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The Australian Atheist

Issue Number 34

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**Atheist Foundation President has a 'hangout'
with the Prime Minister.**

**Poster Auction raises money for
Chaplaincy High Court Challenge,
Kasese Humanist School,
Atheist Foundation of Australia.**

Girl Guides go Godless.

and More



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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From the Editor

The end is nigh! (for me.) Well not really the end, but a new beginning. As of 18 July 2012 the AFA has a new Treasurer and new Membership Coordinator. Julian Jordan has taken over treasury with Mark Gilroy as his assistant. Membership is now in the hands of Grant Ettrick, ably assisted by Donna Ettrick. My main role will be Editor of *The Australian Atheist* with my American 'underling' Tom Melchiorre. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Julian, Grant, Mark and Donna for taking on these roles. As the foundation has grown, the workload has increased significantly, and it is now too much for me to do the magazine, treasury and membership. I will of course be continuing with general AFA business. It has been a fantastic experience for me and I wouldn't have missed it for the world, but after two conventions and 7 years of bookwork I needed a rest.

The GAC posters were auctioned on eBay (see page 4), the GAC DVD is being produced, and Grant Ettrick is spending his 'spare' hours uploading videos to YouTube. The link to our YouTube site is on page 14. Apologies to Grant for making that sound like an easy task — I know it isn't, but I can't begin to explain what you do.

Speaking of Conventions, I hope everyone, young and old, enjoys Michael Williams' article on page 20. His enthusiasm is inspiring. It is also a great testimony to the speakers who attend the conventions.

Once again Jason Ball set the wheels in motion for us in a big way. His suggestion to post a question about School Chaplains on the OurSay website went off like a rocket. The AFA was lucky enough to win a spot on the panel to ask the Prime Minister a question. A transcript can be read on page 7.

On the June long weekend, David and I attended the 90th birthday luncheon for Brenda Cornish. Brenda was the Treasurer of the AFA for nearly 30 years, while Keith, her husband, was President. We have been to many of the Cornish functions over the last 25 years and know the immediate family members quite well. The Cornish clan are renowned for arranging a great spread and are more than generous in accommodating our vegan diet.



David Nicholls

Brenda Cornish

Lee Holmes

After lunch two speeches were made, the first by the eldest child, and the second by one of the grandchildren.

Neither of them mentioned anything about Brenda's involvement in the Atheist Foundation. A third of Brenda's and Keith's lives were heavily devoted to atheism and specifically the AFA. Everyone in the room knew this, yet it was not deemed worthy of a mention. For David and me it was disappointing — especially because the grandchild came to the 2010 Global Atheist Convention — but not totally unexpected. The power of religious influence in rural communities, and in this case Gumeracha, South Australia, is still quite potent.

Despite our personal disappointment it was lovely seeing Brenda again and although nearly blind and deaf, she has not lost her sense of humour or her sharp mind. Congratulations from all of us.

Lee Holmes



GAC Poster Auction

The auction of three posters signed by all the presenters at the 2012 Global Atheist Convention was a huge success.

- Poster 1 with proceeds to The High Court Challenge sold for \$1548.00.
- Poster 2 with proceeds to Kasese Humanist Primary School sold for \$2650.00.
- Poster 3 with proceeds to Atheist Foundation of Australia sold for \$2700.00.

Thank you to all the bidders and congratulations to the lucky winners.



On behalf of Kasese Humanist Primary School, I am writing to thank the Global Atheist Convention Committee for having auctioned the signed Atheist poster on eBay and where funds realised after the sale of the poster were sent to our school. I am passing on a thank you message to all the members who attended the Global Atheist Convention that was conducted on 13th - 15th April 2012 in Australia courtesy of the Atheist Foundation of Australia.

The funds realised from the sale of the posters amounting to \$AU2650 were well received in our bank account in Kasese and these funds have assisted the school in purchasing of more local textbooks, two footballs and two netballs, procured Library furniture, purchased two bags of corn meal and one sack of beans to feed both the teachers and some students, while the remaining portion of funds has been left aside in our Bank Account to reinforce payment of teachers' salaries.

Kasese Humanist Primary School on a special note thanks freethinkers especially from within Australia for continuing to sponsor children in our school. The funds realised from international sponsors have also helped us tremendously in supplementing the day-to-day school fees collections from local parents and guardians for the smooth running of the school.

More about the school at www.kasesehumanistschool.webs.com

We remain fully committed to ensuring we provide a balanced secular education that is free from dogmas and indoctrinations and encourage the secular community whenever they are on a trip to Uganda to visit Kasese Humanist Primary School and meet the children, the teachers and the school managers.

We thank all the members of the Atheist Foundation of Australia and the Global Atheist Convention Committee for this donation and we look forward to more mutual cooperation between our school project and the AFA in more years to come.

Yours in freethought,
Bwambale Robert
School Director



Media Release

Mark no religion – and we did

The Atheist Foundation of Australia ran the 'Mark No Religion' campaign in the months leading up to the Australian Census in August 2011 encouraging those who do not practice a religion to answer the question accurately.

No Religion has shown a marked increase with 5 of the 8 states and territories showing it as the top response. The ACT, Tasmania and SA have the highest number of non-religious at over 28%.

David Nicholls, President of the Atheist Foundation of Australia, said, "Today's results released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that Australians with no religion is climbing quite rapidly while the religious and particularly the Christian portion of society is in decline."

The No religion figure for 2006 was 18.7%. This climbed to 22.3% in 2011.

Nicholls stated, "The loaded question of 'What is your religion', with the no religion box at the bottom of the list of choices on the Census form, and people marking their religion of baptism out of habit, one would expect the figures not to represent reality."

The Census figures are totally inadequate in providing an accurate picture of faith and no-faith in Australia. Politicians and religious leaders use these fundamentally flawed statistics in making laws and influencing the population to accept various notions. Even these extremely distorted figures show about a quarter of the Australian population do not have a religion in their lives. We are not a Christian nation at all.

As there is now an obvious need, the AFA will be contacting the Australian Bureau of Statistics for discussion concerning changing the content and format of the question of religion on the Census form.

David Nicholls
President
Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc

Nimbin godless

Sue Gardiner

The Northern Star 21 July 2012

<http://www.northernstar.com.au/story/2012/07/21/nimbin-godless-lismore/>

Nimbin is the atheist capital of Australia according to 2011 census data which shows only 41% of residents reported a religious affiliation.

The next most godless areas were inner-city suburbs Darlington in NSW with only 43% indicating a specific faith and Clifton in Victoria on 47%, according to census data.

Remote Aboriginal communities were among the most religious.

Atheist Foundation of Australia vice-president Michael Boyd said Nimbin's results were not surprising given that hippies were the first to buck established norms in the 1960s.

"I guess it reflects the fact that people in Nimbin question things a bit more," Mr Boyd said.

Nimbin Hemp Embassy president Michael Balderstone said locals were highly spiritual but not drawn to the mainstream church.

"I'm a total believer. I love Jesus but I hate what the church has done to the message," Mr Balderstone said.

The Uniting Church, Presbyterian, Catholics and Anglicans have representation in Nimbin.

But the congregations were small and mostly comprised of retirees, admits local Anglican Church warden Faye Scherf.

Mrs Scherf said she was disappointed about Nimbin's lack of regard for religion but "people are entitled to their own opinion."

"People who don't believe in anything are lost souls," the 82-year-old said.

"I think we all have to have something to believe in whether we call it God or Buddha or what."

"There's definitely a Christian influence out here but it's not a big one."

She said she felt very at home in Nimbin regardless.



Hangout with the Prime Minister



Misha Schubert

Love, religion overtake tax for 'hangout' with PM

By Misha Schubert

The Sunday Age's national political editor

19 July 2012

Their questions are worlds apart, but they have one thing in common — the ability to mobilise an online community to help them get an audience with a Prime Minister.

Gay marriage advocates, military veterans and atheists opposed to federal funding for school chaplains managed to outstrip opponents of Australia's new carbon tax in popular polling on OurSay to choose some of the participants in tomorrow's Google+ hangout with Julia Gillard.

The people who asked the top three questions — Shane Bazzi, David Jamison and David Nicholls — get the chance to 'hangout' with Ms Gillard in a live video chatroom, putting their questions to her directly in an all-digital interview at 11am tomorrow.

Others from across Australia who have submitted questions via social media will join them for the hour-long discussion about policy, priorities and politics.

The hangout, a collaboration between Fairfax Media, OurSay and Deakin University, is a first for an Australian Prime Minister. US President Barack Obama did a similar thing in January, taking questions from Americans about jobs, foreign aid, small business, and even what romantic gestures he had in mind to mark his wedding anniversary.

You can watch live online via the Deakin Uni YouTube page, and tweet your own questions or comments as the discussion with the PM unfolds.

By the close of voting at 5pm yesterday, more than 109,000 votes had been cast for more than 2000 questions lodged with OurSay, a direct democracy project that aims to connect people with their political leaders.

Shane Bazzi, 25, of Sydney, topped the poll, asking how the Prime Minister could explain her opposition to gay marriage given she has no religious reason to object to it — as an atheist — and leads a party that describes itself as socially progressive.

"The policy affects me because I'm gay, so it's a really personal question that I would like answered," he said last night.

"She said on Q&A that she is not married herself, but she has the choice."

Clinching second place was David Jamison, the national president of the Defence Force Welfare Association, with a question demanding a higher rate of indexation for veterans pensions — contrasting their situation with the indexation rate on the age pension.

In third spot was David Nicholls, 67, who hails from the Yorke Peninsula in rural South Australia and is president of the Atheist Foundation of Australia.

Mr Nicholls wants to ask the Prime Minister about federal funding of school chaplains, believing it has no place in a secular democracy.

"Why are we putting people in schools who are not trained in anything but to pray?" he said.

Reprinted with permission from Misha Schubert



The Question

Watch the full debate at <http://www.youtube.com/deakinuniversity>

Misha Schubert:

Next up, a look at the place of religion in schools. David Nicholls finished in the top three in OurSay's popular voting process, with his question about federal funding for the School Chaplaincy Program, which was established under John Howard's prime ministership, and which Labor leaders have backed enthusiastically since. Over to you, David.



David Nicholls:

Prime Minister, against the strongly expressed concerns of mental health professionals, teacher unions and secular organisations, why do you allow the outrageous situation to continue where largely unqualified religious evangelists have access to young children in public schools, in the form of the National School Chaplaincy Program?

Julia Gillard:

David, my view about this has been formed by going to a lot of schools, I obviously went to a lot of schools as Minister for Education, I continue to go to a lot of schools as Prime Minister 'cos I absolutely love getting the opportunity to see the kids and talk to the teachers, and I always say when I'm visiting that, you know, whatever else is happening in our nation on that day, the thing that's most important that's happening is happening in our schools, so why as Prime Minister wouldn't you be there if you could? The feedback I get from schools when I visit about the Chaplains Program is that chaplains are highly valued and that they've made a difference to school, you know, culture, school engagement on a welfare basis. So we've just had a discussion about bullying, that they've made a difference to things like that, for care for students.



Now, I understand your concern about, you know, people being appropriately qualified, and we have introduced as a condition and component of this program that people do have to have an appropriate qualification in youth work and youth development, now ... and the purpose of the program isn't for people to go around, you know, on an evangelical crusade about their religion but it is for them to use the kind of skills that come with being someone in a caring profession, for our kids. So as long as schools are giving me positive feedback, I'm gonna be there saying this is a program to be valued.

Misha Schubert:

I suspect you may not agree, David. Are you satisfied with that as an answer?

David Nicholls:

No. Not at all. (*laughter*). Sorry. Sorry, Prime Minister! Anecdotal evidence, as you say ... you go round to schools and get an opinion, that is not research. There needs to be research done that can be quantified so that we actually do know what people think. Not just having principals who are happy having an extra set of hands, because that's what all ... any sort of study at the moment has just said that, we've got an extra couple of hands, why not have those hands to be people who have accredited psychological conditions implied upon them, instead of just being able to pray.





Julia Gillard:

Well David, I think you and I are going to be destined to disagree on this. The qualifications question I do agree with you on. We do have to make sure people have got appropriate skills and that has been an innovation in the program under over government, a change under our government. I form a view out there, you know, talking to people face-to-face; it's not the only way that we get information though about school chaplains and about, you know programs generally, we

do evaluations, we get feedback, and that has been positive. All of the work that we've done to do sort of diagnostics on this program and whether or not it's working. So look, I understand it's controversial for some, the government got taken to the High Court about it, for example, but I do feel some good is being done.

Transcript by
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The following is a letter OurSay received from Atheist Foundation of Australia about their thoughts, comments and experiences surrounding the 'Hangout' with the PM OurSay. Huge thanks to David Nicholls for this contribution.

The OurSay Team

<http://blog.oursay.org/post/28018508706/winning-question-asker-on-the-hangout-with-the-pm>

As an idea, the Google Hangout brought to fruition by the OurSay team, from my perspective, was conceptually brilliant as well as being very proficiently orchestrated. The organisational quality and technical expertise was really superb and it would be very hard to fault.

My question went to the top of the list very rapidly, more so than others of equal importance and there were suggestions that the enlistment of atheists in America skewed the vote. Let me say that was not orchestrated by me. Atheism is very strong on the internet, possibly for the reason it is restricted in other media outlets, and no doubt there would have been interested people in the USA and maybe elsewhere who would like to hear an atheist Prime Minister explain why Christian chaplains are allowed anywhere near state school children. The fact of the matter is that the internet does not give accurate polling results for many reasons.

There may have been votes from overseas but most of the comments regarding my question had an Australian flavour about them as many people, including those of a religious persuasion, are

unhappy with the federally funded school Chaplaincy program. A fox in the henhouse, or should I say, very young chicken-house, is an excellent analogy. The situation is a disgrace and when a majority of parents work out that their children are being influenced by evangelical Christians, it will surely come to an end. Codes of conduct are less than useless up against an overly narrow religious zealotry.

The main suggestion for impropriety, by the way, was from a journalist who to my knowledge has never given atheism a fair go in any of his works. Of course, it could be argued that this same journalist, by pushing the question about the Carbon Tax in his writings, gave that question unfair advantage above others, including mine that did not have such access to a wider coverage.

Misha Schubert was a wonderful and competent host. I won't individually name others involved who impressed me with the whole process as it was universally splendid and all should take credit for making it work, something I had grave doubts about considering the task at hand. Very well done is an understatement. It is no easy job to train a



'mob' of people who have had various public speaking experience and technical expertise. The methodology for preparing everyone was superb and was carried out over a very short space of time.

The one thing I would like to see changed is for a greater input from the people posing the questions. Allow them to express their ideas and expand upon

them instead of the main amount of talking coming from, in this case, the Prime Minister who I thought handled the question skilfully but, and this is to be expected, in a manner steeped in politico-speak. The only problem I see in the above is that a more intense 'grilling' by those asking the questions could put off those not willing to enter the Lion's den where they might be devoured.

PM's juvenile hangout

The Sunday Age Letters to the Editor 29 July 2012

From her Google+ 'hangout', the Prime Minister's blithe non-answers on school chaplains and gay marriage left me temporarily at a loss for words. But let me try for a few now: condescending, dismissive, superficial, diversionary, misleading, ill-considered, juvenile.

Stephen Saunders, ACT

Thank you Fnuky! www.fnuky.com.au

I would like to thank all our members and supporters who voted for my question on the OurSay website for a 'Hangout' with the Prime Minister Julia Gillard. Although the answer from the PM was less than satisfactory, it certainly demonstrated the federally-funded School Chaplaincy Program concerns a great many people.

The interesting part of this exercise was that our internet connection was not adequate for the audio/visual presentation. It was only through the kindness of Jeremy Ervine CEO, Fnuky advertising agency in Adelaide that it was made possible.

Jeremy agreed to set up his own high-speed equipment late on Friday night and allowed me to access the same gear on Saturday for five or so hours. This was done at absolutely no cost. The wonderful décor at Fnuky made the perfect backdrop for an interview by the ABC after the 'Hangout'. The AFA is indebted to Fnuky for being so generous with time and equipment for this successful venture.

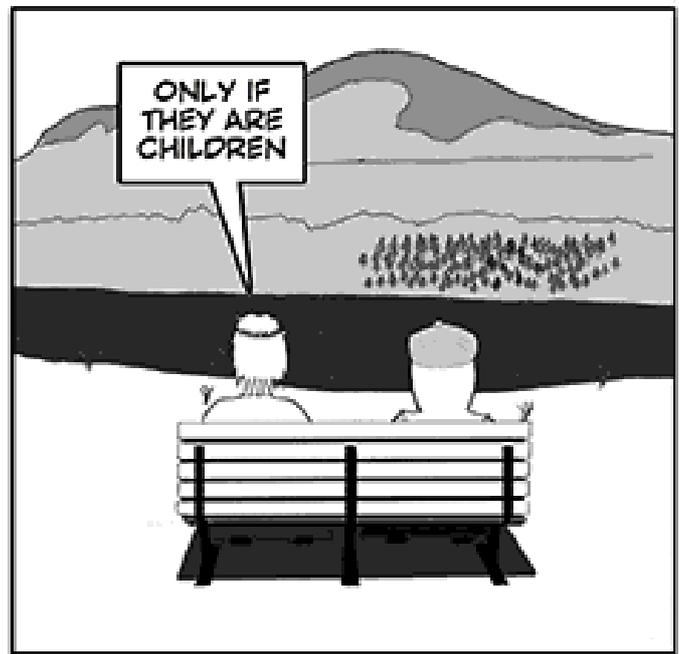
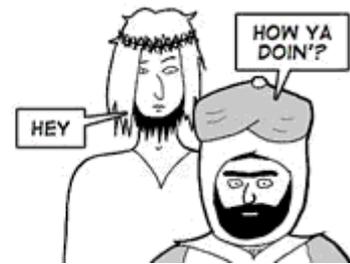
Thanks, Jeremy, and maybe next time any of our members need advertising, they will seek you out. You are a real talented professional.

David



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What a commandment, make disciples (of school children). What a responsibility. What a privilege we have been given. *Let's go for it!*



Evonne Paddison, CEO ACCESS Ministries

From the Inbox

Hello,

I subscribe to no religion and agree with Question 7 in your FAQ¹ – your answer that atheists reject 20,000 religions resonates with me. I also reject them, but I am also a fence sitter regarding the potential existence of God. I cannot rule out God creating a Universe simple because I do not know how or why the Big Bang occurred, or how or why the energy that created matter comes from. It is said that simply the fact that the Universe exists is evidence for God. What are atheists views on how the whole shebang came into being or more pertinently, where the energy/matter came from and potentially why... ?

Regards,
Andrew

¹Don't Atheists have to prove that a god does not exist?

Those proposing that fairies, bunyips or gods exist must produce supportive evidence. It must be acceptable to all peoples and not only to the adherents of a particular 'faith'. Over the last six thousand years, there have been 20,000 religions.* They have all claimed, equally fervently, that theirs is the 'true' one, rejecting the other 19,999 as false. Atheists reject, as fabricated, 20,000.

It is the highest form of unreasonableness to expect Atheists to prove the negative of wild unsupported assumptions. Atheists demand evidence but none has been forthcoming over the history of humanity.

*A Guide to the Gods', by Marjorie Leach.

Hi Andrew.

One of the common misconceptions people have about atheism (and often quite deliberately) is that atheism is the belief that there is no god. While there are undoubtedly atheists who hold this view, the majority appear to simply have no belief in gods, which is an entirely different animal. The definition of atheism used by the AFA sums it up nicely: "Atheism is the acceptance that there is no credible scientific or factually reliable evidence for the existence of a god, gods or the supernatural."

I do not know 'how' the local instantiation we call the big bang occurred and am happy to admit as much. As to a 'why', I'd need some indication that an entity existed who could do such a thing, with or without intent, before 'why' becomes a question I find interesting. I find baseless claims to knowledge without testable and falsifiable evidence less than worthwhile and that is what the claims of religion invariably amount to.

I do know that the big bang did indeed occur and that there is large amounts of evidence floating around in the universe from which people have been able to determine the chain of events from very early in the universe's history up to now. A chain of events I might add that is amenable to measurement and test, unlike the origin claims of the religious.

I find it interesting that a large number of people appear to be so unhappy with 'I don't know' that they will accept the most improbable claims without any evidence for such. Many people seem to want an explanation they can cling to, no matter how impoverished or uninformed that explanation is. To me this is the great failing of religion, as it encourages people to accept just so stories and not see the wonder of the universe or experience the simple awe of 'I don't know, let's see if we can find out'.

I've always worked in science and like most scientists I don't do it for what we know, but for what we do not. That is the challenge we take on, to walk a little further along the path and see where knowledge might lead us. I'm not aware of any evidence supporting the existence of gods of any description. If some evidence pointing to the existence of the supernatural turns up I will have a look and see where it leads. Until then I'll go with the evidence to date, I will keep an open mind but so far no event has ever been shown to be the result of the supernatural and of all the things man has ever investigated, none has ever turned out to be caused by magic.

I hope this helps and wish you well in your musings, and remember the words of the late great Christopher Hitchens: "What can be asserted without evidence can be dismissed without evidence."

Donovan



From Mortality to Morality – The Key to Religious Power

By Martin S Pribble

The biggest question a human can ask during a lifetime is the question of what happens when we die. The short answer, of course, is we don't know. We can't know. It is an unanswerable question, and yet the fact that religions say they have the answer is the one thing that gives them power.

Why can't we answer this question? It is because we live our lives in a state of awareness, this thing we call consciousness, our ability to know our physical and mental beings, which reacts to their surroundings all under the control of the brain. And when we die, the brain stops functioning,

so our ability to know anything ceases. In order to know, the mind must continue afterwards, after the physical mechanisms which allow it to function have ceased. Of course, as far as we can tell, this is impossible. I've likened this idea to a light-bulb that continues to shine long after the batteries have run out of power. If this were the case we wouldn't need batteries at all, lights would be able to shine on their own. Likewise, once the energy that powers our brains runs out, so does the brain activity.

Some would like us to think that beyond the physical nature of our brains there is something else, something independent of the laws of biology and physics, that gives us our personalities and our sense of self, an ethereal and supernatural soul. And because this is supernatural, we can't see, detect or measure this; it's beyond understanding. According to these people, the soul continues after the body ceases to function, therefore, death is not the end but rather the beginning. Why would we think this in the first place? Why this yearning for the soul to continue in the first place?

As we all live and grow, we experience death in many forms: the first dead animal we encounter, the death of our first goldfish, and onward until we experience the deaths of those we know, those we love, and finally, we experience our own deaths. There are a lot of individuals in life that we meet and interact with, many of whom we come to treasure and love, so it's a difficult proposition to imagine these people just stop existing after they die. We admire qualities about others, we see the joy and pain of life, and, through our empathy, we experience these things with them. We, in ourselves, are so vital, so alive, and we have our own thoughts, our own experiences, a lifetime's worth of memories. How can it be that when we die that all this life simply disappears?

Firstly I'd say that our yearning for others in our lives, those whose presence will be missed by us as we continue to live, is the first place the idea of a soul starts. It makes our lives a lot easier when we imagine that our dead loves ones are still around somewhere, looking over us as we toil on alone. It's easy to imagine, and it's a comforting thought, that we don't have to live this life alone.

Once humanity convinced itself of the idea of the mind and memories continuing on after death, we then had to explain where these souls are. We live life as a three-dimensional existence, and we seem to move forward in time, watching as the internal workings of the plants and animals around us continually grow and die, and we know we can't see the souls here in our everyday existence. So in order for the



idea of the unmeasurable soul to exist, it must exist in another dimension, one we can't see, hear, detect or measure. This ghost world is apparently outside of our understanding also, and this being the case, it is impossible to know.

Again, we can't know. If we can't know, then doesn't this all start sounding a little like a poorly imagined film script? A fantasy novel designed to lull us into a false sense of security? If the soul is continuous, doesn't it mean we can stop worrying so much about our lives here on Earth because there is another eternal life hereafter? Can't we therefore do whatever we like after this life, without fear of consequences?

The instigators of religion have already thought of this. They tell us that in order for our after-lives to be pain-free, one where we live in a paradise forever, there are a few rules we must follow, and there will be a test at the end to surmise whether or not we are worthy of living in this paradise. If not, we get thrown into hell where we suffer eternally. This notion of rules therefore calls for an arbitrator, a ruler who will be the judge of us after we die. If he/she/it/they deems that we have followed the rules, as laid out by the instigators of religions, then we will be granted passage to the hereafter, up in the sky with him/her/it/them.

So here we have it. Life is too precious to end at death, therefore there must be a soul. The soul must be eternal, as it has survived this life, therefore there must be an afterlife. The afterlife must be pain-free, or what is the point of eternity? If the afterlife is pain-free, then the lives we lead now are of less consequence. To ensure that anarchy doesn't happen, we then load the current life with all the responsibilities of following a set of rules in order to get to the afterlife, therefore people invented the rule books. In order for the rule books to be judged, there must be an arbitrator, therefore we need god. And, finally, in order to make the afterlife something we desire, we must offer another, far less pleasant alternative, therefore we need hell.

It's a terribly long and arduous train of thought, to start from the desire to have our loved ones and ourselves continue after death, to then have a possibility of eternal torture, don't you think? But because all this is unknowable, and since humanity seems to continually be asking questions along these lines with no good answer, when someone comes along claiming to have this knowledge, we seem to be more than willing to listen.

Many have come before claiming to know the answers, and this is where religion gets its power from: the claim of absolute knowledge over these unanswerable questions.

If, however, we look at life as a single journey, one that each of us gets to take only once, and strip away the afterlife from the picture, what are we left with?

Our lives become far more immediate, our actions are of a far greater consequence, the effects we have on others are real, and the fact that we only get one chance at this life becomes of utmost importance. The theists claim that without this 'morality' they have laid out for us in their rule books the nihilism of soullessness means nothing but anarchy and chaos. This claim is made out of the fear they have of destabilisation by people who dismiss their claims of knowledge.

If we remove the soul from the question, then religions topple, for they hold no power over people.

This article was first published at martinspribble.com on June 23 2012.

Follow the guidebook for an afterlife
Which one do I try which one do I try?
I'd like to believe that I'll never die
But I can't comply, no I can't comply

from

Afterlife
'An Atheist Album'
By Shelley Segal



IN MEMORY OF
**CHRISTOPHER
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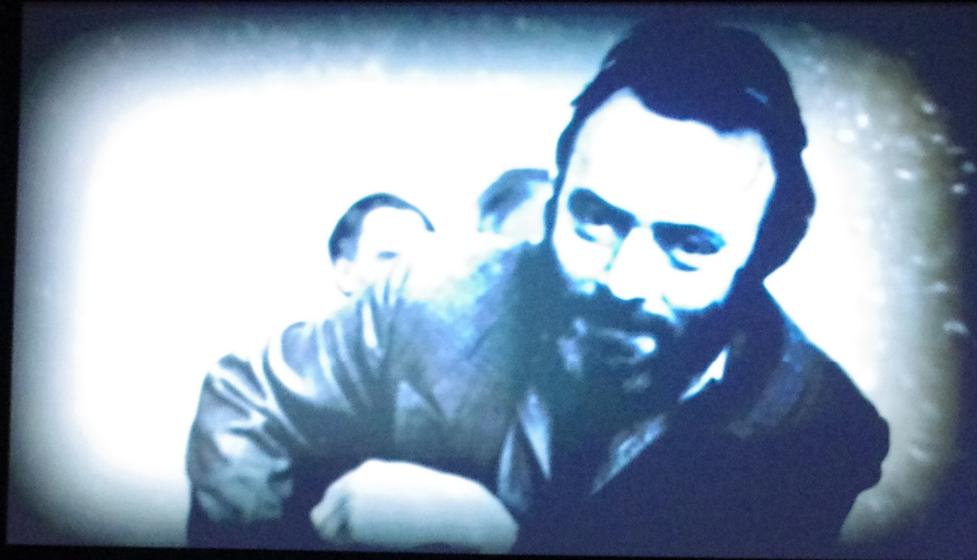


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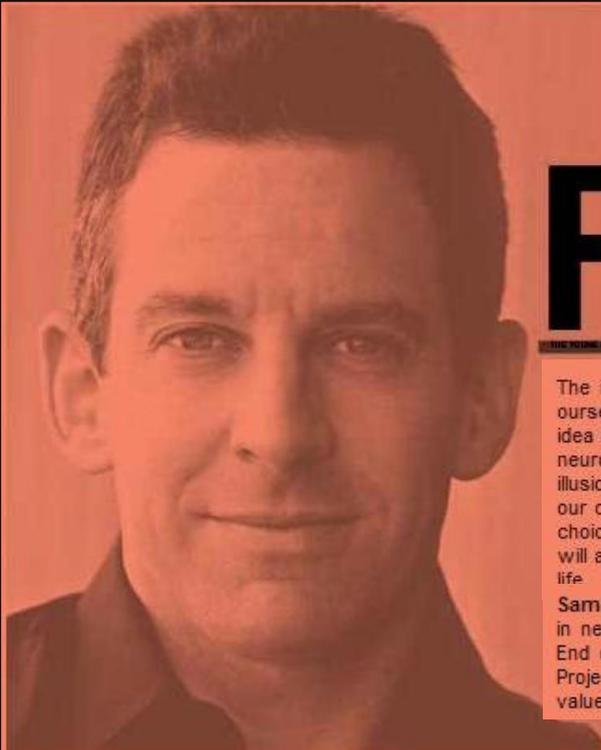
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SAM HARRIS

THE DELUSION OF FREE WILL

The idea of free will underpins our views of morality, religion, ethics, law and ourselves. From our systems of government to our most intimate relationships, the idea that we determine our own thoughts and actions is fundamental. But what neuroscience and psychology have taught us in recent years is that free will is an illusion. This is simply not the way our minds work. So what does this mean for our cherished notions of political and social freedom and our focus on individual choice and responsibility? To find out we need to look beyond the delusion of free will and change the way we think about some of the most important questions in life.

Sam Harris received a degree in philosophy from Stanford University and a PhD in neuroscience from UCLA. He is the author of bestselling books including *The End of Faith*, *The Moral Landscape* and *Free Will*. He is cofounder and CEO of Project Reason, which is devoted to spreading scientific knowledge and secular values in society.

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The Holy See and Sex

By Genevieve Stewart

The declaration text at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development contains no references to reproductive rights.

The weak language pertaining to gender, health and education is largely due to the influence of the Vatican.

The Vatican's permanent mission to the UN, the Holy See, has been included in UN processes as a 'permanent non-member observer state' since 1964.

At the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the Holy See fought and failed to remove the clause calling for "include women-centered, women-managed, safe and effective reproductive health care", and at Rio+20 (2012) took up that mission again.

This time, however, they succeeded in removing any reference to reproductive health and rights from the text. During the negotiations, the Holy See proposed nearly one hundred deletions and alterations to the text on gender, health and education — more than any member observer state present.



Although it is not actually a member state, the Holy See's influence at the UN is granted because the Holy See is recognised as having religious, spiritual and moral authority in the world.

This position is disputed by Catholics for Choice, who have lobbied against the Holy See's inclusion in UN negotiations since 1999. They argue that the Holy See has a 'dogmatic agenda' and "[seeks] to use its privileged position under the banner of the Holy See at the UN to impose its agenda on everyone."

That agenda, at Rio+20, has largely been to block progress on advancing sexual health and reproductive rights.

The original text was endorsed by the Major Groups for Women and Children & Youth, with mention of "ensuring universal access to safe, effective, modern, affordable and acceptable family planning." The final text contains the somewhat less decisive verbs 'recognise' 'aim' and 'support' in relation to women's health.

The consequences of the Vatican's agenda could be disastrous for women's rights and sustainable development as a whole.

"Everyone who cares about women should be very, very worried about the Holy See's interference with reproductive rights," says Tania Dethlefsen of a Danish family planning association.

Ensuring access to sexual health care, including contraception, is a millennium development goal, yet the Vatican opposes the use of all types of contraception other than the notoriously unreliable 'natural' methods.

Socially and environmentally, the Holy See's position on reproductive health is unsound. Population management through effective family planning is an essential component of sustainable development.

Family planning is the cheapest avenue to sustainable development with six dollars saved for every one invested. It is also a human right and one which is too often denied to women, despite the profound influence on women's quality of life. The right to medical care is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and includes the right to reproductive health care.

The Holy See's claim to legitimate statehood — and thus permanent observer status at the UN — is tenuous at best. Unlike the Vatican, the Holy See does not have any permanent citizens or land and its representatives are allowed in Geneva only because other states have permitted it. If the Holy See were to be used as precedent then any religion could claim a seat at the UN, if only it were centralised enough.

The UN Charter expressly ensures "fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to religion." The Vatican's anti-choice, anti-women agenda is clearly a religious one. By blocking UN resolutions on these issues, the Vatican seeks to impose its religious dogma on all people, no matter their beliefs.

Religious dogma has no place at UN negotiations, which seek to improve the lives of many regardless of their faith. The Vatican must not be allowed to continue its anachronistic agenda in such an important international arena.

The 'negotiations' of the Rio+20 summit have officially closed, with all parties agreeing on the severely compromised Declaration text.

In the closing plenary session, the Holy See was the third last 'country' to speak. After successfully campaigning for the removal of any reference to 'reproductive rights', the closing speech was taken as a chance to make it perfectly clear what the Vatican's position was.

The speech took aim at the references to 'reproductive health'.

The Holy See reaffirmed its position that reproductive health encompasses "a holistic sense of health, including the mind, body and soul." We were reminded that, in the Vatican's view, "reproductive health does not include access to abortion or ... contraceptive methods."

Next, the speech took a swipe at the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) community. Sustainable development, according to the Holy See, is best served (somehow) by "marriage as sanctioned by God, between one man and one woman only."

The segue back into reproductive rights was particularly interesting, again letting us know that the Vatican doesn't approve of abortion, contraception, or 'unnatural sexual practices.'

Then, a reminder that "at the centre of sustainable development is the sanctity of the human person."

To close, the representative for the Holy See thanked Brazil, the UN, and all member states, for helping to keep 'all of creation' safe into the future.

Genevieve Stewart is a professional communications and philosophy student in Melbourne. She has worked with various organisations on climate change, forests, women's and LGBT issues. She brings these interests to the Speak Your Mind team as a contributor.



Speak Your Mind www.symnews.org is a media organisation developing young journalists whilst communicating the crisis and advocating the solutions.



News

Godless Girl Guides

Following a year and a half of consultation with thousands of members, Girl Guides Australia has decided to stop serving the Queen and doing their duty to God.

"It's been a huge, huge decision and it hasn't been taken lightly at all," Ms Allen, spokesperson for the Girl Guides, said.

"Our members didn't feel 'duty to God' reflected all faiths and belief systems across the world," Ms Allen said.

Girl Guides Australia hopes the changes will attract girls from other faiths and cultures.

"We are very much hopeful with the new wording to the promise that we'll be seen as more inclusive and modern and relevant organisation and many more people will like to join us," she said.

Other alterations to the guide law include loyal and helpful being replaced with respect and considerate.

Obedience has been abandoned and instead girls are encouraged to make choices for a better world.

"With equality and women, obedient is not an appropriate word to have in a promise and our members very much told us that," Ms Allen said.

From various sources.

From the President

The Atheist Foundation of Australia wholeheartedly congratulates the Girl Guides for initiating change to the Guiding Promise and Guide Law to bring the movement into line with the composition of the modern Australian population make-up.

The choice for many children in the past has been to say words and accept unquestionably concepts they do not necessarily agree with or indeed do not understand, in serving an uppercase 'G' God and the British Monarchy. The God previously referenced by the Guides has been the Christian god. This is not inclusive of those with other gods and indeed, no god at all.

The Queen may be a dearly-respected person of note because of tradition but asking children to serve her is tantamount to encouraging servile obedience to a non-democratic, anachronistic idea. It is now hoped that this progressive stance will be taken on by Boy Scouts Australia. Even though God and Queen are symbolic concepts, they are fertile breeding grounds for instilling notions of exclusion in our youngest citizens.

David Nicholls



The old Guide Promise

I promise that I will do my best:
To do my duty to God,
to serve the Queen and my country;
To help other people; and
To keep the Guide Law.

The new Guide Promise

I promise that I will do my best:
To be true to myself and develop my beliefs
To serve my community and Australia
And live by the Guide Law.



Allah ordered the execution

By Maryam Namazie

Below is a Reuter's report of a woman being executed near Kabul, Afghanistan by the Taliban this Sunday (8 July). It says she was accused of adultery and that Taliban members were 'sexually involved' with her, possibly via rape, and that she was tortured and killed to settle a dispute ...

Watching the very disturbing video, I can't help but think how alone she is in her last moments. She looks behind once and then faces away from the Islamist crowd.

I am taken aback by the fact that she makes no sound and no plea.

Men in the crowd say Allah ordered the execution with smiles on their faces after she is shot countless times in what seems to be an eternity.

At times like this I wonder how the world carries on.

Like W H Auden, I too wish clocks would be stopped and pianos silenced.

And of course so does many a nameless, faceless beloved left behind, maybe her loving parents, children, or the love of her life ...

*Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.*

*Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead
Scribbling on the sky the message [She] Is Dead,
Put crepe bows round the white necks of the public
doves,
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.*

*[She] was my North, my South, my East and West,
My working week and my Sunday rest,
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;
I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong.*

*The stars are not wanted now: put out every one;
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood.
For nothing now can ever come to any good.*

<http://freethoughtblogs.com/maryamnamazie/2012/07/10/allah-ordered-the-execution/>

From the President

The Atheist Foundation of Australia is outraged by the continual oppression of women and the destruction of the minds of men in countries where the Muslim faith is not only a religion but it is the law.

The horrible footage of the murder of the Afghani woman should not only create a rallying cry from atheists and freethinkers against such outrageous barbarism but it must be a focal point where all people rise up and denounce it in the strongest possible terms as being against everything good for which humanity stands.

Every person of faith, whether that be Christian, Muslim or other, needs to take note where extremism in religion leads.

Every church, mosque, synagogue and place of worship is duty bound to condemn the savagery clearly outlined in religious literature.

Every religious leader is obligated to publically denounce the violence and coercion rampant in fundamentalism.

Staying silent is acquiescence in the light of murder and mayhem done in the name of some god or other.

David Nicholls



I Was An Atheist Before It Was Cool

By Michael Williams

It was supposed to be an ordinary May long weekend for Kamloops, British Columbia. Warm breezes, blue desert skies, and plans to take advantage of the much-appreciated holiday. But at an unassuming hotel, in an unassuming conference center, a gathering of heathens was about to begin. Doctors, radio hosts, professors, comedians, activists, bloggers, authors, the average critical-thinking Joe and Jane; all coming together in a celebration of science and skepticism.

This was the *Imagine No Religion 2* conference. And it was *bad-ass*, in the lingo of my generation.

I had the pleasure of attending the conference for the second time this year (thanks to my mother!) and it is obvious how much momentum the event has gained since its first run. Not that last year's *Imagine No Religion* event was anything to scoff at, but the experience the organisers gained from it could be seen and felt this time around. A sell-out show was the first sign of improvement. One would have been hard-pressed to find an empty seat in the auditorium, and even harder pressed to find someone in those seats who wasn't fully engaged and looking to have a conversation during any free time they might have (this was unaffected by the alcohol consumed.) On that note, I was blown away by how approachable everyone was! I regret that it took half a day of precious conference time to realise this. But being a 17-year-old whipper-snapper among all these smart, sharp looking atheists could only be described as uncomfortable at first.

I am not a particularly unconfident person, but I couldn't shake the feeling that I would be unwelcome in any of the conversation circles that would sprout up between speakers. So I removed myself to a solitary perch on the auditorium balcony, setting up my laptop and writing supplies far away from the social interaction and fun. And there I stayed, soaking up the words of August Berkshire and David Eberth, and enjoying my hoard of breakfast goodies from the more-than-satisfactory continental breakfast.

It took sitting down for lunch with a perfect stranger to change my opinion on how I should

approach my experience among these, for lack of a better word, intimidating folks. The perfect stranger became Scott the computer programmer and he exposed me to just how easy it was to discuss anything, and being ashamed of my lack of understanding in a given subject was only hindering what I could gain from the people around me. You have to learn from someone after all. Asking questions really speeds up the whole process, and it turns out some god isn't randomly going to drop down from the sky looking to stuff my brains full of knowledge.

I realised now that there were no strangers here; all it took was an introduction and a whole network of views and opinions was suddenly available and accessible to me.

With a new perspective and confidence to burn I entered the fray. To the best of my ability I began engaging people that several hours before I would have simply walked

past. And you can only imagine my surprise when I discovered that actual speakers at the conference were just as eager to chat as anyone else!

This rapid transition from a scared, awkward teenager to an active member of the atheist community made me realise that there's no way I can be the only person my age experiencing the same fear. For anyone who doesn't remember their teenage years, it is actually quite common for young people to feel out of their element in an event such as *Imagine No Religion*. Having an interest in anything beyond sports, relationships, school and partying is seen as a bit odd among teenagers, at least in my hometown of Whistler, British Columbia. It's not like everyone is devoutly religious, and quite often friends of mine actually seem to agree with me when I bring up an interesting atheistic argument. So why is it so out of place to want to ask questions and understand as much as possible about the beautiful universe and planet we inhabit? I would say it is a lack of exposure for one thing. Whistler is known for downhill sports and being the Las Vegas of Canada, not for its community of freethinkers and skeptics, so the youth of my town emulate what they are expected to be. Professional athletes are our heroes, not the Four Horsemen. This is

IMAGINE
RELIGION

May 18 - 20, 2012 • Kamloops, BC



completely acceptable; however, I consider myself unbelievably lucky to have grown up in such a unique and over-the-top town and will get a good laugh over the ridiculous situations I got myself into in this little ski town until the day I die.

But balance is everything, and there's no reason why openly voicing your opinions on what just went down on Jersey Shore and why religion makes absolutely no sense couldn't come up in the same conversation. All it might take is a little exposure to just how interesting this stuff actually is, in terms that someone who hasn't picked up Hitchens or Krauss is actually going to understand. We don't all need to become activists and start our own social movements (as interesting and exciting as that may be), or even read a word of *The God Delusion*. Rather the simple act of embracing curiosity would suffice, and make it so those who are genuinely interested don't feel like they're going to be seen as 'too big for their britches' when discussing issues with those older than them. Or as a 'nerd' among their friends and peers, as I once felt myself.

Now one little conversation started the ball rolling, but taking in what the phenomenal attending speakers had to say is what really got me fired up. As with any event covering such a broad range of subjects, there were discussions I was just plain disinterested in, and some that eluded my grasp of understanding. Several speakers in particular nevertheless had a profound effect on my interests in everything from universal human rights to our bewitching, chaotic, accidental universe itself.

Desiree Schell, host of the live radio show *Skeptically Speaking*, made some brilliant points on how social movements can be used to effectively promote atheism. Her discussion got me thinking about how little atheism goes 'viral' on social networks like Facebook and Twitter. You may have heard of a little campaign called 'Kony 2012'? That particular movement turned out to be full of half-truths and hidden agendas but it was indisputably effective at occupying the forefront of many a push-button activist's mind. I suggest atheism adopt a similar take on the Kony 2012 campaign; replacing the African warlord exploiting children with a Catholic priest and — you know where I'm going with this.

Maryam Namazie, Spokesperson of the One Law

For All campaign against Sharia Law in Britain spoke on the second day of INR2. Where Desiree Schell piqued my interest in social movements, Maryam Namazie got me riled up enough to want to do something about it. I was pleased to see her raise the subject of Islam and Islamophobia, and how in the west it is taboo to criticise Islam in any way, calling the act 'racist'. Not providing basic human rights to women on the basis of religion is not something to be stashed away in the closet out of fear. Maryam put it simply: "Ideas don't need rights, people do."

Last but certainly not least was *Imagine No Religion 2's* keynote speaker, Dr Lawrence Krauss. I can say with absolute certainty that the content of Dr Krauss' discussion — 'A Universe from Nothing' — put my existence into perspective for me. He covered so much remarkable content, yet he didn't even scratch the surface in what he could have shared. One can't expect the final nail in God's coffin to be explained in a couple of hours, after all, though he did a damn good job of providing the 'Quantum Physics: For Dummies' edition.

Out of every mind-blowing concept he shared, one resonated with me more than any: "The universe equals zero." I won't regurgitate exactly how he explained it but it changed me in ways that I find are difficult to describe. In short, it was the closest thing to a religious

experience I will ever have. If you just became as interested as I was after hearing those four genuinely awesome words, I would more than highly recommend checking out his book, *A Universe From Nothing: Why There is Something Rather Than Nothing*.

I'm sure there are many who would agree that *Imagine No Religion 2* was a resounding success. The Kamloops Centre for Rational Thought put on a banger of a show, keeping everyone well-informed, well-fed, well-entertained, and more than a bit tipsy if they had a hankering for it! Bill Ligertwood is a born host, and was the perfect complement to the speakers he was introducing. At the end of it all, I left Kamloops that weekend feeling privileged to be a part of the amazing community that is Atheism. And to Richard Dawkins' comment that organising atheists is similar to herding cats: They're starting to herd themselves.

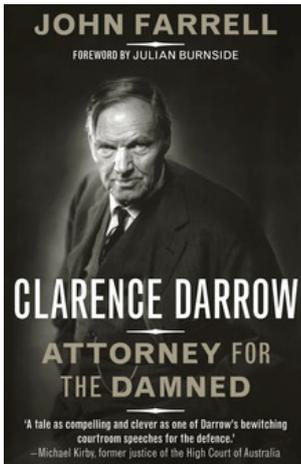
Michael Williams is a high school graduate and will attend university in September.



Michael meets Lawrence Krauss at INR2



Book Reviews



CLARENCE DARROW ATTORNEY FOR THE DAMNED

By John A. Farrell

Doubleday

New York, 2011

Reviewed by Rose Leaf

Chapter 18 - The Monkey Trial

Emerging from the powerful experience of reading Dawkins' *Greatest Show on Earth*, it was somehow appropriate that I came across a review of John Farrell's book in *Spectrum* (*Sydney Morning Herald* supplement) late last year. It was appropriate in the sense that with the rich recent flow of works on evolution and associated freethinking literature, we tend to forget or regard as now obscure the recorded lives and efforts of those who came before, like Clarence Darrow.

This new biography of Darrow was difficult to get hold of through usual Sydney booksellers. I tried to get the Farrell biography as I wanted a more modern version of the Monkey Trial, especially after reading Dawkins' book. I knew about the Monkey Trial — don't we all? — but I wanted to read it again from a fresh and updated perspective of Darrow's life and work.

The book does not recoil from a picture of a man who was truly larger than life even in his own day (during and after World War I, the 1920's and early 30's, of the last century). The sub-title does not exaggerate. If anyone was in serious legal trouble, Darrow was there.

In the US, especially around Chicago at that time, there was injustice aplenty. The United States was coming to terms with its rapid industrialisation and the war (which it was) between Capital and Labour was raw, brutal and, often, bloody. The increasingly poor migrant population, in its teeming tenement cities, was demarcated along class lines.

In his introduction, Farrell refers to Darrow as 'Jefferson's heir'. If we take this to mean a simple belief in Paine's rights of man, then the appellation is correct. For Darrow's motives, throughout his professional life, were really quite simple: he fought injustices wherever he saw them. He took up the cudgels for the 'damned', especially where the odds were heavily against someone for whatever reason. However, Darrow was no romantic Robin Hood figure.

In terms of religion, he was probably an agnostic. He was also a casual philanderer, and was almost certainly a briber of jurors in a good cause. But was motivated to anger and action on the side of working men, and inevitably, their families, when they were being crushed, as he saw it, by powerful economic forces. And this was true not only of the working poor. In the Leopold and Loeb case, his motivation was almost certainly the odds against these rich young men. He at least saved their lives.

Darrow was a dominating figure in the courtroom, standing over 6 feet tall. He was well versed in the more histrionic arts of great advocacy. He could use his voice in natural, unaffected tones or moderate it to great volume and intensity. He would shrug with sarcasm, use body language to intimidate, or make a point with grand gestures. Ridicule was a favoured weapon of exposure, especially in relation to religious



bigotry. However, he conceded that religion offered solace for some in times of adversity.

It was ridicule he used to great effect against William Jennings Bryan with whom he clashed in the Monkey Trial. Bryan was a famous public and legal figure, a former Secretary of State who later emerged as the country's foremost critic of Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution. Darrow said that Bryan "tried to shut out the teaching of science in public schools." This type of religious extremism, of course, as we know, still dogs American society.

Farrell's book is a fascinating account of Darrow's most famous cases, none more so than the Monkey Trial of 1925. To quote Darrow himself: "It was the dense ignorance of fundamentalists and their persistent endeavour to destroy freedom of thought" that motivated his fierce defence of Scopes, the High School teacher for whom he appeared against Bryan.

Scopes was a 24-year-old, selected by the American Civil Liberties Union especially for the purpose of the trial, which was based on Scopes' admission that he taught science from a book called *A Civic Biology* (which mentioned Darwinism).

The account of the trial in Chapter 18 is entertaining and can be read with admiring partisanship as of a thriller. It was a good example of how to win when you lose. Scopes was fined a measly \$100 and the teaching of science continued in most places. The Monkey Trial became world famous and was made into the memorable film *Inherit the Wind* in 1960.

The trial and the Great Defender are worth remembering when we consider all that has passed, and is still passing, in this arena.

Postscript: Bryan died in his sleep a few days after the end of the trial. Darrow dismissed any thought of Bryan dying of a broken heart, or from the ridicule he suffered at Darrow's hand in court, with these words:

"Busted heart nothing. He died of an overstuffed belly!"

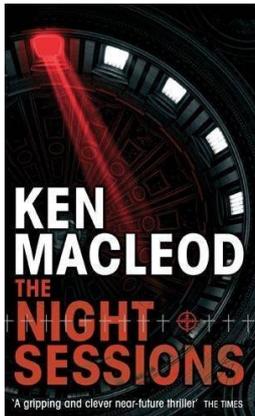


If today you can take a thing like evolution and make it a crime to teach it in the public school, tomorrow you can make it a crime to teach it in the private schools, and the next year you can make it a crime to teach it to the hustings or in the church. At the next session you may ban books and the newspapers. Soon you may set Catholic against Protestant and Protestant against Protestant, and try to foist your own religion upon the minds of men. If you can do one you can do the other. Ignorance and fanaticism is ever busy and needs feeding. Always it is feeding and gloating for more. Today it is the public school teachers, tomorrow the private. The next day the preachers and the lectures, the magazines, the books, the newspapers. After a while, your honor, it is the setting of man against man and creed against creed until with flying banners and beating drums we are marching backward to the glorious ages of the sixteenth century when bigots lighted fagots to burn the men who dared to bring any intelligence and enlightenment and culture to the human mind.

Clarence Darrow

Scopes Trial, Dayton, Tennessee (13 July 1925)





THE NIGHT SESSIONS

By Ken Macleod

Publisher: Orbit, 2008

ISBN: 1841496510, 9781841496511

Reviewed by Gregg Bender

Those familiar with high-concept science fiction set in the near future will immediately recognise the author's name as one of the top authors of the genre. He writes with a strong eye to detail and a very European point of view, refreshing after all of the U.S.-centred science fiction novels that flood the market.

Highlighted are the current secularist bent in today's European Union and their very valid concerns about the Christian fundamentalists' effects on U.S. and international politics.

Ken MacLeod's novels have won the Prometheus Award and the BSFA award, and been shortlisted for the Hugo and Nebula Awards. His writing strongly reminds me of authors such as Peter K. Hamilton and Richard K. Morgan.

In *The Night Sessions*, the concepts he ably tackles in this slim novel are diverse. The accidental creation of self-aware AI's (artificial intelligences), near-Earth orbital engineering on a massive scale, and, most interestingly, the almost total collapse of the world's major religions and what happens when AI's get religion all play their parts in the story.

The protagonist of the novel is Adam Fergusson, a police constable trying to deal with a very changed world in the aftermath of the 'Faith Wars' (called the 'Oil Wars' in the U.S.), which began on 11 September 2001. The world has soured on religion after outright religious warfare in the Middle East has left both Israel and the Muslim countries a radioactive waste.

One of the after-effects of the Faith Wars was the Second U.S. Civil War, which drove many of the religious underground or out of the country when they lost to the secular forces. In response, the United States has overwhelmingly passed a Constitutional amendment that clearly states that the country was and is a secular republic. Many well-to-do Dominionists, zealots and Christian fundamentalists have fled the openly hostile and

secularist U.S. to New Zealand to found a Creationist 'amusement park,' which interestingly enough is where most of the free sentient AI's that survived the Faith Wars and the Second U.S. Civil War have chosen to reside — and hide.

Other than that, the U.S. is mostly background in this book. In Scotland and the rest of the UK, the result of the Wars was 'boots in the pews' monitoring of believers by the Social Nationalists (Sozis) and brutal repression of believers in public. As a result, few public churches are left open and some small underground religious movements hide in the wreckage they created — some of which may not have given up the Faith War. Terrorism has been extinguished for decades, or so everyone thought. The heel of the state was partially lifted in response, and the Church is slowly dying out.

Then a Catholic priest is spectacularly murdered and the case lands on PC Fergusson's desk. Is this murder due to a personal vendetta or the return of something much more sinister from the past? Soon more violence directed at churches follows. Who is responsible? Was the first victim actually working on the bomb that killed him? Is one of the vocal and militant Atheist groups responsible? One of the still-active Muslim splinter groups? Perhaps it is a remnant of the old Troubles between the Protestants and the Catholics flaring up after all these years? No matter who is doing the killing, what could the motive be?

Modern technology has progressed and much police work is handled in virtual space, aided by both sentient and non-sentient AI's. Since many of the deadliest weapons of the recent war were AI's, many humans are uncomfortable or fearful of them. Some of the AI's that survived have gone into police and security work, since the demilitarized minds of high-tech hunter-killer robots have a 'need' to use their skills.

It is not specifically stated, but it appears from context that fully-sentient AI's have limited



'human' rights in this world. Drones and cameras are everywhere (and not always under control of the police), sniffing the EM bands and physical world for clues and information. AI's monitor and track suspicious activity online. Human officers have instantaneous connection to the virtual 'Headspace' at will, but much of the work has to be done the old fashioned way, feet on ground and notes on whiteboards. As exotic weapons such as EMP grenades are still available through the black market, many 'back-up' critical information on paper or whiteboards to prevent permanent loss. Minor details are important, some of which can only be found and linked by human intuition.

Ultimately, the true perpetrators and targets are

so unbelievable to the authorities that even with the evidence, no one can credit it at first. A race against time develops in the last chapters that leave the reader breathless. The result is a profoundly human novel, even though some of the main characters are robotic. I loved it and best of all, the door has been left open a tiny crack to a sequel.

Gregg Bender is a technical writer and former airline supervisor. He holds a BS in Professional Writing and Communication from Missouri State University and is happy to 'friend' science fiction fans or freethinkers on Facebook.

Isaac Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics

1. A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
2. A robot must obey the orders given to it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws.



Portrait of Asimov enthroned with symbols of his life's work by Rowena Morrill

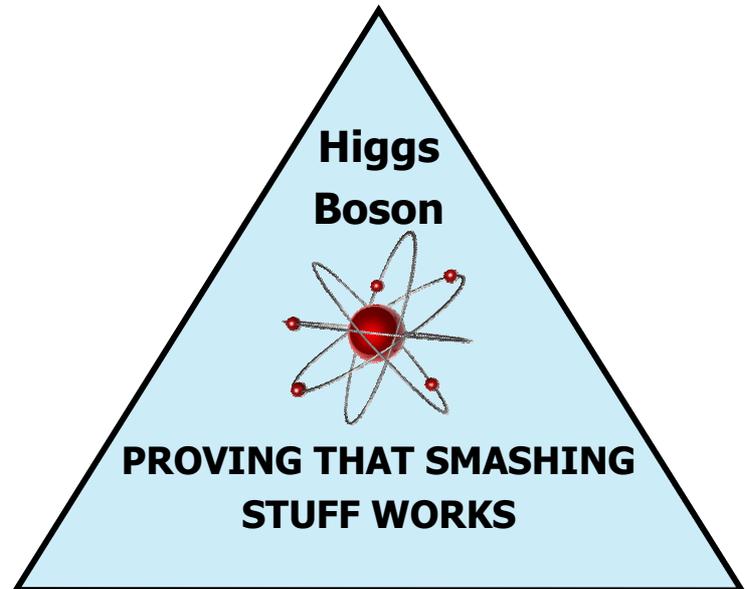
“ It is change, continuing change, inevitable change, that is the dominant factor in society today. No sensible decision can be made any longer without taking into account not only the world as it is, but the world as it will be ...

This, in turn, means that our statesmen, our businessmen, our everyman must take on a science fictional way of thinking.

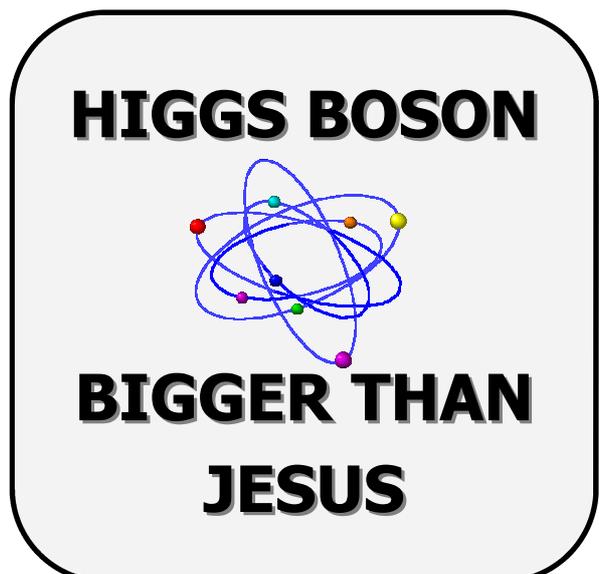
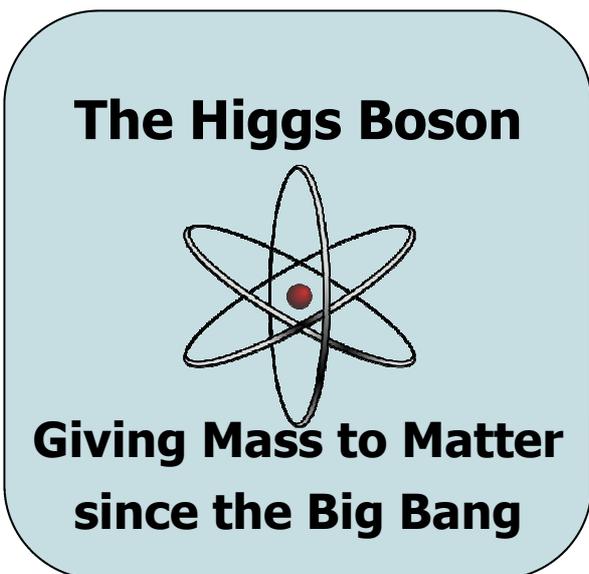
Individual science fiction stories may seem as trivial as ever to the blinder critics and philosophers of today — but the core of science fiction, its essence has become crucial to our salvation if we are to be saved at all.

There is a single light of science, and to brighten it anywhere is to brighten it everywhere. ”

Humour



A Higgs boson walks into a church.
"We don't allow Higgs bosons in here!"
the priest shouts.
"But without me," the particle asks,
"how can you have mass?"



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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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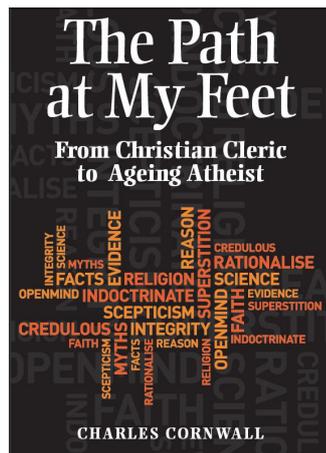


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