

THE AUSTRALIAN ATHEIST



ATHEISM:

is the acceptance that there is no credible scientific or factually reliable evidence for the existence of a god, gods or the supernatural.

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ATHEIST FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA INC

EST. 1970

PHILOSOPHY

The Atheist Foundation of Australia recognises scientific method as the only rational means toward understanding reality. To question and critically examine all ideas, testing them in the light of experiment, leads to the discovery of facts.

As there is no scientific evidence for supernatural phenomena, atheists reject belief in 'God', gods and other supernatural beings. The universe, the world in which we live, and the evolution of life, are entirely natural occurrences.

No personality or mind can exist without the process of living matter to sustain it. We have only one life - here and now. All that remains after a person dies is the memory of their life and deeds in the minds of those who live.

Atheists reject superstition and prejudice along with the irrational fears they cause. We recognise the complexity and interdependence of life on this planet. As rational and ethical beings we accept the challenge of making a creative and responsible contribution to life.

AIMS

To encourage and to provide a means of expression for informed free-thought on philosophical and social issues.

To safeguard the rights of all non-religious people.

To serve as a focal point for the fellowship of non-religious people.

To offer reliable information in place of superstition and to offer the methodology of reason in place of faith so as to enable people to take responsibility for the fullest development of their potential as human beings.

To promote atheism.

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From the Editor

There was a news item recently on television that featured what was purportedly video footage of Al-Qaeda conducting the training of children in terror tactics — handling weapons, kidnapping methods etc. If true, this is child abuse of the worst type. These children are being indoctrinated with the same irrational beliefs and hatreds as their trainers, and being groomed to be the next generation of suicide bombers. At the same time there is an equally insidious indoctrination of children taking place all over the world — not as sinister in nature as that of Al-Qaeda, but equally dangerous in its effect because it is happening to millions of victims.

It's a world-wide and difficult problem. Even the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, Annex 2, Convention on the Rights of the Child, does not address it. Article 3, Part 1 states "In all actions concerning children ... the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration", yet Article 14 has the following statements: 1, "State parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion." 2, "State Parties shall respect the rights and duties of the parents ... to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right..." and 3, "Freedom to manifest one's religion or belief's may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law..." This does not protect children from religious indoctrination and does not even recognise the fact, as pointed out by Richard Dawkins, that a child does not have a religion (there is no such thing as a Catholic child, only a child of Catholic parents).

When I first joined the *Atheist Foundation of Australia* my motivation was to do something about what I perceived to be the stupidity of religion. Typical of the sort of thing that "got up my nose" was the rejection of the Northern Territory's legislation on voluntary euthanasia by religious politicians in Canberra, with Kevin Andrews leading the charge.

One of the stated aims of the AFA is to safeguard the rights of all non-religious people. This can be broken down into at least two very specific aims, which are (1) to prevent the interference in politics by religion and (2) to prevent the indoctrination of children with religious myths and ideas. The AFA and other organisations like it are unique in that they are working very hard to bring about a situation where they are (in theory) no longer required. Meeting these two aims would probably be enough. In fact meeting the second aim only would probably be enough. Religions rely almost totally on the indoctrination of the young for their survival. If it were illegal, or considered by mainstream society to be morally corrupt, as it should be, to feed un-evidenced religious myths and ideologies to children, how many generations would it take for religion to die out? If all children could reach adulthood having been educated *about* religion, in an historical and cultural context, but not brainwashed *with* religion, the number of people who would subsequently decide to carry on with irrational religious beliefs would be small enough not to be a concern. These people would be regarded in much the same way as Raëlians (see <http://skepdic.com/raelian.html>) are currently viewed today by mainstream society (i.e., as fruitcakes).

My motivation now as an ongoing member of the AFA is primarily this second one. All those people who may have been tut-tutting about the terror training of children by Al-Qaeda—whilst dragging their kids along to the local church, synagogue or mosque at the same time—need to seriously reconsider their behaviour: they are bringing along the next generation of adults like Kevin Andrews.

Dennis

Correction

"Hitler and Religion"

Michael Riley's article, "Hitler and Religion" (THE AUSTRALIAN ATHEIST, Number 6, Nov-Dec 07) contained a spelling error on page 15.

The second-last paragraph begins with the name Rudolf "Hess". It should be Rudolf Hoess.

Apologies to Michael Riley as he had the correct spelling in his original copy.

Letters to the Editor

Hello,

I am a new member to the AFA and would just like to thank you guys for creating a place where like minded, rational people can come together and express their views. I have been spending a lot of time reading and posting on your forum and can honestly say that the interactions which I have had with fellow members and posters have been amongst the most interesting and inspiring exchange of ideas I have ever experienced. We don't always agree on everything (it would be a pretty boring forum if we did) but we all share a mutual respect for each other's individual thoughts that is simply not found in the general public.

For years I have been standing fast in my atheistic ideals and confronting people on their fantasy dogmas and I have always been looked down upon for doing so. I am regarded by the general public as being the most untrustworthy minority and by many fundamentalists as being evil. I consider myself to be an extremely moral person. In fact there have been many times that I have seen a stranger hurt or in danger, and I have gone out of my way to help them, while hoards of others just walk by; and I find offence in the widespread belief that I am a bad person and someone not to be trusted or listened to.

I believe that we (atheists) have a very important role to play in society, as I recently posted: "I believe that it is very important for Atheists to speak up when involved in conversations about faith. If you think about it, what we stand for is pretty important. We are the only ones even marginally maintaining the stance of reality. It has encroached on our schools, our popular culture and our legal system. This is not being dramatic. I find the Christian proverb — about how the Devil's greatest trick was to fool us into thinking he didn't exist — tragically ironic. The god myth has been, if not the motive for, the catalyst for virtually every war in the history of humankind."

Finally I have a community of decent, intelligent people that I can exchange ideas with and have logical, rational debates about important issues affecting our lives. Thank you for creating this community and if there is anything that I can do to aid your cause please let me know.

Yours sincerely,
Damian Moratti,
Melbourne.



Dear Editor,

I'm disappointed by Jocelyn's fanciful assessment (THE AUSTRALIAN ATHEIST, No 7) of that "offending" AXA Insurance TV advertisement, and by her inaccurate assumption regarding my objections to it.

Since I first saw the advertisement, in June 2007, I have corresponded on the matter with the organisations concerned, namely, SBS, Channel 9, AXA Insurance, and the Advertising Standards Board. My principal purpose has been to seek public redress for a demonstrable affront to atheists regarding their rights, dignity and convictions.

Without exception, all those organisations have failed to address satisfactorily, if at all, the matters of principle, logic and professionalism I've argued. And these included the notion, as expressed by Jocelyn, that it was all a bit of a joke. Most, however, have written me a personal apology.

In their summation, the Board quoted six paragraphs of the advertiser's apologetics, but limited their reference to my submissions to a single sentence stating my basic objection. As attempted justification for the advertisement's moral and social implications, they stooped to employ the fatuous terms "enjoyable to watch", "attention grabbing", and "memorable".

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The Board, in dismissing my complaint, took refuge behind their convenient dictum that their decision was final.

My key contention (by no means the only one), was that there was no way it would have been seen fit to have the dissolute, inebriated degenerate, as featured, identify himself as: “I’m (already) a Christian”, or “a Muslim”, or “a Jew”, or “a Catholic”. So why an atheist?

This selection of his identity as an atheist was, no doubt, a professional media advertising decision. Even if by crass neglect, it was discriminatory on “religious” grounds — supposedly a no-no. And isn't atheism, as a matter of personal conviction, entitled to the same respect and consideration as routinely demanded by religious interests?

I suggest that not to object to the likes of this advertisement is to betray the sacrifices made for so long by so many to secure for us the freedom of expression we enjoy today — and which we take for granted at our peril.

Had the depicted character identified as one or other of the above categories I believe there would have been a storm of indignant protests.

The whole matter was finally referred to the Commonwealth Department of Communications which, in a masterly cloud of bureaucratic obfuscation, backed off.

All I can hope for is that I might have alerted certain commercial and government agencies to the need to give everyone, including atheists, a fair go.

John Dillon
NSW



Dear Editor,

Gus Burston, (THE AUSTRALIAN ATHEIST, No 7) stated that decisions are made in the mind. Now, it is common knowledge that the mind is just an everyday word we use for all the activity of the brain. Therefore decisions are made by the brain. The brain is a big hunk of neurons, which are made of molecules, which are made of atoms, which are made of electrons, neutrons and protons, which all are governed by, and must obey, the laws of physics. Therefore the brain is governed by, and must obey, the laws of physics. Therefore your decisions are governed by, and must obey, the laws of physics.

I was referring to the fundamental reasons as to why we make certain decisions. Psychologists will wade ankle-deep onto this question and answer with our past. Neurologists delve deeper into brain function and cellular biology. Biochemists will go further still into biochemistry. But physicists, gawd love 'em, will go the deepest and explain that every little bit of us, including the organ in which our decisions are made, are governed by strict laws (even though you can't exactly be a counsellor helping people with their tough life decisions by using quantum mechanics). We might say a computer is thinking when it is stirring about, but really it's just following the laws of electricity and semiconductors and magnetism, etc. It's the same with living things too, although the complexity is bedazzling.

Therefore, since our particles, atoms, neurons and ultimately our brains are ruled by the laws of electromagnetism (between protons and electrons), the strong nuclear force (between nucleons), quantum mechanics (chemistry) etc., we are sort of like puppets controlled by strings which are those laws and forces, and “choice” technically does not exist. Think about it scientifically Gus, from the point of view of biochemistry and physics. I mean, the origin of life involved just lots of chemicals on the primitive earth, and after 4.6 billion years of more chemistry here we are today. What else could there be? However, I don't think many people refer to this in their day-to-day lives, if that's what you were talking about.

Colin Healey
ACT



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Dear Lee,

I would like my grandson: James to be admitted as a member of the Atheist Foundation. He is 19 years old and is the third generation of our family to join. The other is my son David.

In my Sydney University of the Third Age research group, as Course Leader, I have introduced two relevant topics for 2008.

1. The Concept of God as plainly relegating us to the supernatural, and
2. "Faith Schools": are parents and schools brainwashing children before they can make choices?

Best wishes,

**Rose
NSW**



Dear fellow Atheists,

As usual, I enjoyed reading THE AUSTRALIAN ATHEIST. It was with great interest I read the article by Peter Taylor, "Mediations on Morality" (January – February, pages 7 - 8.)

The idea of religion having ownership of morality is mind bending to the point of; "are you delusional?" As consistently highlighted by history and more disturbingly by recent world events, it appears that religion is the number one planetary opiate problem. — Harm minimisation required?

Inevitably, as with most opiates, cooperation diminishes and a percentage *lose it* — as manifested by slowed progress and catastrophic anti-social behaviour.

When the above occurs, the usual minimisation statements crop up as an attempt to disown and deny accountability. All this so it's "business as usual."

We are effectively dealing with a form of sociopathic behaviour: religio-sociopathic.

Cheers for now
Dave Cox



Dear Editor,

Thank you for publishing Paula Kirby's article, "Reassuringly Rational" (THE AUSTRALIAN ATHEIST, No 7).

I particularly agree with her suggestion that reason and rational argument may not be sufficient. I have often thought that religion is preferable to many people because it offers a complete package of metaphysical explanations, social support and a firm set of rules to live by. In addition, the religious follower gains a role in the greater scheme of things and an overall sense of security.

Therefore, most people will never fully give up religious beliefs because of the costs involved. To do so requires the personal creation (or understanding) of a viable alternative, as well as sufficient inner strength to be able to make one's own role in life. Compare this to followers of religion, where all the hard work is already done for them. Religion is easy!

Nonetheless, I don't fully agree with Paula's emphasis on the implications for post-mortality in a non-religious paradigm. It goes without saying that the atheist's assertion that death is final is an obstacle to throwing off religion. I think, however, that there is a greater obstacle.

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Someday, the last humans will cease and, possibly, this universe will follow. If intelligent beings arise in some new universe, they will never know of us just as we know nothing of any beings in past universes. Even if we are not alone, we still have no way of recording our existence in a way that will withstand everything that space and time can mete out. In that respect, therefore, we are very much alone.

There are no supernatural beings to look out for us or even to remember us. We are not some sort of alien being dumped here as an afterthought by a capricious deity. Instead, we are very much part of this universe, and if anything makes us special, it is that we are conscious of it. However, the universe that gave birth to us will just as easily destroy us. No one will remember us. The thought that we will all end is beyond terrifying and explains the popularity of religion. It is obviously very difficult for some people to get past that fear.

Paula remarks that "being rational may not be enough: we may need to be reassuring too." I think, therefore, that such reassurance may need to emphasise that, however alone we are in this universe, we at least have one another. I think that is what truly brings people together.

Anyway, thank you again for publishing that article. I've enjoyed reading my first couple of issues of THE AUSTRALIAN ATHEIST.

Yours sincerely,
Lincoln Cooper



Dear Lee

Thanks for your recent and speedy reply with my membership, T-Shirt, magazine, etc — great.

Thought I would include a copy of a recent letter I sent to a Sydney gay weekly — *Sydney Star Observer*. It was published in 21 February edition. I have also included the *Sydney Morning Herald* article that prompted my letter.

I was really pleased to see a Gay Mardi Gras link on *our* website (<http://www.atheistfoundation.org.au>). I intend contacting *Sydney Gay Freethinkers* and also have a friend who will join the AFA soon, I hope.

Well that's all for now.

Keep up the great work that you and all those terrific South Australian free-thinkers do!

Best wishes and regards,

Colin
Sydney



Scotty in hell



Free Will

I was interested to read the article “Choice and Decision” by Colin Healey in the November-December THE AUSTRALIAN ATHEIST and the response by Gus Burston in the January-February 2008 edition.

I wish to suggest that Colin Healey’s conclusion is based on a misunderstanding and that Gus Burston’s response – even discounting its aggressive tone – misses the point.

It goes without saying that the question of free will is an issue that has occupied the minds of some of our greatest philosophers since time began. It does not muddy the waters to suggest that it depends very much on what we mean by “free will”.

Are we autonomous individuals able to choose freely between the alternative courses of action that may be open to us? Or are we constrained by the laws of physics to have absolutely no control over our actions? Are our actions predetermined? I shall argue that we do indeed have control over our actions, that they are in a very limited sense predetermined, yet are nevertheless unpredictable. We may not have free will but our actions are exactly what they would have been if we had free will – and in neither case can the results be foreseen.

The question of free will lies at the heart of the debate about mind-body duality. Philosophers from Plato to Descartes (and beyond) believed that the material world was accompanied by a supernatural or transcendental world inhabited by gods, spirits and ideas, independent of the material world. For them, the problem of free will was solved, as it continues to be solved today for those who believe in the transcendental, by considering the human will to exist outside of our physical selves in this spirit world. For philosophical materialists, however, who deny the existence of any world beyond the material, that answer is impossible. Since everything about us is governed by our material bodies, they argue, our human will must logically be governed by the laws of physics, and human actions must therefore be predetermined and predictable. But, as I shall show, it is at this last step that their argument fails.

Before we grapple with the main argument, however, let me raise another argument that has been used by materialists to defend the concept of free will, namely quantum uncertainty. As Gus Burston rightly points out, our physical bodies are for all practical purposes governed by the laws of chemistry. Even though it can be argued that chemistry is really only physics writ large, the fact remains that, when we are dealing with the vast numbers of atoms and molecules present in even a single human cell, quantum uncertainties completely average out and cellular chemistry is, with overwhelming probability, entirely predictable. No uncertainty capable of influencing macro-scale outcomes remains.

Coming now to the main argument, it is useful to consider every human action to be a reaction to an event or stimulus of some kind. The stimulus can be external or might be internally generated by the human mind reacting to its current state – of tiredness, for example. The nature of the reaction will be dependent on the nature of the stimulus and on the state of mind of the person concerned. This state of mind – its predisposition – will in turn be determined by the genetic makeup and past history of that individual. So far so predictable. But no man is an island. We act and react to those around us and to our changing environment. These myriad external stimuli are inherently unpredictable: they are in fact chaotic. And if the inputs to any system are unpredictable so, logically, must be the outputs.

Thus, regardless of whether or not free will exists, human experience and human behaviour are inherently unpredictable.

Now it can be argued that, even though one’s situation is inherently unpredictable beforehand, each of us is aware at each moment of the situation in which we find ourselves. Our choice of action in response will then be determined by our predisposition. The action we take will be the action we feel most inclined to take in the circumstances and at that time. At another time, when we were feeling more wide awake – or more tired – we might have chosen differently. Our disposition might have been different. Whatever our choice – and in this very narrow sense the

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fatalists are right, our response will be determined by the laws of physics (and chemistry): we will decide what to do. My action will be the result of a personal decision*. Now if one were to argue that my action was nevertheless the result of the laws of physics acting on me, that action would still be exactly what I had willed.

In summary, then, we can never know in detail what situation we might find ourselves in from moment to moment. All such situations are inherently chaotic and unpredictable. Furthermore, we cannot know the exact predisposition of anyone else to any particular situation. This is far too complex to be modeled or known by anyone other than – just possibly – the individual concerned. When a stimulus arrives, consciously or unconsciously, we react. This reaction may indeed have been preconditioned, but for me it is precisely this preconditioning that gives me my reason for so acting. Thus, willed or predetermined, it feels like free will. Surely if it looks and feels like free will, and the outcome is the same as if it had been free will, then we can call it free will.

Hitler, Stalin and Pol Pot acted as they did because they chose to do so, based upon their predispositions. In the case of Hitler, for example, we know that he decided to act against the Jews because he had been preconditioned by reading the nineteenth-century fake *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* and because of the anti-semitism he heard preached in church as a child. The laws of physics had nothing to do with the Holocaust other than to make it possible – once Hitler had willed it.

Roy W Brown
Lausanne,
Switzerland

*This is of course a gross simplification but it does not affect the main argument. Human decision making is not a single process taking place in a central processing unit but is made up of a number of autonomous processes acting individually. Conscious decision making is often illusory. The subconscious mind makes decisions and initiates action before the conscious mind is aware of it, and the brain somehow tricks the conscious mind into thinking that *it* made the decision. None of this, however, invalidates the argument that the decision making process results in an outcome that is dependent on the stimuli applied to and predisposition of the individual concerned.



Perth Atheists MeetUp

Sunday 2nd March 08 was the inaugural meeting of the Perth Atheists Meetup group.

AFA member Grant organised the event and from first reports the day was very successful. Another AFA member Mark generously offered his home for the meeting and was a wonderful host.

Although the Meetup groups are not affiliated with the Atheist Foundation many of our members have joined to have personal contact with like-minded people. The internet and emails don't always offer that extra specialness of actual face to face conversation.

Congratulations to everyone and we wish the group every success for the future.

Grant is in the process of setting up a website for the group.
The site can be found at <http://www.perthatheists.org>



Letters to the Papers

No place for God in schools—*The Age* 22/02/08

John Howard's idea of a "God Squad" infiltrating schools with his particular ideology has come unstuck before it has even started (*The Age*, 21/2). Its introduction was an ideologically driven mistake and a wise Kevin Rudd would end it as soon as is possible. Impressionable young minds are not in need of subtle indoctrination with a particular narrow belief system.

Education that goes beyond factual knowledge is a matter for priests and shamans, not secular governments.

David Nicholls
President
Atheist Foundation of Australia

Patriarchal faiths—*The Advertiser* 5/3/08

The article (*The Advertiser* 3/3) 'Greer has God in her sights' will without a doubt attract negative responses from the ranks of the three Abrahamic religions. It is no secret that Christianity as well as Islam and Judaism are patriarchal faiths oozing with misogynistic rules and sentiment.

And before religious apologists wind themselves up into frenzied attack on Germaine Greer's germane comments, concerning Papal attitudes to the female gender, remember this: Popes, Caliphs and Head Rabbi's need a certain genital structure to qualify for the job.

It has to be wondered, when applying for the position, if there is a 'penis/no-penis' square that needs a tick to make sure no females get through by mistake.

David Nicholls
President
Atheist Foundation of Australia

The article, 'Scientists study why believers believe in God' (*The Australian* 20/2), left out one extremely important factor of any study into belief. If the study were to be about people who believe in visiting UFO's, the existence of fairies or the bad luck caused by walking under a ladder in the presence of a black cat, then superstition would be high on the list of anthropological components under investigation.

Observations of animals clearly demonstrate superstition plays an important role in survival. Too much or too little superstition lessens the chance of living long enough to reproduce. Of course, humans can override innate tendencies such as this, testified by the many Atheists who have done so.

In this investigation, results by science, as that is what science is about, can only conclude the highest probability of any hypotheses being correct. Religion can remain safely in denial behind a thing called faith, which requires no proof. This method of understanding nature, historically, has tended to slow the acceptance of new information, but not forever.

David Nicholls
President
Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc

Education is indeed, 'At the crossroads?' (Article - *The Age* 25/2) The Howard Government is responsible for messing with the minds of one in three children. The disparity of views taught in 'faith' schools can only bring forth a naivety about reality and enhance divisiveness as an end-product.

Firmly implanting ideas held by parents onto the young is a method evolution uses as a survival tactic. The messages do not necessarily have to be correct only repetitious and given with adult authority. Those taught in this manner; go on to repeat the exercise with the next generation.

Slow changing societies benefited, whereas the rapid rise in knowledge over the last few hundred years, makes this system a danger to good order and a threat to survival.

The examples of evolution denial, inadequate sex education, promotion of misogynistic and homophobic attitudes and rejection of science are but some of the 'values' foisted onto unsuspecting children.

The consequences of not recognising that threatening children either subtly or overtly, that hell awaits detractors, is child abuse. It is well past the time for governments to come to grips with the modern understanding that young members of society must be educated and not indoctrinated.

David Nicholls
President
Atheist Foundation of Australia

DEBATE - "DO GAYS NEED GOD?"

On 13 January the Atheist Foundation received a call from JOY FM, a gay radio station in Melbourne, saying that they were having a debate on "Do Gays need God?". We were asked whether we would like to make any contribution. I volunteered to be on the debating panel and the offer was accepted.

The station is mainly music but is interspersed with talk about gay rights issues. They have a regular program of debates, which is recorded on Mondays at the Glasshouse, a gay pub in Collingwood, to be aired on the following Friday at 7 p.m.

The panel of five consisted of one Jewish gay activist, a gay-friendly Anglican priest, a gay Anglican priest, a Druidic gay representative, and myself representing the AFA. After we were all introduced, the compère said that he did not want the discussion bogged down with the question of whether God existed or not. That did not sound too promising to me, and got me wondering as to how I could work it into the debate.

Anyway each panellist got a turn to say something; The Jewish guy came out with the theory that Jews could be gay: they just could not engage in anal sex. That caused a bit of a stir. The compère said he would bear it in mind for future reference in encounters with Jews. The two Anglicans took the view that God is love, he loves everyone, and all is OK. The New Age druid had the view that anyone could believe anything and all is all right.

I did get a chance to say something along the lines that religions are not true, not necessary and not good, and that why, of all people, would gays be religious. I managed to get in the quote from Leviticus saying that if a man would lie with a man as a woman, he should be put to death. I asked "Why would you love a god that wants to kill you?" The compère promptly changed the subject.

The audience was largely non-believing. But there was one lesbian who was quite traumatised by her sexuality. She had been thrown out of her pentecostalist church because of it. She was distraught because she wanted to be a born-again Christian but they would not let her. She asked for help and advice.

I piped up with "You can keep your sexuality and lose your religion". I continued to say how tragic it was that people were in this situation and mentioned that it would be much worse for such people in other societies, such as Islamic ones, which are more strict.

The two Anglicans, being professional peddlers of superstition, both got a fair bit of air time, although I did think they were feeling uncomfortable that their spiels were not being completely swallowed.

As usual, people were probably not convinced enough to change their minds, due to the weird emotional loyalty they feel to their beliefs; though it was good that the atheist voice was there to present an alternative.

John Perkins
Public Relations Team
Melbourne

NICE CHANGE

Sydney Star Observer 21 February, 08

Labor's Maxine McKew is a wonderful replacement for John Howard. In her maiden speech to the new Parliament she is quoted in Friday's *Sydney Morning Herald* as saying, "It is time to revive some big ambitions about sustainable cities, education, etc...and about how we treat everyone with dignity and equality, regardless of physical ability, race or sexual preference." Onya, Maxine!

In sharp contrast is the quote in the same article from the new Liberal member for Cook who rabbited on about his Christian faith in his maiden speech.

Says it all for this old, gay, atheist leftie.

Colin
Sydney

Editor note: Colin is a member of the AFA



The Karamazov Principle

By Christopher Hitchens

I remember Professor Leszek Kolakowski, one of the great Polish intellectual dissidents from the Stalinist period, saying that when he debated with apologists for the system, he often found himself almost on the losing side. This was because the arguments of his opponents were so antiquated that he'd forgotten what the original refutations were. (Another way in which he phrased this was to compare the experience to sitting through a boring movie and the sense of relief of being able to leave early upon realizing that one had seen it before and already knew the ending.)

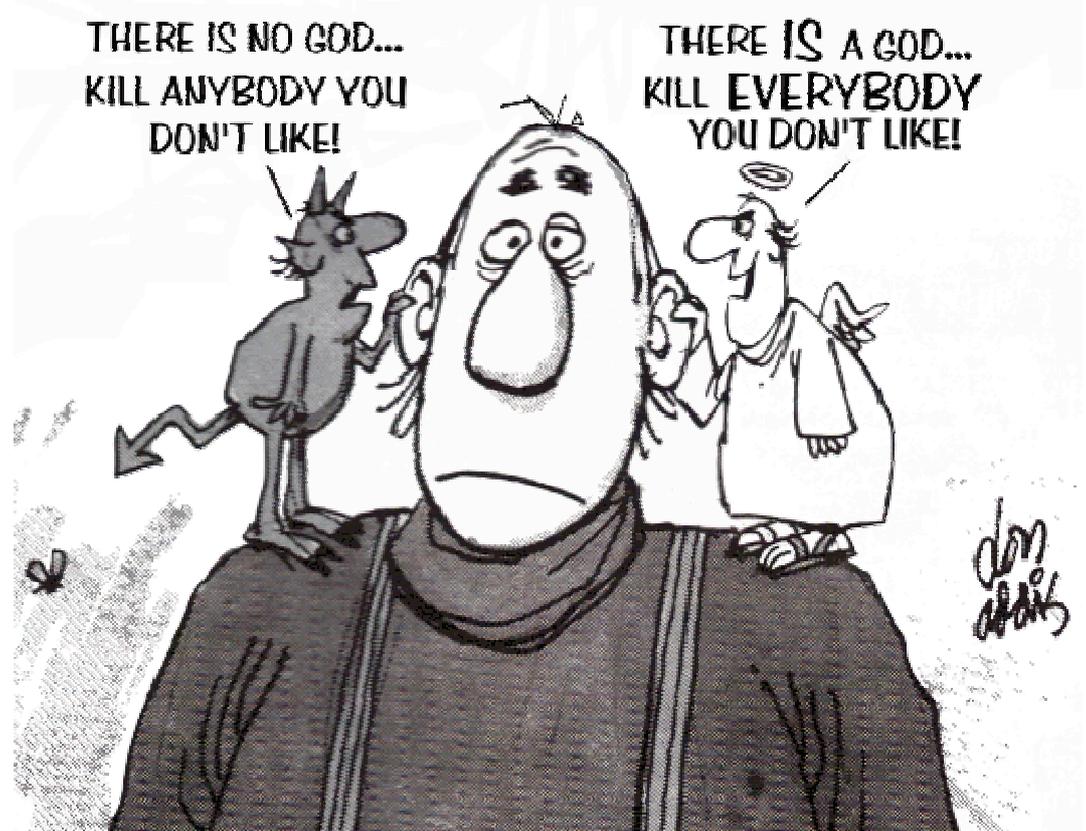
Trudging around the country and debating various representatives of the faithful has sometimes made me feel the same way. I lack Kolakowski's intellectual history and authority, but I recognize a stale and worn-out debating point when I see it and am occasionally able to reach through the fog of boredom and recall the counterargument. In fact, I am thinking of doing a handy series of briefings on just this.

My first exhibit might be the belief, often attributed to Dostoyevsky and certainly put in the mouth of Smerdyakov, one of the characters in *The Brothers Karamazov*, that without God all things are possible. In other words, in a godless world, people would feel free to behave exactly as they choose and would award themselves permission for any selfishness or excess. "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law"—this, I have read, is the credo of the Satanists.

Well, for starters, it can't be said that the Satanists don't believe in a supernatural authority. But if we step

over that obvious point, we find that the rest of the argument is either very feeble or very revealing. To begin with, what are the believers telling us about themselves? Are they saying that if they did not fear hellfire or desire paradise they would indulge in rape, theft, pillage, and perjury? If so, then they are telling us something worth knowing about "faith-based" morality. Examine your own conscience, reader of this secular humanist magazine. What really inhibits you from abusing your children, stealing from your neighbors, or lying to your colleagues? Is it a belief in a supreme being who can convict you of thought-crimes for your sinful private desires? Or is it some notion of human solidarity and the vague yet distinct idea that we have a common interest in behaving as well as we can toward one another?

Maintaining that the second choice is far more realistic and based on a much higher degree of probability, one might also add that the first choice is even less "moral"



than it looks. Don't we frequently find, when considering the most horrible, self-destructive, and antisocial crimes, that they are committed by those who are listening to divine instructions? Smerdyakov was wrong, or at least he was very gravely one-sided. It is only with God that certain otherwise unthinkable cruelties are possible.

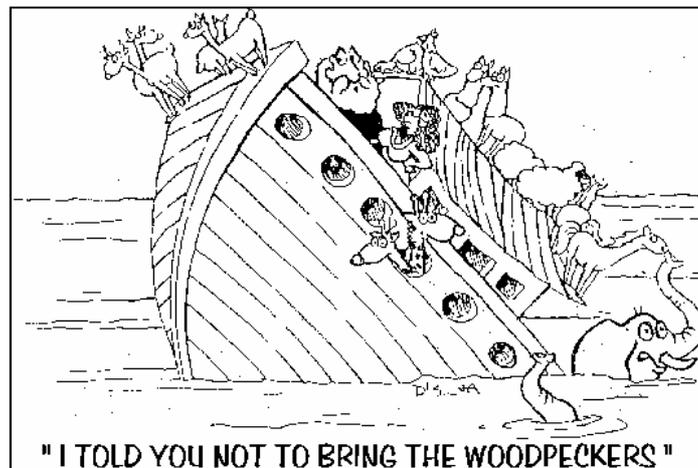
(Continued on page 13)

(Continued from page 12)

We don't seem to know of many godless despots and conquerors in antiquity, but suppose there to have been such; one might imagine a despot deciding to slaughter all the civilians in a town that had just fallen. Brute self-interest might dictate such a policy or the setting of such an example. However, just picture the scene in that town once the papal envoy has said, as was said of the city that sheltered the Albigensian heretics: "Kill them all. God will know his own." The massacre would at once cease to be utilitarian and become hysterical. An unbeliever might well torture an enemy in order to get him to say where the treasure is buried, but torture really becomes exorbitant when the authorities have convinced themselves that they are saving the soul of the tortured one. Then, there are no limits. I have heard several times from Iranian oppositionists that Islam forbids the execution of a virgin. Very well, then, a guilty virgin will first be raped by Mr. Ahmadinejad's pious "Revolutionary Guards" and, only when they are done with her, handed over to the hangman. Once you have God on your side, there is no crime you cannot commit and no cruelty you cannot self-righteously devise.

The genital mutilation lobby is exclusively religious. The suicide-bombing "community" is almost exclusively religious. The "end of days" and eschatological movements, which gleefully hope for the utter destruction of the only world we know or will ever know, are religious by definition. Not to make a cheap point, but the serial-killer and "voices told me to do it" community is hardly a secular or atheist one. So, once again, we discover that it is not just logically impossible to derive ethics and morals from the supernatural; it is actually much less likely that we get our moral precepts from the sky than it is that we get them—or may hope to get them—from an examination of our common human condition. Those who argue the contrary are refusing to face the role of religion and superstition, not just in failing to make people behave better but in positively inciting them to behave worse.

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The cartoon is one of many in the
booklet/magazine

LUCY'S LORE

by member

David Giles

If you would like a

FREE

copy please send your details to

Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc

Private Mail Bag 6

MAITLAND SA 5573

Please be aware some of the humour is adults only and may offend.

VISIT FROM IHEU

On 28th January David and Lee played host to Roy Brown and Mary Gallnor. Roy is the past president of the International Humanist and Ethical Union. His current role is representing the IHEU at the United Nations.

Mary Gallnor, an AFA member looked after Roy while in Adelaide. Mary is former President of the South Australian Voluntary Euthanasia Society (SAVES) and also former President of The World Right to Die Societies.

Atheism and Humanism were lively topics of discussion, with all parties agreeing that closer ties between groups is a necessary ingredient in spreading the secular message.



Roy Brown and David Nicholls

The Gross Immorality of the Christian Easter

by Keith S Cornish

The Roman Church usurped the pagan spring festival of rebirth which follows the European winter and turned a joyful celebration into an acceptance of the primitive concept of sacrificing a human being to appease a blood-thirsty god.

As the Christian rite is tied to the Jewish Passover it is necessary to recall the story of the slaughter by Yahweh of the first-born children of the Egyptians to secure the release of the Hebrews from slavery. As the Pharaoh was the only person involved in the negotiations and the only person able to grant or withhold freedom it therefore follows that he alone was punishable. Any punishment inflicted on the innocent population was clearly vindictive.

From the Bible story the number of Hebrews involved in the so-called exodus was around three million. Obviously the exodus of such a large number would have been physically impossible and all avenues of research show that no large body of Hebrews were ever slaves in Egypt or were granted freedom to wander for forty years on their journey back to their 'promised land'. The Exodus is a potent reminder of the power of myth.

The Jesus of the gospels accepted the story of the Exodus and obviously saw nothing immoral in celebrating the slaughter of the Egyptian firstborn children. Not being Hebrew children their deaths were of no consequence. Jesus was supposed to have been crucified at the time of the Jewish Passover.

According to Christian dogma he was the innocent son of the god Yahweh and for believers his sacrifice secured immunity from punishment for wrong doing and gained for them entry into eternal heavenly bliss instead of everlasting torment in Hell. Clearly this is precisely the same concept as that of our primitive ancestors. It is morally wrong and ethically unacceptable today.

Whilst it is possible for an innocent party to pay the penalty for the wrong doing of another person they cannot be made into the guilty party. Penalty can be transferred but guilt cannot.

(Continued on page 15)

(Continued from page 14)

The history of the Roman Catholic Church has been a record of the ways in which breaches of the laws of the church could be expiated by payments in various ways — Hail Marys and penances. It has nullified the sense of individual responsibility for acceptable social practice and led to Catholics being involved in a disproportionate level of crime. To a lesser extent this applies wherever the concept of vicarious sacrifice is taught.

Vicarious sacrifice is unacceptable in modern ethics and research and common sense explodes the belief that a 'god-man' died and came back to life again almost 2000 years ago so that human beings could rise from their graves and enjoy everlasting bliss in Heaven. How gullible and infantile are the rank and file of humanity!

Editor's note.

Keith S Cornish was the President of the Atheist Foundation of Australia for nearly 30 years. The above article was written in March 1996.

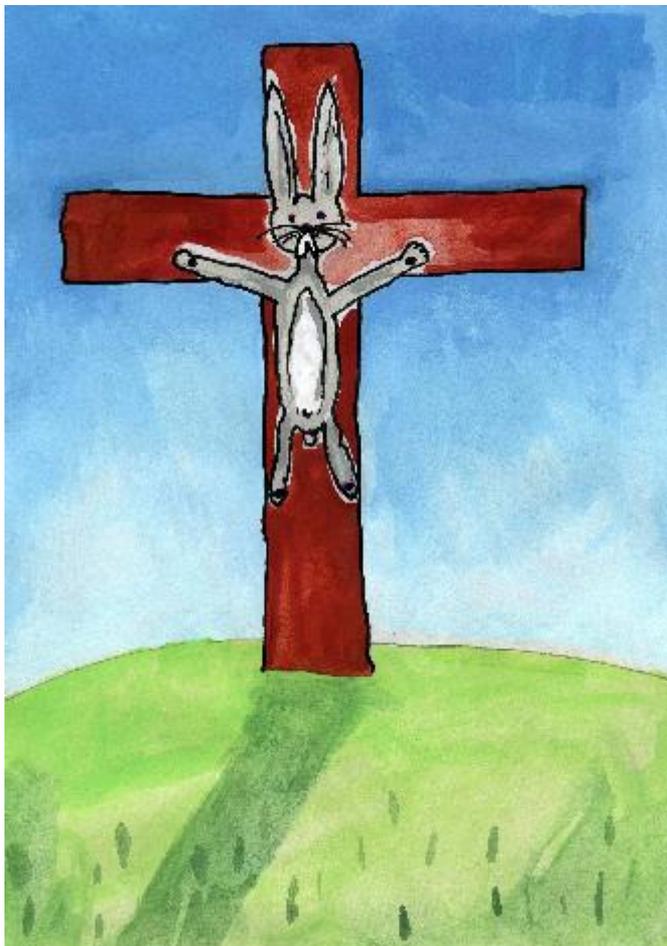
“What, after all, is the cross of Jesus Christ? It is nothing but the sum total of a sado-masochistic glorification of pain.”

Joachim Kahl

from *The Misery of Christianity - A plea for a Humanity without God.*

John Douglas Art

<http://www.JohnDouglasArt.com>



Darwinism or Matthewism?

By Nigel Sinnott

2008 will mark the 150th anniversary of the first public airing, at a meeting in London of the Linnean Society on 1 July 1858, of the views of Charles Robert Darwin (1809-82) and Alfred Russel (sic) Wallace (1823 – 1913) about natural selection as a mechanism for species formation and evolution. Neither Darwin nor Wallace was present, and their joint paper, “On the Tendency of Species to form Varieties; and on the Perpetuation of Varieties and Species by Natural Means of Selection”, was formally presented by Darwin’s friends the geologist Sir Charles Lyell and the botanist Sir Joseph Hooker. Hooker reported that “The interest excited was intense, but the subject was too novel and too ominous for the old school to enter the lists, before armouring. After the meeting it was talked over with bated breath.”¹

The joint paper was published in the Linnean Society’s *Journal of Proceedings: Zoology* (vol. 3) on 28 August 1858, and Darwin got down to turning his notes and opinions on the subject, in which he had been interested for about twenty years, into a book. Darwin and Wallace’s ideas were now in the public — or at least scientific — domain, but were they the first people to come up with the idea of natural selection as an evolutionary mechanism? Not quite, it seems.

Darwin’s book, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, was dated 1 October 1859 but published on 24 November 1859 in an edition of 1250 copies. It was sold out on the first day, and a second edition of 3000 copies was undertaken, to be published on 7 January 1860. Wallace, with characteristic modesty, now referred to evolution by natural selection as “Darwinism”, but, although the idea generated considerable interest, not everyone supported it. The American zoologist Louis Agassiz asserted in 1860 that Darwin’s arguments “have not made the slightest impression on my mind” and that Agassiz would “consider the transmutation theory as a scientific mistake, untrue in its facts, unscientific in its methods, and mischievous in its tendency”²

On 7 April 1860 the *Gardener’s Chronicle* published “Nature’s Law of Selection”, by Patrick Matthew, claiming that he had formulated the concept of natural selection in a book published as early as 1831, and he added some extracts to back this up. Darwin read the claim, and ordered a copy of the book. In the *Gardener’s Chronicle* of 21 April 1860 Darwin wrote: “I freely acknowledge that Mr Matthew has anticipated

by many years the explanation I have offered of the origin of species, under the name of natural selection.” He added, not unreasonably, “I think that no one will feel surprised that neither I, nor apparently any other naturalist, had heard of Mr. Matthew’s views, considering how briefly they are given. . .” Darwin apologised for his “entire ignorance” of Matthew’s book and promised that “If another edition of my work is called for, I will insert to the foregoing effect.”³

Who then was Patrick Matthew? According to Wikipedia⁴ he was born to a prosperous Scottish family near Dundee in 1790, and later went to the University of Edinburgh, though he did not take a degree. In 1807 he returned to manage the family estate in Errol and took a particular interest in apple and pear trees and in growing timber for ship building. He noticed that removing only high quality trees for timber resulted, in the long term, in the decline of the quality of a managed forest, and he suggested that the opposite, culling poor trees, could be employed to improve timber quality.

Mathew’s book, *On Naval Timber and Arboriculture; with critical notes on authors who have recently treated the subject of planting*, was published in Edinburgh and London in 1831, and in an appendix the author remarked:

There is a law universal in nature, tending to render every reproductive being the best possible suited to its condition that its kind, or organized matter, is susceptible of, which appears intended to model the physical and mental or instinctive powers to their highest perfection and to continue them so. This law sustains the lion in his strength, the hare in her swiftness, and the fox in his wiles. As nature, in all her modifications of life, has a power of increase far beyond what is needed to supply the place of what falls by Time’s decay, those individuals who possess not the requisite strength, swiftness, hardihood, or cunning, fall prematurely without reproducing — either a prey to their natural devourers, or, sinking under disease, generally induced by want of nourishment, their place being occupied by the more perfect of their own kind, who are pressing on the means of subsistence . . .

And he further added that the progeny of the same parents, “under great differences of circumstance, might, in several generations, even become distinct species, incapable of co-reproduction”.

Before his death in 1874, Matthew had some visiting

(Continued on page 17)

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cards printed with “Discoverer of the Principle of Natural Selection” on them. Two other people may be also be considered as contenders for the role of “discoverer”, Dr William Charles Wells (1757 – 1817) in 1813, and Edward Blyth (1810-73) between 1835 and 1837.⁵ Patrick Matthew certainly anticipated the views of Darwin and Wallace but, unlike them, he never amassed a wealth of observation and evidence to present natural selection as a comprehensive scientific theory. In the words of the historian Peter Bowler, “Simple priority is not enough to earn a thinker a place in the history of science: one has to develop the idea and convince others of its value to make a real contribution.”⁶ Nevertheless, Matthew’s insights were an interesting and significant achievement for their time.

Notes

1. DARWIN, Francis (ed.), 1887. *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin, including an*

autobiographical chapter; edited by his son . . . (London) v. 2: 126.

2. *Ibid.*, 2: 184, footnote.
3. *Ibid.*, 2: 302, footnote.
4. The author of the *Wikipedia* entry about Matthew is not given, but the account gives a useful list of references about Patrick Matthew. The article also mentions that Matthew, despite being a landowner, was sympathetic to Chartism and also regarded the idea of hereditary nobility as detrimental to society.
5. *Life and Letters*, 3: 41. And see Charles Darwin’s “Historical Sketch of the Progress of Opinion on the Origin of Species” in later editions of *The Origin* (e.g. 6th edn., 1882), which mentions Matthew, Wells and several others (but Blyth only in Chapters 1, 5 and 9). *Wikipedia* has entries for both Blyth and Wells.
6. BOWLER, Peter J., 2003. *Evolution: The History of an Idea* (3rd edn., Berkeley, California): 158 (quoted by Wikipedia).

“QUOTES”

All religions are founded on the fear of the many and the cleverness of the few.

Stendhal—French writer 1783—1842

What divisions, hatred, miseries and dreadful physical and mental suffering have been produced by the names of Confucius, Brahma, Juggernaut, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, Penn, Joe Smith, Mother Lee etc.! If any of these could have imagined that their names should cause the disunion, hatred and suffering which poor deluded followers and disciples have experienced, how these good or well-intentioned persons would have lamented that they had ever lived to implant such deadly hatred between man and man, and to cause so much error and false feeling between those whose happiness can arise only from universal union of mind and co-operation in practise, neither of which can any of the religions of the earth, as now taught and practiced, ever produce.

Robert Owen—Welsh social reformer 1771-1858

Formal religion was organised for slaves: it offered them consolation which earth did not provide.

Elbert Hubbard—American writer, publisher, artist, and philosopher 1856—1915

I can no more understand that any serious injury can come to my moral nature from disbelief in Samson than from disbelief in Jack the Giant-Killer. I care as little for Goliath as for the giant Blunderbore. I am glad that children should amuse themselves with nursery stories, but it is shocking that they should be ordered to believe in them as solid facts, and then be told that such superstition is essential to morality.

Sir Leslie Stephen—English author, critic 1832-1904

IN THE NEWS

From *The Advertiser Adelaide*

Greer has God in her sights

Samela Harris

March 3, 2008

It was not the male of the species but the male of theology that the doyen of feminists now has denounced.

“If God exists, I am against Him,” she told the Writers’ Week crowds yesterday.

Areas around the East Tent had packed out early in anticipation of the Meet the Author address by the author and academic.

It was a huge crowd....

...It was at question time that Greer let loose.

Asked what she thought of the Pope’s wish to keep biblical references masculine, she responded that she had never had interest in feministic theology.

“Feminists struggling within the Judeo-Christian religion are on a hiding to nothing,” she declared. “If God exists, I’m against him. And, if the Pope manages to discredit Catholicism in the eyes of Catholic women, so much the better.”

The immense crowd, which was largely female, whooped and cheered in agreement...

[See David Nicholls’ Letters to Papers page 10]

Items from *National Secular Society Newsline*

Ayan Hirsi Ali protection

28 February 2008

Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the Somali-born Dutch activist facing death threats for her outspoken criticism of Islam, is to come under national police protection anywhere in the European Union, the top justice official in Brussels said tonight.

Franco Frattini, the European commissioner for justice and home affairs, told the Guardian that Hirsi Ali and any other persons facing threats to their lives because of their opinions or writings, would be guaranteed protection wherever they went in Europe and that the host country would bear the expense.

The issue was discussed at a lunch of all 27 interior ministers of the EU in Brussels today after being raised by the Dutch. Frattini said the ministers agreed and that the pact would be effective immediately based on “unanimous consensus”.

Other European sources doubted whether such an agreement could be implemented so promptly.

British sources said a pan-European deal could not be “that simple” since there were cost and legal implications to authorising such special police measures.

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“There can't possibly be political agreement on it,” said an official.

Hirsi Ali went to the European Parliament two weeks ago to demand that the EU pay for her protection when living in the US.

Her colleague, Theo Van Gogh, was murdered on an Amsterdam street in 2004 after he and Hirsi Ali made a film, *Submission*, attacking Islamic treatment of women.

From then until last autumn, at a cost of around two million euros a year, she enjoyed special 24-hour Dutch police protection, even after she went to live in the US. Last autumn the Dutch government withdrew the funding for the US operation and she returned to Europe.

Dozens of MEPs have signed a document of support calling on Brussels for pay for her protection round-the-clock wherever she may be.

“This is a new decision,” Frattini said, declaring that no new laws were necessary to try to guarantee the safety of Hirsi Ali and others in similar situations. “If we need a law to guarantee the right to life, we're in a difficult position. We have the decision based on mutual trust.”

Taslima Nasreen's visa extended

29 February 2008

The Indian Government has decided to extend the visa of NSS Honorary Associate Taslima Nasreen, who has been living under virtual house arrest in the country since violent protests by Islamists drove her out of Mumbai. However, the statement accompanying the visa extension berates Taslima for “hurting the sentiments” of other communities in India, giving the impression that she was the cause of the rioting that resulted in her having to use a “safe house”. No mention was made of the hooligans and religious extremists who attacked Ms Nasreen because she had written something that they didn't like.

The statement reads: “Throughout its history, India has a tradition of offering hospitality to those who seek it. It has also afforded protection to those who have come as our guests. Ms. Taslima Nasreen is our guest and, in keeping with our traditions, we have offered her the same privileges.

“It is incumbent on those who are welcomed as guests in India that they remain sensitive to India's traditions and do not conduct themselves in a manner that either affects our relations with other countries or cause hurt to our secular ethos. We expect that they do not undertake actions that could hurt the sentiments of the many communities that make up our multi-religious and multi-ethnic nation. These are the same restraints which we in India follow.

We expect nothing less from our guests.”

Significant majority of Dutch voters would be happy with atheist PM

29 February 2008

According to a new poll in the Netherlands, 87% of voters said they would be happy with an atheist Prime Minister. Under a third — 27% — would find an Islamic Prime Minister acceptable, while 33% would be happy with a fundamentalist Christian. A Jewish PM would be OK with 53%. Just 19% would be happy with a political leader over 70, while 93% were comfortable with a female premier. 34% would accept a PM who visits prostitutes and 26% one who took hard drugs such as heroin, and 78% said they would be comfortable if their leader was gay. 21,000 members of popular TV programme *EenVandaag*'s opinion panel gave their views.



The following statements about the Bible were written by children. Incorrect spelling has been left in.

HUM☺UR

- In the first book of the bible, guinnessis. God got tired of creating the world so he took the sabbath off.
- Adam and eve were created from an apple tree. Noah's wife was joan of ark. Noah built and ark and the animals came on in pears.
- Lots wife was a pillar of salt during the day, but a ball of fire during the night.
- The jews were a proud people and throughout history they had trouble with unsympathetic genitals.
- Sampson was a strongman who let himself be led astray by a jezebel like delilah.
- Samson slayed the philistines with the axe of the apostles.
- Moses led the jews to the red sea where they made unleavened bread which is bread without any ingredients.
- the egyptians were all drowned in the dessert. Afterwards, moses went up to mount cyanide to get the ten commandments.
- The first commandments was when eve told adam to eat the apple.
- The seventh commandment is thou shalt not admit adultery.
- Moses died before he ever reached canada. Then joshua led the hebrews in the battle of geritol.
- The greatest miricle in the bible is when joshua told his son to stand still and he obeyed him.
- David was a hebrew king who was skilled at playing the liar. He fought the finkelsteins, a race of people who lived in biblical times.
- Solomon, one of davids sons, had 300 wives and 700 porcupines.
- When mary heard she was the mother of jesus, she sang the magna carta.
- When the three wise guys from the east side arrived they found jesus in the manager.
- Jesus was born because mary had an immaculate contraption.
- St. John the blacksmith dumped water on his head.
- Jesus enunciated the golden rule, which says to do unto others before they do one to you. He also explained a man doth not live by sweat alone.
- It was a miricle when jesus rose from the dead and managed to get the tombstone off the entrance.
- The people who followed the lord were called the 12 decibels.
- The epistels were the wives of the apostles.
- One of the oppossums was st. Matthew who was also a taximan.
- St. Paul cavorted to christianity, he preached holy acrimony which is another name for marraige.
- Christians have only one spouse. This is called monotony.

HERETICAL HAPPENINGS

Keeping you in the know

Greetings,

I reported in this column in the January - February issue of THE AUSTRALIAN ATHEIST that the AFA intended to send a submission to the Australian Bureau of Statistics regarding the question about religion in the census form. To present the Bureau with a better idea of the views on this question of the broader secular population, we approached many groups and individuals to countersign it. A steady response ensued then we learned that the ABS has stopped accepting submissions for the 2011 Census. Those already forwarded will not have sway until after the 2011 Census. The reason given was that the Federal Government is reducing its funding to the ABS. The Bureau is not allocating any new funds to its census section and all questions will remain as they were in the 2006 version.

I would like to thank those who have already agreed to undersign our submission and all the individuals and groups who have taken it upon themselves to make similar representation to the ABS. Although the Bureau's decision is disappointing, it is quite likely that the next questionnaire will raise the ire of secular Australia more than ever. In that case we must be prepared to repeat our plans for a submission.

The AFA occasionally asks members to represent the Foundation on radio and public forums. In December 07, Colin Kline, a Ballaratarian, went up against Bishop Hough at the ABC Ballarat Studios, with the topic being: "Are we taking the Christ out of Christmas?" Colin's academic style delivered the Atheist viewpoint in an extremely composed and reassuring manner, which should have impressed even the most ardently pious listener.

In January 08 John Perkins represented the AFA in Melbourne on JOY94.9 FM radio *Rainbow Report*, where the topic was: "Do gays need God". (See Page 6) John's calm approach to debating certainly portrays Atheism far from the radical image some attempt to associate with it.

Halfway through February 08, in Perth, at a talk given by a member of the Secular Party of Australia, Donna Etrick, on behalf of the AFA, answered questions about Atheism and the Foundation. Donna was well prepared for the occasion with help from husband Grant who had previously barraged her with tricky questions to hone her skills on Atheism.

A big thanks, folks, for your efforts.

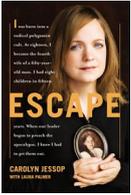
Just to allay any fears by AFA members that we will pounce on you to do public presentations, be assured that is not the way it works. We have a rough idea of who might agree to front up to an event at a particular location and we politely ask for volunteers in that area. There are no reprisals or death threats if the answer is no. Anyone who would like to be listed should contact head office for a chat. Basic knowledge about Atheism and religion is all that is required. Your influence in spreading the Atheist message may be an untapped resource.

In addition, the AFA's Public Relations Team is always on the lookout for people capable of corresponding with the community on a variety of issues surrounding Atheism. As we have many PR Team members, the individual workload is more fascinating than it is hectic. If you are interested in being part of this group, send us an e-mail.

Readers are reminded that the AFA's AGM is on Wednesday 19 March 2008 at 7.30 pm (more details were given in TAA No 7: p. 23) and all members are most welcome to attend. AFA meetings are enjoyable and worthwhile occasions entailing open and lively discussion on all manner of topics. Who knows: you may even offer to be on the Committee of Management. The main qualification is being able to get along affably with others. So, why not come along and check us out.

Until we meet again,





Escape
by Carolyn Jessop
Penguin UK
\$32.95

Book Review

Those who read *Not Without my Daughter* and *Infidel* will find many similarities to the riveting account of Carolyn Jessop's book *Escape*. Islamic societies do not have the monopoly in brutality, oppression, totalitarianism and fanaticism. While America is on its way to becoming a Christian theocracy, it is still difficult to believe that in the 21st century there are American citizens who are imprisoned within a cult so oppressive and totalitarian that it has much in common with the Taliban in Afghanistan.

A brave and intelligent woman, Carolyn Jessop has a disturbing story to tell. She was born in a breakaway sect of the official Mormon Church, in a cult known as the Fundamentalist Church of Latter-Day Saints (FLDS) that practices polygamy. Indeed, it was the issue of polygamy which caused the split from the "mainstream" Mormon Church, which abolished polygamy some hundred years ago.

Carolyn lived and went to school in Colorado City, a small FLDS enclave in Arizona. Even though the schools were public, most of the teachers were FLDS and taught that dinosaurs never existed. Evolution and anything deemed inappropriate by FLDS doctrine was excised from the curriculum. Children were taught that FLDS followers were God's chosen people and that all outsiders were evil.

Carolyn's secret dream was to go to college and become a paediatrician. She told her father and he went to speak to the then "prophet" Leroy Johnson. Johnson decreed that Carolyn could study to become a teacher, but first she had to marry Merrill Jessop, a man thirty years her senior who already had three wives. Within fifteen years Carolyn had given birth to eight children with some of the pregnancies being complicated. Merrill's wives would always fight one another for supremacy and the children would be abused and neglected. If a child was sick the mother would be blamed for being sinful, the ambulance would not pick up any woman or child unless they had permission from the father or husband. Wives had to submit to their husbands in everything — no surprises here! — and had to give birth to as many children as possible.

When Warren Jeffs became leader of the cult the rules and indoctrination became more extreme. Education was virtually banned and girls were married off at younger and younger ages, sex was only permitted for the purpose of procreation. Boys who broke the rules by listening to CDs or kissing girls were expelled from the enclave, though the real motive for expelling some of the boys was so that the older men could have more women and girls for themselves. Warren Jeffs would torture animals to death in front of children in order to illustrate that humane treatment of animals was a secular idea that would move people away from worshipping god.

Domestic violence and child abuse was rife and victims had no hope of receiving help from the local police as they too were members of the FLDS. With Warren Jeffs becoming more and more extreme, Carolyn realized that she had to get herself and her children out. Women were allowed to drive but their vehicles had no number plates: that way if they were to attempt to escape they would be stopped by the police. The enclave had a watch patrol that would drive around during the night. If a woman was driving she would be stopped and asked if her husband knew where she was going.

One night, when her husband was away, Carolyn packed her eight children into her van and drove to a convenience store where her brothers Arthur and Darrel, who agreed to help her to escape, were waiting to escort her to Salt Lake City.

Eventually Carolyn succeeded in making a life for herself and her children in the outside, but unfortunately her eldest daughter Betty "chose" to return to the cult when she turned eighteen. Carolyn has not heard from her since.

The abuses of FLDS were tolerated by the authorities who were silenced by the "Freedom of Religion" principle. But isn't "freedom of religion" an oxymoron?

How can there be freedom when children are indoctrinated from birth and denied the information and education to develop the ability to make informed choices?

(Continued on page 23)

(Continued from page 22)

Isn't "freedom of religion" a tool used by the various religious leaders to exercise power over every aspect of their follower's lives? How can there be freedom when people are punished for doubting and exiting a particular religion?

The words *freedom* and *religion* do not belong together, they are mutually exclusive, a joke at the expense of those who suffer within the various religions.

True freedom encompasses freedom *from* religion. Unless societies can guarantee the individual's human right of *freedom from religion*, we cannot and should not uphold the principle of freedom of religion as a human right.

Carolyn's book has kept me up late for several nights, just one more page — and another — and then I would look up at the clock and it would be two hours past my bedtime!

This book is a "must read" for all of those suffering from the delusion that religion is a force for good and that communities should be allowed to get away with human rights abuses, simply because it is their religion or culture.

Voila Papas

Recommended further reading:

Under the Banner of Heaven by Jon Krakauer

Not Without my Daughter by Betty Mahmoody

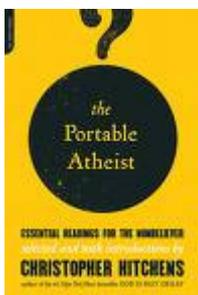
Infidel by Ayaan Hirsi Ali

Editor's note: I would also add to the list of Recommended Reading, *Once a Brethren Boy* by Noel Virtue.

More about Mormon Polygamy and forced marriages:

<http://www.helpthechildbrides.com/>

<http://www.polygamy.org/>



The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever

Selected by **Christopher Hitchens**

Da Capo Press, U.S.A., 2007

500pp. with index

Christopher Hitchens, acknowledged as one of the world's "top 100 public intellectuals", is a prolific author who has vigorously engaged in the current, raging God or no-god debate with such books as his recent *God Is Not Great: How religion poisons everything*.

In *The Portable Atheist* he has chosen extracts from the writings of 47 eminent freethinkers, past and present. The list includes such famous names as J. S. Mill, Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, Mark Twain, Sigmund Freud, Albert Einstein, Bertrand Russell, Carl Sagan, Richard Dawkins, Salman Rushdie and Sam Harris. Each one is introduced by Hitchens.

Hitchens prefaces his anthology with a compelling introduction that is, in essence, a distillation of his *God is Not Great*. He begins by observing that in this age of science and reason there is an upsurge of self-interested forces that want to compel us to return to the religions of ignorance and fear. High on this list are "the American evangelical fundamentalists [who are] trying to teach stultifying pseudo-science in schools, criminalize homosexuality, forbid stem-cell research, and display Mosaic law in courtrooms."

Hitchens goes on to enumerate some of the hoary chestnuts of these apologists for the unbelievable, such as, without God there is no basis for morality and ethical behaviour, and then proceeds effectively to demolish them.

(Continued on page 24)

(Continued from page 23)

Some of the absurdities of the faith religions are next to come under his fire – take one from the Judaeo-Christian tradition for example. *Homo sapiens* has been on this earth for at least 150,000 years. “And yet, for all these millennia, heaven watched with indifference and then – and only in the last six thousand years at the very least – decided that it was time to intervene as well as redeem.” During those preceding millennia before God intervened, humankind struggled and suffered, floundered and groped its way, inventing a variety of man-made religions to “answer” some of the mysteries of life and nature. To put it another way, what this means is that if the time *Homo sapiens* has been on this earth is represented by 100 periods of time, 96 went by before this benevolent, loving God deigned to intervene. Absurd, isn’t it?

Yet, as Hitchens points out, “Even today, there are important men and women of science – admittedly a minority – who maintain that their findings are compatible with belief in a creator.” Such people, says Hitchens, “testify to the extreme stubbornness with which intelligent people will cling to unsupported opinions.” Don’t we know it!

Having set the scene in the introduction, the reader is then led through a selection of the writings of influential freethinkers, past and present, that have dared to challenge the conventional “wisdom”.

It is clearly not possible, within the scope of this review, to say something about each of these 47 freethinkers and their writings, so I will confine myself to a general observation about the overall selection.

The writings selected by Hitchens range over the period from the first century BCE (Lucretius) to the present day (Dawkins etc). Thus, the reader cannot expect each and every selection to be an exposition of atheism as we understand it today. Some of the authors lived in pre-science days and others when scientific enquiry was in its infancy. Yet all of them were genuine freethinkers who were prepared to think outside the square, challenge the conventional wisdom and critically examine the beliefs of the day. Thus, these freethinkers prepared the way for those who followed — people who had a vastly greater fund of scientific knowledge at their disposal; and we are as much in their debt as we are to Dawkins, Harris and Hitchens himself.

What the reader will find, therefore, is a development of thought ranging through deism, agnosticism to full-blown atheism. Indeed, one author even goes beyond the definition of atheism as accepted by many, including the Atheist Foundation of Australia (“atheism is the acceptance that there is no credible scientific or factually reliable evidence for the existence of a god, gods or the supernatural”). Penn Jillette says, “I believe there is no God. I’m beyond atheism. Atheism is not believing in God. Not believing in God is easy – you can’t prove a negative . . . believing there is no God lets me be proven wrong and that’s always fun.” Although this thought was novel to me, it may have preceded Jillette by some fifty years. One of the 36 quotations from Einstein’s writings selected by Hitchens makes a similar point, “Mere unbelief in a personal God is no philosophy at all.”

This progression of thought is not only to be seen in the writings of freethinkers down through the ages but also in the thinking of individuals over their lifetime. Einstein is a case in point. In 1921, in a letter to a Jewish rabbi, he said, “I believe in Spinoza’s God who reveals himself in the orderly harmony of what exists, not in a God who concerns himself with fates and actions of human beings.” In another letter of 1950 he stated, “My position concerning God is that of an agnostic.” However, in yet another letter in 1954, shortly before his death, he said, “It was, of course, a lie what you read about my religious convictions, a lie which is being systematically repeated. I do not believe in a personal God and I have never denied this but have expressed it clearly.”

I think there is a lesson here for us atheists. Sometimes we think of agnostics as timid, wishy-washy and wanting a bob each way. Undoubtedly in some cases this is true. However, in other cases a person’s agnosticism may be a *stage* through which they are going in their thinking on the journey from a faith based religion that may, in time, reach a conclusion in atheism. This was so in my own case. The process took many years. So we should be careful in our dialogue with agnostics lest we jump to the wrong conclusion about their agnosticism and hinder rather than help them on their journey to atheism.

To summarise: within the writings of the 47 authors chosen by Hitchens a development of thought over the ages and, in some cases, within the individuals themselves, is evident. The common factor, however, is that they were freethinkers all and we are in their debt whatever the stage of their beliefs at the time. Thus I thoroughly recommend this book, not only to atheists but to anyone who is critically rethinking the religious beliefs of his or her upbringing.

Charles Cornwall



Once again, this time here in my state of Florida, the evolution in the classroom debate has surfaced. It seems there's just no court ruling that keeps the anti-evolution crowd down! After the Dover, Pennsylvania, case in 2005 where a judge ruled "Intelligent Design" was basically creationism in drag and not permitted in the classroom, the war against science has heated up again. This time they have forced the Florida State School Board to use the expression "the scientific theory of evolution" in place of simply "evolution", when referring to the process. As most of us Atheists have observed over the years, the religious zealots have employed the term "scientific theory" as a euphemism, or code word within their ranks, as some crackpot idea derived by those who hate God, to promote "satanistic Darwinism". A scientific theory has no standing compared to the most holy divine truth handed down thousands of years ago by their invisible deity! I suppose we should be somewhat satisfied, considering that the word "evolution" has in the past never been permitted in a Florida science textbook. The phrase "change over time" had been substituted.

Since only 42% of Americans accept evolution as fact, according to a Harris poll taken last November (and probably fewer than that in Florida), it was impossible to convince the state school board, influenced by the pious politicians, to implement all the changes requested by the scientific community regarding the material in the new textbooks. Not to change the subject, but another *really* scary number from that Harris poll was 31% of Americans still believe in witches!

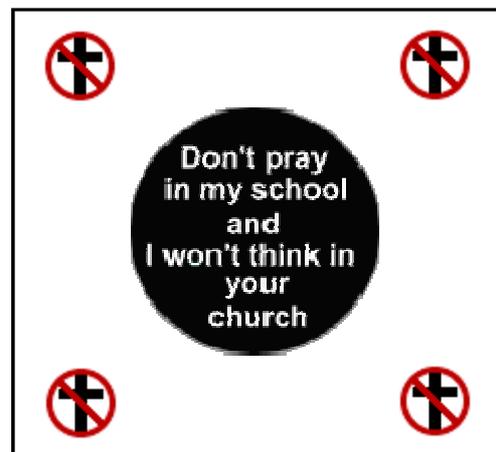
Even more anti-evolution sentiment may soon rear its ugly head in Texas where Christine Comer, former Director of Science Curriculum for the Texas Education Agency, was forced to resign in November after she forwarded an e-mail promoting a talk by one of the pro-evolution witnesses in the Dover, PA, case. In a December interview with the *Austin American Statesman*, Mrs Comer said, "We were actually told in a meeting in September that if

creationism is the party line, we have to abide by it." The new chair of the Texas board is now — you guessed it, a creationist! Looks like we're in for yet another battle when the Texas school board decides on new science textbooks this year. And Americans continue to wonder why our country is rated so poorly on international scholastic standards in science.

As my deadline for this article approaches, it's beginning to look like we'll have John McCain on the Republican side versus Barack Obama, the Democrat, for the November Presidential election. Hillary Clinton is still holding on, but maybe through after the 4 March primary elections in Texas and Ohio. Typically, McCain is the "pro-life" god-fearing, war hero Republican, and Obama the "baby killing, liberal, pro-Islam, Satan worshipping" Democrat! I can just hear the Republican hate and smear machine gearing up for the November election campaign! Obama *might* just win this one considering how the Bush gang has made a total mess of the country. As far as the separation of church and state goes, the lesser of the "evils" is always the Democrat. To get elected here, you *must*, of course, subscribe to some version of Christinsanity. The difference is how much prayer in public schools, anti-abortion, anti-evolution, anti-gay nonsense, etc, we have to put up with when the Republicans are in power. Remember that 31% who believe in witches? *They vote!*

One other disturbing item this month: a few days ago I saw a car with a licence tag from Indiana that had the phrase "In God We Trust" conspicuously emblazoned on it, just to the left of centre. I checked the State of Indiana web site, and, sure enough, you can get this special issue plate for no additional charge! State sponsored promotion of religion raises its ugly head! Hmm! I wonder if you could get in trouble for getting one of these tags and painting an X across the damn slogan?

Bill



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2	LARGE	2	LARGE
2	EXTRA LARGE	1	EXTRA LARGE

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