won't offend someone. Does this mean we have to stop arguing in order to not hurt people's feelings? No.

Dangerous ideas exist in society and we must come to know about them. That's the only way we are going to confront them. Because if these ideas exist and emerge from underground we will not be ready to battle them. Let's face them, challenge them, and eradicate them while there is still time.

The bad consequences of Bristol SU's actions is that they are appeasing a student generation which has learned that it has the right to determine which ideas others can and cannot hear. This generation also thinks that it has the right to never feel uncomfortable or even slightly distressed, or be protected from ideas they do not like. Universities should mirror society – but the way universities are currently managed and operated only present an elite and privileged form of society, which differs substantially from how the real world operates or functions.

Jacobsen: The tweet became the main point of focus for much of the reportage over the last while now, even for stuff on the free speech event, or as if a super-dangerous conspiratorial secret plot to have you – a surreptitious tweeter and panel participant. This is in spite of other interesting writing and news on Mars colonization, clarification in The Spectator on the free speech campus event, or running for Communications Officer in the University of York GSA, etc. You're a busy person with an intellectual life insofar as I knew and know you. In other words, the idea of 'opinions being expressed on Twitter.' Your views tend to come in essays, interviews, and articles, not tweets. The tweet may be offensive to some, but not all. That's the main point. If individuals wanted to review the personal opinions of yours, they can review some of the articles relevant to the subject matter deemed important by them. As far as I can tell, this was not done by either the SU or the BFSS. Any advice of reading your views before concluding on your moral worth based on one sentence from an old tweet?

Sofocleous: I said earlier how I thought Twitter will be valuable for future historians. The modern world has become incredibly fast-paced. Speed-read a book. Form your opinion about someone's views in 240 characters or less. Double-speed your podcast. Digest your daily news in 5 minutes. Get notifications about every email, every Facebook notification, every Twitter mention, every Instagram like – it's become incredibly exhausting and we cannot keep up with it.

The world has been divided into good and bad people, everyone you don't agree with is a fascist and everyone calls each other names or derogatory terms all the time. We have become extremely polarised and yet we feel that we need to belong somewhere and adjust to whatever our ideology dictates. We were never as individualistic as we are now, in the history of humankind. Yet, we have lost ourselves. Unfortunately, this comes at a cost of being unable to have a civil discussion with another human being

Let's take the time and get to know others, have a discussion with them about their views, their opinions, their background, their upbringing, their ideas, their dreams about life. We will find that we share more than what divides us.

Let's not conclude one's moral worth in a single tweet – we can do much better than that!

Jacobsen: What's next?

Sofocleous: That we have to not conclude someone's moral worth from a sentence they uttered does not mean that we should not strive for justice to be served to those who, having evil intentions, wanted to harm us.

For this reason, I am continuing my appeal to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator against the University of Durham and specifically Dr Clare Mac Cumhaill for her harassment and bullying, and Prof Sophie Gibb and Prof Stephen Mumford for being complicit to harassment and bullying and for doing absolutely nothing to correct Clare's behaviour.

I will also be taking legal action.

Other than that, I am continuing my PhD in Philosophy at the University of York, focusing on the phenomenology of depression. Alongside, among other things, I am involved in some publications (Nouse, Secular Nation, The Definite Article), I am active within the Cypriot reconciliation movement, and doing research on a paper and a book review which I'm writing.

Cases of Abuse and Cults – William Branham

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 12, 2020

Updated May 27, 2020.

The Roman Catholic Church's sexual abuse scandal continues apace and reflects a common trend in churches around the world. There are many facets of this to consider, including cults and fringe religious movements or groups, as this happens in and out of the communities of worship and the cults while the communities of worship and the cults provide a formalized structure for this.

Individuals who may not hear about the abuse in the church can be as upstanding citizens, and as moral individuals within some universal conceptualization of morality, as possible; however, other facets remain important for consideration in the context of the abuse of individuals within the church, whether physical abuse or psychological abuse, or sexual abuse. As we can note with some church members, they may state, "But I never heard about it." One reason is the abuse did not happen at all. Another is some have not seen it because of the high costs to the victim, the culture of denial, and the complicity of the community in protecting the prominent men. This has happened in religious and secular communities. However, we see this more in the religious communities with an assumed divine mandate in support of the higher authority endowed upon the men. It can create some questions around theology.

If trends exist in theology, and if outcomes exist in people coming out of the theology in several churches and around the world independently, then some scrutiny is deserved, rather than necessarily confirming as a diagnosis. However, there appear to be confirmed cases in some churches around the world regarding The Message theology. From Canada to the rest of the world with over 2,000,000 adherents to this day, people after the Western world collapsed due to a second world war wanted answers. Preachers came in to fill the void. The theology of the late purported Prophet William Branham (1909-1965) was one response. A man who arose in the midst of the post-WWII Healing Revival Movement with several prominent figures proclaiming, by themselves, 'faith healer' status within a movement continuing to this day with televangelism and the Charismatic movement. Anything in association with Branham should be taken with suspicion and scrutiny, especially with historical cases of abuse in churches, including [Cloverdale](#), [Phoenix](#), [Colonia Dignidad](#), [Zimbabwe](#), or the cult compound in [Prescott](#) (click name for hyperlink).

There can be a man considered near to or equal to Jesus Christ as a messenger of the Lord of Lords through The Message, i.e., the late Mr. William Branham providing theological – his own – buttresses for the abuse in the churches. To quote Mr. Branham, "Let her daughter stay out all night and come in the next morning with her make-up all over her face and her hair twisted sideways, out drunk somewhere. You know what she would do? She would teach her a lesson with a barrel slat. That's right." Another time, "And I've see them laying out on the beaches half naked before man stretching themselves out there, say they get a sun-tanning. Brother, I — I may not live. But if God lets me live and keep my right mind, if one of mine does it, she'll get a sun-tanning. It'll be Mr. Branham's son with a barrel slat behind her. She'll be tanned all right. She'll know where it come from too. Yes, sir." In this, individual churches of The Message may operate independently. However, the main point is an overarching theology called The Message.

In this theology, this may influence some of the men in the private of the home or church, where the victims, if in a particular home or church, stay quiet. The Casting Pearls Project, devoted to abuse survivors coming out of The Message, run by Jennifer Hamilton gathers stories and quotes. From the Casting Pearls Project, we have a statement from Careyann Z.:

My father came from an abusive family. Through becoming a “Message” minister and missionary, he found a purpose and a way to feel accepted. He believed his interpretation or revelation of the “Message” would lead the bride into the rapture. My mother came from a strict Roman Catholic family. When my parents met, my father told my mother, “God told me you’re my wife.” My mother said it felt like a supernatural presence overtook her when my father asked her to marry him which forced her to marry him against her will. A week and a half later, they were married. My father was a very good manipulator. There were numerous healings that took place in my father’s ministry, and some of the things he prophesied took place. I chalk those up to luck. There were also many things that did not come to pass. Fear of God’s wrath effectively controlled his entire family and drove us to do everything he wished. When we went against his wishes, he would prophesy to us, staring deeply into our eyes as his countenance changed and his entire body shook. My father treated my mother like an object, and she just took it faithfully, helping him in all his businesses like a good slave. Once when she was 9 months pregnant and nauseous, she was up on a ladder painting a house. When she climbed down due to the nausea, he yelled at her to get back up on the ladder and finish painting. Whenever she questioned him or he disagreed with something she did, my father would speak in tongues and prophesy against her saying, “This is God speaking,” or “God is going to strike you dead.”

Another from Christine H.:

I married at a very young age (barely 17). It was expected that we marry young and not risk making “mistakes” before marriage. I went from being in a very controlling home, to being married and becoming a submissive wife. I was always raised with the idea that a man was to have the say in the home and that my place was to make him happy (in my mind, at all costs). This wasn’t how my childhood home worked, but it was what I was taught. I already had “pleaser” type of personality. This came from trying to please everyone in hopes of them being proud of me, and the dire need to be good enough. Both sides of the family were very controlling; my family would try to control what I wore and what I did even as a married woman. I never dreamed my life would turn out the way it did. It wasn’t long before the stress of life grabbed our young home, and I found myself in an abusive marriage. After almost 11 years and two children, we ended in a divorce. I felt destroyed, knowing I was committing the forbidden sin. Once again, more hurt and abuse by people that were supposed to love me the most. The pain felt unbearable. Why was I so unlovable? Why could people physically and mentally hurt me, knowing they were causing me pain, but still say they loved me?

The spiral began. My family could only see that their daughter was now divorced and how that was going to look to everyone in the “Message”. I was told I had no rights, but no one wanted to know my story.

Is the statement about barrel slats unquestioned? Why use this language and metaphor? If one can unquestioningly endorse statements of physical abuse with a barrel slat, then this raises questions about actions towards women following from it, as this man, within The Message, is considered a Prophet. At the same time, in The Message, women are considered of the devil.

Branham is considered the Prophet of God. Who is a follower of The Message to question a Voice of God, especially a woman who is of the devil, anyhow? Either Branham was ordinary or not, whether ordinary made prophet of God to become extraordinary or ordinary and a liar about professed prophet status. Even with ignoring these claims about divinity or divine representation of He on High, there can be explicit statements, by the raised standards of today, of sexist statements by Branham, and behaviours within the churches.

Those statements belying particular attitudes with the views reflective of a general philosophy in regards to the roles of men and the roles of women within the “The Message” movement theology and the orientation of general subservience to men alongside a culture of silence. Do not take this from me, take this from an individual with extensive experience with former women members of “The Message,” Hamilton, who I conducted an interview with former member and author John Collins in an educational series where he invited Hamilton into the session, said abuse is normalized in the church. Therefore, this should qualify as a destructive cult.

For those with further interest in researching cults, I would strongly recommend the late Margaret Singer, and Rick Alan Ross, Steven Hassan, and Robert Jay Lifton. All four have been integral to helping hundreds of thousands of people around the continent, and probably the world, in working to combat destructive cults, which remain the main issue or problem now. Collins explained the general context in which the leadership, the pastor even, can further victimize a mother who has been abused by a husband (including the husband abusing the children). The mother was shamed to be in submission to the husband, as per their interpretations of supposedly sacred scripture.

Collins said, “Victims are pressured into keeping silent about abuse. As a result, many members of the group are unaware that sexual abuse exists. Worse, some people that are aware of the abuse have become accustomed to it and view the abuse is ‘normal.’ Some message followers rarely speak up against sexual abuse within the church because they are conditioned to keep silent. In many cases, there seems to be an unspoken rule that ‘if you speak about the problem, then you are the problem.’”

All the while this happens decades after the death of Branham in 1965. We continue to see the admonishments. The thou shalts and thou shalt nots as interpreted of the scriptures for “The Message.” In this case, the message becomes a message of denial of abuse of women’s and children’s bodies and subjugation of the wife to the headship of the husband. Collins described how the culture of abuse can create a situation in which the abused individuals remain accustomed, engendered, to the abuse culture. In the family, this can mean more of the normalization of the abuse in a cult setting with aberrant worship, doctrine, and leadership with destructive consequences under the guise of Christian theology, ethics, and norms. Many Christians would be appalled, probably. Collins only knew of a few situations in which the law enforcement agencies became actively involved in these cases of abuse.

“Typically, one of three scenarios happen when sexual abuse occurs. Unfortunately, more often than not, the victim of rape or sexual assault is afraid to speak up and the abuse is never mentioned to anyone in church authority. The second scenario is that the victim does speak to their pastor or church leader, but the pastor ‘handles’ the situation by either admonishing the abuser privately or dismissing the situation all together,” Hamilton stated, “The third scenario is the less common of the three, but the pastor might bring the offender before the congregation to reprimand them openly. In both instances of speaking out, the victim is almost always shamed

and found at some fault. For sexual abuse towards girls and women, teachings of WMB place blame on the female body for being seductive and therefore a temptation.”

Indeed, as Hamilton further explained, they distrust the secular systems of jurisprudence and social services. She explained:

...when sexually abused members do speak out, the leader dictates complete control of the situation without reporting it to the local authorities. 1 Corinth 6:1-2 is most often used to justify this: “Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest laws courts?” Message pastors have no theological or counseling education and erroneously fail to understand that this passage is about settling civil cases, not criminal ones. In a criminal case, such as physical or sexual abuse, the state opposes the perpetrator in court, not the victim.

Often, cases do not go to the court or to a sufficient authority to deal with these issues. Even if a crime is known to be committed and a charge would be appropriate, and in the case of real consequences for the perpetrator, the punishment for the “rapists and sexual assaulters [are] rarely appropriate for their actions.” Some of these conversations can be seen with some commentary of Nathan J. Robinson from Current Affairs around Joe Biden in a larger sociopolitical context about the Democrats and in extensive commentary about President Donald J. Trump in the examination of the claimants with substantive stories of sexual abuse and rape by the sitting president of the United States of America.

Managing Editor, Sarah Mills, of Uncommon Ground Media (and Min Grob) in “Coercive control activist: ‘Sally Challen case is about more than murder’” wrote on a similar phenomenon of coercive control as an aspect of manipulation through emotional abuse. Another relevant aspect of this cultural phenomenon of cults. Someone in non-normal, aberrant circumstances, where murder became a mind-set induced by coercive control in the case of Challen. A woman who murdered, but who killed someone intentionally with a long background of abuse. In another case from the same outlet, Beatrice Louis or Linda Louis, Business Editor, spoke articulately a couple of years ago about the proposition of “Enforced Monogamy” in the article entitled “What Does Jordan Peterson’s Enforced Monogamy Actually Look Like?” Short answer: “not good”; long answer: “also, not great,” Louis astutely picked up on the ad hoc manner in which Peterson covers a behind connected to him. Louis highlights this statement, “Of much more interest is the preceding paragraph which is reported as, ‘violent attacks are what happens when men do not have partners, Mr. Peterson says, and society needs to work to make sure those men are married.’”

Louis went on to ask about the factors needing change for incels to stop being incels. To a New Mythologist in Peterson, as I call them, mirroring the New Atheist, formulation of loose, ill-considered philosophizing, Louis nailed the point in a form of a question, a circumlocution punctuated by a question mark, as the surrounding contextualization for this crowd comes in the mantra of “personal responsibility” without nary a notion of the “personal” part in matters of crucial concern: underground, online, misogynist culture with derivative manifestations in the larger sociocultural structure. Society retains a deep interest in the men becoming married. That’s the claim and argument in one. In having this, not the men, but the society or factors external to the individual should hold responsibility for the men, perhaps, the small group of

online men who may struggle with heterosexual relations and shifting of norms in some societies towards pragmatic egalitarian norms should focus on individual change. When one claims this, then the double, loose, ill-considered meaning or ad hoc reasoning can mean this all along, while, in fact, the [fill-in-the-blank] was intentionally placed with a surrounding quota of partial truths so as to lead the ‘stallions’ to water. When the cowboy-shepherd is shown to be naked, he meant the more positive egalitarian notion all along. Implication: How could you be so dishonest and stupid to not get the message the whole time? Und so weiter. That’s on a form of a marriage built to industrial efficiency for the subjugation of women and children to the fathers in destructive cult cultures reflected around the world in hundreds of thousands of people’s lives under “The Message” theology.

Mills’ and Grobs’ articulation of some of the emotional and psychological abuse is relevant here too. I love this statement from their article:

Abusive, controlling partners initially shower a potential target with intense flattery designed to seduce them. This is referred to as ‘love bombing,’ a tactic also employed by predatory organisations—like cults—in order to persuade their targets to let their guard down through positive emotional feedback: high self-esteem, a sense of being loved, and belonging. This initial period of idealisation succeeds in forging an intense bond with the abuser, a bond that will later be used against the victim, who will always seek to return to this state, or emotional high, following periods of cruelty.

Exactly, this becomes the basis for the abusive destructive cult tactics one can find in the world created in the post-WWII Healing Revival Movement of William Marrion Branham and others. As we see in the world of coercive control abuse tactics, or in the idealization of a state of nature with God, man, woman, and children, where the man is the head of the household and the woman exists below the man in service of husband and in devotion to the caretaking of the children and the maintenance of the home. God loves you. He is there for you, except during coercive control, during the abuse, after the scars heal while the mind reels, and still while his representative authority in the church shames you. If you come forward, the overwhelming response is a claim as a liar. Some of the most substantial research on rape, as an extreme form of violence against women, represents 8% of the cases as unfounded; thus, the default should be sensitivity and full consideration with the weight of the claims and, as well, the consideration of the claim of, in this instance, rape as highly probable rather than not, based on the statistical evidence gathered by the FBI and the Home Office of the UK – as far as I know, independently.

Hamilton said, “In the cases of the abuser being the pastor or in leadership, the victims are likely labelled liars and disregarded. Abusers in the Message are more protected than their victims through the forced silence. The Message teaches that if the rapist or assaulter confesses, their sin is ‘placed under the blood of Jesus,’ making them as ‘blameless’ as if the crime literally had never happened. Therefore, anyone who speaks about it is shamed for bringing that sin ‘back out from under the blood.’” There is explicit theological backing for these attitudes and behaviours as interpreted within “The Message.” Whether one looks at the more insider knowledge of Hamilton and Collins, or the collegial journalism on coercive control (a classic tactic of cults) and critical commentary of clumsy outmoded thoughts on enforced monogamy, Canadian society, and most other societies know better and, thus, should do better than permit open sanction of such institutional status within borders and cultures, as there have been extreme cases at Cloverdale, Phoenix, Colonia Dignidad, Zimbabwe, or the cult compound in Prescott. All functioning independently while under the common theological banner of The Message. Given

the history and theology, these seem like plausible hypotheses about the organizations. Is there abuse near you? Are there considerations of trying to get out of community without community reprisal? There is help if you need it. There are the authorities – the police, the secret service agencies, the safe houses, the Casting Pearls Project, or other initiatives devoted to the safety of women (and men) who may be experiencing abuse – who can help you.

To the last question from the interview with Hamilton and Collins, I leave this to them prefaced by the original questions:

Jacobsen: *For those who have not faced justice, how can they face it?*

Hamilton: *Time unfortunately impedes most abusers from facing the justice they deserve. Victims that are now speaking out about the abuse are sometimes unfortunately past their state's statute of limitations. After leaving the cult, there is a processing period for de-programming and realizing that the abuse had been normalized and that justice was not served. No matter the length of time, victims can contact their local police station or Salvation Army for resources and advocates.*

Collins: *The only way justice can be served is through education and accountability. Members of any church – cult or not – must hold elders of the church to an acceptable standard of accountability. Leaders of church bodies must be trained in how to respond to abuse, when to report abuse, and how to properly warn members of their church when another member has abusive tendencies. As the proverbial “shepherd of the flock”, they must be held accountable to provide protection for their congregation.*

At the same time, members of the church must be educated to recognize signs of abuse and recognize abuse of power. This becomes problematic for leaders, however, in the case of a destructive cult. In all cases where members are trained to recognize abuse of power, those same members become former members.

Conversation with Dan Fisher (Editor-in-Chief, Uncommon Ground Media) on Humanist Materialism

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 13, 2020

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: We both harbour an affinity for the humanist vision, as seen in the Amsterdam Declaration and in the, probably, 10 or more other declarations and statements devoted to variations of Humanism. In particular, you have a focus on Humanism tied to the philosophical position of Materialism. We live in a material world, or universe of matter and energy. We evolved as a social species. So, we matter to one another as evolved, complex structures with an awareness of social and emotional needs. We are matter, as part of a material order. Bring them together, we have Humanist Materialism. Is this the basic idea?

Dan Fisher: In a sense, yes. Secular Humanism has always had a focus on the material world as opposed to spiritualism. But as we have seen with Humanists UK being captured by the mythology of gender identity, there is room to grow on this matter.

I have always advocated that reason and compassion need each other – they are useless alone. With Humanist Materialism we can forge the two together inseparably. Never forgetting the realities of the world we live in, never forgetting the value of life.

It is also a response to the ‘Historical Materialism’ of Marxists. Whether or not it was intended by Marx himself, adherents of his philosophy have demonstrated time and time again their willingness to kill and otherwise violate human rights in pursuit of their goals.

Since Marxists have never achieved their desired society, what we are left with is a history of blood spilled in service of an elusive end. I too believe we can build a better world, but not by discarding the very principles we should be fighting for.

Jacobsen: How has a “mythology of gender identity” taken some in the humanist communities? How is this mythos different than more empirical ideas of sex and gender?

Fisher: The science is very clear that there are two sexes, male and female. Intersex conditions affect people who are either genetically male or female. Despite this, intersex conditions as well as normal variations of human physicality have been interpreted as a ‘spectrum’ and this way of thinking is espoused by people including the President of Humanists UK, Professor Alice Roberts. Sex denial has real consequences for both social and medical circumstances and yet is being propagated by people who should know better.

The purpose of this is to support the belief in ‘gender identity’ which is equivalent to a male or female ‘soul’ separate from the body. This is fundamentally sexist and regressive thinking which has been delivered into public institutions without appropriate scrutiny.

Jacobsen: How is Historical Materialism of Marx and modern acolytes working to deny fundamental human rights to other human beings? Things they take for granted and harbour unto themselves while ignoring the denials of said rights for others in a denial of moral truisms, including the Golden Rule.

Fisher: I was recently told by someone I previously respected a great deal that we must sometimes sacrifice individuals to protect ‘the cause’. We have seen organisations of all stripes act to cover up, for example, sexual assault scandals, on the grounds that the good work they do is too important to be tarnished. I would argue that such excuses are in themselves what tarnishes the cause. They make a mockery of what we should be standing for. Marx’s focus on the progress of society as a whole enables this overlooking of the rights of the individual in favour of a focus on a promised future.

Jacobsen: You started a social media presence for this idea. Did you start this philosophy? If so, how? If not, who?

Fisher: Humanist Materialism is the end product of at least half a decade of work on my part. You can see the foundations being laid in my For A New Left series on Uncommon Ground Media. Of course it could never have happened without the inspiration, input and motivation given to me by various philosophers and activists. Two particular wellsprings have been the work of gender critical feminists and the development of the Humanist movement in Africa.

Jacobsen: How can others find out about the For A New Left series?

Fisher: It can all be found on Uncommon Ground Media. Each article is linked in the introduction of that first one. Consider it a starting point for what I hope to include in the eventual book.

Jacobsen: What writers, activists, and others have been integral to For A New Left?

Fisher: Historical inspirations include Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill and Henry George, as well as more radical sources such as Rosa Luxemburg and Emma Goldman.

Many of the writers we have published on Uncommon Ground have also helped me shape my own thoughts – Dr. Em, Jennifer Bilek, Angelos Sofocleous and Emeka Ikpeazu for example. Much of it was developed in conversation with my friends and my fiancée Katie Barker.

Jacobsen: Regardless, why form the online community devoted to it?

Fisher: Although the project is only in its infancy, I wanted to share with people the same hope that they have given me. I want to invite people to contribute their own thoughts to the process and build it from the ground up.

Jacobsen: What are some of the aims and goals of the group for its early stages?

Fisher: One of the first steps will be the publication of a book, drawing from my article series, but also with potential collaboration from other writers. We were planning to organize a conference, but obviously that’s had to be put on hold. In the meantime, then, we want to encourage people to get talking and sharing their own perspectives.

Jacobsen: How will this expand into the future?

Fisher: There is potential to form an organization, if the interest and the enthusiasm is there.

Jacobsen: Will this be an entirely non-profit or for-profit affair?

Fisher: Non-profit, for sure. Uncommon Ground Media is a commercial project, and any book will be produced on a commercial basis, but any organization for Humanist Materialism will be strictly not for profit.

Jacobsen: Who have been some early adopters of this philosophy? Who, in reflection, adhered to this philosophical position the whole time?

Fisher: It's hard to say for sure because there is no formal structure, but we've definitely had interest from many of those describing themselves as 'politically homeless'. We also have interest from people within the British Humanist community who have felt let down by Humanists UK. I'm currently in discussions with a number of key figures I hope to bring on board. As you say, there will be many who have already been on this path independently.

Jacobsen: It is still early. However, what has been some of the feedback to the group, the ideas?

Fisher: Reception has been positive so far. The For A New Left series has prompted some incredible discussions. In particular the article on Metamodernism had a lively response from the philosophy community, much more so than I expected. Meanwhile the economically focused articles were very well received by Basic Income proponents such as Scott Santens.

Jacobsen: What is the summary statement on Metamodernism?

Fisher: A response to the meaninglessness of postmodernism cannot be derived solely from modernism. Metamodernism seeks to address the weaknesses of modernism which allowed postmodernism to take root.

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

Fisher: You're very welcome Scott, it's always a pleasure to talk.

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: Which Future is Fairest and Has Us All?

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 13, 2020

Of the more delightfully positive and ill-considered futures proposed within the technocratic communities with some overlap within the humanist communities comes in the idea of a trans-humanist future and a post-humanist future in which the technological advancements of humanity (“Mankind” seems a little passé) simply run away into the sunset without their lover: human beings, the hyphenations for the “trans-” and the “post-” because of the basis in differential images of technology made sentient and transcending humanity while, in a sense, bringing human beings along for the ride and another in which humanity becomes, in the words of the late Robin Williams, obsolete, human patterns of thought and behaviour aren’t going anywhere. They’re integrated into all possible futures, though some questions arise about the prime focus of the early 21st century.

Why focus on the future with technology so advanced so as to reach the heights of delirious farce and comedy posed as reality? Why fixate on a future of techno-beings and techno-boyfriends and -girlfriends who cater to every whim of the wonderstruck nerd-o-sphere, geek-o-drome, on the long dweeb-a-thon? Why focus on the future at all? Is it all bad simply for the sake of wanting to focus on the future? My proposition: Yes, and no. Yes, we should focus on the future; and no, some of the heights of fancy so as to “space out” on the present conditions of those worse off make a mockery of the utopian orgasmic fantasizing.

Both matter because the science fiction writers of the past, in a sense, wrote the future for themselves as a present (gift and current moment) to us. We live, in some ways, within the wildest fancies of previous writers who thought about the world in terms of the possible and the impossible (to make things interesting) as a proposition of “what could be,” almost as an individual escape from the “what was” of the time. Truly, the spirit of the age is a sense of becoming as if a perpetual adolescent mind with an iron clasp on the mindscape of the culture.

A world in which technology holds the cards and the social environs remains bound to the sensibilities of its youngest members and their dominance of the tech world. Think of the phones, the computers, the laptops, the applications, the gaming consoles, all of the small conveniences as virtues, and as petty (de)vices, to make each day a tad more enjoyable, and trivial. With the technology, we feel as if an inevitable march of progress to some point of convergence. If the world continues to move faster and faster, and if technology is the driver of the “faster and faster,” well, of course, the only possible answer to the question of “What next?” is “faster and faster, until some point of convergence.”

Perhaps, but then again maybe not, it could be different, as we have heard calls of the “End of History” and the ‘return of the Messiah’ before. All for naught, while used to make calls for oughts. Which brings the current incarnation of the transhumanist and the posthumanist visions of the world into glaring and full focus, a proposition of a world with human beings as subsidiary nodes in some vast computational complex or as participants in the recombination of the material constituents of the universe at a local and then a galactic scale at some nth point of progress into the future.

Technology and progressive advancements in the science bringing about the technology become part of the same droning of the technocrats. Have you watched the presentations of the Kurzweils of the world? Are you bored too? It is the same darn thing over and over again. Is this a perpetual claim of inevitability answered and, thus, needing some repeating to the proletariat who vulgar primitives they are require such repetitions, or is it a set of charts with reasonably amorphous claims about the future with thick-enough black markers to draw the trendlines? It pays. That's one thing. But then, there's also the long history built by the science fiction writers of old who built the mental landscape of the micro-obsessives.

Those "micro-obsessives" who constructed the foundational technologies for the world seen today in which our lives have been in many ways transformed for the better, and also for the isolatory effects upon a social species. What effects can we expect from such changes? Shall we boot up, chip in, and forget the troubles for a better television or a new first-person shooter? When caught in a time focus on the future, the items of the forever-evolving present moment and the lessons from history can disappear from us, then we can get into some real trouble. Indeed, the systems of technology may be used for ill-begotten purposes against the ideals of the science fictioners, futurologists.

To miss the present and the past while over-focusing on the future creates a foundation for failure amplified by technic and ahistoricity of the world, though some premises appear true with explicit statement with some further considerations of the matter, human beings as evolved natural objects appear in the world as a natural technology with the capacity for the creation of some technology in a constructed manner rather than a naturalistically evolved manner. All possible human futures derive from the nature drummed into this tribal species with a neocortex, where all constructed rather than evolved technologies will become imprinted with the behavioural and cognitive capacities of the human species and, therefore, make the current here-and-now co-extensive with all possible there-and-thens as a formulation of humanity's patterns flowering indefinitely into the cosmos.

In this consideration of the future of the human species and divisions into different 'kinds' of futures, all functions under the banner of an extended consciousness of humanity apportioned into parts of the future of the universe with a trans-humanism future envisioned as an after-humans future impossible as all futures become human futures in consideration of patterns and unified notions of technology with human patterns of thought and behaviour projected into every possible future. Human beings cannot be obsolete as we cannot be lost in full, only in part, into any possible consideration of the constructed technology timelines and futures over which so much anxiety, hemming, and hawing is had in the world.

Eyewitness Testimony is Unreliable

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 16, 2020

Have you ever watched a television crime show or a movie with extension cross-examination of eyewitnesses to a crime, especially when the music eerily rises and come to a crescendo with a subsequent denouement when a particular factoid is released from the quivering lips, and shaking and salt-eyed face, of the eyewitness in the show or movie? It's touching.

Touching in the emotionally rousing nature of the events, but also in the H.L. Mencken commentary on women's observation of the "touching self-delusion" of men, I apply this in a cross-cultural sense. All around the world. We take eyewitness testimony extremely seriously. However, as the pioneering work of Professor Elizabeth Loftus at the University of California, and others, explain and demonstrate, and as Dr. Neil deGrasse Tyson notes, eyewitness testimony remains one of the worst forms of evidence possible while taken as some of the most serious in cinematic portrayals reflecting a similar assumed authority in the efficacy of the human mind as a data-taking device.

Let's make this perfectly clear, human beings are naturalistic and, therefore, evolved organic beings with capacities, and insofar as human beings have capacities; they have limitations. Those limitations come in the form of the human mind too. The mind as a result of the operations of the brain through time in response to internal processing and external input as interpreted and delivered, in so limited and flawed a manner as, from the senses.

The mind's ability to remember is the source of memory, but our memories, by and large, stink. Psychological Science states, "Memory doesn't record our experiences like a video camera. It creates stories based on those experiences. The stories are sometimes uncannily accurate, sometimes completely fictional, and often a mixture of the two; and they can change to suit the situation... memory can be remarkably accurate or remarkably inaccurate. Without objective evidence, the two are indistinguishable."

As an evolved organ with specific traits and functions, human memory is not a single-input engine. Both in the encoding of memories and in the retrieval of memories; the mind acts with memory as a constructing to encode and reconstructing to retrieve system. Both the cognitive biases in encoding and in the breakdown of memory and the flaws in the reconstruction for a memory amount to a large part of the unreliability of human memory.

Scientific American stated, "The uncritical acceptance of eyewitness accounts may stem from a popular misconception of how memory works... The act of remembering, says eminent memory researcher and psychologist Elizabeth F. Loftus of the University of California, Irvine, is 'more akin to putting puzzle pieces together than retrieving a video recording.' Even questioning by a lawyer can alter the witness's testimony because fragments of the memory may unknowingly be combined with information provided by the questioner, leading to inaccurate recall."

So, these movie portrayals of a functional memory and then leading to some of the dynamics of the popular mythologies around human memory. These need to be blown out of the water. Professor Loftus' research can be an important tool and step in this. Indeed, especially for the most cited woman psychologist ever, and the sacrifices made in professional life by her, we should work harder to support the research pioneered by her. A good start would be changes in

the media and in the landscape of popular portrayals of the apparent validity and reliability of human memory for criminal cases, whether movies or television. Another would be in police, detective, and legal work. Human memory sucks.

Simply put, the human organism is a poor data taking device, including, if not especially, in eyewitness testimony. One could apply this standard to the entire Gospel accounts of the life and times of Jesus Christ (superstar) and other religious traditions reliant upon eyewitness testimony. Indeed, with the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, any decade or more timespan after the events would have to come in alignment with the modern empirical evidence if in consideration of the authority of the biblical accounts – even if ignoring supernaturalist claims in the naturalistic tentative conclusion wrought forth by the modern scientific revolutions. Her research will, eventually, revolutionize biblical criticism and, in turn, theological textual analysis by the nature of human fallibility.

Freethought for the Small Towns: Case Study

Scott Douglas Jacobsen

May 16, 2020

Liberty University in the United States closed down its philosophy department, recently. The Boy Scouts of America filed for bankruptcy over sex abuse lawsuits. “Nones” became part of common academic discourse. Movement atheism rose, failed, has begun to change, to adapt internal pressures, and incorporate wider needs and represents another part of a common trend in the hobby-ing of religion in our societies. Canada comes out no different. The fear discourse towards the formally, institutionally non-religious continues apace and the surrounding magical thinking, gullibility, superstition, pseudoscience, fake medicine, and more, co-exists with us, nonetheless. I note a mutual reinforcement, too. If magic can happen from the pulpit, why not from a local clinic or a home remedy sold on the shelf? It would harbour more a sensibility of humour if not for the tragically awful impacts derived in some domains on so many people’s lives. Liberty University’s replica, in part, can be found in the largest fundamentalist Evangelical Christian university in Canada called Trinity Western University with some controversy in its history and in the formulation of community culture in the Township of Langley, British Columbia, Canada. Those students live in its surrounding Fort Langley environment in reasonable numbers. Some times falsely advertised by Trinity Western University marketing as the Trinity Western University village or town, as if an official designation, as in the YouTube clip entitled “This is Fort Langley – TWU’s university town.” That’s a lie. It’s a National Historic Site.

Small towns all over Canada mirror many of the dynamics, magical thinking, and reliance on false or pseudo-medicines in place of (actual) or efficacious medicine. Among the local churches in the area, (e.g., Fort Langley Evangelical Free Church, Living Waters Church, Fraser Point Church – Meeting Place, St George’s Anglican Church, United Churches of Langley – St. Andrew’s Chapel, Vineyard Christian Fellowship, Fraser Point Church Offices, Jubilee Church, and Fellowship Pacific) different interpretations of the Gospels may be taught, but the community retains its Christian ‘spirit’ – in spite of a scuffed, mind you, rainbow crosswalk one can find the in the town business center – with many of the 100+ local businesses hiring many, many Trinity Western University students. The economy is integrated with the institution, in other words. It’s an expensive private Evangelical Christian university with extensive fees, where students pay international student prices as domestic students. Students need to make their way through education without substantial governmental assistance, somehow. In this context, highly educated and well-to-do fundamentalist Christian culture and a local town converge into a strange admixture. A town with a large number of community organizations including Kwantlen First Nations, Seyem’ Qwantlen Business Group, Fort Langley Youth Rowing Society, Fort Langley Community Rowing Club, Fort Langley Canoe Club, History of Fort Langley, History of the Albion Ferry, The BEST of Fort Langley, Langley Weavers and Spinners Guild, Biodegradeables ~ Organic Recycling, Fort Langley Community Association, Langley Heritage Association, and Fort Langley BIA. Indeed, many towns across the country replicate this with different inputs and similar outcomes.

In its recent history, as a starter example, there has been some predictable commentary flowing in the pens and notifications. One from Derek Bisset exhibited a particularly interesting article entitled “There Are Atheists in the Church” as recent as August 4, 2015. Not necessarily a rare

view, it's more a common sentiment based on the trend line of history and the adaptations for the modern world with Liberal Theology and the tenuous status of some foundational tenets with the continual onslaughts of modern empiricism. This was formulated around a somewhat critical commentary about the welcoming-everyone attitude of the church to the general membership of The United Church of Canada. He stated:

It shouldn't come as much of a surprise that after years of saying "All are welcome in this place" that the result is a range of views within the church about the existence of God, especially as we seem to live in a society becoming ever more secular and inclining to require evidence for what we are willing to believe.

I suppose a space journey through emptiness four and a half hours away at the speed of light should have some bearing in putting early concepts of the Heavens to rest. Now I think we will have to stick with a range of ideas about a God who is here on Earth, interventionist or metaphorical, according to our personal views about what we need as individuals or what is needed to make the world a better place for all.

These amount to intriguing propositions about the reasons in which evolution for the church ideology become necessities within a secularizing/de-churching culture rather than true rebukes. The reason for the theological changes come from the empirical revolutions and educational improvements with the churches harbouring less tenable propositions about the nature of the world. Many propositions some deem outmoded, comical, or equivalent to others requiring fewer personal sacrifices of individual and communal wellbeing. The implication of a rejection of the modern views would be a return to more primitive mental constructs, models of the world. Is the concern the truth or the retaining of members? As it turns out, the "most worrying" development came not from a more reality-based church, but the loss of a member to a rival church. This tells the tale of the tribe.

Indeed, the reasons provided for leaving the local church from the member who left: the hot-wax nature of the beliefs rather than the rigid stone pillar faith. Probably, a rigid faith where men have a defined active role. Women have a defined passive role. God intervenes in the world. Prayer can aid in healing ailments. Homosexuality is a sin. The Bible is the literal truth, God-breathed Word of the Lord. And Jesus rose from the dead after 3 days. And evolution is the work of He down Below. If one wants to move back the civilizational lens in the West several centuries, I suppose one could 'upgrade' or, rather, retrograde the theology and the worldview. Of course, the personality focus for the critical examination of a local United Church of Canada congregation came around some of the beginning of the controversy for Rev. Gretta Vosper. Bisset continued:

When a minister of the United Church of Canada declares herself for atheism in the Church and still retains her position with her own church and a sizeable congregation things appear to be coming to a head. That Gretta Vosper has changed the practicing of religion in her church drastically and has been on a personal speaking crusade to persuade Christians that more change is needed has brought her into conflict with those responsible for allowing her to act as a United Church minister. She may require to be defrocked and no longer allowed to preach her heretical doctrine...

A woman on a "personal speaking crusade to persuade Christians" who has been "brought... into conflict" and "may require to be defrocked and no longer allowed to preach her heretical doctrine." Although, the bias is obvious. The larger, more interesting point is the focus on having

to snuff out dissent and retain membership. It's not about the ideas, except as derivative, inasmuch as it is about the numbers of the followers, the flock, for which the local church is bound to shepherd. This is relatively marginal and isolated talk or idle public conversation within an individual church. Behind the closed doors of home & hearth, and church on Sundays, the discussions, rumours, and insinuation & innuendo will be much the same. Only some retain the gumption to speak in this manner in public. He leaves off a nice skeptical note, "After all, if you can't have a good argument about religious beliefs within the Church, where is there a better place to have it," and deserves kudos for it. In general, though, the undercurrent probably replicates in events with different churches and similar phenomena. Demographic decline and theological liberalization – seen as watering down – concern significant sections of 2/3rds of the population of Canada.

As noted in Issue 48 of the Fort Langley Evangelical Free Church from 2017, they describe an event with The Canadian Scientific and Christian Affiliation. An organization – The Canadian Scientific and Christian Affiliation, akin to the Templeton Foundation, devoted to strange attempts at bridging religion and science. Although, the Templeton Foundation comes with a huge cash prize. That's motivation enough for some. The Canadian Scientific and Christian Affiliation focuses on science and a "life-giving Christian tradition" with a statement of faith (common in Christian organizations throughout the country):

We confess the Triune God affirmed in the Nicene and Apostles' creeds which we accept as brief, faithful statements of Christian doctrine based upon Scripture.

We accept the divine inspiration, trustworthiness and authority of the Bible in matters of faith and conduct.

We believe that in creating and preserving the universe God has endowed it with contingent order and intelligibility, the basis of scientific investigation.

We recognize our responsibility, as stewards of God's creation, to use science and technology for the good of humanity and the whole world.

These four statements of faith spell out the distinctive character of the CSCA, and we uphold them in every activity and publication of the Affiliation.

As implicitly admitted in the "Commission on Creation" of the American Scientific Affiliation taken by The Canadian Scientific and Christian Affiliation for presentation to its national public, some members of the affiliation will adhere to a "Young-Earth (Recent Creation) View," "Old-Earth (Progressive Creation) View," "Theistic Evolution (Continuous Creation, Evolutionary Creation) View," or "Intelligent Design View." There's the problem right there. Only one real game in town, evolution via natural selection. This becomes four wrong views plus one right position with the four incorrect views bad in different ways or to different degrees, i.e., four theological views and one scientific view. In other words, the Canadian Scientific and Christian Affiliation, by its own claims and standards, amounts to a theological affiliation, not a "Scientific" affiliation. It's false advertising if not outright lying by title and content.

Anyway, the Issue 48 newsletter of the Fort Langley Evangelical Free Church presented the event entitled "Science, Religion, & the New Atheism," by Dr. Stephen Snobelen, who is an Associate Professor of the History of Science and Technology Programme at University of King's College, Halifax. This is common too. This is, based on extensive research in "Canadians' and Others' Convictions to Divine Interventionism in the Matters of the Origins and

Evolution,” the trend for years now. (Any commentary considerations for creationism and Intelligent Design can be considered there, as the rest would be repetition.)[1] In short, the only places, or the vast majority of places, to present these ideas are churches and religious institutions. Outside of those, these theological hypotheses posed as scientific aren’t taken seriously or, generally, are seen as a hysterical joke when posed as science rather than theology. Some, like Zak Graham in “Atheism is simply a lack of belief,” get the point published in The Langley Times. That seems like an uncommon stance in the wider community.

As Brad Warner notes in a short confessional post in Fellowship Pacific, he came to the Christian religion in university. It’s a sweet confession, which tells a sociological tale. The personalities are landmarks or guideposts, so largely irrelevant, not the main points in this article. Either someone is indoctrinated into faith or religion with specific thou shalt and thou shalt not before critical thinking becomes a real possibility, or the individuals, typically, attend a Christian or private university and become suffused within a Christian ethos in a vastly dominated-by-Christianity culture in Canadian society with 2/3rds of the general population identifying as Christian. Even in some indications of the counselling professionals in the area, as an individual case study, statements emerge as in Alex Kwee, Ph.D., R.Psych. stating, “A distinctive of my approach lies in the fact that I am a Christian. The practice of psychotherapy is never value-neutral; even the most ostensibly ‘objective’ of counsellors must possess certain irreducible value propositions—even atheism or secular humanism are value systems that cannot be proven ‘right’ one way or another.” Note, he makes Christianity or Christian identity as part of the approach, as I am certain of the same for countless others in the area and around the country. Also, the conflation or dual-linkage between atheism and secular humanism alongside value systems. It’s a quaint proposition and half-false. In the instance of atheism, it does not posit values, but it proposes a lack of belief in gods – not values. (Hence, “half-wrong,” Q.E.D.) Coming from a Christian worldview with the good coming from God, the denial of such can only seem as if this. It’s not. What does propose values? Secular humanism, certainly, proposes values; Christianity asserts values too. Why bring atheist and secular humanism into the equation? Does this come from a pre-emptive defensive posture for the inevitable conflict of professional ethics and the introduction of theological constructs into psychotherapeutic processes with clients? Indeed, the potentially inevitable, seemingly incurable prejudice and bias in practitioners bringing their religious faiths with supernatural structures may bleed into the therapeutic process. Mr. Kwee states:

As a Christian, I contextualize my approach and strategies within a spiritual and faith-affirming framework, which is important for many of the Christian clients with whom I work. I firmly believe that therapy cannot be done in an existential or spiritual vacuum, but that the most effective therapy contextualizes evidence-based techniques to a client’s system of personal meaning to help them to create a life that is rich with meaning and purpose, not just devoid of psychological pain. Because most people are in search of greater meaning and appreciate a more “ultimate” frame of reference, I find that clients of many walks and backgrounds are comfortable working with me even if they do not share my worldview.

One can come as a non-religious person, but one should be wary – as has been commonly reported by prominent secular therapists as Dr. Darrel Ray of Recovering From Religion and the Secular Therapy Project. Furthermore, some of the peer-reviewed research presented on the professional website for Mr. Kwee amounts to assertions of sexual addiction or sex addiction.

This is a pseudoscientific view or a theological assertion, not a psychological construct viewpoint. Take a counselling psychologist, Dr. Lloyd Hawkeye Robertson, in an interview with me entitled “Ask Dr. Robertson 13 — A Hawk’s Eye on Counsellors’ Professional Ethics and Morals,” stated:

When an ideology or religion is used to modify terms like “psychology,” “counselling” or “psychotherapy,” I become wary. For example, how does “Christian Counselling” differ from counselling? Christian counsellors I have talked to define their religion as having certain superior attributes with respect to love and spiritual fulfillment. But a secular counsellor, on finding that a client believed in prayer, for example, might invite the client to pray as part of his or her therapeutic plan. A difference might be that if the prayer does not work to the client’s satisfaction, the secular counsellor might be more willing to explore other alternatives while the Christian counsellor might be more prone engage in self-limiting platitudes such as, “Maybe God does not want this for you.” Counsellors employed by Catholic Family Services are routinely required to sign a statement stating they will respect the Church’s beliefs regarding “the sanctity of life.” This is regularly interpreted to mean that counsellors in their employ may not explore the option of abortion with pregnant clients, and if a client chooses that option, she will do so without the support of her counsellor or therapist. Counsellors from a variety of Christian denominations actively discourage people who are non-heterosexual. A particularly unethical practice is encapsulated in the oxymoron “Conversion Therapy.” Conversion implies a template outside of the individual to which the individual converts. It is, therefore, the opposite of therapy where the client defines his own template. Overall, Christian counselling does not add to the professional practice but is subtractive, limiting the options permitted clients.

The notion of limiting psychology’s ability to increase to individual choice and volition is pervasive...

... Scott, you asked me about professional codes of ethics. Codes of ethics are written by those with the power to do so. Conversion Therapy as practiced by some Christian groups has been ruled unethical. The feminist version has not. I believe that freedom of conscience involves a duty to conduct oneself to a higher ethic, and in my case that ethic involves supporting individual volitional empowerment. Individual volition operates within the constraint that there is a reality outside ourselves and if we stray too far from that reality we will harm ourselves and others. We cannot gain empowerment by feeding a delusion.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)-5 or the DSM-5 rejected sex addiction for inclusion in 2013. There’s no such thing as sex addiction as a formal psychological construct; sex addiction is a theological construct, i.e., a pseudoscientific and worldview construct posed as psychological. This seems like bad science and, thus, leading to the potential for a bad theoretical foundation for praxis, for practice. Could purity culture from Christian doctrine and worldview be influencing this particular academic output? Could these views influence the “meaning and purpose” of those coming to the Kwees of psychotherapy or counselling psychology? It’s an open question; I leave this to clientele, while I intend this as a case study of a larger issue within the therapeutic practice culture. As Dr. Darrel Ray in “Extensive Interview with Dr. Darrel Ray on Secular Therapy and Recovering From Religion” stated:

So, #2 behind the fear of hell are issues around their sexuality and things like, “I know it’s not wrong to masturbate, but I still feel guilty,” “I am a sex addict because I look at porn.” There’s tons of evidence that the most religious people self-identify the most as “sex addicts.” Not to mind, there is no such thing as sex addiction. There’s no way to define it. I have argued with atheists that have been atheists for 20 years who say that they are sex addicts. Help me understand, how did you get that diagnosis? “My mother-in-law diagnosed me” [Laughing]. “I look at porn once or twice a week.” I do not care if you look at porn once or twice an hour. You are still not a sex addict. So, get over that. You may have other issues. You may have some compulsions. You may have some fear of driving the issue. But it almost always comes down to early childhood religious training, as we spoke about earlier. So, people are simply responding to the programming. Even though, they are atheist, secular, agnostic. I do not care what you call yourself. You are still dealing with the programming. Sometimes, you can go an entire lifetime with a guilt, a shame, a fear, rooted in religion.

If you do not believe in the Christian influence on the research and views, please review the articles in the most superficial of ways with articles entitled “Theologically-Informed Education about Masturbation: A Male Sexual Health Perspective,” “Sexual Addiction: Diagnosis and Treatment,” “Sexual Addiction and Christian College Men: Conceptual, Assessment and Treatment Challenges,” “Constructing Addiction from Experience and Context: Peele and Brodsky’s Love and Addiction Revisited,” and even a society entitled Society for the Advancement of Sexual Health (SASH). It’s like this on issue and after issue. Fundamentalist Christian universities and theological beliefs in areas infect towns, attract similarly minded individuals from around the fundamentalist Christian diaspora, and reduce the amount of proper science in professional lives and the critical thinking in the public. People are part of the culture in some framings. Then these connect to academic formalities around pseudoscientific views with societies and groups built around them too, e.g., SASH, as the “Society for the Advancement of Sexual Health (SASH) was founded in 1987 by Patrick Carnes, Richard Santorini and Ed Armstrong. SASH began as a membership organization for people concerned with sexual addiction problems.” [Emphasis added.]

Again, the point isn’t the individuals inasmuch as trends in culture with representative case studies as important for this. In those cases of the Bissets with a marginally skeptical view, it’s not about factual accounts of the world. It is about maintenance of numbers. In the cases of the Kwees, it’s not about factual and empirical all the time, but it’s about selective factual-and-empirical, and buttressed and warped by theological pseudoscience (by the most up-to-date standards of the professional diagnostic and statistical manual for psychologists or the DSM-5 with lack of inclusion on one theological theory of sexual dysfunction in “sex addiction”). It should be noted. In the United States of America under the American Psychological Association, any imposition by an American-trained counselling psychologist can be called out on ethics violations. Slippery language should not be a basis upon which for a tacit claim for circumnavigation of A.4.b. Personal Values of the ethics code for American counsellors, which stipulates, “Counselors are aware of—and avoid imposing—their own values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours. Counsellors respect the diversity of clients, trainees, and research participants and seek training in areas in which they are at risk of imposing their values onto clients, especially when the counsellor’s values are inconsistent with the client’s goals or are discriminatory in nature.” However, this is in Canada. If one sees presentations crossing the line in an explicit manner in a local or national context, one can express appropriate concerns with

formal channels to act on it, whether non-Christians in general or the non-religious in particular. I doubt in this case on some levels, though, as the statements are reasonably carefully worded – and is grounded in psychotherapy as opposed to counselling psychology.

Fort Langley culture follows from the culture of Trinity Western University on a number of qualitative-observational metrics. A university that failed to attain a law school status based on the bias and prejudice stemming from a Community Covenant with statements deemed repeatedly and nearly unequivocally as biased and prejudiced against members of the LGBTI community. They overwhelmingly lost the law school case 7-2 in the Supreme Court of Canada with denial of status as a law school as “reasonable” by the judgment of the Supreme Court of Canada. It was June 15, 2018; the decision where the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in favour of the British Columbia and Ontario law societies in a 7-2 collective decision for Trinity Western University v Law Society of Upper Canada and Law Society of British Columbia v Trinity Western University. Shortly thereafter, they retracted the mandatory nature of the Community Covenant for the students, but, as I have been told, not for staff, faculty, and administrators. A faith needing community legislation appears weaker than one strong enough as written on the heart and lived out in one’s life. Bearing in mind, Christ never wrote anything down on paper. Perhaps, there has been some wisdom in this fact worth retaining in this case. Dissenting views exist on the campus and in the community. One TWU is one LGBTI community group around campus without formal affiliation (“*We are run completely independently from and bare no formal affiliation with Trinity Western University”), though small, for individual students who may be struggling on or around campus. While others outside the formal TWU community, and in the extended fundamentalist Christian community, and taking the idea of “think differently” differently – as in “think the same, as always,” Richard Peachey is as fast as proclaiming the literal Word of God Almighty with homosexuality as an affront to God and fundamentally a sin in His sight. In spite of this, at one time or another, based on Canadian reportage and some names in the current listings, Matthew Wigmore, Bryan Sandberg, and David Evans-Carlson (co-founders of One TWU), and Nate/Nathan Froelich, Kelsey Tiffin, Robynne Healey, and others in the current crop – Kieran Wear, Elisabeth Browning, Queenie Rabanes, and Micah Bron – stand firm against some former mandatory community covenant standards either as supports for themselves or as allies who have been negatively impacted by the Community Covenant. A minority gender and sexual identity is completely healthy and normal. If the theology rejects this, then the theology is at odds with reality, not the students’ sense of themselves, who they love, and their identities, or the science. I agree with them and stand far more with them. When the Community Covenant was dropped as a mandatory requirement for students, many were excited and thrilled. Although, some questions arise about the reaction of excitement and thrill about some who left the university and see the change in the mandatory nature of the Community Covenant.

Why excitement? Why thrill? Aren’t some of these students gone? Wouldn’t this leave the concerns behind them? Aren’t others graduated at this point? Haven’t others already signed and suffered in the past? In short, isn’t it history? Insofar as I can discern, it’s a grounding of common suffering across academic cohorts at Trinity Western University for compassion and empathy for a sense of “no more” and “not to you, too” in the community of the fundamentalist faithful. These students, many of them, went through hell by the attitudes and behaviours reflected in a Community Covenant and selective literalist reading of purported sacred scripture of a larger sex and gender identity majority who, sometimes, treated them with suspicion, pity, or contempt grounded in theology and legislated in the Community Covenant. I feel a similar

sentiment around the denial of same-sex marriage by some fundamentalist Evangelical Christians. The proportional response: I don't believe in heterosexual marriage between a man and a woman for those particular fundamentalist Evangelical Christians. It sounds absurd because the former is outlandish, too.

Anyhow, continuing, why make others experience hell here-and-now in the belief of one's personal near guarantee to hypothetical heaven there-and-then when one's corpse is ash, ice, or six feet under, regardless? Does it matter? That is to ask, if God has a Divine Will and is the source of the Moral Law, the Good, and all in, of, and under Creation, why not let Him deal with it, not you? It's obvious as to the implications here. All this is not due to the Devil, to demonic forces, to non-literalist Christians, to secular humanists, to atheists. This is entirely mundane. It is due to community attitudes and beliefs leading to actions making vulnerable members of the community feel wrong by nature, not of what they believe or their moral character but because, of who they are; that which they cannot change and are born with as human beings with minority sexual and gender identities. That's bigotry. A nativist sensibility for the negative presumption of an individual based on, more or less, inborn characteristics with thin disguises in the form of "don't hate the sinner, hate the sin." Does anyone seriously buy this outside of the informationally, emotionally, and theologically confined and constricted fundamentalist walls where "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"? These are human, all-too-human, follies and foibles wrought forth on the lives of the few by the many in the hallowed halls of the largest Christian university in the country. The relief felt was less for themselves and more for others who would not have to endure as much next time around. I consider freedom of religion, belief, and conscience important for a secular democratic and pluralistic state. Thus, the students may feel healthier in a non-Christian or public university. However, if they choose a Christian university, or if they are pressured into this by parents, community, friends, church, and theology, then they have personal respect to choose, and in making the choice, to me, because, based on the readings, the reactions, and the sensibilities expressed, they're entering hostile territory.

Congratulations for making it this far, but freethought extends into other areas too, of the local culture, as with hundreds of towns in this country, whether colonics/colonhydrotherapy, aromatherapy, chiropractory, acupuncture, reflexology, naturopathy/naturopathic medicine and traditional Chinese medicine, or simply a culture of praying for help with an ailment (which is one overlap with the religious fundamentalist community and the reduced capacity for critical thought). Colonics/colonhydrotherapy is marginally practiced within some of the town in Fort Langley Colonics. Dr. Stephen Barrett, M.D. in "Gastrointestinal Quackery: Colonics, Laxatives, and More" stated rather starkly:

Colonic irrigation, which also can be expensive, has considerable potential for harm. The process can be very uncomfortable, since the presence of the tube can induce severe cramps and pain. If the equipment is not adequately sterilized between treatments, disease germs from one person's large intestine can be transmitted to others. Several outbreaks of serious infections have been reported, including one in which contaminated equipment caused amebiasis in 36 people, 6 of whom died following bowel perforation. Cases of heart failure (from excessive fluid absorption into the bloodstream) and electrolyte imbalance have also been reported. Direct rectal perforation has also been reported. Yet no license or training is required to operate a colonic-irrigation device. In 1985, a California judge ruled that colonic irrigation is an invasive medical procedure that may not be performed by chiropractors and the California Health Department's

Infectious Disease Branch stated: “The practice of colonic irrigation by chiropractors, physical therapists, or physicians should cease. Colonic irrigation can do no good, only harm.” The National Council Against Health Fraud agrees.

In 2009, Dr. Edzard Ernst tabulated the therapeutic claims he found on the Web sites of six “professional organizations of colonic irrigations.” The themes he found included detoxification, normalization [sic] of intestinal function, treatment of inflammatory bowel disease, and weight loss. He also found claims elated to asthma, menstrual irregularities, circulatory disorders, skin problems, and improvements in energy levels. Searching Medline and Embase, he was unable to find a single controlled clinical trial that substantiated [sic] any of these claims.

On aromatherapy, this one is a softball. One can find this in the True Aromatherapy Products and Spa (TAP) store. As William H. London, in an article entitled “Essential Considerations About Aromatherapy” in Skeptical Inquirer, describes the foundations of aromatherapy as follows, “The practice of administering plant-derived essential oils on the skin, via inhalation of vapors, or internally via ingestion for supposed healing power is commonly called aromatherapy. The oils for aromatherapy are described as ‘essential’ to refer to the volatile, aromatic components that some people describe as the ‘essence’ of the plant source, which represents the plant’s ‘life force,’ ‘spirit,’ or soul. Aromatherapy is thus rooted in vitalism...” RationalWiki states:

Like most woo, aromatherapy starts with observable, real effects of smells on humans, and extrapolates and exaggerates into a whole range of treatments from the effective, to the banal, to the outright ridiculous...

... As well as the inherent problematic practice of wasting money on useless medicine and potentially substituting useless concoctions in place of conventional medicine, the essential oils in aromatherapy may be a skin irritant. It is also poorly regulated, as the claims that scents having any beneficial effects are regulated as a cosmetic claim, and it thus does not require FDA approval. Combined with the lack of evidence it really is a waste, but for you, not for those that sell the products. According to Quackwatch, Health Foods Business estimated that the total of aromatherapy products sold through health-food stores was about \$59 million in 1995 and \$105 million in 1996.

To chiropractic, it is widely regarded as a pseudoscience with either no efficacy or negative effects on the patient or the client. Fort Family Chiropractic and Evergreen Chiropractic are the two main businesses devoted to some practice of chiropractic. As Science-Based Medicine in its “Chiropractic” entry states:

Chiropractic was invented by D. D. Palmer, Sep 18, 1895 when he adjusted the spine of a deaf man and allegedly restored his hearing (a claim that is highly implausible based on what we know of anatomy). Based on this one case, Palmer decided that all disease was due to subluxation: 95% to subluxations of the spine and 5% to subluxations of other bones.

The rationale for chiropractic hinges on three postulates:

Bones are out of place

Bony displacements cause nerve interference

Manipulating the spine replaces the bones, removing the nerve interference and allowing Innate (a vitalistic life force) to restore health.

There is no credible evidence to support any of these claims...

...In over a century, chiropractic research has produced no evidence to support the postulates of chiropractic theory and little evidence that chiropractic treatments provide objective benefits. Research on spinal manipulation is inherently difficult, because double blind studies are impossible and even single blind studies are problematic; a placebo response is hard to rule out...

...There is no acceptable evidence that chiropractic can improve the many other health problems it claims to benefit, from colic to asthma. There is no evidence to support the practice of adjusting the spines of newborns in the delivery room or providing repeated lifelong adjustments to maintain health or prevent disease.

Up to half of patients report short-term adverse effects from manipulation, such as increased local or radiating pain; and there is a rare but devastating complication of neck manipulation: it can injure the vertebrobasilar arteries and cause stroke, paralysis, and death. Some chiropractors do not accept the germ theory of disease and only about half of them support immunization.

Acupuncture is another issue. Hardman Acupuncturist & TCM, Integrated Health Clinic, devote themselves, in part, to this. Dr. Steven Novella of Science-Based Medicine in “Acupuncture Doesn’t Work” stated:

...according to the usual standards of medicine, acupuncture does not work.

Let me explain what I mean by that. Clinical research can never prove that an intervention has an effect size of zero. Rather, clinical research assumes the null hypothesis, that the treatment does not work, and the burden of proof lies with demonstrating adequate evidence to reject the null hypothesis. So, when being technical, researchers will conclude that a negative study “fails to reject the null hypothesis.”

Further, negative studies do not demonstrate an effect size of zero, but rather that any possible effect is likely to be smaller than the power of existing research to detect. The greater the number and power of such studies, however, the closer this remaining possible effect size gets to zero. At some point the remaining possible effect becomes clinically insignificant.

In other words, clinical research may not be able to detect the difference between zero effect and a tiny effect, but at some point it becomes irrelevant.

What David and I have convincingly argued, in my opinion, is that after decades of research and more than 3000 trials, acupuncture researchers have failed to reject the null hypothesis, and any remaining possible specific effect from acupuncture is so tiny as to be clinically insignificant.

In layman’s terms, acupuncture does not work – for anything.

This has profound clinical, ethical, scientific, and practical implications. In my opinion humanity should not waste another penny, another moment, another patient – any further

resources on this dead end. We should consider this a lesson learned, cut our losses, and move on.

Many of these practices are swimming in the, or have a foot in the, waters of pseudoscience practiced as if medically or physiologically feasible, but, in matter of fact, remain a drain on the public's purse based on taking advantage of public confidence in medicine in Canada while having given zero benefit while failing to reject the null hypothesis.

Another issue practice is reflexology, as seen in Health Roots & Reflexology. Quackwatch concludes, "Reflexology is based on an absurd theory and has not been demonstrated to influence the course of any illness. Done gently, reflexology is a form of foot massage that may help people relax temporarily. Whether that is worth \$35 to \$100 per session or is more effective than ordinary (noncommercial) foot massage is a matter of individual choice. Claims that reflexology is effective for diagnosing or treating disease should be ignored. Such claims could lead to delay of necessary medical care or to unnecessary medical testing of people who are worried about reflexology findings." Health Roots & Reflexology appears to be one business devoted to thus. As Dr. Harriet Hall in "Modern Reflexology: Still As Bogus As Pre-Modern Reflexology" said, "Reflexology is an alternative medicine system that claims to treat internal organs by pressing on designated spots on the feet and hands; there is no anatomical connection between those organs and those spots. Systematic reviews in 2009 and 2011 found no convincing evidence that reflexology is an effective treatment for any medical condition. Quackwatch and the NCAHF agree that reflexology is a form of massage that may help patients relax and feel better temporarily, but that has no other health benefits. Our own Mark Crislip said, 'The great majority of studies demonstrate reflexology had no effects that could not be replicated by picking fleas off your mate...And it has no anatomic or physiologic justification.'"

A larger concoction of bad science and medicine comes from the Integrated Health Clinic devoted, largely, to naturopathy/naturopathic medicine (based on a large number of naturopaths on staff) and traditional Chinese medicine with manifestations in IV/chelation therapy, neural therapy, detox, hormone balancing & thermography, anthroposophical medicine, LRHT/hyperthermia, Bowen technique, among others. We'll run through those first two, as the references to them are available in the resources, in the manner before. Scott Gavura in "Naturopathy vs. Science: Facts edition" stated:

Naturopaths claim that they practice based on scientific principles. Yet examinations of naturopathic literature, practices and statements suggest a more ambivalent attitude. NDhealthfacts.org neatly illustrates the problem with naturopathy itself: Open antagonism to science-based medicine, and the risk of harm from "integrating" these practices into the practice of medicine. Unfortunately, the trend towards "integrating" naturopathy into medicine is both real and frightening. Because good medicine isn't based on invented facts and pre-scientific beliefs – it must be grounded in science. And naturopathy, despite the claims, is anything but scientific.

The Skeptic's Dictionary stated:

Naturopathy is often, if not always, practiced in combination with other forms of "alternative" health practices. Bastyr University, a leading school of naturopathy since 1978, offers instruction in such things as acupuncture and "spirituality." Much of the advice of naturopaths is sound: exercise, quit smoking, eat lots of fresh fruits and

vegetables, practice good nutrition. Claims that these and practices such as colonic irrigation or coffee enemas “detoxify” the body or enhance the immune system or promote “homeostasis,” “harmony,” “balance,” “vitality,” and the like are exaggerated and not backed up by sound research.

As Dr. David Gorski, as quoted in RationalWiki, stated, “Naturopathy is a cornucopia of almost every quackery you can think of. Be it homeopathy, traditional Chinese medicine, Ayurvedic medicine, applied kinesiology, anthroposophical medicine, reflexology, craniosacral therapy, Bowen Technique, and pretty much any other form of unscientific or prescientific medicine that you can imagine, it’s hard to think of a single form of pseudoscientific medicine and quackery that naturopathy doesn’t embrace or at least tolerate.” The Massachusetts Medical Society stated similar terms, “Naturopathic medical school is not a medical school in anything but the appropriation of the word medical. Naturopathy is not a branch of medicine. It is a combination of nutritional advice, home remedies and discredited treatments... Naturopathic practices are unchanged by research and remain a large assortment of erroneous and potentially dangerous claims mixed with a sprinkling of non-controversial dietary and lifestyle advice.” This is the level of qualifications of most of the practitioners of the IHC or the Integrated Health Clinic.

Now, onto Traditional Chinese Medicine or TCM, or Chinese Medicine or CM, also coming out of the Integrated Health Clinic, RationalWiki notes some of the dangerous, if not disgusting to a North American and Western European palette, ingredients:

CM ingredients can range from common plants, such as dandelion, persimmon, and mint, to weird or even dangerous stuff. Some of the more revolting (from a Western standpoint) things found in TCM include genitals of various animals (including dogs, tigers, seals, oxen, goats, and deer), bear bile (commonly obtained by means of slow, inhumane extraction methods), and (genuine) snake oil... Urine, feces, placenta and other human-derived medicines were traditionally used but some may no longer be in use.

Some of the dangerous ingredients include lead, calomel (mercurous chloride), cinnabar (red mercuric sulfide), asbestos (including asbestiform actinolite, sometimes erroneously called aconite) realgar (arsenic), and birthwort (Aristolochia spp.). Bloodletting is also practiced. Bizarrely, lead oxide, cinnabar, and calomel are said to be good for detoxification. Lead oxide is also supposed to help with ringworms, skin rashes, rosacea, eczema, sores, ulcers, and intestinal parasites, cinnabar allegedly helps you live longer, and asbestos...

Dr. Arthur Grollman, a professor of pharmacological science and medicine at Stony Brook University in New York, in an article entitled “Chinese medicine gains WHO acceptance but it has many critics” is quoted, on the case of TCM or CM acceptance at the World Health Organization, saying, “It will confer legitimacy on unproven therapies and add considerably to the costs of health care... Widespread consumption of Chinese herbals of unknown efficacy and potential toxicity will jeopardize the health of unsuspecting consumers worldwide.” On case after case, we can find individual practices or collections of practices of dubious effect if not ill-effect in the town. Indeed, this follows from one of the earliest points about the infusion of supernatural thinking or pseudoscientific integration of praxis into the community, whether fear of liberal theology, encouragement of pseudobiology, prejudice and bigotry against the LGBTI members of community, pseudo-psychological diagnoses passed off as real psychological and behavioural issues while simply grounded in theological bias and false assertions as

psychological constructs, or in the whole host of bad medical and science practices seen in “colonics/colonhydrotherapy, aromatherapy, chiropractory, acupuncture, reflexology, naturopathy/naturopathic medicine and traditional Chinese medicine.”

This isn’t a declaration of “what to do,” but “if done, be, at least, informed about bad science, bad medicine, questionable theology, etc.” As noted about the right to freedom of belief, religion, and conscience (and expression and opinion), people are free to lose money on dubious treatments or otherwise. Freedom seen throughout Canada on the basis of “what people, in fact, do anyway”; whereas, at a minimum, the critical thinking of the culture should rise to the bare minimum standard of “if done, be, at least, informed about bad science, bad medicine, questionable theology, etc.”

[1] Canadians’ and Others’ Convictions to Divine Interventionism in the Matters of the Origins and Evolution states:

Canadian Mennonite University invited Professor Dennis Venema from Trinity Western University as the Scientist in Residence. Venema, at the time, stated, “I’m thrilled to be invited to be the Scientist in Residence at CMU for 2019. I think it’s a wonderful opportunity for students, and I am honoured to join a prestigious group of prior participants... I hope that these conversations can help students along the path to embracing both God’s word and God’s world as a source of reliable revelation to us.” Venema defends the view of evolutionary theory within a framework of “evolutionary creationism,” which appears more a terminologically diplomatic stance than evolution via natural selection or the code language within some religious commentary as things like or almost identical to “atheistic evolution” or “atheistic evolutionism.” He provides education on the range of religious views on offer with a more enticing one directed at evolution via natural selection. The Canadian Scientific and Christian Affiliation provides a space for countering some of the young earth geologist and young earth creationist viewpoints, as with the advertisement of the Dr. Jonathan Baker’s lecture, or in pamphlets produced on geological (and other) sciences.

He works in a tough area within a community not necessarily accepting of the evolution via natural selection view of human beings with a preference for special creation, creationism, or intelligent design. Much of the problems post-genetics as a proper discipline of scientific study and the discovery of evolution via natural selection comes from the evangelical Christian communities’ sub-cultures who insist on a literal and, hence, fundamentalist interpretation or reading of their scriptures or purported holy texts. Another small item of note. Other universities have writers in residence. A Mennonite university hosts a scientist in residence. Science becomes the abnorm rather than the norm. The King’s University contains one reference in the search results within a past conference. However, this may be a reference to “creation” rather than “creationism” as creation and more “creation” speaking to the theological interpretations of genesis without an attempt at an explicit scientific justification of mythology.

By far, the largest number of references to “creationism” came from the largest Christian, and evangelical Christian, university in the country located in Langley, British Columbia, Canada called Trinity Western University, which, given its proximity and

student body population compared to the local town, makes Fort Langley – in one framing – and Trinity Western University the heart of fundamentalist evangelical Christianity in Canada. Trinity Western University teaches a “SCS 503 – Creationism & Christianity [sic] (Korean)” course and a “SCS 691 – Creationism Field Trip” course. They hosted a lecture on Stephen Hawking, science, and creation, as stated:

In light of Steven Hawking’s theories, is there enough reason for theists to believe in the existence of God and the creation of the world?

This lecture will respond to Hawking’s views and reflect on the relationship between science, philosophy and theology.

Speaker: Dr. Yonghua Ge, Director of Mandarin Theology Program at ACTS Seminaries (Ibid.)

They hosted another event on evolution and young earth creationism:

All are welcome to attend, Public Lecture, hosted by TWU’s ‘Science, Faith, and Human Flourishing: Conversations in Community’ Initiative, supported by Fuller Seminary, Faculty of Natural and Applied Sciences, and the Canadian Scientific & Christian Affiliation, “Evolutionary and Young-Earth Creationism: Two Separate Lectures” (Darrel Falk, “Evolution, Creation and the God Who is Love” and Todd Wood, “The Quest: Understanding God’s Creation in Science and Scripture”)

Dirk Büchner, Professor of Biblical Studies at Trinity Western University, states an expertise in “Hebrew Bible / Old Testament, Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac (grammar and syntax), Hellenistic Greek (grammar and lexicography), The Septuagint. Of more popular interest: The Bible and Social Justice, and Creationism, Scientism and the Bible: why there should be no conflict between mainstream science and Christian faith.” Professor Büchner holds an expert status in “creationism.” A non-conflict between mainstream science and the Christian faith would mean the significantly reduced status of the intervention of the divine in the ordinary life of Christians. He remains one locus of creationism in the Trinity Western University environment. Dr. Paul Yang’s biography states, “Paul Yang has over twenty years teaching experience, lecturing on physics and physics education, as well as Christian worldview and creationism. He has served as the director of the Vancouver Institute for Evangelical Worldview [Sic] as well as the Director of the Christian.” Yang holds memberships or affiliations with the American Scientific Affiliation, Creation Research Society, and Korea Association of Creation Research. Dr. Alister McGrath and Dr. Michael Shermer had a dialogue moderated by a panel with Paul Chamberlain, Ph.D., Jaime Palmer-Hague, Ph.D., and Myron Penner, Ph.D. in 2017 at Trinity Western University.

All exist as probably Christian front organizations with the pretense as scientific and Christian organizations. One can see the patterns repeat themselves over and over again. Christian ‘science’ amounts to creationism, as noted before. Yang, with more than 20 years, exists as a pillar of creationist teaching, thinking, and researching within Canada and at Trinity Western University...

...Other cases of the more sophisticated and newer brands of Christianity with a similar theology, but more evolutionary biology – proper – incorporated into them exist in some

of the heart of parts of evangelical Christianity in Canada. Professor Dennis Venema of Trinity Western University and his colleague Dave Navarro (Pastor, South Langley Church) continued a conversation on something entitled “evolutionary creation,” not “creation science” or “intelligent design” as Venema’s orientation at Trinity Western University continues to focus on the ways in which the evolutionary science can mix with a more nuanced and informed Christian theological worldview within the Evangelical tradition. One can doubt the fundamental claim, not in the Bible but, about the Bible as the holy God-breathed or divinely inspired book of the creator of the cosmos, but one can understand the doubt about the base claim about the veracity of the Bible leading to doubt about the contents and claims in the Bible – fundamental and derivative...

...A more small-time politician, Dr. Darrell Furgason, ran for public office in Chilliwack, British Columbia, Canada. Furgason lectured at Trinity Western University and earned a Ph.D. in Religious Studies. Dr. Furgason claims inclusivity for all while ignoring standard protocol in science, i.e., asserting religious views in written work, “Theistic evolution is a wrong view of Genesis, as well as history, and biology. Adam & Eve were real people....who lived in real history....around 6000 years ago.” ..

...The main fundamentalist Evangelical Christian postsecondary institution, university, found in Canadian society is Trinity Western University, where Professor Dennis Venema was the prominent individual referenced as the source of progress in the scientific discussions within intellectual and, in particular, formal academic discussions and teaching. Trinity Western University operates near Fort Langley, British Columbia, Canada in Langley. The main feature case for Story comes from a city near to Trinity Western University in Abbotsford, British Columbia. Story considers this the single most controversial case of creationism in the entire country...

...John Sutherland, of Trinity Western University, chaired the Abbotsford school board of the time, which, potentially, shows some relationship between the surrounding areas and the school curriculum and creationism axis – as you may recall Trinity Western University sits in Fort Langley, British Columbia, Canada, next to the city of Abbotsford, British Columbia as an evangelical Christian university. “The Minister agreed with Goodman and the Teachers’ Association and sent a letter requesting assurances from the board that they were adhering to the provincial curriculum...”, Story explained, “...The Minister’s requests were not directly acknowledged, but Sutherland was vocal about the issue in local media outlets. He accused the Minister of religious prejudice by attempting to remove creationism from the district.”

See “Canadians’ and Others’ Convictions to Divine Interventionism in the Matters of the Origins and Evolution”: <https://www.newsintervention.com/creationism-evolution-jacobsen/>.

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