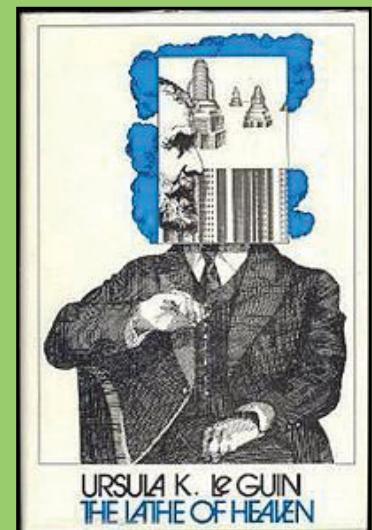
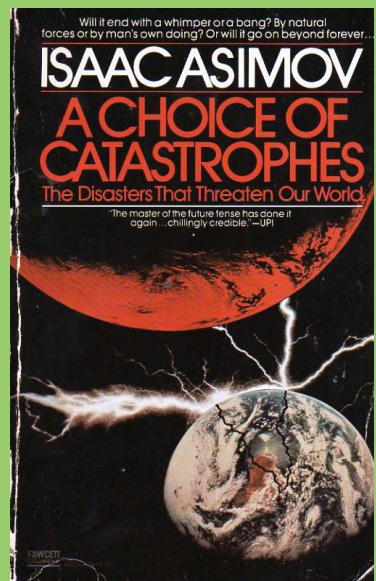
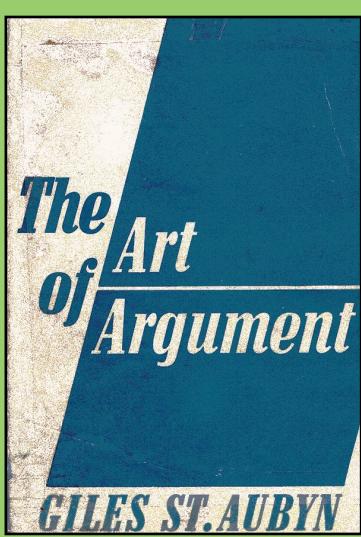
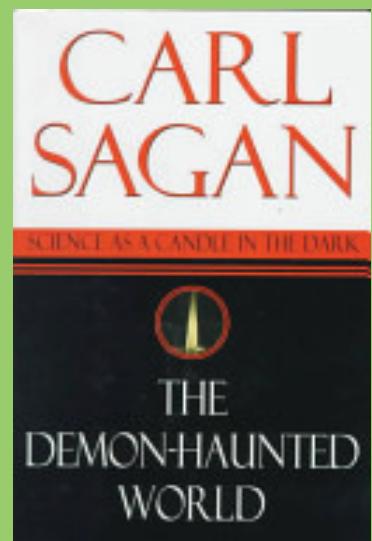
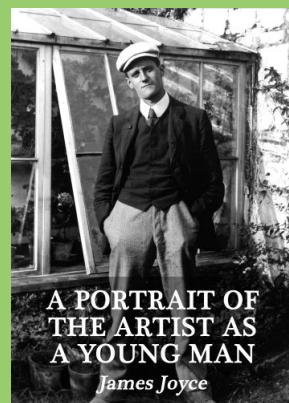
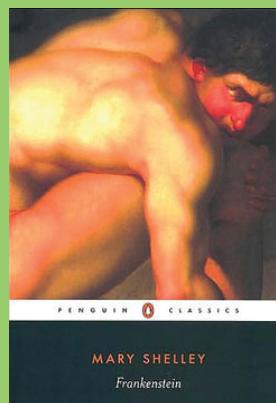
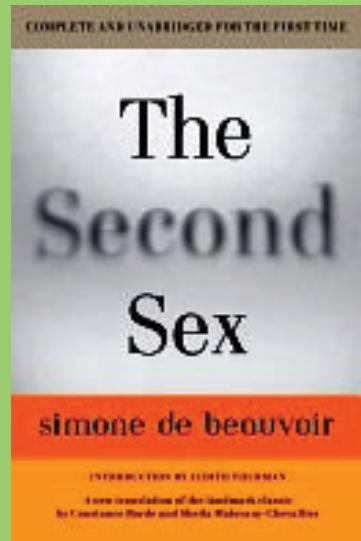
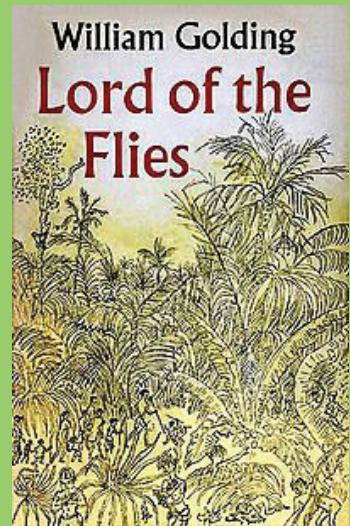
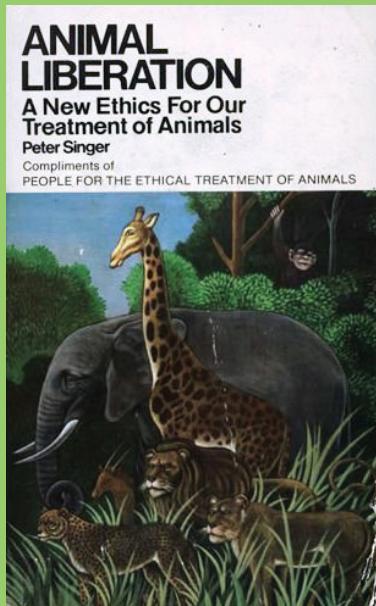
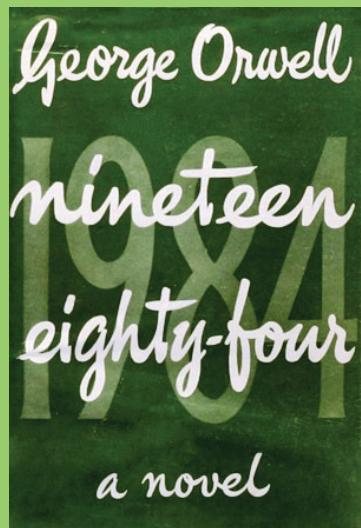


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From the Editor

It was a dark and stormy night — wait — what has that got to do with an editorial for *The Australian Atheist*? Well nothing really, except I, along with my co-editor Tom have chosen the five most influential books in our lives. You can read our picks beginning on page 24. What are yours? Send an email to TAA@atheistfoundation.org.au we'd love to hear from you.

Voluntary euthanasia continues in this issue. I would particularly like to thank David Mathers for sharing his very personal story. Thanks also to Tracey Spicer, for allowing me to reprint her poignant letter to her mother.

Our Public Relations team has once again done us proud. All too often we receive emails (mainly from the religious) who can't understand why atheists don't just "end it all" if we consider there is no "purpose" to life. The difference this time was that the person said she can't rationally believe in a humane God. Her point highlighted how difficult it can be for people to rid themselves emotionally from religion.

"School Chaplaincy Victory" on page 7 should be an inspiration to everyone. Read it and cheer!

The AFA was invited on to Community Radio 3RRR in Melbourne and a transcript of the interview with Tanya Smith is on page 11. Community Radio has been a wonderful avenue for the Atheist Foundation of Australia to spread our message. Every one of the people who have been interviewed has found the experience enjoyable and very professional. Sadly Community radio is under threat from lack of funding. Please read about how you can help on page 15.

Tanya also spoke about Atheist Alliance International's new campaign: *Critical Thinking and Secular Ethics in Cambodia*. Details are on page 14.

Richard Dawkins' autobiographical memoir, *An Appetite for Wonder: The Making of a Scientist* is due for release (USA and UK) in late September. It looks fascinating.

So many books to read ...

ACNC Australian Charities and Not-for-Profit Commission

Excerpt from "In the Black" a journal of the CPA (Certified Practising Accountants) Australia.

Initially the ACNC will regulate only charities and not the wider not-for-profit sector. No decision has been made whether this scope will be expanded to cover other not-for-profits in the future.

... The ACNC will publish details about each registered charity, together with financial and other relevant information. Online publication of basic details of charities has commenced and it is expected financial information will be added to the website from early next year, once the ACNC begins receiving the data.

... Additionally, medium and large charities will be required to submit financial reports that are externally audited (large charities) or review (medium charities). **"Basic religious charities" are exempted from requirements to prepare and submit financial reports.*** The first financial reports for the year to 30 June 2014 will need to be submitted the 31 December 2014. As part of the considerations in finalising the reporting schedules, government is considering allowing a further years' grace period for financial reports.

... Charities are not obliged to register with the ACNC, but must do so if they seek tax concessions. The ATO (Australian Taxation Office) will continue to be responsible for administering tax concessions.

Not-for-profits that are not charities are not regulated by the ACNC.

* My emphasis. Editor.



Letters to the Editor

Thank you for your coverage of voluntary euthanasia. This is a subject whereon I have no expertise but some involvement, having served three weeks on remand in Parklea Jail for my part in my partner's death. I subsequently pleaded guilty to manslaughter on advice and was handed a suspended sentence for the balance of two years. I was not the primary cause of death and had no motive other than to fulfil her wishes. In a sane world it would never have got as far as me. My partner should have been able to satisfy a magistrate she was rational, informed and not acting under coercion, and been given access to effective means to a peaceful death.

At the time I was in Parklea (July 2009) a man in Western Australia was allowed to die by withdrawal of food and treatment. This is needlessly cruel and drawn out when you know what the inevitable outcome must be.

While my case was sub judice, Peter Jensen (Anglican Archbishop of Sydney) used his Easter message to attack voluntary euthanasia. He said there is no dignity in death. Sometimes there can be very little dignity in life. My partner knew that. In the early days of our relationship she'd sit daily with her mother in a nursing home when she could no longer care for her at home. She knew all about the indignity of bed-ridden old age. At seventy-eight she said, "I've had a good life and I don't need this."

Doubtless inspired and encouraged by the establishment of a Royal Commission to clerical child abuse, the number of courageous personal revelations of abuse has increased by four hundred per cent.

Not surprisingly, counselling services for those traumatised victims are seriously short of funds.

Perhaps a remedy could begin with the Catholic

My action was born of witnessing my partner's pain, being bedside in two hospitals when prognoses were delivered (opinion and second opinion) and sharing her experience of visiting her mother in the nursing home.

The most vociferous opponents of voluntary euthanasia are Catholic clergy, yet their job description precludes them being in such a relationship. As they say about sex, if you don't play the game, don't make the rules.

I recently saw this subject debated on *Big Ideas* (ABC TV). The opposing team seemed anxious to avoid the G-word, but this is obviously where they were coming from. One was head of the religious department of the ABC. He said your life is a gift to others. I can certainly appreciate Eva's life as a gift to me, but would I be a worthy recipient of that gift if I demanded she give 'til it hurts? Another speaker was a palliative care specialist. Palliative care should be a choice. It is not a reason to deny death with dignity for those who choose that. He called for more funding for palliative care. It may seem callous to question this, but given there's only a finite fund to draw from, to whom else are you being callous by diverting this money? Surely money is best spent where it can restore someone to a fulfilling life.

David Mathers

Church, of some \$16 billion acknowledged annual income, refunding the \$120 million or so of public money it received to stage its 2008 World Youth Day.

The abysmal (and camouflaged) failure of that event to meet expectations, including return revenue for state coffers, is a subject on its own.

John Dillon



From the Inbox

H

i
I can't rationally believe in a humane God when I look at the world but I struggle with the point of living as an atheist. Everything I do will ultimately fail and those I love cease to exist with absolutely no point or reason. Millions are born to suffering and pain for nothing. I understand this may well be the truth and have no wish to hide from it but how do you cope? Where is the source of your hope? Why get up each day rather than end it now?

Caroline

H

i Caroline,
Personally I find living life a totally absorbing endeavour. Dwelling on these sorts of issues only gives me a headache.

If I do have any time to wallow in melancholy I only need ponder the infinity of time and space to bring me back to a state of childish wonder about how grand it all is. I am just grateful that the energy and molecules of the universe converge, for me, into this human form for a brief period to appreciate it from this perspective.

Live life, enjoy life. Don't waste your precious time on unknowable speculation.

Michael

H

i Caroline,
As an atheist, living is the point. This is it. This is all we have. I don't want to waste this opportunity to be alive here and now, on this planet and considering all of the amazing aspects of the universe that had to click into place to make that possible.

Just because something ends doesn't mean that you decide not to even bother. I know when I open a book that eventually I will finish it. However, I enjoy reading it in the moment. When I eat a good meal, I know it will be over soon enough. I just savour every mouthful in the moment. While those are trivial experiences compared to love, I also don't hold back from love just because at some point one of us will die. I love and I am loved and I appreciate and savour that in the here and now.

You are concerned that "millions are born to suffering and pain for nothing". This implies you want a purpose for life. The universe has no cosmic or higher purpose. However, that doesn't mean you can't ascribe your own purpose to your existence. Yes there is suffering in the world. As an individual you can't fix every problem. You can be active to make changes to the aspects of the world you don't like. You can also live your life like it matters to you.

I am no "Pollyanna" but I get hope with interacting with the next generation. I get hope from volunteering

and working with vulnerable and marginalised people in society. You can find "humanity" in the most unlikely of places.

That's not to say I don't get depressed occasionally as an atheist. In particular, I believe death affects us differently. How much easier would the death of someone we care about be if we actually believed they are going to some paradise and that we will see them again. Instead, we know that they are gone and feel that on every level of our beings. That can, and does, affect me. I don't have a solution for those times. The best I can do is to remember those I've loved and live my life as if it mattered.

Tracy

H

ello Caroline,
You have raised a very interesting idea although I feel it is one steeped in religious thinking. The many faiths have the opinion that this life is only a stepping stone into a supernatural eternity of bliss or pain. It downplays the importance of the only natural life that we know is available. It dismisses human appreciation of existence through the senses as not being a valid expression of this remarkable incarnate part of the universe which is our privilege to participate in.

There is a glaring fact that states we are alive at this moment. There is a glaring fact that states we have no idea how this came about and it does not appear to have any meaning or purpose that can be quantified, measured or given any meaning to other than that we know we are alive right now.

The grandeur of the universe unfolds with each passing decade for us to appreciate as science unravels its mysteries. Our inner universe struggles with loving others and if we are lucky being loved back by them. The pleasures derived by the senses and the knowledge that others have similar inclinations and appreciations unites humanity in a bonding of sister and brotherhood in an effort to escape the loneliness and despair of eventual nothingness.

The innate bravery of being human goes unrecognised as we ask questions as you pose



because we are capable of asking them. Such questions do not need answers as none are available. We get out of bed because the alternative is to surrender the only life and consciousness we are ever going to have, no matter how we live it, to the dark forces of despair that is the human condition. We live, we love, we die, and are no more. That is all there is.

But, isn't that just absolutely remarkable and just something inexplicably wonderful and not to be missed?

David

Hi Caroline,

I feel that I live at all to be as close to "miraculous" as an atheist can envisage. It's simply an amazing thing to be alive!

Cat

Hello Caroline,

There is a catch-22 lying at the heart of the long-standing human wish for a reason, a meaning, a purpose for our lives. The catch is that there is no possible answer to such a quest which would not itself face the same quandary.

For instance, suppose the whole point of our existence is to find God and worship him for all eternity. For all its bliss, if you could call it that (many people would shrink in horror at the sheer aimless boredom of such an existence), what would be the point of it?

If the meaning of life is to be reunited for eternity with those we love or once loved (ignoring for the moment the absurdities of being united for all eternity with say, a two-month-old child who died prematurely), what would be the point of that? And why would that have any more meaning or purpose than the life we presently lead? Does a thousand years of existence have ten times as much purpose or point as an existence of a hundred years? Of course not. Eternal existence has no more point than a finite existence. Even an eternity without any suffering and with infinite choice from an infinite number of pleasures or challenges or desires or experiences, even that, or whatever you could imagine, suffers from the same flaw: it is ultimately without meaning.

In short, there is no conceivable circumstance which would create the elusive "meaning of life." Or to put it differently, whatever natural or indeed supernatural form of existence a person might attain, he or she would inevitably (and rightly) ask: what is the point of this? What is its "higher" meaning? And if in turn that "higher" state of so-called meaning was ever attained, what could anyone say? Only, what's the point of all this?

So the worth and meaning and purpose and success or failure we find in our present lives do not make us the victims of some short-changed swindle. Once you recognise that you already have in your heart and mind all the purpose and point you need (since no future change of circumstance will increase or decrease it), you will find it easier to celebrate your time for what it is. And for all its hazards and miseries, its rewards are priceless.

Mike

Hi Caroline,

I will start by saying, in the main, religion clutters the here and now, by exhorting you to live your life in futile preparation for an illusory ultimate destination.

Atheism clears the space so that you can fully enjoy, and make the most of, the rich journey itself.

You are correct in saying that each of our lives is ultimately meaningless, in the larger scheme of the universe. But they are (or can be) meaningful to us. To those who know, like or love us. Even to those who don't know us, but whose lives we can positively influence, for example through charity, public service or other altruism — or even just a kind word or deed for the person next to you.

Yes, at some point no-one will remember me and my life when I am gone. But I'll be gone, so what does it matter? To quote Mark Twain: "I do not fear death. I had been dead for billions and billions of years before I was born, and had not suffered the slightest inconvenience from it."

I can't help but feel that saying "atheists have no point to living" only comes up at all by reference to the pervasive religious "afterlife/heaven" paradigm. If that paradigm has no validity, then atheists have as much point to their lives as everyone else, don't they? We're all in the same boat on that score.

We don't exist "for a reason" or "for no reason". We exist. And then we get to do whatever we want to enrich that. Each day that we get out of bed.

Cool, huh?

Ian

Hi Caroline,

Just because I do not believe in a supernatural god, in my opinion, makes the universe a more wonderful and awe inspiring place. There is wonder in nature, and the planets, and worlds beyond my knowledge. My respect for the cycle of nature — birth to death — enables me to enjoy and savour life to the fullest, and to care for all living things.

Leaving the world a better place for those I love and leave behind is far more fulfilling and rewarding than leaving a legacy of false promises and lies.

Janine



School Chaplain Victory

By Danny Jarman

Hearty congratulations to members Tess and Danny Jarman for attending the P&C meeting, thus allowing parents to have another view of the school chaplaincy program. Editor.

The AFA was contacted recently by a parent who had witnessed an event at their P&C (Parents and Citizens) meeting where one of the parents raised the question of chaplaincy. Surprisingly, there happened to be two representatives of the Scripture Union Queensland (SUQLD) there who were then able to do a presentation on all the wonderful things that would happen if the school was to get one of their chaplains.

I need help! A mother at my child's state primary school is pushing (very hard) for a chaplain to be installed at our school. Representatives from the Scripture Union have come to a P&C meeting this month and they are master salespeople. They had the majority of the room eating out of their hands. The concerns of a couple of non-believers were shut down. In my experience, guests doing a presentation at a meeting are listened to and given more respect than the parents.

I have heard of a man from Brisbane who challenged the government over the paid appointment of chaplains in state schools. He won. Is there a representative that would be prepared to come to a meeting and explain to the parents why having an overwhelming representation of one brand of religion in a state school is divisive and discriminatory? My kids are already removed from their classroom when Religious Education is taking place.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Jen

I contacted Jen and had a number of discussions. It appeared that it was almost a foregone conclusion that the chaplaincy was to be approved. She was able to get the P&C to accept a guest speaker (AFA) to present an alternative opinion. Tess and I went along to the school on 22 May.

Here is a summary of the main discussion points and tips from my talk, which may prove handy for others.

1) Projection:

During the discussion I always referred to the chaplains from SUQLD who presented at the previous meeting as "the salespeople from the Scripture Union".

2) Representation:

I explained that we were not just here as representatives of the AFA but also the parents. I explained that based on the last census, the "No religion" category was the largest single demographic in the catchment area of the school and that a fundamentalist chaplain only actually represents 2.5% of the population.

- | | |
|------------------|-------|
| • No religion | 25.2% |
| • Catholic | 21.7% |
| • Anglican | 20.3% |
| • No answer | 7.3% |
| • Fundamentalist | 2.5% |

3) Competition for funds:

I explained that once they have a chaplain at their school, much of their activity is focused on fund raising for the chaplain, SUQLD or a local church. As the P&C had a finite pool of resources each year, introducing a competitor for those resources would limit the ability of the P&C to achieve its financial goals.



4) Local Chaplaincy Committee:

The P&C would need to set up and resource a Local Chaplaincy Committee, which would require multiple people from multiple religious denominations (and no religion). This would stretch the P&C's human resources thinner with what usually ended as the same people on all of the committees.

5) Australian Psychological Society (APS) position on National School Chaplaincy Program (NSCP)

Although the APS is aware that school chaplains represent an alternative approach to student support in government schools in the way of spiritual and religious guidance, the APS believes that, when chaplains work outside of this role, the risks to both students and schools are immense and will ultimately result in significant costs both financial and human.

There is clear evidence that school chaplains are engaging in duties for which they are not qualified.

There is clear evidence that church organisations and ministries are supporting school chaplains in their boundary violations.

The NSCP promotes a combination of religious guidance and mental health service provision, which is in contrast to mainstream evidence-based service provision.¹

6) Discussion on why I thought that these fundamentalist chaplains overstep their boundaries.

Fundamentalists tend to follow the doctrine of the "Great Commission":

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Matthew 28:18-20 (KJV)

I then shared our experience (from our previous churchy life) where we were visited by one of the chaplains from SUQLD. They spoke only of using the opportunity to win souls for Jesus (which was clearly not allowed). This was rationalised away by the notion that "God's law is greater than man's law!"

7) NT Ombudsmen's Report into the NSCP

Throughout this report several breaches by the chaplains were identified and in particular blatant defiance of DET Executive directives relating to the continued provision of services to a child during the defined suspension period.

In considering the types of chaplaincy services provided it was interesting to find that all of the five schools under the scope of this investigation, with the exception of the senior school at Taminmin High School, permitted the chaplains to provide one-on-one services when this was contrary to the position held by the DET Executive. As was established in reviewing the chaplain school diaries the nature of the one-on-one sessions was of a highly sensitive nature and quite concerning. The chaplains have also been privy to the confidential information about students discussed during the wellbeing team meetings even for those without parental consent.²

8) Hypothetical

I then painted a hypothetical case of a young teenager who was somewhat confused about her/his own sexuality who was targeted for a one-on-one session with a fundamentalist chaplain who truly believed that all homosexuals deserve to spend an eternity of torture in a fiery hell created by their version of an "all-loving" god. What would this chaplain say to this teenager when they are away from any other eyes and ears?

9) QLD Teachers Union (QTU) position on the NSCP

The QTU regards the placement of chaplains in general education, welfare and counselling programs as extremely inappropriate in State Schools. While the Education Minister might believe that chaplains can replace qualified counsellors, members know that they cannot. Students need support staff that is properly qualified,



such as guidance officers, not well meaning amateurs. The issue has to be what's best for the children not what's cheapest.³

10) As a parent

There is nothing in the legislation regarding the NSCP that allows me as a parent to opt out of having a chaplain target and approach my child. I have no recourse and they are not deemed to have made any breach of the rules if they do so even when aware that I do not consent to it. This is unacceptable.

Tess and I stayed for the entire meeting. We chatted with the other parents, committee members and the principal afterward.

A few days ago we received the following email from Jen and Andrew.

Hi Danny and Tess!

I have some positive news. The principal of our school had a quick conversation with me yesterday and has decided that she will not go ahead with introducing a chaplain at our school.

I couldn't have got this result without you and I'm so grateful for your help.

Jen

Hi Jen and Andrew,

That's fantastic news. The real heroes in this situation are you and Andrew. You two stood up and took a stand against this attempt at a religiously-motivated incursion at your school. Tess and I congratulate you for putting yourselves out there in the face of obvious opposition and potentially discriminatory backlash. The courage to do this is not a common occurrence and if only there were more parents like you these organisations would not be able to get such a foothold in gaining unfettered access to all our children. You are part of a wave of people not only in Australia but across the world who are making themselves known and saying "enough is enough". Just because religions have held an automatic privileged position doesn't mean this has to continue. Tess was so excited when I called her and told her the news. You both should feel extremely proud that you have not just made a difference to the current students at your school but potentially for many more grades that are yet to even attend their first class.

Our hats go off to you both. Well done!

Danny and Tess

¹ www.psychology.org.au/Assets/Files/APS-Submission-School-Chaplains-July2010.pdf

² www.ombudsman.nt.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/INVESTIGATION-REPORT-ON-THE-OPERATION-OF-THE-CHAPLAINCY-SERVICES-WITHIN-5-GOVT-RURAL-SCHOOLS-OF-THE-NT.pdf

³ <http://issuu.com/qldteachers/docs/nov2012-qtj>



Heretical Happenings

Keeping you in the know.

It seems remarkable, and we tend to take it all for granted, but atheism is at its strongest and most rational stage in all of the history of humanity. Many countries in Western Europe and other democracies spattered around the globe, and Australia is a very fine example of this, no longer take religion seriously nor does religion now have the power of bygone days to enforce its will on all and sundry in those countries. Even in the most repressive regimes, where religion and politics sit side by side in an unhealthy alliance, there are definite signs of discontent in the populations. Anachronistic religious tenets are coming up against a world where information via the internet and media is supplanting traditional thinking, especially in the youth.

Atheism is certainly at its strongest, but what of it being most rational. There have always been people who subscribed to a no-god approach to living as evidently the idea has never been supported by positive proof. However, the niggling thoughts of how did everything, that is the universe and life, originate must have kept all but the sturdiest of atheist thinkers trapped in the religious mould.

However, over the last few hundred years, and especially during the last few dozen decades, science has come to the rescue by supplying very satisfying answers to many of the conundrums that have existed since the time humans began to question existence.

To me, on top of the list of discoveries enhancing the idea of a naturalistic universe was the work by Charles Darwin and Alfred Wallace in discovering *natural selection* as the mechanism for evolution of species over immense periods of time. This suddenly threw the young-age earthers off their podiums, although some persist in hanging grimly onto notions of creationism by using mental gymnastics bolstered by wishful thinking. With education levels increasing and greater numbers of people accessing such, in the near future we may see its power diminished to that of a pastime most will consider as quaint and a harmless diversion of a very small minority.

But biological life is not all that is evolving. Everything is. The evidence to date is that the universe began some 13.7 billion years ago in one tremendous rush known as the Big Bang. What was before that or if that is even a relevant question at all and what will happen eventually are all questions up for grabs by imagination and science. A very interesting thing here is that no one is expected to believe scientifically suspected origins of the universe under the threat of eternal punishment for not doing so.

Whatever brought the universe into being happened. That much we know because we are here. It is only a few decades ago that science worked out that the Milky Way Galaxy was not all that was there but is one of billions of other galaxies "out there". Ours might be one of the oldest galaxies but it is decidedly not alone. And, they are all receding away from each other at increasing speeds for no apparent reason. Dark energy, a mysterious force only recently recognised but not described is possibly the cause.

There are postulations that this universe is maybe one of many or even an infinite number all connected in some kind of multi-verse system, that the most distant galaxies may be moving away from each other at or greater than the speed of light, that we may all be a hologram projected from information stored on the event horizon of a black hole or even the edge of the universe. Edge of the universe ... egad! Could there be such a thing and what would it look like?

As highly speculative as are some of these explanations, they still fit the definition of rational as they are based in how the natural order may work. If we take a leap of faith and postulate a supernatural order, then that is beyond natural as the name suggests. Both of these are guesses. The very big difference is that guessing from a progression of possible answers using actual antecedents, even if these guesses all turn out to be wrong, is far superior to guessing without any antecedents at all as the chances of success in that venture are mind-bogglingly minute.

So, I would say today that in educated parts of the planet atheism is a most rational choice. We are very lucky to be in possession of the knowledge that has allowed us to make a decision based on the most probable likelihood that gods do not exist. In arriving by pure happenstance of historical placement we should take our hats off to atheists of bygone eras who never had the opportunity to know all that we do. This luck must be used to help others come to terms with the fact that their religious feelings are just that.

Atheism today is a phenomenon that is helping to change the way humans relate with each other, other species and the environment. It doesn't necessarily mean that we will all get along just fine, but it does mean that solutions to perceptual differences are less likely to be self-righteously lethal in nature. Justifying



destruction of the biosphere because we think we are a special creature with a god-given right will, I am sure, eventually give way to a view where we see that Earth is the only place we can call home and we had better look after it a little better than we have.

Historically speaking, the no-god idea is emerging at an extraordinarily rapid rate and is creating a profound change in the human psyche. It is difficult to envisage this will not be for the better.

Until we meet again,

David

- Interview - Tanya Smith on Community Radio



3RRR radio presenter Josie Smart contacted the AFA with a request for someone to be interviewed at the station. AFA Public Relations Team Member Tanya Smith graciously agreed to the interview. It came to Josie's attention that Tanya was the past president of Atheist Alliance International and this information triggered her interest in focussing the interview on both the AFA for a local view on atheism, and AAI for an international one.

So, statistics from the latest National Census indicate that the number of Australians identifying as nonreligious has hit around 22%. With new scientific discoveries constantly popping up, the credibility of Creationism is dwindling continuously and yet religion is still a dominant force globally, giving many people the means to seek explanation for the most inexplicable aspects of life. In contrast, atheism privileges scientific method as the only rational means of understanding reality. Today in the studio we're pleased to welcome Tanya Smith to talk about atheism a little more with us. Tanya has been an active member of the Atheist Foundation of Australia for a few years now and in 2011 she was the President of the Atheist Alliance International. How are you Tanya?

Tanya: I'm great, thank you.

Josie: That's good. Firstly, could you tell us what does it actually mean to identify as atheist?

Tanya: Well, there's no rules or dogma in atheism so it can be different for everybody, but for me atheism has the positive aspect of accepting that this is it, this

is my one life, and I want to live in a valuable way and in a meaningful way, and as a reaction to the prevalence of religion in society, for me being an atheist means a conscious decision to not live in a fairytale, to not care about the interpretations of old books, and to stand up on the social issues that I care about like women's rights and GLBT rights where I see religious bigotry harming people.



Josie: Have you always identified as atheist?

Tanya: I have. I wasn't raised to be either religious or atheist in particular, I was raised to think, to ask questions, and to figure things out for myself, and by the time I got to about seven I was like, you know what? This concept of God really doesn't make a whole lot of sense!

Josie: And could you tell us about the two organisations you're involved with?

Tanya: Sure. I've been on the PR team for the Atheist Foundation of Australia for about four years now; it's the largest and most active atheist group in Australia. It's regularly involved in public discourse about atheist and secular issues so it explains atheism to the community and it acts in opposition to situations where religion is harming people; restricting women's access to reproductive rights, discrimination against GLBT people, promoting effective sex education for children. And Atheist Alliance International is a global alliance, so it's in a position of facilitating communication between its members, supporting atheist events around the world, for example we supported conferences in the Philippines, Germany, and Brazil last year, and campaigning on international issues, for example, Alexander Aan, who is an atheist in Indonesia, who's in jail after he said God doesn't exist on Facebook, he was attacked. He was arrested. He's in jail. We fund raised for his legal fees, we campaigned with the Indonesian government. So we do lots of different things and it's really important to have both the national organisations like the AFA active at a national level, they take the lead on issues in Australia of course, and also groups like AAI to coordinate things internationally and support those groups.

Josie: According to the website, the Atheist Foundation of Australia recognises the scientific method is the only rational means of understanding reality. Could you explain a little bit about the relationship between atheism or science?

Tanya: Well the scientific method is to critically question everything. You know, test, observe, consider the evidence, draw conclusions, and then of course if the evidence changes you change your conclusions. So science provides a generally applicable tool that you can take out and really apply to everything, but if you think critically about religion, if you look for the evidence, if you apply an intellectually consistent standard and you're honest about it, atheism is the logical conclusion because there is no credible

evidence for the existence of any gods or the supernatural.

Josie: Some of the scientific explanations popping up regarding the vastness of the universe and how we came into being can still be pretty daunting though. Do you think this is why a lot of people are still turning to the concept of a god or a higher being?

Tanya: I think there's a lot of reasons that people rely on religion, and that is one of them. It is daunting to think about these things. I recently read *The Grand Design* by Stephen Hawking — it kinda bends your brain trying to understand that sort of stuff, but I think a lot of people are not comfortable with the concept of "I don't know", and humans don't know everything and that's okay because "I don't know but I want to find out" is exciting. "I don't know therefore this particular god did it" is just nonsensical. It doesn't actually answer the question, it's no better than saying "well the fluffy pink elephants did it", and if you scratch the surface people think it is an explanation but if you go one step further you go well hang on a minute, which god? And why did it do it in this particular situation and is it going to do the same thing tomorrow? And how did it actually do it? It doesn't actually provide the answers to the questions that you're looking for. And once you get to the point of "well you just have to have faith" or "God moves in mysterious ways", it's an intellectual copout. You're basically saying "I have no idea and I'm stopping asking", and I think it's fine to not know the answer but you should keep looking.

Josie: So how do you deal with the fact that many people are still turning to religion for these so-called explanations or even peace of mind when faced with traumatic events or distress?

Tanya: I think it's a very human desire to try and look for an explanation and ultimately it is a good thing, that's how we progress by looking for a better explanation. And I get that it's comforting for people to think that there's a reason for things to happen, and I get that it's comforting for people to think that there's going to be an eternal life, or they'll see their loved ones again, and all that sort of stuff but just because something is comforting doesn't make it true. So you can choose to live your life in reality and accept what it is and value the short time that we have on Earth, or you can live in a fantasy. And I choose the former.

Josie: Moving onto the Atheist Alliance International, can you elaborate a little more

on some of the projects that you've been working on with that organisation?

Tanya: Sure. Well, one thing we do is we support the Kasese Humanist Primary School in Uganda, but we recently launched a project that I'd like to mention because I think it's a really great example of taking a step to help to try and change the world. We're working with the Cambodian Children's Trust to educate Cambodian orphans and street children in critical thinking and secular education. We're trying to fund raise around \$6000 to cover the project at the moment — that will cover the pilot and keep it going for the rest of this year. What we want to do is teach children how to think not what to think. And that will give them the best possible tools to go out and live their life, in topics of religion and indeed everything else, so we'd really appreciate any support for the project. If people would be willing to go to startsomegood.com/ctse_project — that would be most appreciated.

Josie: And do you think schools in Australia are doing enough to teach children how to think and not what to think?

Tanya: Unfortunately there is still a lot of religious education in Australia, and unfortunately religion has a fairly privileged position in this country. We have the School Chaplaincy Program where instead of putting money into counselling for children on a, you know, non-religious whatever-the-child-needs basis, the federal government (allegedly headed by an atheist) is, you know, pouring money, hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money, into school chaplains. And in Victoria we have a situation where Access Ministries, a very right-wing, evangelical Christian group, have access to primary school children in our public schools. I think the scientific method is taught in school and I do have plenty of friends and know people who came out of religious schools — in fact I went to a religious school for a brief period of time as well — so I do think people can overcome it but I would like to see Australia's education system be completely secular. Children should be taught how to think. If they want to go to religion as an adult, that's their choice to make but when you're quite young you've opened your mind to being taught by people in a position of authority and telling people that this one particular god... Forget all the other ones, they're wrong! This one particular god is the right god is not what you should be telling children. You should be teaching them how to think about the world.

Josie: Many other religions are entrenched in different cultures all around the world. Do you

think that religious practices are necessary in order to sustain such cultures and such cultural traditions?

Tanya: No I don't because I think people value culture on the basis for what it is, for the community that it provides, a sense of belonging, and religion can back that up but I don't think you need to have it. I mean, I'm very proud to be an Australian; I live here, I value the culture in this country, but I don't need to believe in some kind of supernatural being to have that. My friends, my family, the things that I do in my life are enough.

Josie: And what can you foresee about the future of atheism both in Australia and internationally? Do you think that we'll ever live in this secular society that you desire?

Tanya: Look, it's a pretty long path and there are certainly some daunting obstacles along the way, but overall I am optimistic and it's because we have reason and evidence on our side. And what humanity, you know, maybe with a few wrong turns at times, but over time, in the long run, humanity has progressed. The number of non-religious people in the world is rising and they're speaking out. And what we've seen particularly in the last 10 years or so is that people are much more willing to say "you know what? I'm actually going to question that" and the fact that someone believes in something isn't enough reason to not question it. Religion is just an idea about how the world works, like any other idea. It should be critically examined and if the evidence supports it then that's fine. But if the evidence doesn't support it then it doesn't deserve the privileged place of not being questioned. So in the long run, I am optimistic but there's an awful lot of work to be done but I think we are making a difference.

Josie: I think so. And hopefully we can keep such discussions going in the future.

Tanya: Absolutely.

Transcribed by Leanne Carroll



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Critical Thinking and Secular Ethics in Cambodia

by Atheist Alliance International



poverty line, it is vital that Cambodia's children, its future leaders learn how to think for themselves, how to reason and how to be ethical and moral citizens. The future of Cambodia depends on it.

We will teach them to question. We will show them how to work out what is ethical or unethical (or somewhere in between). We will teach them to be able to identify flaws in arguments. We will educate them about the major religions and, with the skills they develop in this course, enable them to make up their own minds.

Studying ethics and philosophy will give children skills to use good thinking as the guide by which they live their lives.

startsomegood.com/ctse_project

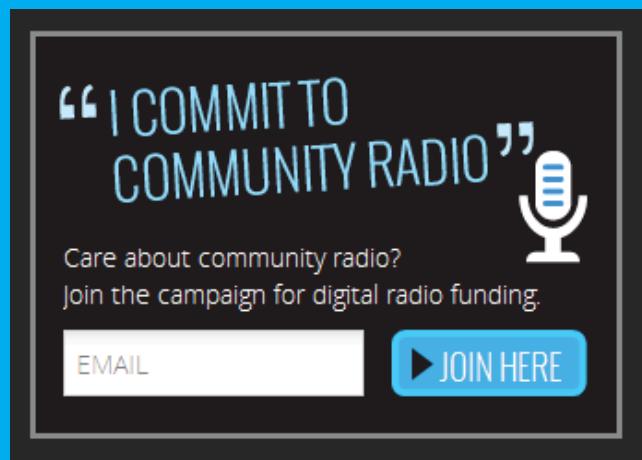
If we teach children everything we know, their knowledge is limited to ours. If we teach children to think, their knowledge is limitless.

At The Cambodian Children's Trust (CCT) we strive to give vulnerable Cambodian children the best chance at leading a happy, fulfilling, and successful life. Succeeding in life depends on our ability to solve the problems we encounter along the way.

Theravada Buddhism is (supposedly) practiced by around 95 per cent of the Cambodian population. In reality however, behind the doors of Khmer Temples there lies belief in superstitions, with rituals, spirits, ghosts, gods, and sorcerers, which, it can be argued, injects immeasurable stress and fear into the lives of most Cambodians. In a country where corruption is widespread and 40 per cent of the population live below the



CommitToCommunityRadio.org.au



Community Radio is an essential part of Australia's media diversity. The sector needs its digital operations funded adequately so as it can do what it does best, that is providing opportunities for both individuals and communities to get their ideas across to as large an audience as possible. And let's not forget that many established radio presenters at all levels of the caper today began their careers in community radio.

Greig Pickhaver – AM

Community Radio occupies an important and unique place in the Australian media landscape. Unlike mainstream media, it talks directly to the people it serves, allowing them access to local issues the big boys and girls regard as too trivial and too parochial for their mass markets. And unlike the internet blogs, it is open to all, offering a variety of viewpoints backed up by the editors and fact-checkers the blogs frequently lack. It is an irreplaceable resource which needs and deserves support at every level.

Mungo MacCallum – Writer and Journalist

IS YOUR LOCAL MP COMMITTED
TO A DIGITAL FUTURE FOR COMMUNITY RADIO?

The federal election is nearing.
Will your local MP stand up
for community radio?

Help maintain the future
of digital community radio.



Farewell “Reverend Rain”

By Bob Irwin

It sounds like reign

In July this year the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, the Most Reverend Dr Peter Jensen, retires after a reign that began in 2001. It is a same-sounding word (as reign) which opens a window onto the thinking and theology of this evangelical Christian leader.

At a press conference in June 2001 soon after becoming Archbishop, Dr Jensen offered advice to Prime Minister John Howard: “Read your Bible”. Six years later Peter Jensen and John Howard were co-proclaimers of biblical belief when they sang from the same hymn sheet regarding the power of their God to alter weather patterns.

Archbishop Jensen has been nothing if not controversial, which has often seen him in the media spotlight, something he seems to enjoy and take advantage of in selling his interpretation of Christian scripture while “talking about Jesus” and “promoting the word of God” — his self-declared primary role. Jensen’s belief: only Jesus, the Son of God, can save you.

In 2010 Dr Jensen claimed atheists were believers who hated God, while at the time of the April 2012 Global Atheist Convention in Melbourne he was on television, smiling and bubbly as ever, acting as though he’d had a win over atheism when he said how good it was that atheists were talking about God. Jensen was wrong in both instances: atheists were talking about the non-existence of God.

Let’s go back to 2007 to see why Archbishop Jensen was given (by this humble writer) the sobriquet “Reverend Rain”.

No rain checks

On national radio in 2007 Archbishop Jensen said he “prays for rain every day”, and “hopes Christian people everywhere do the same”.

In an olden-day God’s-will-and-Noah’s-ark mindset, Jensen claimed that Christians are “encouraged by the Bible” to pray for rain and he believes without any doubt that “Christians have a God that answers prayer”.

At the time, Australia was in a widespread drought and many people, animals and rural properties were badly affected. In giving false hope to those suffering, Jensen went on to assert that “Christians may bring their concerns to God, and He may answer them, in fact God moves to answer them even before people pray”. One might ask, does that mean his God could stop a drought (or flood) before it even starts? Under “Reverend Rain” Jensen’s assertion, yes, but only if God so wishes. Though it seemed to be more of a premise than a promise from the Archbishop — and he didn’t offer any rain checks.

Reverend Rain received support from John Howard when the prime minister used the power of national television to ask the Australian people to pray for rain to help end the drought. Mr Howard’s call to God came just before the June 2007 floods over the Hunter region and central coast of New South Wales, and the Gippsland and Lakes areas of Victoria. One might be entitled to ask: did that make Howard and Jensen complicit (even if their intentions were truly honourable)?

Well, if they take on the responsibility of praying themselves and asking others to pray for rain, should they be held to account for any excess precipitation? — which in the above cases caused deaths of people and stock, property damage and increased insurance premiums.

Dr Jensen and Mr Howard have apparently never studied geography or meteorology because basic



instructions in these Earth sciences would soon educate them to the reasons why rain falls when and where it does. Alternatively, they could speak to a rainfall expert who would put them right, for example, someone from the Australian Bureau of Meteorology or the CSIRO, or a scientist working in the field of bioprecipitation. Or my dear ol' grandma.

One can only wonder if it was deep Christian religious commitment that led to Jensen's and Howard's beliefs about prayer resulting in divine rain, or if they made their public pronouncements because they reckoned it's the traditional sort of thing to do, and Christian people and voters expected that of them.

It's worth pointing out here the words of Archbishop Jensen on national television in 2009. I am paraphrasing him:

After Noah and his family, and the animals had scrambled down from the ark [around 4,500 years ago], Noah received a promise from God for there to be no more floods, but mankind would need to live by new rules; God placed a rainbow in the sky to remind people of the covenant or agreement He made with Noah.

Given this Biblical belief, it is easy to see how Reverend Rain can conjure up rain-related fantasies without first checking the meteorological reality.

Over-riding nature

To many people, praying for rain may seem an odd, indeed selfish, expectation that is outside the laws of nature; but not to Dr Jensen. It's been ingrained into his thinking. The words of the following "Prayer For Rain" are taken from an edition of the *Book of Common Prayer for the Church of England* in use around the time young Jensen was attending Sunday school and having his neural pathways shaped for a life and career devoted to God, Jesus and church:

O God, heavenly Father, who by thy Son Jesus Christ hast promised to all them that seek thy kingdom, and the righteousness thereof, all things necessary to their bodily sustenance; send us, we beseech thee, in this our necessity, such moderate rain and showers, that we may receive the fruits of the earth to our comfort, and to thy honour; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Presumably Dr Jensen and other Christians who pray for rain believe that their God's will in answering their prayers is of greater consequence than any abnormalities and disturbances (caused by their prayers) to planet Earth's naturally self-balancing

climate. However, rain is in the natural domain and falls only when and where it's meant to, based on prevailing weather patterns.

Suspending reality for a minute: rain that is asked through prayer to fall outside its normal distribution would upset this equilibrium — with potentially disastrous consequences. There is only a certain amount of water vapour in the clouds, so if Christian rain falls where it is not supposed to and causes problems, another area misses out, possibly to its detriment. How might those who pray for rain feel about that, especially as fresh water becomes an ever more scarce and valuable resource? Have they even considered this prospect, and the legal consequences: loss of income, property and life; abandoned picnics and sporting fixtures; flattened perms, and so on.



It probably makes congregations feel content and cared for, in an oblivious or selfishly ignorant sort of way, when their priest or preacher attempts (or pretends) to help them, their neighbours or others by asking for God's help over the weather. In the real or natural world they are wasting their time, because no amount of prayer or appeals for divine intervention will alter precipitation by one drop.

You can blame Billy too

In 1959, when Peter Jensen was 15 years of age, American mass evangelist Reverend Dr Billy Graham played a major role in Jensen's life by converting him at one of the preacher's zealous crusades. Jensen said Graham had a "huge impact" on him.

Thanks to Billy Graham, Peter Jensen became another (albeit prominent) recruit to a life devoted

to fundamental Christian beliefs. When Graham was touring Australia that year, the flamboyant proselytising orator said he wanted to "remind the people of some old truths about the coming judgement of God". It would be the "last message they would ever hear". Billy's memory jogger led to mass born-againism and conversions of people giving their lives to Jesus and God.

Dr Graham went over the top Down Under, and took a young and intelligent Peter Jensen and thousands of others with him. With the recent and rapid advances in neuroscience, the psychology of Billy Graham-type conversions is now well understood: they can easily capture emotionally charged or psychologically vulnerable youths, or simply people who are inexperienced or immature about life's realities and the world around them.

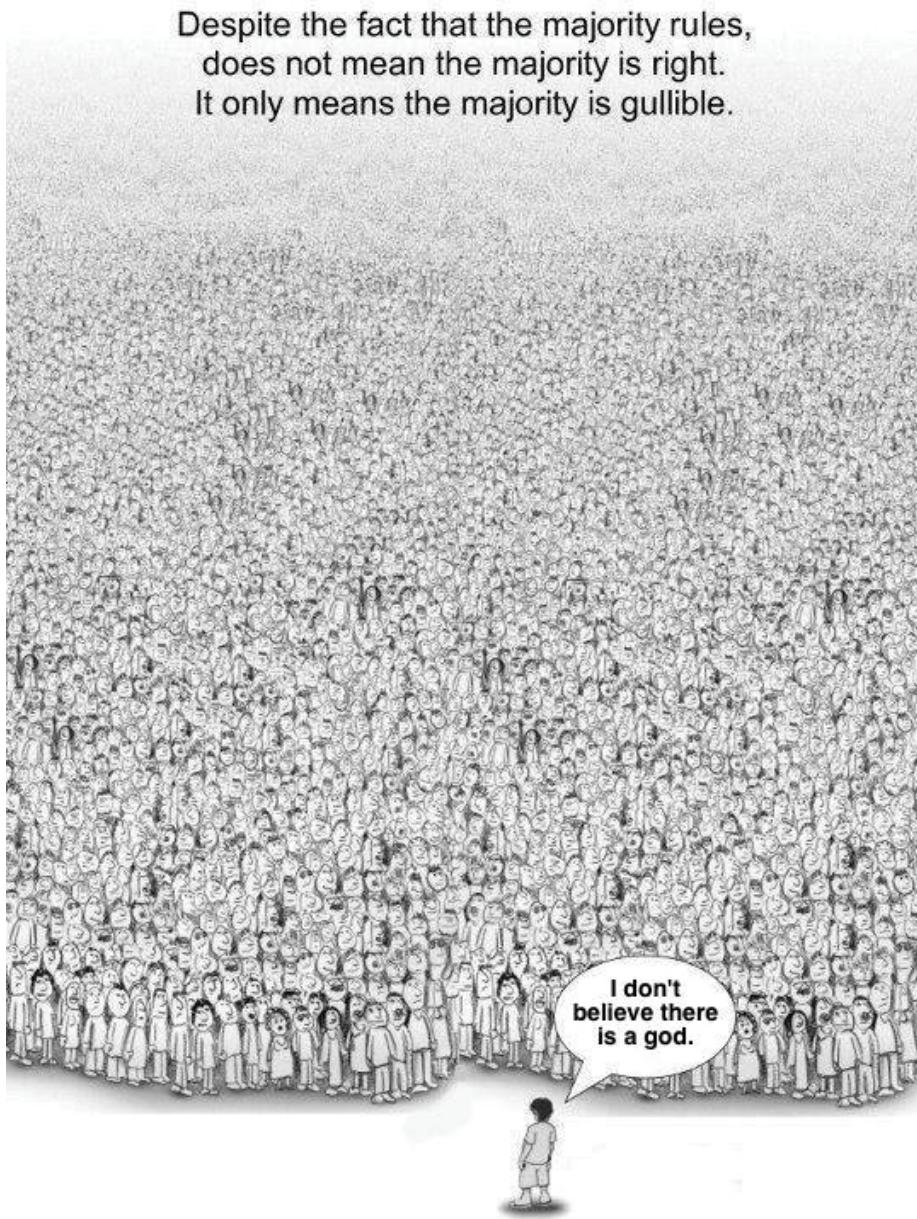
Peter Jensen claimed that Graham's preaching led to a "dramatic and concrete expression of faith". So "concrete" it got set in stone.

Farewell

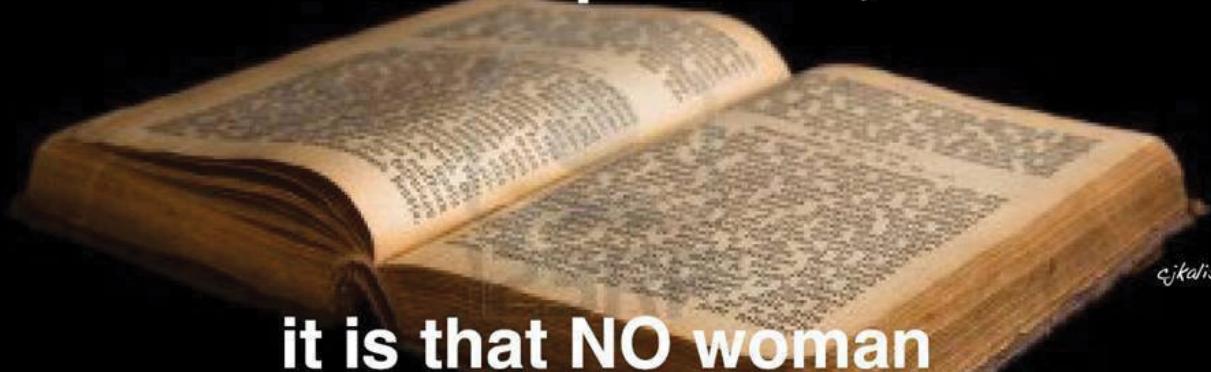
Rain-related fantasies (and similar misconceptions of reality) that, when given a biblical basis and turned into Christian convictions, are typical of the style of religious fundamentalism practiced by Dr Jensen. And they are one reason why people who are able to know better have been leaving the Anglican and other Christian churches in droves, or not joining up.

We'll miss you, Peter. If only no longer to marvel at your first-century-God-and-Jesus-based assertions, which have provided easy opportunities to show how out of touch and error ridden such beliefs are in the twenty-first century.

Despite the fact that the majority rules,
does not mean the majority is right.
It only means the majority is gullible.



If there is one thing
that all women
can be proud of,



it is that NO woman
in the history of the world
wrote even one line of the Bible.

*"I see Atheists
are fighting
and killing
each other
again,
over who
doesn't believe
in any God
the most.*

*Oh,
no..
wait..
that
never
happens."*

Ricky Gervais



"I'm Sorry I Didn't Kill You, Mum"

By Tracey Spicer

Dear Mum,

I'm so sorry I didn't kill you.

I came close, believe me.

The pillow was millimetres from your mouth.

But I just couldn't do it.

How could I take life from the one who gave it to me?

My suckler and snuggler, role model and mentor, nurturer and nemesis: yes, you were all of those things.

To your daughters you were an impossible picture of perfection.

Successful career woman, devoted wife, loving mother — a feminist before your time. You laid out your manifesto: "I want you to be independent women. You don't have to have babies. The world is your oyster. Go out there and show them what you're made of! Who says you have to be sugar and spice and all things nice?"

Brave, bold and beautiful, you always called a spade a bloody shovel.

Possessed of a wicked wit, you could cut to the quick.

That humour came in handy the day you were diagnosed.

The oncologist held up an x-ray, dappled with snowflakes (unusual, on a sunny day in March).

"You can see the cancer here, here, here... and here," he said.

"It has spread from the pancreas to the lungs. Any chemotherapy will be palliative."

You turned to Dad with a wry smile: "Might as well go outside for a smoke. No point giving up now!"

I had to laugh.

At a family meeting that night, you were chairman of the board.

Speaking simply yet eloquently, you set KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) for the coming months.

There was to be no pity, no moping, and no wailing: but there must be mercy.

A conversation we'd had many times around the dinner table suddenly had currency.

"If I lose control of my faculties then put me down," you said, clearly.

"They do it to dogs. Why can't they do it with us, as well?"

We all agreed.

Voluntary euthanasia had never been up for debate in our house: it was a given.

The next six months were the worst — and best — of my life.

We looked at old photos, decorated with '70s flares, floppy sunhats and floral jumpsuits.

(Incidentally, why did you sew matching outfits for Suzie and me? We weren't even twins! I should have taken you to the Hague for those purple and green smocks. They were a crime against humanity.)

You gazed at me lovingly as I stabbed needles into your stomach, managed to keep down a modicum of meals, and patiently painted shadow boxes as precious keepsakes.

We laughed at the bandannas you made us to wear to your chemo sessions, at my dreadful Manuel* impressions in the kitchen, and at the stupid things people said when they dropped by.

"Oh, we know it's terminal. But it's a gift, isn't it? All this special time you'll be having together in these next few months," they'd sigh.

Well, if that's a fucking gift, I want a refund. It's clearly faulty.

One day, it all got too much. We could no longer care for you at home.

We drew up a roster so there was always someone to hold your hand during those bright sunny days and



dark desperate nights.

Your screams of pain were blood curdling.

It was a Tuesday, I think, when I pinned the oncologist to the wall.

"Is there nothing else you can do for my mother's pain?" I pleaded. "Can't you up the morphine to put her out of her misery?"

"If I do that, I'll lose my job. I'm sorry," he answered, kindly.

We asked the nurses. "Please, someone, anyone, end this godforsaken suffering." (Which was a big call for an atheist: I had been forsaken long before this.)

They, too, were kind, patting us on the back saying, "There, there. It won't be much longer now."

It made me wonder — how long is too long?

Is there a mathematical equation for this?

"I've heard three shrieks, five hollers, and one 'Please, kill me now', is that enough, nurse?"

So we decided to do it ourselves.

Suzie stood there all night pressing that bloody red button to flood your body with morphine.

The next day she showed me the bruise on her thumb.

"I know I could go to jail but I don't care," she declared.

But her bravery was for naught.

You kept breathing. And writhing. And screaming.

And so, at 3am, I got up from the recliner chair, lifting the pillow I had wedged behind my back.

I told you I loved you. And I lowered the pillow over your face.

It hovered there for what seemed like an eternity.

But in the end, I couldn't do it.

I was weak. A coward. Not my mother's daughter.

I collapsed on the floor, sobbing.

You must have known: you died hours later.

Finally, you were in peace.

Mum, I hope you forgive me.

Not for the clumsy way I've written this letter (you were always a masterful wordsmith) but for not having the courage to help you when you needed it most.

If it's any comfort, Dad, Suzie and I are campaigning for voluntary euthanasia.

This was my wake-up call.

Let your suffering — and that of so many others — be a lesson to those short-sighted, selfish, puerile politicians who refuse to show compassion to their fellow man. And woman.

How many of them have seen someone they love die in agony, and live with feelings of grief, regret, and helplessness?

Like I do.

Love you Mum.

Your daughter,

Tracey

xxx

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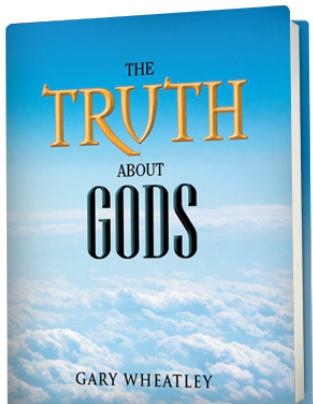
Tracey Spicer is a journalist and an ambassador with Dying With Dignity.

Tracey originally read this letter at a Women of Letters event. <http://womentofletters.com.au>

* Manuel from Fawlty Towers



Book Review



The Truth About Gods

By Gary Wheatley

Publisher: XLIBRIS
October 31, 2012
ISBN-10: 1479726869

Reviewed by Tracy Burgess

Atheist parents have difficult choices in order to raise children that are logical and rational in a world where often logic and reason are not the norm. Do you ignore religious teaching at all with your children? Or do you explain what others believe? Do you try to influence your child's beliefs? Or do you try to give them a framework of thinking and hope they will find reason and logic?

Like it or not, religions exist in the world. To ignore them and not discuss them with your children can be dangerous. Unless you are planning to raise your children in a cave, at some point they are going to encounter the god delusion. How do you prepare them for that? If you don't arm them with some reason and logic mechanisms and an understanding of the basics of religion, they could run the risk of being influenced by theists they encounter in their lives.

Gary Wheatley has written a book for children that provides the basic logical framework for viewing and assessing religions. The book is targeted at the 10 to 12 age group and provides a background on the major world religions and their beliefs. It is easy to read and can be used as a counter-measure against the proselytising material distributed to children through religious instruction in schools.

I was recently shown a copy of religious workbooks given to children in Queensland state schools. It is easy to mock and see the inanity in the activities and information provided. Had it been targeted at adults, it would be easy to be amused and leave it at that. However, knowing that this material was targeted at children at primary school level adds an element of revulsion to my reaction to the material. Children at this age are vulnerable. They believe what they are told. In particular, they are taught to believe what they are told at school. Distributing religious propaganda to children of this age group I consider to be morally reprehensible. It discourages free thought and embeds

false "truths" into the framework of assessment by which children view the world, informing their thought processes as they mature.

The Truth About Gods can be provided to children of the same age group as a counter-measure against illogical thinking. It questions the authority of belief and explains that thousands of religions have existed. The Epicurus problem of evil conundrum is explained. This is a really effective basic argument that children will understand. Children are naturally empathetic. The author asks children to imagine that they were able to be present for every person being hurt in the world; and to imagine that they were able to help every one of those people, but that instead they chose to just stand by and watch. I believe children will be able to connect with the Epicurus argument.

The book finishes with a call to everyone to make choices for a better world. The author touches on global warming and also the need for people to just care about each other. A nice song is provided that the author wrote with his own children. The inclusion of a song in the book makes it a great counter-measure for the workbooks being handed out in public schools through religious instruction. *The Truth About Gods* provides a good alternative option for teaching children about religion as a concept, rather than as an unprovable, un-falsifiable "fact".

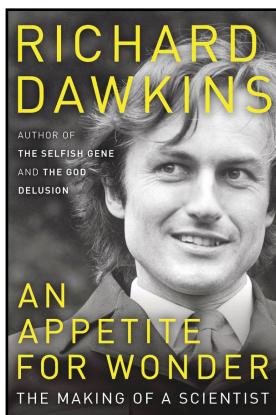
I would recommend this book for children and I would love to see it handed out as part of an ethics or religious theory class. Given the level of religious belief in the world, parents cannot just ignore it and keep their children clueless. This book can provide the starting point for discussions about belief, gods, religion and how to apply the filter of rationality and logic to things we are told or may encounter in our lives.



Book News

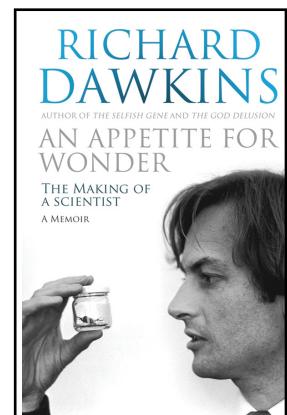
An Appetite for Wonder: The Making of a Scientist

By Richard Dawkins



USA Cover

An Appetite for Wonder: The Making of a Scientist is the first volume of the upcoming autobiographical memoir by British evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins. The hardcover version of the book will be published in both the United Kingdom and the United States on 24 September 2013, and will cover Dawkins's childhood and youth up to the writing of *The Selfish Gene*. A second volume, covering the remaining part of his life, is planned for release in 2015.



UK Cover

Born to parents who were enthusiastic naturalists, and linked through his wider family to a clutch of accomplished scientists, Richard Dawkins was bound to have biology in his genes. But what were the influences that shaped his life and intellectual development? And who inspired him to become the pioneering scientist and public thinker now famous (and infamous to some) around the world? In *An Appetite for Wonder*, we join him on a personal journey back to an enchanting childhood in colonial Africa. There the exotic natural world was his constant companion. Boarding school in England aged 8, and later, public school at Oundle, introduce him (and the reader) to strange rules and eccentric school masters vividly described with both humorous affection and some reservation. An initial fervent attachment to Church of England religion soon gives way to disaffection and, later, teenage rebellion. Early signs of a preference for music, poetry and reading over practical matters become apparent as he recalls the opportunities that entered his small world.

Oxford, however, is the catalyst in his life. Vigorous debate in the dynamic Zoology Department unleashes his innate intellectual curiosity, and inspirational mentors together with his own creative thinking, ignite the spark that results in his radical and new vision of Darwinism, *The Selfish Gene*.

From innocent child to charismatic world-famous scientist, Richard Dawkins paints a colourful, richly-textured canvas of his early life. Honest self-reflection and witty anecdotes are interspersed with touching reminiscences of his best-loved family and friends, literature, poetry and songs. We are finally able to understand the private influences that shaped the public man who more than anyone else in his generation explained our own origins.

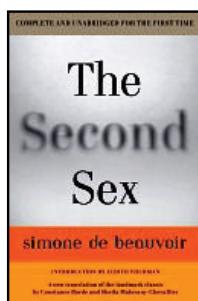
Here, for the first time is an intimate look into the childhood and intellectual development of the world's most famous atheist and evolutionary biologist, Richard Dawkins, "one of the most outstanding intelligences in modern science." (*Evening Standard*) and "one of the greatest nonfiction writers alive today" (*Steven Pinker*)

Sources: <http://www.amazon.com/An-Appetite-Wonder-Making-Scientist/dp/0062225790>
http://www.richarddawkins.net/news_articles/2013/3/8/browse-titles-childhood-boyhood-truth#



My Five Books

By Lee Holmes



The Second Sex

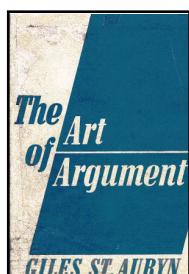
Simone de Beauvoir

One of her best-known books, it deals with the treatment of women throughout history and is often regarded as a major work of feminist philosophy and the starting point of second-wave feminism. Beauvoir researched and wrote the book in about 14 months when she was 38 years old. The Vatican placed it on its "List of Prohibited Books".

Publisher: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc

Publication date: 1949

ISBN: 0-679-72451-6



The Art of Argument

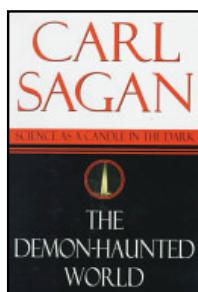
Giles St. Aubyn

"Many people naively assume," writes the author, "that the mind is effortlessly logical: whereas, in fact, to be rational is not to comply with nature but to defy it."

Publisher: Emerson Books Inc.

Publication date: 1962

ISBN-13: 9780800803698



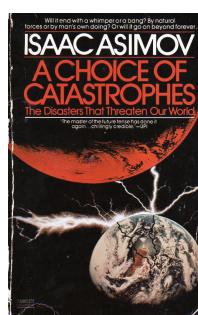
The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark

Carl Sagan

The book is intended to explain the scientific method to laypeople, and to encourage people to learn critical or skeptical thinking. It explains methods to help distinguish between ideas that are considered valid science, and ideas that can be considered pseudoscience. Publisher: Random House / Ballantine Books

Publication date: 1995 / 1997

ISBN: 0-394-53512-X / ISBN: 0-345-40946-9



A Choice of Catastrophes: The Disasters That Threaten Our World

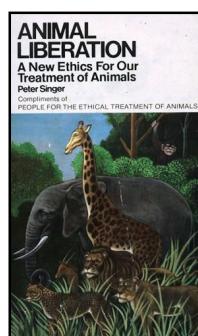
Isaac Asimov

Scientist, author, and Earth-dweller, Asimov explores the many potential natural and man-made catastrophes that could change life as we know it, or erase us from the face of the Earth.

Publisher: Ballantine Books

Publication date: 1981

ISBN-10: 0449900487 / ISBN-13: 978-0449900482



Animal Liberation

Peter Singer

Widely considered within the animal liberation movement to be the founding philosophical statement of its ideas. Singer himself rejected the use of the theoretical framework of rights when it comes to human and nonhuman animals: he argued that the interests of animals should be considered because of their ability to feel suffering and that the idea of rights was not necessary in order to consider them.

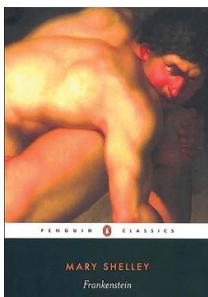
Publisher: Pimlico

Publication date: 1975

ISBN: 978-0-7126-7444-7

My Five Books

By Tom Melchiorre



Frankenstein

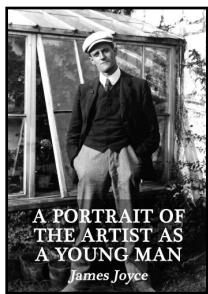
Mary Shelley

Victor Frankenstein creates a grotesque creature in an unorthodox scientific experiment. Shelley started writing the story when she was nineteen, and the novel was published when she was twenty-one. The first edition was published anonymously in London in 1818.

Publisher: Harding, Mavor & Jones

Publication date: 1818

ISBN: 978-1851243969



A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

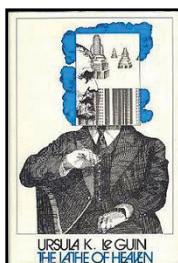
James Joyce

Joyce's autobiographical novel traces the intellectual and religio-philosophical awakening of young Stephen Dedalus as he begins to question and rebel against the Catholic and Irish conventions with which he has been raised. He leaves to go abroad to pursue his ambitions as an artist.

Publisher: The Egoist Ltd.

Publication date: 1917

ISBN: 0-14-243734-4



The Lathe of Heaven

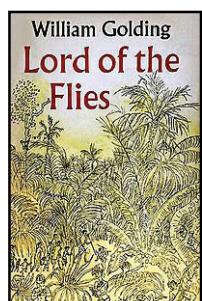
Ursula K. LeGuin

The plot revolves around a character whose dreams alter reality. The story was first serialised in the American science fiction magazine *Amazing Stories*.

Publisher: Avon Books

Publication date: 1971

ISBN: 0-684-12529-3



Lord of the Flies

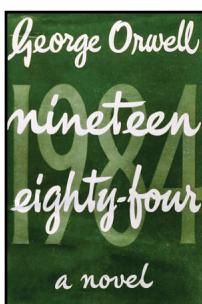
William Golding

A group of British boys stuck on an uninhabited island who try to govern themselves with disastrous results. Its stances on the already controversial subjects of human nature and individual welfare versus the common good earned it position 68 on the American Library Association's list of the 100 most frequently challenged books of 1990–1999.

Publisher: Faber and Faber

Publication date: 17 September 1954

ISBN: 0-571-05686-5



1984

George Orwell

1984 is a classic novel in content, plot, and style. Many of its terms and concepts, such as Big Brother, doublethink, thoughtcrime, Newspeak, and memory hole, have entered everyday use since its publication.

Publisher: Secker and Warburg

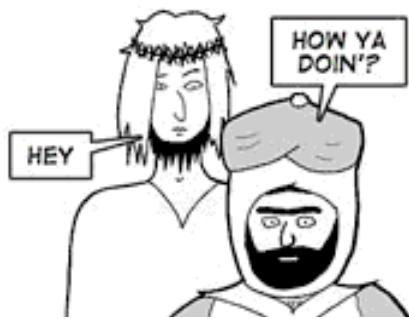
Publication date: 8 June 1949

ISBN: 978-0-452-28423-4

Book details sourced from Wikipedia



The Australian Atheist



Jesus and Mo



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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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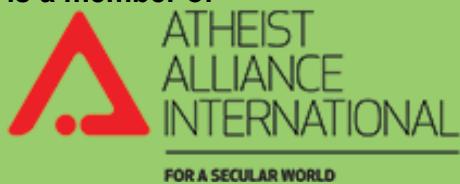
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