

FREETHOUGHT RESOURCE GUIDE

A Directory of
Information, Literature,
Art, Organizations, &
Internet Sites Related to
Secular Humanism,
Skepticism, Atheism, &
Agnosticism

MARK VANDEBRAKE

**Freethought Resource Guide:
A Directory of Information, Literature, Art,
Organizations, & Internet Sites Related to
Secular Humanism, Skepticism, Atheism,
& Agnosticism**

By Mark Vandebrake

Praise for *Freethought Resource Guide*

“Mark Vandebrake has created a one of a kind work. This is a book to explore, think about, read pieces here and there, learn new methods and explore ideas. I cannot imagine the effort that went into this project. It is monumental. The *Freethought Resource Guide* is a deep mine in which you will find many gold nuggets. You could spend a lifetime exploring the resources compiled here. The Freethought Movement now has a single source for all things secular.”

-Dr. Darrel W. Ray, author of *Sex and God* , and *The God Virus* , founder and Chairman of the board for Recovering from Religion

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DEDICATION

Dubito, ergo cogito, ergo sum
(I doubt, therefore I think, therefore I am)

This work is a salute to the past, present, and future heroes of unfettered critical inquiry.

Here is to the late great iconoclast and personal inspiration, Christopher Hitchens (1949-2011) and eminent humanist of the twentieth century Paul Kurtz (1925-2012).



"The Scarlet A"

From <http://outcampaign.org/promotions>

A symbol of atheism

COVER DESIGN

Vandebrake, Linda. (Stained glass artist). (2012). *Happy Prometheus* [Stained glass].

The cover was inspired by three important symbols of freethought, the *Happy Human*, the pansy, and a character of Greek mythology, Prometheus.



“Happy Human”

1) Reprinted with kind permission from the British Humanist Association

1) A secular icon which was designed by Dennis Barrington in 1965. It is the official symbol of the International Humanist and Ethical Union and the most widely used symbol for humanism.



“Pansy, Symbol of Freethought”
From <http://www.photos-public-domain.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/yellow-pansies.jpg>

2)



“Prometheus”
From Library of Congress Collection

3)

2) The word pansy comes from the French *pensée* meaning “thought” and was first adopted by the American Secular Union in the late 19th century. The pansy resembles a human face and in mid to late summer it leans forwards as if in deep thought.

3) Prometheus means “forethinker” and is a titan in Greek mythology. The myth tells of how he stole fire from the gods and gave it to humanity, for which he was punished by being chained to a rock and tortured by an eagle eating his liver which grew back every day. This character has long symbolized humanity’s intelligence, rationality, search for truth, and liberation from superstition.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS & ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I Had the Same Right to Think

I found in this new friend a woman emancipated from all faith in manmade creeds, from all fear of his denunciations. Nothing was too sacred for her to question, as to its rightfulness in principle and practice... It seemed to me like meeting a being from some larger planet, to find a woman who dared to question the opinions of Popes, Kings, Synods, Parliaments, with the same freedom that she would criticize an editorial in the *London Times*, recognizing no higher authority than the judgment of a pure-minded educated woman. When I first heard from the lips of Lucretia Mott that I had the same right to think for myself that Luther, Calvin, and John Knox had, and the same right to be guided by my own convictions, and would no doubt live a higher, happier life than if guided by theirs, it was like suddenly coming into the rays of the noon-day sun, after wandering with a rushlight in the caves of the earth. (Stanton, Anthony, Gage, & Harper, 1881, p. 422)



"Elizabeth Cady Stanton"
From Library of Congress Collection

-Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902), abolitionist,
women's rights leader

INTRODUCTION: THE NECESSITY OF FREETHOUGHT

Freedom of the mind requires not only, or not even specially, the absence of legal constraints but the presence of alternative thoughts. The most successful tyranny is not the one that uses force to assure uniformity but the one that removes the awareness of other possibilities. (Bloom, 1987, p. 249)

-Allan Bloom (1930-1992), philosopher

The horrific events of September 11, 2001, raised new and pressing concerns about the role of religion within and between societies. Although broader cultural economic issues were also to blame for the radicalization of a minority of Muslims, religion was used to justify the murder of over 3,000 people. Of course, many of the issues surrounding religious belief did not begin with 9/11. After-all, religion, in its varied forms, has been with humanity for tens of thousands of years. Yet, the imagery produced by this specific event, with its combination of modern technology used to carry out an ancient and barbaric philosophy pressed the point more vicerally than at any time before or since. This should have been the perfect opportunity for highlighting the dangers of irrational faith in unconfirmed belief systems and for freethought to flourish as a counterpoint to dogma. However, while 9/11 beckoned individuals to question and reexamine traditional sources of knowledge and morality, religious fervor actually increased over the next decade. On the other hand, a skeptical attitude presents humanity with the question of whether or not our planet can survive the application of primitive morals and beliefs to 21st century problems. More specifically, how can issues such as international cooperation, global climate change, nuclear proliferation, and so on, be addressed when rational thought is not placed at the center of debates?

The fact that supernatural claims are largely unfounded, except for widespread personal testimony and anecdotes which are very poor forms of evidence, should be cause for concern to everyone, whether religious or not. For most theists the truth claims of other religions are often subjected to the same level of incredulity

freethinkers hold of all such statements. To be sure, it can often be quite difficult to tell fact from fancy, what should be taken as adequate evidence and what should not, what constitutes valid statements of truth, and what are mere speculations or delusions. How are we to tell whether or not the murderers of 9/11 were correct and the rest of us terribly wrong? Any system which purports to be an all encompassing life-philosophy with numerous claims about the nature of reality should be held to the highest evidentiary standards, including our own. This is why freethinkers and open-minded theists should strive together to make critical thinking a central part of education and public discourse. For if one cares about truth, about integrity, and the well-being of future generations, then educating and instilling in ourselves and our children the necessary tools to tell facts from falsehoods is essential for personal and societal development and perhaps survival.

I was raised neither religious nor particularly skeptical. My mother encouraged our family to attend church, not because she was a true believer, but because she wanted us to be accepted and active members of our community. I was confirmed into the Catholic Church under this same basic assumption. Perhaps because of this particular upbringing, I have always been interested in why people believed so confidently in stories which seemed as plausible as any fantasy novel. I could understand between the creative imaginings of playtime and realities of the external world. Why couldn't others, I asked myself?

At the age of 16 my mother recommended the book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by the mythologist Joseph Campbell. It would be an understatement to say that the book changed my perspective and course in life. It was a rudimentary introduction to comparative mythology. At once I was able to see that religion was pervasive throughout human history and that most shared similar patterns and themes. For some, the conclusion may be that religion is an intrinsic human need and/or that therefore there must be some sort of supernatural world (e.g. "not all of those individuals and societies could be wrong"). For me, it simply pointed to shared human psychological tendencies which manifests through culturally specific symbols, stories, and rituals. Although I now find Campbell's

scholarship somewhat lacking and his conclusions weak at times, the comparisons between religions that he offered opened up a world of inquiry which emersion in only one religious tradition could never have fostered. I think, in conjunction with critical thinking, comparative religion classes in school and such discussions in public forums would be beneficial to understanding the shared cultural legacy of humanity. From then on I was set on a path to try and comprehend why religion had such widespread influence on human communities.

The following work represents the culmination of a 10-year journey through academia. Along the way, I studied history, the humanities, and psychology. For a long time, I didn't consider becoming active in the freethought community or voicing my agnostic atheism publicly.

Yet, becoming increasingly concerned about the negative influence irrationality has on nearly every sphere of individual and collective life, I realized I could no longer remain on the sidelines. Advocating for a comparative view of religion was simply not enough. Listening to nearly all the 2012 Republican presidential candidates simultaneously reject science while affirming their faith was the particular catalyst for my decision to create this guide. I felt that becoming active to support freethinkers and self-identify as an agnostic atheist were essential as a matter of immediate political importance, long-term planetary well-being, and personal integrity.

The decision to become active in the freethought community raised an essential question: How could I contribute effectively to the freethought movement using the education and skills at my disposal? I began exploring the world of freethought and soon realized there was not a single work which brought the various threads of this perspective together. Furthermore, there are so many resources dedicated to various aspects of freethought that it is easy to get bogged down and confused. What I wanted was a single book which had filtered through this mass of information and presented the very best of what freethought has to offer. The *Freethought Resource Guide* is my attempt to create such a work.

While I now self-identify as an agnostic atheist, these terms merely describe a specific subset of what I do not know and what I

do not believe respectively. I am an agnostic because there is no empirical evidence for or against (although there are more plausible explanations for phenomena often attributed to the supernatural) the existence of a God or gods, therefore I do not know whether or not such entities are real beyond the minds of believers. I am an atheist for the same reason with the addition that I think that theism has a negative influence on individuals and society. However, the terms say very little else about what I actually do believe. I am, for instance, a humanist and advocate for the merits of the scientific method. I am also a cultural Catholic. Inevitably we are all products, more or less, of the cultural and family milieu in which we were raised. My family still celebrates Christmas, for instance, but we have always tended to emphasize the positive humanistic values of the holiday. I think this is the case for a growing portion of the population of open-minded theists, who while nominally religious, have taken morality and meaning into their own hands and have, using the values and knowledge of our progressively secular and science based society, shaped their understanding and, thus, perception of reality. This guide is for those religious or spiritual individuals as well, who honestly and earnestly seek greater understanding of alternative perspectives.

In this book you will find plenty of criticisms of dogmatic ideologies with particular focus on religion. But it is much more than that. The skeptical and critical perspective reveals an incredible vista of possibilities about how humanity should think about and behave toward reality. When rigid conformity is shed individuals and communities can begin to appreciate and apply the vast potential of the human species. Much of this work is a celebration of and an education in how humans have contemplated the nature of existence. What I hope to stress is not what is perhaps wrong with some ideas, but what is right about the ability and capacity of humans to transform the world into a healthier, safer, and more compassionate place.

General Notes & Methodology

You might be wondering how exactly I arrived at these particular resources. The following is not an exhaustive collection of all the

resources available to freethinkers; rather, it is a *guide to carefully vetted , selected , arranged , recommended , and (mostly) synopsised* references to those resources which are of the highest quality, historical importance, and/or greatest utility to freethinkers (Be warned! Descriptions may contain spoilers). Most of the works selected either focus on the harm of irrational thought in its various forms or are instructive or are a celebrations of reason, science, and freedom. I have reviewed thousands of books, websites, art, and other applicable material in order to present this condensed directory. The process of final selection was guided by two objectives: 1) to offer enough information to be useful to the active freethinker while not 2) overwhelming the casual reader. Consider the guide a gateway to exploring the vast and profound catalogue of independent and rational philosophy.

This book has several other goals in mind. Primarily, this is an educational tool. The second goal is to encourage individuals to “come out” as freethinkers, atheists, agnostics, humanists, or any other authentic rational identification, by demonstrating that these are tenable positions to hold. And lastly, I hope to give freethinkers the intellectual and emotional support required to speak up and get active. I consider this work a communal effort; to this end, the reader is encouraged to chime in with questions, comments, suggestions, and critiques (see: [Appendix D: Questionnaire: Thinker’s Choice: What Are Your Favorite Freethought Resources?](#)). My overarching vision for the *Freethought Resource Guide* is to have it help inform, empower, connect, and entertain those who have chosen to live with integrity, independence, reason, and humanity.

Ebook readers should take advantage of the hundreds of hyperlinks found throughout this book. There are two types of hyperlinks: 1) internal hyperlinks will navigate to a particular spot in the book and 2) external hyperlinks will open up a browser window so you can check out a website or other resource.

Symbol Key

There are certain references which are followed by one or more symbols. These symbols are either intended to help the reader identify certain types of references or facilitate movement within the

guide. (All symbols are adapted from the free clip art website 1clipart.com or were created by the author.) Note that it might be useful to place a book mark on this page for quick reference. The meaning of the symbols are as follows:

- - Introductory items for beginners/novices in a particular subject.
- + : Christians, ☾ : Muslims, ✠ : Hindus, ✡ : Jews - These works are solid introductions recommended for theists who would like to learn more about a particular subject.

- ✓ - Resources I found to be of particular importance and/or quality.

#1 – 186 fellow freethinkers were gracious enough to share their favorite resources through an online questionnaire. The top 3-5 vote getters in each section are “Thinker’s Choice” selections and are ranked and highlighted in bold. There were a few ties. In such cases, I cast the deciding vote. To have your opinions heard in the next edition visit: freethoughtguide.com/thinkers-choice-questionnaire The questions may be found under [Appendix D: Questionnaire: Thinker’s Choice: What Are Your Favorite Freethought Resources?](#) . Thank you to all those who contributed!

- ➡ - Entries within the *Arts & Entertainment: [Film](#)* section may contain this symbol which will direct you to a corresponding book in the *Arts & Entertainment: Literature: [Prose](#)* section, unless otherwise indicated.

- 🎬 - All books with this symbol have been adapted to film which can be found in the *Arts & Entertainment: [Film](#)* section. Note that I have not included all film adaptations available, however, since many are either of poor quality, or have failed to represent the book’s original freethought themes.

Glossary of Terms



“Atheist Defined”

Reprinted with kind permission from Tracie Harris.

I am neither Jew nor Gentile, Mahomedan nor Theist; I am but a member of the human family, and would accept of truth by whomsoever offered—that truth which we can all find, if we will but seek—in things, not in words; in nature, not in human imagination; in our own hearts, not in temples made with hands. (as cited in Epstein, 2009, p. 58)

-Francis Wright (1795-1852), suffragist, writer, lecturer

Clarity of meaning is essential to communication. Debates about freethought are often founded on misunderstandings of identifying terms. This is especially so with the meaning of atheism. I have chosen the following terms based either on their pervasiveness and/or importance.

Agnosticism – Without knowledge of the validity of a specific claim.

Strictly speaking, agnosticism has more to do with the truth value of knowledge in general, rather than any specific claims about deities, although metaphysical claims are included within the purview of its critique. Popularly, agnosticism is an answer to the specific question: “does God exist?” If your answer is “I don’t

know” you are an agnostic. This is different from, but not unrelated to, the question “do you believe in God?” which is answered with either a yes (theism) or no (atheism).

Agnosticism is compatible with both atheism and theism. For instance, one can be an 1) agnostic atheist: one who does not know whether or not a specific god or gods exist and does not believe said deity or deities exist, or an 2) agnostic theist: one who does not claim to know whether or not a specific god or gods exist, but believes that said deity or deities do. Note that one cannot only be an agnostic. This lies in the distinction between knowledge and belief. An individual either claims to know (gnostic) or not to know (agnostic) and claims to believe (theist) or not believe (atheist). Agnosticism is, therefore, not an alternative stance to theism or atheism because it is a response to a question of knowledge, rather than belief.

Variant with regard to theistic claims:

Ignosticism – The view that a coherent definition of a particular god or gods must be presented before the question of the existence of such entities can be meaningfully discussed.

Antitheism – Opposition to belief in and/or the organized religion around a particular god or gods.

This position can take several common nonmutually exclusive forms: 1) opposition to theism based simply on the perspective that its various god claims are unfounded, therefore, probably false (“It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence” [Clifford, 1999, p. 48]), 2) opposition to the purported morality and/or conduct of a particular god or gods as described in religious texts, 3) opposition to one or more organized religions due to its negative affect on the morality and behavior of theists under the sway of particular beliefs, faith, adherence to dogma, and/or subservience to religious authority figures (similar to antireligion). Christopher Hitchens summarizes these views in *Letters to a Young Contrarian* (2005):

I am not even an atheist so much as I am an antitheist; I not only maintain that all religions are versions of the same untruth, but I hold that the influence of churches, and the effect of religious belief, is positively harmful. (p. 55)

Note that in all three cases it is possible to be an agnostic, atheist, or theist depending on the specific theistic claim(s) being made. For instance, a theist might object on one or more of these grounds with regard to one or more variant theistic propositions (e.g. a Hindu who is anti-Christian). Also, one can be an atheist, thinking that theism has not met its burden of proof (form 1), while still extolling the virtues of belief in god or gods (form 3).

Atheism – The absence of belief in a particular god or gods.

First, it is important to understand that a stance of atheism is contingent upon types of theism. There are innumerable definitions of gods and atheism applies to each individually. For instance, to most Christians, Hindus are atheists because they do not believe in the god of *The Bible* . The reverse may also be true. One either believes in a specific theistic conception or one does not. Where the usual usage of the term atheism applies is to those individuals who do not believe in any conception of god or gods which have been offered to them. It may also be contended that thus-far proposed concepts of god are very often contradictory and/or incoherent, and, therefore, meaningless. In this case,

Atheism may be defined as the view that ‘God exists’ is a false statement. But there is also a broader sense in which an atheist is someone who rejects belief in God, not necessarily because such belief is judged to be false. It may be rejected because it is incoherent or meaningless, because it is too vague to be of any explanatory value, or because, as LaPlace put it in his famous exchange with Napoleon, there is no need for this ‘hypothesis.’ Atheism in this broader sense remains distinct from agnosticism, which advocates suspense of judgment. It is surely possible to justify atheism in this broader sense without having to ‘examine

every object in boundless space and eternal time.’ (Edwards, 2009)

Also, there are religions which are ostensibly atheistic such as Buddhism. Furthermore, Sam Harris (2008) states that:

Atheism is not a philosophy; it is not even a view of the world; it is simply an admission of the obvious. In fact, ‘atheism’ is a term that should not even exist. No one ever needs to identify himself as a ‘non-astrologer’ or a ‘non-chemist.’ We do not have words for people who doubt that Elvis is still alive or that aliens have traversed the galaxy only to molest ranchers and their cattle. Atheism is nothing more than the noises reasonable people make in the presence of unjustified religious beliefs. An atheist is simply a person who believes that the 260 million Americans (87 percent of the population) claiming to ‘never doubt the existence of God’ should be obliged to present evidence for his existence — and, indeed, for his benevolence, given the relentless destruction of innocent human beings we witness in the world each day. An atheist is a person who believes that the murder of a single little girl— once in a million years— casts doubt upon the idea of a benevolent God [‘the problem of evil’]. (pp. 51-52)

Two most common types:

Agnostic Atheism – Without knowledge of, and the absence of belief in, the existence of a particular god or gods. The position that belief in God or gods is not justified because the evidence does not support such claims.

Similar to: negative, weak, soft, or empirical atheism

Gnostic Atheism – With knowledge of the non-existence or impossibility of a particular god or gods and also the absence of belief in God or gods. The position that “It is justified not to believe in God or gods” because the evidence disproves such claims (Cooke, 2006, p. 50).

Similar to: positive, strong, hard, or strict atheism

Deism – The belief in God based on reason rather than revelation and involving the view that God has set the universe in motion but no longer interferes with its operation. Deism was especially influential in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Freethought – A philosophical viewpoint which holds that opinions should be formed on the basis of science, logic, and reason rather than on tradition, faith, dogmas, or authority. Freethought may be said to encompass a full spectrum of nonauthoritarian and rational life-stances. These include atheism, humanism, skepticism, secularism, and agnosticism.

According to philosopher Bertrand Russell (1944):

What makes a freethinker is not his beliefs but the way in which he holds them. If he holds them because his elders told him they were true when he was young, or if he holds them because if he did not he would be unhappy, his thought is not free; but if he holds them because, after careful thought he finds a balance of evidence in their favor, then his thought is free, however odd his conclusions may seem.

Furthermore, freethinkers

want to stand upon [their] own feet and look fair and square at the world—its good facts, its bad facts, its beauties, and its ugliness; see the world as it is and be not afraid of it. Conquer the world by intelligence and not merely by being slavishly subdued by the terror that comes from it. The whole conception of God is a conception derived from the ancient Oriental despotisms. It is a conception quite unworthy of free men. When you hear people in Church debasing themselves and saying that they are miserable sinners, and all the rest of it, it seems contemptible and not worthy of self-respecting human beings. We ought to stand up and look the world frankly in the face. We ought to make the best we can of the world, and if it is not so good as we wish, after all it will still be better than what these others have made of it in all these ages. A good world needs knowledge, kindness, and courage; it does not need a regretful

hankering after the past, or a fettering of the free intelligence by the words uttered long ago by ignorant men. It needs a fearless outlook and a free intelligence. It needs hope for the future, not looking back all the time towards a past that is dead, which we trust will be far surpassed by the future that our intelligence can create. (1957, p. 26)

Humanism – A rational perspective and “progressive lifestance that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment, aspiring to the greater good of humanity;” in essence, Humanism is the belief “in life *before* death” and “being good without God” (Epstein, 2009, pp. xiii-xiv, emphasis in original). “Humanism is the creed of those who believe that in the circle of enwrapping mystery, men's fates are in their own hands— a faith that for modern man is becoming the only possible faith” (John Galsworthy as cited in Lamont, 1988, p. 71). (For more on the humanist perspective see: *Appendix A: Affirmations of Humanist Perspectives*)

Logic – A system of valid reasoning which is divided into deductive, inductive, and abductive. There are three unchangeable fundamental laws of logic known as the classic logical absolutes:

- 1) *Law of Identity* : Something is what it is or $B=B$.
- 2) *Law of Excluded Middle* : A statement is either true or false, or $B=B$ is either true ($B=B$) or it is false ($B \neq B$).
- 3) *Law of Non-Contradiction* : Two opposing statements cannot both be true, or $B=B$ and $B \neq B$ cannot both be true.

See Also: *Religion & Pseudoscience Resources: Selected Bibliography: Skepticism & [Counter-Apologetics](#)* and *Religion & Pseudoscience Resources: Additional Resources: Skepticism & [Counter-Apologetics](#)* and for logical fallacies see: [Appendix B: Top 25 Most Common Logical Fallacies](#) .

Materialism – A view on the question of the nature of reality which holds that nothing exists except matter and energy and that all of reality is the result of material interactions (naturalism).

Monotheism – The belief that there is only one god, as professed in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Naturalism – The view that reality functions through the laws of nature (cause and effect) and the supernatural does not exist and/or has not been sufficiently demonstrated.

Pantheism – The belief that a particular god and the material world are one and the same thing.

Polytheism – The belief in multiple deities, as professed in Hinduism and many folk religions .

Rationalism – The reliance on logic, reason, and evidence as the foundations of knowledge and a system of ethics, rather than relying on subjective beliefs and faith.

Science – “The systematic enterprise that gathers knowledge about the world and condenses the knowledge into testable laws and principles” (Wilson, 1999, p. 58). The basic scientific method includes these steps: 1) define a question, 2) collect and examine resources about the subject matter (e.g. previous experimental data), 3) form an hypothesis, 4) test the hypothesis through controlled experimentation (e.g. the double-blind) which must be reproducible, 5) analyze data produced from the experiment, 6) interpret data and formulate conclusions while also considering possible objects and flaws in the research, 7) publish results for peer (qualified experts within the field) review, 8) expect and encourage independent verification or falsification through retesting, 9) repeat the process making adjustments where necessary. These are some very basic steps of the general method. It should be noted, however, that each field, and each question must be approached with creativity and reason, fitting the unique qualities of the phenomenon under investigation.

For our purposes, it is important to understand how science is distinguished from pseudoscience. A few of the general traits science has and values which are not shared by either most religions or pseudoscience are skepticism, critical thinking, self-correction,

and no claim of absolute knowledge or certainty. Furthermore, here are biologist E.O. Wilson's five diagnostic features distinguishing good science from bad science:

- 1) *Repeatability* : The same phenomenon is sought again, preferably by independent investigation, and the interpretation given to it is confirmed or discarded by means of novel analysis and experimentation.
- 2) *Economy* : Scientists attempt to abstract the information into the form that is both simplest and aesthetically most pleasing—the combination called elegance—while yielding the largest amount of information with the least amount of effort.
- 3) *Mensuration* : If something can be properly measured, using universally accepted scales, generalizations about it are rendered unambiguous.
- 4) *Heuristics* : The best science stimulates further discovery, often in unpredictable new directions; and the new knowledge provides an additional test of the original principles that led to its discovery.
- 5) *Consilience* : The explanations of different phenomena most likely to survive are those that can be connected and proved consistent with one another. (p. 58)

Check out the *Science Resources* section for information on the method and findings of science.

Secularism – The opposition to the injection of religion into civil affairs, particularly public education. It is important to understand that “Secularists are often wrongly accused of trying to purge religious ideals from public discourse. We simply want to deny them public sponsorship” (Kaminer, 1996, p. 24).

Skepticism – The questioning of claims, especially about the supernatural, and an insistence on evidence as a condition of knowledge or belief.

Unitarian Universalism – a creedless religion which upholds the “free and responsible search for truth and meaning” and spiritual growth (Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, 2011).

Frequently Asked Questions

“I contend that we are both atheists. I just believe in one fewer god than you do. When you understand why you dismiss all the other possible gods, you will understand why I dismiss yours” (Roberts, 1995).

-Stephen F. Roberts (1967-)

Here I will attempt to succinctly answer a few of the more frequently asked questions about freethought. Individual freethinkers may have very diverse responses to the questions within this section. There is no dogma or standard to which freethinkers must adhere, apart from the few common values of thought described above. Therefore, it should be understood that the responses provided below are a combination of my own personal perspectives and what I have found to be common generalized views within the community. There is a selection of texts at the end of this section which explain freethought in its various forms.

Why do many freethinkers oppose religion?

Freethinkers realize that there is an important distinction between critical inquiry and dogmatic belief, each affecting the pursuit of knowledge and human well-being in profoundly divergent ways. Primarily, religions hold authority and “revealed” scripture above all else, a perspective which to freethinkers is antithetical to the progress of thought, moral development, and individual freedom. Freethought is a perspective which holds that subjective experience and authority are not sufficient grounds for justifying truth claims. In order to arrive at qualified truths, subjective biases should be mitigated through testable, repeatable, parsimonious, and logical theories. Freethinkers recognize that the majority of religious truth claims have not been substantiated by tests of reason. While religious metaphor may be a potentially information rich expression of the human imagination, their literalization as an accurate description of the external world is unfounded. Essentially, freethinkers believe in the authority of truth rather than truth of authority.

Not only do freethinkers consider religious truth claims unsupported by evidence, but we also feel religion inhibits moral and intellectual progress by excluding new information. Freethinkers are opposed to religion because it has been used to justify physical and mental slavery, racism, homophobia, intolerance, genocide, rape, and murder. Most individuals now find these atrocities reprehensible precisely because of new understandings acquired through reason and the scientific method. Activist and freethought biographer Joseph Lewis (1954) wrote:

Many ask what difference does it make whether man believes in God or not.

It makes a big difference.

It makes all the difference in the world.

It is the difference between being right and being wrong; it is the difference between truth and surmises—facts or delusion.

It is the difference between the earth being flat, and the earth being round.

It is the difference between the earth being the center of the universe, or a tiny speck in this vast and uncharted sea of multitudinous suns and galaxies.

It is the difference in the proper concept of life, or conclusions based upon illusions.

It is the difference between verified knowledge and the faith of religion.

It is a question of Progress or the Dark Ages.

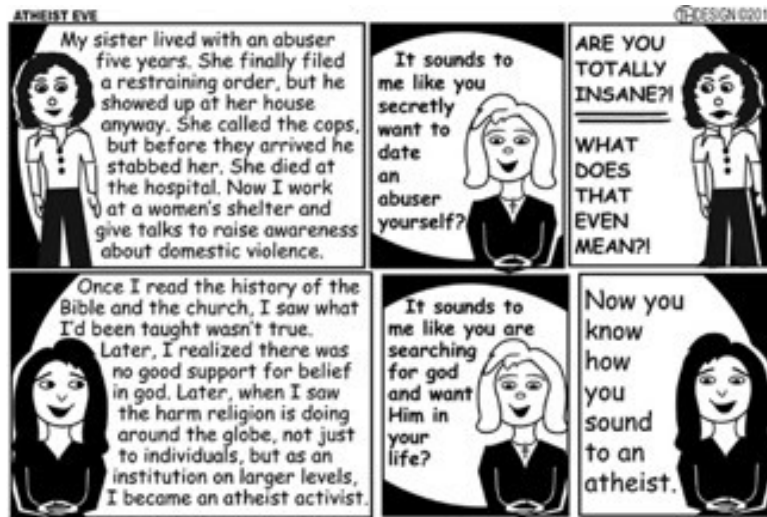
The history of man proves that religion perverts man's concept of life and the universe, and has made him a cringing coward before the blind forces of nature.

If you believe that there is a God; that man was 'created'; that he was forbidden to eat of the fruit of the 'tree of knowledge'; that he disobeyed; that he is a 'fallen angel'; that he is paying the penalty for his 'sins,' then you devote your time praying to appease an angry and jealous God.

If on the other hand, you believe that the universe is a great mystery; that man is the product of evolution; that he is born without knowledge; that intelligence comes from experience,

then you devote your time and energies to improving his condition with the hope of securing a little happiness here for yourself and your fellow man.

That is the difference.



“Searching for God”

Reprinted with kind permission from Tracie Harris.

How do freethinkers find meaning in life?

Freethinkers realize that all available evidence suggests that the evolved mind is the only generator of meaning in the universe. Thus, the responsibility of assigning value to life rests solely with individuals and communities. Freethinkers place great value on rational thought and science, unfettered by dogma and authority, as the most productive and healthy ways to facilitate the individual and collective search for meaning. We feel it is always wrong to believe something without sufficient evidence. It is often a matter of integrity which leads a freethinker to attempt to shed delusion, selfish aggrandizement, and biased certitude which lies at the heart of religious fundamentalism. We find authentic meaning in facing the world, as it is, no matter how uncomfortable our provisional truths may be, so as to promote substantial and lasting progress. Freethinkers find additional meaning through the pursuit of knowledge, art, relationships, pleasure, and much more, just like anyone else.

Do freethinkers have a basis for morality?

It is true that science in the narrow sense cannot show what is right or wrong. But neither can appeals to God. It's not just that the traditional Judeo-Christian God endorsed genocide, slavery, rape, and the death penalty for trivial insults. It's that morality cannot be grounded in divine decree, not even in principle. Why did God deem some acts moral and others immoral? If he had no reason but divine whim, why should we take his commandments seriously? If he did have reasons, then why not appeal to those reasons directly? (Pinker, n.d. p. 3)

-Steven Pinker (1954-), cognitive scientist

Like meaning, morality is generated by the human mind and is a concept which encompasses those values individuals and societies hold most deeply. Humanism bases morality on human needs and centers behavior around compassion or the "golden rule." Freethought believes in the addition of reason as a means of moral deliberation within the individual, between individuals, and amongst communities. Science, as a form of rational thought, is a powerful and useful tool for exploring the biological basis and origins of our evolved moral inclinations. Most freethinkers value the insights of evolutionary theory in attempting to understand our nature in order to help create societies more compatible with human well-being. Essentially, compassion is necessary for engaging in dialogue and reason essential for the communicative process of weighing the merits of conflicting values inherent in moral dilemmas.

Freethought orients morality differently than most theistic perspectives. Freethinkers act morally, not out of fear of divine judgment or belief in immutable laws, but because doing so enhances the quality of life for everyone. Morality is sound if it is based in reason, its merits discussed among people in a non-exclusionary and non-authoritarian manner. We may often look for "higher" moral principles but always do so with an awareness that human beings are the beginning and end of moral decision-making, and that no other entity or creed supersedes this process.

Was atheism responsible for the crimes committed by the Soviet and Nazi regimes?

A frequent argument against atheistic societies is the claim that they lack morality and are responsible for some of history's greatest atrocities. Pope Benedict XVI (2010) recently echoed this view when speaking of the Nazis:

As we reflect on the sobering lessons of the atheist extremism of the twentieth century let us never forget how the exclusion of God, religion and virtue from public life leads ultimately to a truncated vision of man and of society and thus to a reductive vision of the person and his destiny. (Benedict XVI, 2010, para. 6)

This view is in error, for it neglects the fact that both Nazi and Soviet regimes vigorously promoted dogmatic "cults of personality" which were essentially religions with Hitler and Stalin as gods. Furthermore, the Nazis frequently invoked God, and the Soviets deliberately modeled their state rites and rituals after religious ceremonies. Hitler (1969) wrote the following in his polemic autobiography, *Mein Kampf*: "Hence today I believe that I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator: by defending myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the work of the Lord" (p. 60) Also, the belt buckles of elite Nazi SS troops were inscribed with *Gott mit uns* meaning "God with us." These are just two pieces of evidence that the Nazis considered themselves Christian. Furthermore, after Hitler took power, he banned all atheist and free-thought organizations including the German Freethinkers League and began waging an "anti-godless" crusade known as the Volkisch movement. In a 1933 speech, he announced the Nazi's had "undertaken the fight against the atheistic movement, and that not merely with a few theoretical declarations: we have stamped it out." Today, the most obvious example of the cult of personality is the one surrounding communist dictator Kim Jong-un and his two predecessors in North Korea. In short, history demonstrates that no society has suffered because their citizens or government were too reasonable.

Even freethinkers at the beginning of the 20th century noted the similarities of socialist ideology with religion. Historian Susan Jacoby (2004) relates that "In 1904 the Truth Seeker explicitly indicted socialism as just another form of blind faith." (p. 231). It stated:

A religion cannot be built upon the known, it must place its heaven far off, beyond the ken of man, and beyond the possibility of its being brought within his ken. So with socialism. When one says to a socialist that the conditions here are all awry, that our officials are nearly all tyrants, that our courts do not do justice, that a man elevated to office imagines himself a tin god set up to rule over those who delegate power to him, the socialist says, Oh, that will all be regulated when socialism comes. He says this just as a Christian says to a sufferer, be patient, resign yourself to the will of God, and in his good time all will be well. The how, why or wherefore of these things is left to the imagination. The Christians have implicit faith in their God, the socialists the same faith in the state. (as cited in Jacoby, 2004, p. 231)

The primary lesson to be drawn, not just from these two examples, but from all examples of human behavior is that motivations are a product of what individuals believe rather than what they do not believe. For example, an abolitionist is not motivated by a compulsion to destroy slavery, *per se*, but by the desire to free all of humankind. So to is the desire of the freethinker to be released and to release others from the mental shackles of dogma, whatever form it may take, not to eliminate its positive aspects such as ritual, myth, etc.

For more on this interesting, albeit appalling, history see the following items:

Bergen, Doris. (1996). *Twisted cross: The German Christian movement in the Third Reich*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Cline, Austin. (n.d.). *Hitler was an atheist who killed millions in the name of atheism, secularism?* Retrieved November 1, 2011, from atheism.about.com/od/isatheismdangerous/a/HitlerAtheist.htm

Cline, Austin. (n.d.). *Isn't atheism the same as communism? Doesn't atheism lead to communism?* Retrieved November 1, 2011, from atheism.about.com/od/atheismmyths/a/Communism.htm

Ericksen, Robert & Herschel, Susannah. (Eds.) (1999). *Betrayal: German churches & the holocaust* . Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers.

Steigmann-Gall, Richard. (2003). *The holy reich: Nazi conceptions of Christianity 1919-1945* . New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Walker, Jim. (n.d.). *Hitler's Christianity* . Retrieved November 1, 2011, from nobeliefs.com/Hitler1.htm

Most freethought organizations offer answers to frequently asked questions (FAQ's). Here is a concise webpage:

atheist-community.org/faq

Selected Bibliography

There are two caveats to the works presented below. First, the resources, which take a critical tone do so almost exclusively towards religion, particularly literalized religion. This is somewhat unbalanced as freethought's criticism extends to any form of non-rational dogmatic ideology, not just those which are religious in nature. Second, the resources are particularly Western-centric, a deficiency I hope to correct in future editions.

Secular Humanism

Cave, Peter. (2009). *Humanism: A beginner's guide* . Oxford, United Kingdom: Oneworld Publications. ●

A witty start to humanism with a few arguments against some claims of theism and why living without such beliefs is a good option.

Clay, Jimmy. (2010). *Discovering secular humanism: Answers for the novice & the curious* (2nd ed.). Charleston, SC: CreateSpace. ● † ↻ ❌ ☆

Comte-Sponville, Andre. (2008). *The little book of atheist spirituality* . New York, NY: Bantam Books.

The French philosopher makes the case that a life which celebrates human and cosmic relationships can be both profound and non-theistic.

Einstein, Albert. (2011). *Essays in humanism* . New York, NY: Open Road Integrated Media. ●

A series of very short essays from the great humanist mind of Albert Einstein dealing with topics such as racism, nuclear proliferation, the interaction of nations, the still prevailing militaristic mindset, and on other eminent scientists, among others. He wrote that

the most important factor in giving shape to our human existence is the setting up and establishing of a goal: the goal being a community of free and happy human beings who by constant inward endeavor strive to liberate themselves from the inheritance of anti-social and destructive instincts. In this effort the intellect can be the most powerful aid. (preface)

Epstein, Greg. (2009). *Good without God* . New York, NY: HarperCollins. ● + © ☞ ✨ ✓ # 1

This is a book I wish I could write, for it is clear, concise, and necessary. *Good Without God* is also appealing to me because Epstein is of my own generation and he certainly demonstrates that we are capable of taking the humanist vision into the future.

Frolov, Ivan. (1990). *Man, science, & humanism: A new synthesis* . Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.

Goldfinger, Eva. (1996). *Basic ideas of secular humanistic Judaism* . International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism. ● ✨

Herrick, Jim. (2005). *Humanism: An introduction* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. ●

Huxley, Julian. (1927). *Religion without revelation* . New York, NY: Harper & Brothers.

In a promotional work of humanism, biologist Julian Huxley made this humorous assessment: “Operationally, God is beginning

to resemble not a ruler, but the last fading smile of a cosmic Cheshire Cat.”

Kurtz, Paul. (2000). *Embracing the power of humanism* . Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

A collection of excerpts from other works by the influential humanist including his thoughts on freedom, living a fulfilling and excellent life, morality and ethics. His central messages are self-determination and viewing life “as a work of art, or as a career, and through self-motivation you will succeed” (p. xvi).

Kurtz, Paul. (2001). *Skepticism & humanism: A new paradigm* . Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Kurtz, Paul. (2004). *Affirmations: Joyful & creative exuberance* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Kurtz, Paul. (2007). *What is secular humanism* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. • **#2**

Lamont, Corliss. (1997). *The philosophy of humanism* (8th ed). Washington, DC: Humanist Press. • ✓ **#3**

Morain, Lloyd & Morain, Mary. (2008). *Humanism as the next step* (Rev. ed.). Washington, DC: Humanist Press. •

A simple and short book which lays out the basic tenants of humanism, and its many parallels to the common values of major religions, while also acknowledging some profound differences of outlook. The book also explains how a humanist perspective may be applied to the dilemmas of individuals and societies.

Norman, Richard. (2004). *On humanism* . London, United Kingdom: Routledge. •

Praag, J.P. (1982). *Foundations of humanism* . Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.

Walter, Nicolas. (1998). *Humanism: Finding meaning in the word* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Warner, Michael., Antwerpen, Jonathan., & Calhoun, Craig. (Eds.). (2010). *Varieties of secularism in a secular age* . Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Atheism & Agnosticism

Baggini, Julian. (2003). *Atheism: A very short introduction* . Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press. ●

A good starter text, clocking in at a mere 136 pages.

Blackford, Russell & Schuklenk, Udo (Eds.). (2009). *50 voices of disbelief: Why we are atheists* . Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons. ✓

A good variety of stories that make me proud to be an atheist. This is a must read for anyone just starting their journey of non-belief.

Christina, Greta. (2012). *Why are you atheists so angry?: 99 things that piss off the godless* . Dirty Heathen Publishing. ● + ↻ 🚫 ⚙️ ✓

#3

There have been few books which I completely agree with and this is one. The popular blogger Greta Christina lays out a very short list in response to this extremely common question from theists.

Cohen, Chapman. (1921). *A grammar of freethought* . London, United Kingdom: Pioneer Press. ● ✓

This is my favorite of Chapman Cohen's work. Here he describes the freethought perspective and contrasts its liberating spirit with that of theism.

Cohen, Chapman. (1921). *Theism or atheism: The great alternative* . London, United Kingdom: Pioneer Press.

This work is a polemic, practical, and pointed argument for unbelief.

Eller, David. (2008). *Atheism advanced: Further thoughts of a freethinker* . Parispany, NJ: American Atheist Press.

Answers many common questions and offers some suggestions for furthering freethought. Also includes short descriptions and comparisons of many religions.

Gora. (1980). *The need of atheism* . Vijayawada, India: Atheist Centre.

Gora is the pen name of Goparaju Ramachandra Rao who was the co-founder of the Atheist Centre in India.

Grayling, A.C. (2010). *To set Prometheus free* . London, United Kingdom: Oberon Books.

A fuller exposition of the ideas presented in his earlier work *Against All Gods* (2007).

Harbour, Daniel. (2001). *An intelligent person's guide to atheism* . London, United Kingdom: Duckworth.

An expansion of the argument for atheism beyond debates about the existence of the supernatural (he doesn't get into it) to include the consequences of atheism or theism to matters of morality, government, knowledge, and beyond.

Harris, Sam. (2004). *The end of faith: Religion, terror, & the future of reason* . New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

This early work of Sam Harris' is a warning about religions with nuclear weapons and call to rationality in an increasing complex and interconnected world. He also has stern words for religious moderates who implicitly help perpetuate and support their more extreme counterparts.

Harris, Sam. (2008). *Letter to a Christian nation* . New York, NY: Vintage Books. + **#1**

This is Harris' response to critiques of his previous book. It is also a continued plea to moderate Christians to question their beliefs for the sake of our species and our planet.

- Krueger, Douglas. (1998). *What is atheism?: A short introduction*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. ●
- Lewis, Joseph. (1954). *An atheist manifesto*. New York, NY: The Freethought Press Association.
- Maisel, Eric. (2009). *The atheist's way: Living well without gods*. Novato, CA: New World Library.
- Martin, Michael. (Ed.). (2007). *The Cambridge companion to atheism*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

The foreword states that the work has “eighteen of the world’s leading scholars present original essays on various aspects of atheism: its history, both ancient and modern, defense, and implications.”

- Mills, David. (2006). *Atheist universe: The thinking person’s answer to Christian fundamentalism*. Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Press. ●✓

This book is excellent due to its accessibility, candor, and clarity of thought.

- Poidevin, Robin. (1996). *Arguing atheism: An introduction to the philosophy of religion*. New York, NY: Routledge. ●✓
- Poidevin, Robin. (2010). *Agnosticism: A very short introduction*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press. ●✓
- Russell, Bertrand. (1972). *Atheism; collected essays, 1943-1949*. New York, NY: Arno Press. ● + © ☞ ✨ ✓

Contains many great short works by Bertrand not included in the collection below such as *Am I an Atheist or an Agnostic?* (1949) and *The Value of Freethought* (1944).

- Russell, Bertrand. (2009). *Bertrand Russell bundle: The basic writings of Bertrand Russell*. New York, NY: Routledge. ● + © ☞ ✨

✓ #2

One of the seminal thinkers of 20th Century freethought! This volume is highly recommended to appreciate the scope of Bertrand’s work. The volume includes *Why I Am Not a Christian* (1927), *An Outline of Intellectual Rubbish* (1943), and *What I Believe* (1925) in which he succinctly and powerfully expressed his

belief by proclaiming that “The good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge.”

Schellenberg, J.L. (2007). *The wisdom to doubt: A justification of religious skepticism* . Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

The author advocates for a “categorical skepticism” or a withholding of judgment on matters we cannot be certain of. A patient and ultimately positive work.

Smith, George. (1979). *Atheism: The case against God*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books. ●✓

Clear and to the point exposition of the nonsensical arguments for the supernatural and why atheism is the only rational position.

Steele, David. (2008). *Atheism explained: From folly to philosophy* . Chicago, IL: Open Court.

Stenger, Victor. (2009). *The new atheism: Taking a stand for science & reason* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. ●

Walters, Kerry. (2010). *Atheism: A guide for the perplexed* . New York, NY: Continuum.

Warrag, Ibn. (2003). *Why I am not a Muslim* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. ☺✓

Memoirs & Testimonies

Ali, Ayaan. (2007). *Infidel* . New York, NY: The Free Press. ☺✓ **#1**

Former member of the Dutch parliament and atheist activist Ayaan Hirsi Ali recounts her brave story of emerging from the world of Somali Islamic fundamentalism to secular society.

Allen, Steve. (1982). *Beloved son: A story of the Jesus cults* . Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Co. +

Entertainer Steve Allen tells the story of how his son Brian joined a cult and his struggle to understand and communicate with him.

Andrews, Seth. (2012). *Deconverted: A journey from religion to reason* . Outskirts Press.

Former Christian, religious broadcaster, and recent founder of "The Thinking Atheist" community, Andrews relates his difficult, yet, ultimately redemptive path to atheism and reason. He asks everyone to "Assume nothing. Question everything. Challenge the opposition. And start thinking." And how!

Antony, Louise. (Ed.). (2007). *Philosophers without gods: Meditations on atheism & the secular life* . Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Babinski, Edward. (Ed.). (2003). *Leaving the fold: Testimonies of form fundamentalists* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. †

A collection of personal stories from contemporary and historical former Protestant fundamentalists who either remained Christian or became agnostics. Babinski found that some common themes link the various testimonies including:

the dilemmas and fears each person faced in leaving fundamentalism behind; their gradually dawning courage to ask crucial critical questions, and to continue asking more questions; their discovery of how wonderful it can be to allow one's innate curiosity the freedom it craves; and the blossoming of their distinctive personalities and beliefs. (p. 16)

Barker, Dan. (2006). *Losing faith in faith: From preacher to atheist*. Madison, WI: Freedom from Religion Foundation. †

A former fundamentalist preacher who "After preaching for nineteen years, [Dan] Barker 'lost faith in faith.' Throwing out the bath water, he discovered: 'There is no baby there!'" (cover jacket). Dan is now the co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, co-host of Freethought Radio, the author of several books, and song writer.

Brogaard, Betty. (2010). *The homemade atheist: A former evangelical woman's freethought journey to happiness* .

Berkeley, CA: Ulysses Press.

Burns, Eric. (1995). *The joy of books: Confessions of a lifelong reader* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

A former anchorman tells of his experience and love of reading and its importance for society and culture.

Compere, John. (2010). *Towards the light: A fifth generation Baptist minister's journey from religion to reason* . Chandler, AZ: Writer's Cramp Publishing.

Hayes, Judith. (2000). *The happy heretic* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Lobdell, William. (2009). *Losing my religion: How I lost my faith reporting on religion in America & found unexpected peace* . New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Loftus, John. (2008). *Why I became an atheist: A former preacher rejects Christianity* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. **#3**

Porteous, Skipp. (1991). *Jesus doesn't live here anymore: From fundamentalist to freedom writer* . Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.

Sagan, Carl. (1985). *The varieties of scientific experience: A personal view of the search for God* (A. Druyan, Ed.). New York, NY: Penguin Books. ✓ **#2**

Sentilles, Sarah. (2011). *Breaking up with God: A love story* . New York, NY: HarperOne.

Templeton, Charles. (1999). *Farewell to God: My reasons for rejecting the Christian faith* . Toronto, Canada: McClelland & Stewart Limited.

Winston, Hella. (2006). *Unchosen: The hidden lives of Hasidic rebels* . Boston, MA: Beacon Press. *

Tells the story of those within these communities who long for greater physical and intellectual freedom.

Dictionaries & Encyclopedias

Carroll, Robert. (2003). *The skeptic's dictionary: A collection of strange beliefs, amusing deceptions, & dangerous delusions* .

- Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons. **#1**
- Cooke, Bill. (2006). *Dictionary of atheism, skepticism, & humanism* .
Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. ✓ **#2**
- Flynn, Tom. (Ed.). (2007). *The new encyclopedia of unbelief* .
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MD: Scarecrow Press.
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1-4). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- McCabe, Joseph. (1948). *A rationalist encyclopedia: A book of
reference on religion, philosophy, ethics, & Science* . London,
United Kingdom: Watts & Co.
- Saul, John. (1994). *Doubter's companion: A dictionary of aggressive
common sense* . New York, NY: The Free Press.
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pseudoscience* (Vols. 1-2). Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO. **#3**
- Stein, Gordon. (Ed.). (1989). *The encyclopedia of unbelief* (Vols. 1-
2). Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Stein, Gordon. (Ed.). (1996). *Encyclopedia of the paranormal* .
Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. ✓

A BRIEF HISTORY OF FREETHOUGHT

“The only thing such doubters really need, that believers have, is a sense that people like themselves have always been around, that they are part of a grand history” (Hecht, 2003, p. 494).

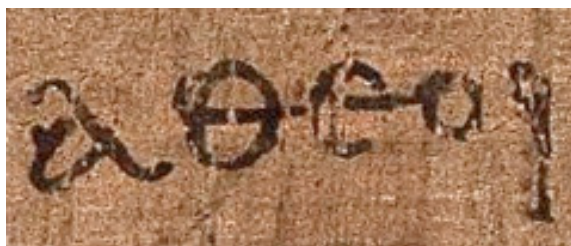
-Jennifer Michael Hecht (1965-), poet, historian

What follows is a whirlwind tour of freethought heroines, heroes, and seminal events over the course of several thousand years, a history of true iconoclasts. This is not meant to be a comprehensive history, but rather a series of biographical and event snapshots. It must be noted that freethinkers are a very diverse lot. They have always had a wide spectrum of thoughts and beliefs. What they have in common is the courage to think independently, to doubt and question, to critically analyze, to explore alternative perspectives, use reason to examine the natural world and the affairs of human beings in order to facilitate the greater well-being and progress of humanity. Skepticism is not a dreary negative pursuit as some have claimed. The freethinker embraces doubt and sees it as ultimately life-affirming. Doubt is as ever-present as the air we breathe; doubt is corrosive oxygen to hard ideologies precisely because it is the life-blood of honesty and truth.

I hope that the events and figures presented here will encourage you to explore this fascinating story further. It is also hoped that, like the rest of the guide, you will be strengthened, encouraged, and informed by the wisdom of those who sometimes failed, often succeeded, but always dared to bring honesty, integrity, hope, and ultimately enlightenment to the world. One can only speculate how many other unfortunate anonymous individuals humanity has lost to inquisitions and other religious conflicts and persecutions. There are innumerable figures whom I have left out of this brief history, most often for the sake of brevity and sometimes because those individuals are adequately represented elsewhere within the guide. A bibliography with important histories and classic texts before 1900 has also been provided.

In proportion to their numbers, the contribution of freethinkers of all stripes in the development of human civilization has been

profound and enduring. From liberating masses of people from oppressive regimes to privately contemplating the nature of existence, from boldly standing up for freedom and democracy, to quietly writing irreverent literature, freethinkers have, in multitudinous ways, remained at the forefront of advancing morality, culture, and freedom. Freethinkers have always been at the vanguard of offering ideas and moral positions which many of their conservative grandchildren would eventually take for granted. Perhaps for this reason, the freethought legacy has been unfairly neglected.



“Greek Atheos”

from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ephesians_2,12_-_Greek_atheos.jpg

When studying this history one must always keep in mind that the identifying terms of freethought have not always held the same meanings over time. This is especially so with regard to the term atheism. As it is generally expressed today as a specific perspective, the term is a relatively recent phenomenon. Atheism originates from the Greek word *atheos* meaning “without god.” However, the all-encompassing meaning was not fully adopted until the Enlightenment when individuals began to self-identify as not believing in *any* gods. Prior to this period, a charge of atheism was more often hurled as an insult towards one’s enemies regardless of whether or not they believed in god or gods. This is not to say that there have not always been those who disbelieved all god claims, as there probably have, but a recognition that the surviving works of antiquity are either too obscure on the matter or simply do not support the common modern meaning of the word.

Classical Greece

Some of our first inclinations of freethought come from the pre-Socratic Greeks. Diagoris “the Atheist” of Melos (5th Century B.C.E.), who speculated that religion was used to scare people into behaving,

was notorious for exposing the Eleusinian mysteries in order to get his fellows thinking, and is widely considered the first known atheist. Others in this era include Protagoras (490-420 B.C.E.), Xenophanes of Colophon (570-475 B.C.E.), Prodicus of Ceos (465-395 B.C.E.) and most exceptionally Democritus of Abdera (460-370 B.C.E.). These latter two speculated that since the names of the gods and earthly objects were synonymous, early humans simply worshiped those things important to them.

Socrates (469-399 B.C.E.) began a new phase of Greek philosophy and choose to commit suicide rather than be executed by the polis for inspiring others to question the gods. He was followed by Plato (424-347 B.C.E.) and, most important to this history, Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.) who pushed for a rational examination of the world.

Ancient Asia

In India, Hindu atheist schools, Logic and Atomism, were in operation as early as 1200 B.C.E. The Carvaka was a movement which most seriously challenged Hinduism and was thoroughly materialistic. Buddhism and Jainism are also considered largely atheistic. Hsun Tzu (3rd Century B.C.E.) and Wang Ch'ung (27-97) introduced a practical and sarcastic side to religious skepticism in China. Tzu spoke of the dangers of humans focusing on supernatural causes while ignoring human mismanagement, which he called "ominous human signs" (as cited in Hecht, 2003, p. 118). The mood of this era was less about attacking belief in God or gods than skeptics laughing "at or respectfully dismiss[ing] a whole range of ideas that seemed designed to make people feel better but that actually made them miss the true and real aspects of the beauty of life" (pp. 123-124). Hundreds of years later saw the birth of Zen Buddhism, which held that faith was unnecessary and made no claims beyond what the individual could discover. In other words, "Great doubt: great awakening. Little doubt: little awakening. No doubt: no awakening" (p. 214). Perhaps the finest poet of the Zen tradition was Ikkyu Sojun (1394-1481).

The Hellenistic Age

Pyrrho of Elis (360-270 B.C.E.) launched Skepticism and was so highly regarded that, in his honor, his home town “instated tax exemption for all philosophers” (Hecht, 2003, p. 42). How wonderful it would be if we held philosophers and scientists in such high esteem today! Epicurus (341-270 B.C.E.) thought that there might be gods but they were unconcerned with humanity and that pleasure, not superstitious fear, should be the focus of human life. Carneades of Cyrene (214-129 B.C.E.) advocated that “we cannot know anything for certain, but we can carefully determine whether one conclusion is more likely than another” (Hecht, 2003, p. 43). This remains an important freethought perspective.

The *Old Testament* of the Jews includes many struggles with doubt, most notably expressed in *Job* and the *Ecclesiastics*. The Jewish community, coming into contact with Hellenistic culture, reexamined their own history of doubt and many left the fold altogether during this time.



“Hypatia of Alexandria”
From http://space.about.com/library/graphics/hypatia_2.jpg

The Roman Empire

“Reserve your right to think, for even to think wrongly is better than not to think at all.”

-Hypatia of Alexandria (350?-415), Neoplatonian philosopher

The Roman Republic and later Empire placed great emphasis on rationality but the majority of people still worshiped supernatural

forces. Philosopher, statesman, and political theorist Cicero (106-43 B.C.E.) was an important skeptic although he believed cynically that society needed religion in order to stay intact. The poet Lucretius (99-55 B.C.E.) believed that there were gods, but they were unconcerned with humanity, unable to affect the natural world, and therefore, humans had no reason to fear them. Furthermore, he had no problem with people giving the natural forces godlike names, at least with caveats:

If a man insists on calling the sea 'Neptune' or the grain 'Ceres,' and would sooner abuse the name of 'Bacchus' than to call wine what wine's called, we'll give way, let him tell us and tell us the world is the 'Goddess Mother' so long as in truth he still keeps his mind clean of the taint of vile religion. (as cited in Hecht, 2003, pp. 149-150)

Pliny the Elder (23–79) anticipated Sigmund Freud when he suggested that supernatural "beliefs are little short of the fantasies of children" (p. 153). The philosopher emperor Marcus Aurelius (121-180) is a most interesting figure. Whereas most leaders upheld the notion of the supernatural because it helped keep the masses in line, he was considered a philosophical agnostic and practical atheist.

The age of ancient secular philosophy in the West continued with Sextus Empiricus (160-210), Lucian of Samosata (120-190). The intellectual period ended with the destruction of the Library of Alexandria which housed the near sum of human knowledge through a combination of war, Christian fanatics in 391, Muslim armies in 642, and the ravages of neglect. One of its last librarians, the philosopher Hypatia (350-415) was killed at the hands of Christian fanatics. Here are two quotes attributed to her:

Fables should be taught as fables, myths as myths, and miracles as poetic fancies. To teach superstitions as truths is a most terrible thing. The child mind accepts and believes them, and only through great pain and perhaps tragedy can he be, in after years, relieved of them. In fact, men will fight for a superstition quite as quickly as for a living truth --- often more so, since a superstition is so

intangible you cannot get at it to refute it, but truth is a point of view, and so is changeable.

And “To rule by fettering the mind through fear of punishment in another world, is just as base as to use force.”

Early Islam

As Europe became engulfed in the dark-ages, the Islamic world saw a flourishing of intellectual thought and skepticism. Ibn al-Rawandi (827-911), Muhammad al-Warraq (9th century), and Abu Bakr al-Razi (865-925) attacked prophecy and miracles. Here is Abu Bakr questioning the revealed religion of Mohammed:

You claim that the evidentiary miracle is present and available, namely, the Koran. You say: ‘Whoever denies it, let him produce a similar one.’ Indeed, we shall produce a thousand similar, from the works of rhetoricians, eloquent speakers and valiant poets, which are more appropriately phrased and state the issues more succinctly. They convey the meaning better and their rhymed prose is in better meter... By God what you say astonishes us! You are talking about a work which recounts ancient myths, and which at the same time is full of contradictions and does not contain any useful information or explanation. Then you say: ‘Produce something like it!’ (as cited in Hecht, 2003, p. 229)

There were some interesting groups of note including the Zindiq poets, Faylasufs (particularly Al Ghazzali [1058-1111]), and The Brethren who held that one should “shun no science, scorn no book, nor cling fanatically to a single creed” (Hecht, 2003, p. 230). Great advice!

Early Christian Europe

It is interesting to note that the early Christians were labeled atheists by the non-Christians of the Roman period because they rejected polytheism and also for refusing to show even token respect to the old pantheon. Under these charges, many were executed and many more persecuted. Yet, once they seized power under the Roman Emperor Constantine (272-337), Christians began persecuting individuals of other faiths and philosophies. Their efforts

helped accelerate a process of intellectual destruction and neglect begun by the collapse of the Roman Empire. Books were burned, schools were closed, and discussion of ideas largely condemned. The result was the Dark Ages, a period of intense ignorance and religious domination. Europe's past intellectual achievements were in danger of being lost forever. Europe had fallen under the physical, mental, and cultural dictatorship of the Catholic Church and its monarchical allies.

After nearly a thousand years of suppression, pointed skepticism towards Christianity reemerged during the Renaissance. Shortly before and during this cultural "re-birth" a small band of brave humanists, like Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459), sought out and attempted to disseminate the last remaining works of antiquity. They helped inspire figures such as Pietro Pomponazzi (1462-1524), who questioned the immortality of the soul, the need for people to have fear of heaven or hell to act morally, and many other supernatural claims. In 1509, Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) lambasted the Christian school of logic, the Scholastics, in his *Praise of Folly*. In 1543 Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543) published his *On the Revolution of Heavenly Spheres* which challenged the centuries old Ptolemaic earth centered cosmology with the observation that the earth revolves around the sun. Sixty-six years later Galileo (1564-1642) defended Copernicus, thus further challenging the centrality of humans in the universe and a literal interpretation of *The Bible*. Painters like Raphael (1483-1520) praised ancient Greek philosophy (e.g. the fresco *The School of Athens* [1510-1511]) and Michelangelo (1475-1564) reintroduced the nude in sculpture (e.g. *David* [1501-1504]). Perhaps more importantly, Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) sought experimentation as a means of explanation of spiritual phenomenon. The French humanist and satirist Francois Rabelais (1494-1553) was also a great skeptic during this period.



"Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man"
From <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/17/Vitruvian.jpg>

The Church, troubled by the new cultural milieu, redoubled efforts to suppress the spread of the new ideas. The Inquisition sent many freethinkers underground, to jail, or the stake. Much freethought can be heard during this time from the many common individuals who were persecuted through the Inquisition records of the churches. What is surprisingly fresh is that many of the people persecuted said that they derived their heretical ideas from their own minds. Furthermore, books were being more widely disseminated with the invention of the printing press in 1440. Doubt is often fueled by the thoughts of the highly educated but need not necessarily begin there.

Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) was burned at the stake for heresy. When the sentence of death was handed down he proclaimed: "Perchance you pronounce this sentence against me with greater fear than I receive it" (Singer, 1950, p. 180). Because of his modern scientific ideas, Bruno's death is often considered the birth of modern freethought. Other individuals of note are Lucilio Vanini (1585-1619), Shakespeare (1564-1616, see also: *Arts & Entertainment: Literature: Poetry* section), and Montaigne (1533-1592) whose motto was *Que scais-je?* (What do I know?). Pierre Charron (1541-1603) refuted the idea that certainty is a guarantor of happiness when he described what doubt means to the wise person:

It alone can provide true repose and security of our spirits. Have all the greatest and most noble philosophers and wise men who have professed doubt been in a state of anxiety and suffering? But

they say: to doubt, to consider both points of view, to put off a decision, is this not painful? I reply, it is indeed for fools, but not for wise men. It is painful for people who cannot stand freedom, for those who are presumptuous, partisan, passionate and who, obstinately attached to their opinions, arrogantly condemn all others... Such people, in truth, know nothing. They do not even know what it is to know something. (as cited in Hecht, 2003, p. 307)

The Renaissance also saw the birth of humanist art through the likes of Dutch and Flemish masters such as Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1525-1569) who began depicting the events of everyday life, as opposed to strictly religious themes. A growing merchant class, greater social mobility, a scientific revolution, memories of the bubonic plague, and the Reformation all contributed to a widespread reevaluation of the Church as the only source of meaning and purpose.

The Revolution of Reason



"Baruch Spinoza"
From <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/ea/Spinoza.jpg>

Three individuals helped propel a modern psychological interpretation of belief in the supernatural. Rene Descartes (1596-1650) reduced what we can know about God to an idea in the mind. Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) expanded the notion to claim that many people are more susceptible to ideas of the supernatural when they face adversity (however, there are indeed "atheists in foxholes") or uncertainty about their future prospects and Thomas Hobbes (1588-

1679) concluded that religion is used by those in power to control the masses. We may say that these philosophers provided a source and explanation of supernatural thought: God is a psychological phenomenon to which people are susceptible in times of uncertainty. Individuals and institutions may use this practical psychological weakness to maintain and/or expand their control.

Pierre Bayle (1647-1706) popularized philosophy and science, and defended the morals of atheism. His *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (1697) became very popular with freethinkers of the day. Bayle thought that religion might have some good philosophy in it, but its truths were not revealed to the average person.

Deism, the belief that God exists, set the world in motion, but now no longer plays a role, was articulated by Edward Herbert (1583-1633) and was promulgated by John Locke (1632-1704). Meanwhile, the French priest Jean Meslier's (1664-1729) posthumously released work was the first to unabashedly express a strictly modern atheistic perspective. Julien Offray de La Mettrie (1709-1751) followed with the materialist tract *Man a Machine* in 1748.

The Enlightenment was phenomenally important to freethought because it ushered in a fight for free inquiry based on reason and observation. Through his biting satire and socio-political commentary Voltaire (1694-1778) inspired many to think and speak freely. This is best expressed in Denis Diderot (1713-1784) and Jean d'Alembert's (1717-1783) *Encyclopaedia or a Systematic Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts & Crafts*. David Hume (1711-1776) presented a more acute attack on religion itself in that he thought it was simply pointless to add God to any system of thought. Paul-Henri Thiry, the Baron d'Holbach, (1723-1789) was also prolific in his attacks against religion at this time. Atheist Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) essentially founded secular history with his *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1789) in which he remarked about Roman belief:

The policy of the emperors and the senate, as far as it concerned religion, was happily seconded by the reflections of the enlightened, and by the habits of the superstitious, part of their

subjects. The various modes of worship which prevailed in the Roman world were all considered by the people as equally true; by the philosopher, as equally false; and by the magistrate, as equally useful. And thus toleration produced not only mutual indulgence, but even religious concord. (Gibbon, 2000, p. 35)

Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) championed freedom of religion, religious pluralism, and a scientific outlook without abandoning his own faith. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) also remained faithful while simultaneously arguing that God was ultimately unknowable. He essentially cast the concept of God out of the reality of the senses. Somewhat echoing Mendelssohn's nuanced view was Jewish poet Heinrich Heine (1797-1856) who wrote:

In dark ages people are best guided by religion, as in a pitch-black night a blind man is the best guide; he knows the roads and paths better than a man who can see. When day-light comes, however, it is foolish to use blind, old men as guides. (as cited in Hecht, 2003, p. 376)

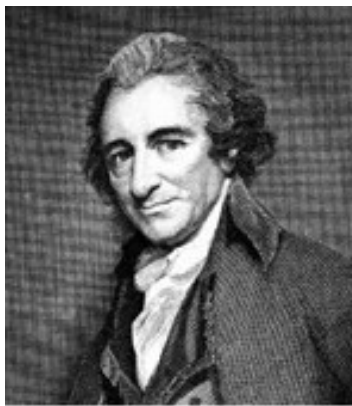
The French Revolution (1792) represents a crescent in the Enlightenment and an attempt to transform an entire society from religious to secular. While much of it bloodily failed, its impact is still felt today and the most prominent and notorious figure to emerge was Napoleon (1769-1821) who was personally an atheist and politically a theist. In 1811, the great Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) was expelled from Oxford for co-writing a pamphlet called *The Necessity of Atheism* .

The American Experiment

In North America, a host of diverse groups found a refuge from the religious strife and government sponsored persecution which characterized much of European history. When they escaped the intolerance of their native lands, however, they often set about silencing critical voices in their new home. Yet the plurality of Christian sects in the new colonies also enabled a state of relative

religious equilibrium which, coupled with the vast open space of the West, allowed the religious and non-religious to live together.

The events leading up to the American Revolution and the new scientific spirit of the Enlightenment helped to breed a particularly American freethinker. The strong disconnect between the American colonies and an oppressive far-away monarch in England fostered in many North Americans a deep sense of independence from hierarchy and orthodoxy. This is especially characterized in the establishment of a representative democracy in America. From Thomas Paine (1737-1809) to Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) skeptics played a seminal role in the nation's founding.



"Thomas Paine"
From Library of Congress Collection

Contrary to popular belief, America was not intended to be a Christian nation. Except for the signatory section which uses a common way of expressing the day used in both religious and secular settings (Seventeenth Day of September in the Year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and Eighty seven) the *Constitution* does not contain any references to God or any other higher power. The first official and explicit denial by the United States government that it was founded as a Christian nation come from the 1797 diplomatic agreement the *Treaty of Tripoli*, which stated in article 11 that: "The government of the United States is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion." The treaty was written by Joel Barlow but signed and proudly proclaimed to the nation by President John Adams. Yes, most Americans were nominally Christian, but many did not attend church or hold the rigid beliefs of modern fundamentalists. Indeed, many of the founding fathers were

so unorthodox in their Christianity that they would hardly be recognized as Christian today. Deism, was typical amongst founders. Thomas Jefferson, who wrote a supernatural free *Bible* , and the relentless scientist Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) once told Thomas Paine: “where liberty is, there is my country.” To which Paine replied: “Where liberty is not, there is mine” (Griffith, 1982). Both are extremely moving statements of humanism in that they express the sentiments of loving liberty where it resides and of striving to bring it to everyone. The founders recognized the danger of coupling religion and government because of the experience of Europe, and their belief in the ability of human beings to dictate their own lives.

As the new republic settled into expansion and freedom, religion began to reassert itself through the numerous revival movements of the early 19th century. A slew of roaming prophets travelled throughout the country causing boom and bust outbursts of religious fervor. However, freethought remained alive and found its most powerful expression in the abolitionist and women’s rights movements. The 1848 Seneca Falls Convention lead by freethinkers Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902) and Lucretia Mott (1793-1880) marked the beginning of the women’s movement in America. Ernestine Rose (1810-1892) openly lectured about her atheism, in part because of the patriarchal nature of *The Bible* which is largely opposed to women’s liberty. Many others within the women’s struggle came to recognize religion as the chief instrument in their unequal and oppressive treatment. As with every American war, the Civil War brought about a conscious suppression of freethought. However, with the end of the conflict a major freethought led triumph had been achieved, the abolition of slavery.



"W.E.B. Du Bois"
From Library of Congress Collection

The long peace towards the end of the 19th century saw true “golden age” of freethought in America. The “Great Agnostic” orator Robert G. Ingersoll (1833-1899) was the movement’s most famous and outspoken leader. Mark Twain (1835-1910) and Walt Whitman (1819-1892) hilariously and poetically undermined religious dogma while entertaining and expanding America’s consciousness. Freethinker W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963) co-founded the NAACP and is considered a “father of the Civil Rights Movement.”

Women’s rights continued to gain traction through the continued efforts of Stanton, Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906), and others. Unitarian and Transcendentalist movements also captured the hearts of many Americans. Religion fought back with the infamous anti-obscenity laws of the Comstock era (1873-) which made it illegal to mail any material deemed “obscene, lewd, and/or lascivious.” These laws were merely pretenses for silencing uncomfortable opinions, like those expressed by one of its last major victims birth-control advocate, founder of Planned Parenthood, and freethinker Margaret Sanger (1879-1966).

Post-Enlightenment Europe

Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872), in his 1841 *The Essence of Christianity*, considered God to be a human projection and religious activities to be merely wishful thinking. His work greatly influenced many later philosophers. The atheist thinker, Arthur Schopenhauer

(1788-1860), made this insightful and humorous quip about believers :

For if we could guarantee them their dogma of immortality in some other way, the lively ardor for their gods would at once cool; and... if continued existence after death could be proved to be incompatible with the existence of gods... they would soon sacrifice these gods to their own immortality, and be hot for atheism. (as cited in Hecht, 2003, p. 393)

Overall, Schopenhauer thought there was no need for God in explaining reality. Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), on the other hand, wanted very much to believe but found himself incapable. Towards the end of the 19th century we witness Charles Bradlaugh (1833-1891) founding the British National Secular Society and fighting for rationality with his wife Annie Besant (1847-1933). Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) proclaimed the death of God and Karl Marx (1818-1883) envisioned a society without religion.



"Margaret Sanger"
From Library of Congress Collection

It would be hard to overstate Charles Darwin's (1809-1882) contribution to freethought. Apart from revealing outright frauds and lies, much of what freethought has had to say about religion is either philosophical disproof or discovering alternatives. Questions of our origins cut to the heart of what it is to be human. It was Darwin who gave us the most comprehensive and demonstrable mechanism for the origin and change of species over time ever conceived. His work

began a long process of systematically debunking religious answers to human origins. Furthermore, as Richard Dawkins (1986) points out: “although atheism might have been logically tenable before Darwin, Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist” (p. 6). Darwin himself struggled between the faith of his youth and family and the personal integrity of following the conclusions his evidence suggested. Early on evolution was championed by Darwin’s “bulldog” Thomas Huxley (1825-1895). Huxley also popularized the idea of agnosticism with regards to religious questions.

Freethought Today

The latest and most recognizable expression of freethought has come from four men: Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris, the so-called “new atheists.” They represent a necessary reaction to the horrors of religious fundamentalism in action with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. We are now more than 10 years on from that terrible day and freethought has gained some traction and much attention. I have often wondered how this new spot-light on freethought will affect the future and whether we are approaching it the right way. Most importantly, where do we go from here?

You will notice that I have largely avoided the twentieth century and beyond in this brief history of freethought. I have done so because the population of important interesting freethinkers grows exponentially larger as we approach the present and is therefore beyond the scope of this work. I encourage you to explore the bibliography below for more information.

Selected Bibliography

Classic Texts

This and the following section contain what I consider to be the most historically important freethought texts. I have chosen to limit the list to works published before 1900. Note that some of the works do not have complete references. Either I could not locate the original publication information or such information is ultimately

unknown. Also, some of the works were originally published in a language other than English. In these cases, the English translation or popular equivalent is given followed by the original title in parentheses. Many of the works in the following two sections can be found for free at the websites: gutenberg.org (for free e-books), librivox.org (for free audiobooks), or by visiting freethoughtguide.com (for a zip file containing 115 freethought classics) and clicking on the link "Free Stuff." The later two sites also contain thousands of other public domain books .

Aristotle. (4th Century B.C.E.). *The metaphysics* (Metaphysica). Greece.

For the great philosopher metaphysics is "being in the highest degree of abstraction." This is the first writing to deal with metaphysics and in it Aristotle sets out to rectify the apparent contradictions of Plato's idea of unchanging "Forms" with the fact of constant change. Its significance lies in his inclusion of observation as a method for discovering truth. The downside is that it has also provided arguments for theists. However, after Aristotle, philosophy alone was not enough to justify truth claims.

See also: *Nichomachean Ethics*, *Poetics*, and *Politics* all from the 4th Century B.C.E.

Arnobius. (305). *Against the heathen* .

Effectively argued against the claims of pagan religion and unintentionally undermined Christianity as well.

Arnold, Matthew. (1875). *God & The Bible: A review of objections to 'literature & dogma* .' London, United Kingdom: Smith, Elder.

Widely known for his poetry, Matthew Arnold was also a social and religious critic. He wrote in the above work that "The freethinking of one age is the common sense of the next" (p. xl). And that "the personages of the Christian heaven and their conversations are no more matter of fact than the personages of the Greek Olympus and their conversations" (p. 212).

Aurelius, Marcus. (161-180). *Meditations* (Ta eis heauton). Italy. **#5**

Perhaps the most philosophical of the Roman Emperors, Marcus lays out his Stoic philosophy from a naturalistic perspective. Meant as a sort of personal journal of ideas, he calls for a holistic cosmic worldview, ethical principles, regardless of whether it makes one happy, and critical analysis of one's own judgment and that of others.

Bacon, Francis. (1620). *New instrument of science* (Novum organum scientiarum). London, United Kingdom .

Extremely important to the development of empiricism and the scientific method.

Bakunin, Mikhail. (1882). *God & the state* (Dieu et l'état). Geneva, Switzerland: Carlo Cafiero & Élisée Reclus.

The father of anarchism wrote this incomplete work as a criticism of the role religion plays in political control.

Bayle, Pierre. (1682). *Miscellaneous reflections, occasion'd by the comet which appear'd in December 1680. Chiefly tending to explode popular superstitions. Written to a doctor of the Sorbon* (Pensées diverses sur l'occasion de la comète). Rotterdam, Netherlands: Reiner Leers

On the seeming pretense to debunking supernatural claims for the comet given in the title and explaining it with scientific principles, Pierre Bayle gave what is perhaps the first ever defense of atheist morals. In one gem refuting appeals to authority or the precedence of history he wrote: "it is pure illusion to claim that a notion that has passed from one century to the next, from generation to generation, cannot be entirely false."

Bayle, Pierre. (1697). *Historical & critical dictionary* (Dictionnaire historique et critique, Vols. 1-2). Rotterdam, Netherlands: Reiner Leers.

A work of skepticism and religious tolerance. A forerunner of Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopaedia* (1772).

Bentham, Jeremy. (1789). *Introduction to principles of morals & legislation* . London, United Kingdom: W. Pickering.

The founder of utilitarianism lays out his view of human nature and his philosophy of government. Jeremy Bentham also argued forcefully for individual freedom, secular society, free expression, the abolition of slavery and capital punishment, and animal rights.

Bentham, Jeremy, Grote, George, & Beauchamp, Philip. (1822). *Analysis of the influence of natural religion upon the temporal happiness of mankind* . London, United Kingdom: R. Carlile .

The authors view religion as an irrational and dangerous product of nature. Note that they used the pseudonym Philip Beauchamp for publication.

Bentham, Jeremy. (1823). *Not Paul but Jesus* . London, United Kingdom: John Hunt.

Criticizes the Church for following much of the teachings of Paul rather than Jesus. Here again he used a pseudonym, this time Gamaliel Smith.

Bentham, Jeremy. (1824). *Book of fallacies: From unfinished papers of Jeremy Bentham by a friend* (P. Bingham, Ed.). London, United Kingdom: J. & H. L. Hunt.

This work deals with the kinds of fallacies Bentham thought individuals often make about themselves and their relation to society. Bentham thought humans were primarily motivated by hedonism, that in “every human breast... self-regarding interest is predominant over social interest; each person's own individual interest over the interests of all other persons taken together” (pp. 392-393). He is arguing that the locus of human value was within the individual and that perceived authority of institutions (Church and state in particular) were corruptions of this reality.

Besant, Annie. (1877). *My path to atheism* . London, United Kingdom: Freethought Publishing Company.

The enigmatic freethinker lays out her case against the historicity of Christianity as a guide for explaining her own atheism.

Blount, Charles. (1693). *The oracles of reason* (C. Gildon, Ed.). London, United Kingdom.

An early work of deism that was influential to later freethinkers. In it he denies miracles, revelation, and further criticizes the *Bible* . This is a collection of his pamphlets and private papers printed shortly before his death.

Boccaccio, Giovanni. (1353?). *The decameron* (Il Decameron, cognominato Prencipe Galeotto). Italy: Filippo & Bernardo Giunti.

Following the Black Death in the 14th Century which killed millions of Europeans, there emerged an elevated level of religious skepticism and criticism. The Decameron or “ten days” is a collection of 100 stories borne from that environment, the emerging merchant class, and the beginning of the Renaissance. In the introduction to a translation of Boccaccio (1982/1353?) Thomas Bergin describes the work as “a token of the emancipation of western culture from the dogmatic rigidities of the Middle Ages; a proclamation of man's dignity and worth” (p. xxviii).

Bradlaugh, Charles & Besant, Annie. (1893). *The freethinker's textbook* (Vols. 1-2). London, United Kingdom: Freethought Publishing Company.

Collaborative volumes by husband and wife freethinkers which delve into the historicity of the creation and nature of Christian and other esoteric texts.

Bradlaugh, Charles. (1895). *A plea for atheism*. London, United Kingdom: Freethought Publishing Company.

Bruno, Giordano. (1584). *On the infinite universe & worlds* (De l'infinito universo et mondi). Venice, Italy.

Giordano Bruno was a friar who was executed for blasphemy, immoral conduct, and heresy (a freethought hat-trick?). He believed that the Earth revolves around the sun and that there are many more planets each revolving around a sun.

Büchner, Ludwig. (1855) *Force & matter: Empiricophilosophical studies* (Kraft und stoff: Empirisch-naturphilosophische studien). Tübingen, Germany: University of Tübingen.

A work of extreme materialism. Ludwig was the founder of the German Freethinkers League which, along with the above work, helped create and expand the significant German freethought movement.

Cassels, Walter. (1874). *Supernatural religion: An inquiry into the reality of divine revelation* . London, United Kingdom: Longmans, Green & Co.

Charron, Pierre. (1601). *Of wisdom* (De la sagesse). Bordeaux, France.

A founder of modern secularism and lover of doubt. In this work Pierre Charron clearly lays out Montaigne's philosophy and demonstrates how a writer can cleverly get past religious sensors. He also makes a strong case that doubt is not only a correct perspective but that it can make one happy as well.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. (Late 14th Century). *The Canterbury tales* . United Kingdom.

A diverse group of English pilgrims travelling from Southwark to Canterbury Cathedral wile away the time by holding a story telling contest. The result is a series of tales critical of English society and the Church. Much in the vein Boccaccio's Decameron.

Chekhov, Anton. (1979). *Anton Chekhov's short stories* (R. Matlaw, Ed.). New York, NY: Norton. (All original works published 19th Century)

This collection is the best way to taste the breadth of Chekov's work.

Ch'ung, Wang. (2nd Century B.C.E.). *Discourses weighed in the balance* (Lùnhéng). China.

Cicero. (45 B.C.E.). *On the nature of the gods* (De natura deorum). Italy.

Clifford, William. (1877). The ethics of belief. In *Contemporary Review* .

In this work, the mathematician and philosopher argues that unjustified belief is dangerous and immoral. He wrote that:

If a man, holding a belief which he was taught in childhood or persuaded of afterwards, keeps down and pushes away any doubts which arise about it in his mind, purposely avoids the reading of books and the company of men that call in question or discuss it, and regards as impious those questions which cannot easily be asked without disturbing it—the life of that man is one long sin against mankind.

Collins, Anthony. (1713). *Discourse on free-thinking, occasion'd by the rise & growth of a sect call'd free-thinkers* . London, United Kingdom.

The work that, more than any other, helped popularize freethought as a unique perspective.

Collins, Anthony. (1724). *Discourse of the grounds & reasons of the Christian religion* . London, United Kingdom.

Confucius. (500 B.C.E.). *The analects* (Lún Yǔ). China.

Copernicus, Nicholas. (1543). *On the revolutions of heavenly spheres* (De revolutionibus orbium coelestium). Nuremburg, Germany: Johannes Petreius.

Introduced the heliocentric theory to the world and forever changed understanding of our place in the universe and helped put into question other truth claims of established dogmas.

Darrow, Clarence. (1899). *Why I am an agnostic & other essays* . East Aurora, NY: Roycroft Shop.

The great civil libertarian defense attorney expresses his doubt, among other things.

Darwin, Charles. (1839). *Journal & remarks, 1832-1835. In Narrative of the of the surveying voyages of his majesty's ships adventure & Beagle (Vols. 1-4)*. London, United Kingdom: Henry Colburn.

More commonly known as *The Voyage of the Beagle* this is young Darwin's account of his 1831-1836 trip half-way around the world, most importantly the Galapagos Islands.

Darwin, Charles. (1859). *On the origin of species by means of natural selection, or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life* . London, United Kingdom: John Murray. ✓ #1

It is hard to overstate the importance of this landmark text which marked the birth of evolutionary biology.

Darwin, Charles. (1871). *The descent of man, & the selection in relation to sex* . London, United Kingdom: John Murray. ✓

Charles tackles human evolution, a topic he avoided earlier because of the inevitable controversy it would induce.

Descartes, Rene. (1637). *Discourse on the method of rightly conducting one's reason & of seeking truth in the sciences* (Discours de la méthode pour bien conduire sa raison, et chercher la vérité dans les sciences). Leiden, Netherlands.

An important text for the modern development of science and philosophy. His first precept "was never to accept anything as true if I did not know clearly that it was so; that is, carefully to avoid prejudice and jumping to conclusions" (2000, p. 16). And of course, here he also proclaims one of the most famous conclusions in all of human history: "I think, therefore I am." He essentially believed that knowledge comes from reason.

Diderot, Denis & d'Alembert, Jean. (Eds.). (1751-1772). *Encyclopaedia, or a systematic dictionary of the sciences, arts, & crafts* (Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences,

des arts et des métiers, Vols. 1-17). Paris, France: Andre le Breton, Michel-Antoine David, Laurent Durand, & Antoine-Claude Briasson.

One of the most important texts of the Enlightenment. The editors hoped to gather as much information as possible for public consumption. The list of illustrious contributors (the first encyclopedia to have many different authors) is extensive including: Voltaire, Baron d'Holbach, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Montesquieu.

Diderot, Denis. (1796). *The nun* (La religieuse). France.

About the 18th century slavery-like practice of forcing young women into convents and subjecting them to the whims of an often cruel hierarchy and lifestyle.

Dumas, Alexander. (1845). *Queen Margot* (La Reine Margot, Vols. 1-6). In La Presse. Paris, France: Gamier Freres. ([see](#))

Alexandre Dumas was a believer but delivered this fictionalized account of the marriage of Catholic Marguerite de Valois of France and Protestant King of Navarre, Henri de Bourbon. The story depicts the absolutely insipid and grotesque power struggle during France's Wars of Religion. Along with the constant political intrigue, the story pivots on the consequences of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre which killed from 5,000 to 30,000 Protestant identifying human beings. Reads as a searing condemnation of every aspect of totalitarian society.

Eliot, George. (1855). Evangelical teaching: Dr. Cumming. *Westminster Review* , 64.

Eliot, George. (1874). *Middlemarch: A study of provincial life* . London, United Kingdom: William Blackwood & Sons. ([see](#))

George Eliot was the pen name of Mary Anne Evans who was a freethinker and remains one of the finest authors in the English language. This, her seventh and greatest novel, is a mature story of multiple characters and numerous themes including the status

of women, religion, politics, and hypocrisy. She was also the first English translator for several of the works in this section.

Empiricus, Sextus. (2nd Century). *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (Pyrrhoneioi hypotyposesis).

See also:

Empiricus, Sextus. (1985). *Selections from the major writings on skepticism, man, & God* (P. Hallie, Ed. & S. Etheridge, Trans.). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett.

Epictetus. (2nd Century). *Discourses of Epictetus* (A. Diatribai, Ed.). Greece.

Erasmus, Desiderius. (1511). *In praise of Folly* (Moriae encomium). Paris, France.

Erasmus was a believer but realized that the Church could be as corrupt and hypocritical as any other human institution. He advocated for religious toleration and is often called the “Prince of the Humanists.” With its classical allusions as vehicle for satirical criticisms of the Catholic Church this work helped fuel the Protestant Reformation and the idea that humans possess free will and can act as rational, independent beings.

Euhemerus. (4th Century B.C.E.). *Sacred history* . Greece.

A work that attempts to rationalize the Greek pantheon as simply mythologized or exaggerated accounts of real people and events, known as the “Historical Interpretation.”

Feuerbach, Ludwig. (1841). *The essence of Christianity* (Das wesen des Christenthums). Leipzig, Germany: Otto Wigand.

Hugely influential as a work of humanism and critique of religion.

Foote, George. (1885). *Comic Bible sketches* . London, United Kingdom: Progressive Publishing Co.

A collection of comics, reprinted from the world's oldest freethought publication "The Freethinker."

Foote, George. (1886). *Prisoner for blasphemy* . London, United Kingdom: Progressive Publishing Co.

Foote recalls his imprisonment for blasphemy in England.

Foote, George. (1882). *Arrows of freethought* . London, United Kingdom: Progressive Publishing Co.

Foote, George. (1893). *Flowers of freethought* (Vols. 1-2). London, United Kingdom: Progressive Publishing Co.

France, Anatole. (1895). *The garden of Epicurus* (Le jardin d'Épicure). Paris, France: C. Lévy

Frazier, George. (1890). *The golden bough: A study in magic & religion* (Vols. 1-2). London, United Kingdom: Macmillan & Co.

A classic work of comparative mythology which has greatly and justly influenced modern literature and anthropology.

Gage, Matilda. (1893). *Woman, church, & state: A historical account of the status of woman through the Christian ages with reminiscences of the matriarchate* . New York, NY: The Truth Seeker Company.

Galilei, Galileo. (1632). *Dialogue concerning the two chief world systems* (Dialogo dei due massimi sistemi del mondo) . Florence, Italy .

The great work which compared and contrasted the Copernican with the Ptolemaic systems of planetary arrangement. Helped to further question the truth claims of *The Bible* . The book had the honor of being placed under the Index of Forbidden Books and getting Galileo convicted of heresy. He was yet another great scientist to benefit from the patronage of the Medici family.

Gibbon, Edward. (1776-1789). *The history of the decline & fall of the Roman Empire* (Vols. 1-6). London, United Kingdom: Strahan & Cadell.

Perhaps the first purely secular work of history. He contended there were far fewer martyrs than the church claimed and that Christian anti-intellectualism contributed to the fall of the Roman Empire.

Hardy, Thomas. (1895). *Jude the obscure* . London, United Kingdom: Osgood, McIlvaine, & Co. (see: [Jude](#) [1996])

An aspiring scholar and a school teacher fall in love and find hardship as second class citizens because they are not married. Set in Victorian England this love story celebrates the beauty of the freedom to live as one pleases while condemning those who wish to control the behavior of others.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. (1850). *The scarlet letter* . Boston, MA: Ticknor, Reed, & Fields.

Herbert, Edward. (1624). *On truth, as it is distinguished from revelation, the probable, the possible, & the false* (De veritate, prout distinguitur a revelatione, a verisimili, a possibili, et a falso). Paris, France.

Hobbes, Thomas. (1651). *Leviathan: The matter, form, & power of a commonwealth ecclesiastical & civil* . London, United Kingdom: Andrew Crooke.

Thomas Hobbes outlines his social contract theory. Although he supported a religious and monarchical political order, he also argued for equality and individual rights which are cornerstones of modern democracies. He believed that primitive decentralized life (e.g. hunter-gatherer societies) was “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” Therefore a strong central government, capable of making objective decisions about the welfare of and between people, was necessary for increased prosperity and the security of rights.

Check out the section entitled “Of Religion” in which he writes: “Fear of things invisible is the natural seed of that which every one in himself calleth religion.”

Huxley, Thomas. (1898). Agnosticism. In *Science & Christian tradition* . New York, NY: D. Appleton & Company.

Huxley coined the modern usage of the term agnosticism in the sense of answering the claim of theism with an “I don’t know” and here he elaborates on its meaning. In another work, *Science and Morals* (2009) he wrote that “The foundation of morality is to have done, once and for all, with lying; to give up pretending to believe that for which there is no evidence, and repeating unintelligible propositions about things beyond the possibilities of knowledge” (p. 146).

d’Holbach, Paul-Henri. (1761). *Christianity unveiled: Being an examination of the principles & effects of the Christian religion* (Le Christianisme dévoilé, ou examen des principes et des effets de la religion chrétienne). Nancy, France.

d’Holbach, Paul-Henri. (1770). *The system of nature: Or, the laws of the moral & physical world* (Système de la nature ou des lois du monde physique & du monde moral, Vols. 1-2). France. ✓

Perhaps the greatest classic defense of atheism, both in terms of influence and style. Published under the pseudonym of Jean-Baptiste de Mirabaud.

Holyoake, George. (1845). *Rationalism: A treatise for the times* . London, United Kingdom: J. Watson.

Holyoake, George. (1853). *The history of the last trial by jury for atheism in England a fragment of autobiography* . London, United Kingdom: Ward & Co.

Holyoake, George. (1874). *The limits of atheism: Or, why should skeptics be outlaws?* London, United Kingdom: J.A. Brook & Co.

The man who coined the term “secularism” and the last person in England to be convicted for blasphemy in 1842 lays out a legal defense of atheism.

Holyoake, George. (1877). *The trial of theism* . London, United Kingdom: Trubner & Co.

Holyoake, George. (1896). *The origin & nature of secularism: Showing that where freethought commonly ends secularism begins* . London, United Kingdom: Watts & Co.

Hume, David. (1748). *An enquiry concerning human understanding* . Oxford, United Kingdom: Clarendon Press.

For an exposition of this work pick up:

Flew, Antony.(1961). *Hume's philosophy of belief: A study of his first inquiry* . London, United Kingdom: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Hume, David. (1757). The natural history of religion. In *Four dissertations* . United Kingdom.

A purely naturalistic view of religion. He felt there operated a psychological corrective cycle waning and waxing between polytheism and monotheism. Has the insight that the competition for dominance amongst religions leads to a corruption of honesty, morals, and leads to intolerance. In this work he wrote of doctrinaire religion: "Men dare not avow, even to their own hearts, the doubts which they entertain on such subjects: They make a merit of implicit faith; and disguise to themselves their real infidelity, by the strongest asseverations and most positive bigotry."

Hume, David. (1779). *Dialogues concerning natural religion* . United Kingdom.

A posthumously published manuscript which is a more pointed critique of theist arguments.

Ingersoll, Robert. (1900). *The works of Robert Ingersoll* (Vols. 1- 12). New York, NY: Dresden Publishing Company.

Robert Green Ingersoll was the most vocal and influential American freethinker of the 19th Century. Many of his speeches and much of his writing is stunningly eloquent.

Jefferson, Thomas. (1776). *United States declaration of independence* .

Jefferson, Thomas. (1895). *The life & morals of Jesus of Nazareth* . Washington, DC: National Museum. (Original work written 1820).

America's 3rd President condenses *The Bible* to just the philosophy of Jesus, leaving out all supernatural elements. Note that Jefferson distributed the manuscript to some of his friends but never intended it to be published during his lifetime.

Kant, Immanuel. (1781). *A critique of pure reason* (Kritik der reinen Vernunft). Riga, Latvia: Johann Friedrich Hartknoch.

A landmark of philosophy in general, Kant also explained the problems of rational theology.

Khayyam, Omar. (1859). *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyam* (E. Fitzgerald, Trans.). London, United Kingdom: Bernard Quartich.

A true polymath, Omar made significant advances in philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, but is most popularly known for his poetry. There is much controversy over his actual beliefs. Was he a Sufi mystic, believing skeptic, atheist, or something else? I tend to see him as freethinking deist. One thing is for certain, he had an extremely independent and brilliant mind.

Locke, John. (1689). *Two treatises of government: in the former, the false principles, and foundation of Sir Robert Filmer, and his followers, are detected and overthrown. The latter is an essay concerning the true original, extent, and end of civil government*. London, United Kingdom: Awnsham Churchill.

Considered the father of classical liberalism. He advocated that knowledge comes through empirical data.

Locke, John. (1690). *Essay concerning human understanding* . London, United Kingdom: The Ballet.

His most powerful and influential writing.

Lucian. (2nd Century). *Hermostimus or concerning the sects* . Greece.

A satirist who was widely influential for later Renaissance humanists, including Erasmus.

Lucian. (2nd Century). *Dialogues of the gods* . Greece.

Makes a mockery of the Homeric view of the gods.

Lucretius. (1st Century). *On the nature of things* (De rerum natura). Italy. ✓ **#2**

A poem by Titus Lucretius Carus explaining and expounding Epicurean philosophy and arguing against the supernatural. Note that there are no biographies of the poet since next to nothing is known about his life.

Greenblatt, Stephen. (2011). *The swerve: How the world became modern*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

I highly recommend this history of the rediscovery and significance to modernity of Lucretius' work.

Machiavelli, Niccolò. (1532). *The prince* (Il Principe). Florence, Italy: Antonio Blado d'Asola.

The classic of shrewd political conduct, including the practical use of religion. Machiavelli was among a number of Renaissance humanists who helped foster a renewed interest in trying to understand the human condition from a rational perspective. Amoral realism placed emphasis on truth rather than fantasy. What Machiavelli did for politics, Leonardo did for anatomy, Copernicus for cosmology.

Madison, James. (1789). *United States bill of rights*. Philadelphia, PA.

Mandeville, Bernard. (1720). *Free thoughts on religion, the church, & national happiness*. London, United Kingdom: T. Jauncy & J. Roberts.

Marx, Karl & Engels, Friedrich. (1848). *The communist manifesto* (Das kommunistische manifest). London, United Kingdom: J.E. Burghard.

The founders of communism understood that inhumane living conditions were to blame for the allure of the irrational "opiate" that is religion.

Melville, Herman. (1851). *Moby-Dick, or the whale* . New York, NY: Harper & Brothers Publishers. ([see](#))

Perhaps the greatest American novel; it certainly is my favorite. There are tons of themes interwoven into this complex epic, including questioning religion and the existence of God. Indeed:

Dissect him how I may, then, I but go skin deep; I know him not, and never will. But if I know not even the tail of this whale, how understand his head? much more, how comprehend his face, when face he has none? Thou shalt see my back parts, my tail, he seems to say, but my face shall not be seen. But I cannot completely make out his back parts; and hint what he will about his face, I say again he has no face. (Melville, 1961, p. 375)

Meslier, Jean. (1729). *Memoir of the thoughts & sentiments of Jean Meslier: Clear & evident demonstrations of the vanity & falsity of all the religions of the world* .

Michel Onfray (2007) claims:

For the first time (but how long will it take us to acknowledge this?) in the history of ideas, a philosopher had dedicated a whole book to the question of atheism. He professed it, demonstrated it, arguing and quoting, sharing his reading and his reflections, and seeking confirmation from his own observations of the everyday world... [with its publication] The history of true atheism had begun (p. 29).

Mettrie, Julien. (1748). *Man a machine: Wherein the several systems of philosophers, in respect to the soul of man are examined* (L'homme machine). Leiden, Netherlands: Elie Luzac.

A work of practical materialism, Julian Offray de la Mettrie contends that once we observe a causal link between certain physical and mental states all other hypothesis, namely metaphysical ones, are mere speculation and must be proved likewise. Furthermore, conceptions such as soul, spiritual, etc.

usually tend to confuse rather than clarify the nature of a particular phenomenon.

Mill, John. (1859). *On liberty* . London, United Kingdom: John W. Parker & Son. ✓

Mill, John. (1874). *Three essays on religion* . London, United Kingdom: Longman, Green, Reader, & Dyer.

Mirandola, Giovanni. (1486). *Oration on the dignity of man* . Italy.

Has been called the “manifesto of the Renaissance.”

Montaigne, Michel. (1580). *Essays (Essais)*. France. ✓

Widely considered the father of modern skepticism, Michel Eyquem de Montaigne was a champion of individualism, free expression, and certainly doubt. In this voluminous collection of essays he gives great thought and personality to a number of subjects; his primary concern is with describing human nature.

Newton, Issac. (1687). *Mathematical principles of natural philosophy* (Philosophiæ naturalis principia mathematica). London, United Kingdom: Royal Society.

This work, more popularly known as the *Principia* , is a landmark in the history of science in which Isaac Newton lays out the three laws of motion and the law of universal gravitation. He straddled the divide between modern methods of inquiry and ancient speculative philosophy. His life embodies this divide in that he was at once an astute scientist and practitioner of alchemy.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. (1895). *The Anti-Christ (Der Antichrist)*. Germany.

Ovid. (8). *Metamorphoses* . Italy.

A mytho-historical poem in fifteen books describing the history of the world and highlighting the cruelty and absurdity of the conception of gods.

Paine, Thomas. (1776). *Common sense* . Philadelphia, PA: R. Bell.

A pamphlet passionately advocating America's separation from Great Britain.

Paine, Thomas. (1776-1783). *The American crisis* .

A pamphlet series which was read aloud to the Continental Army on the eve of the Battle of Trenton, helped inspire the American people during the Revolution, and contain the stirring words: "These are the times that try men's souls."

Paine, Thomas. (1791). *Rights of man: Answer to Mr. Burke's attack on the French revolution* . London, United Kingdom: J.S. Jordan. ✓

A response to Edmund Burke's defense of monarchy, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790).

Paine, Thomas. (1794). *The age of reason; being an investigation of true & fabulous theology* . Paris, France: Barrois. ✓ **#3**

Represents a pinnacle of freethought literature. "Infidelity," Paine wrote,

does not consist in believing, or in disbelieving; it consists in professing to believe what one does not believe. It is impossible to calculate the moral mischief, if I may so express it, that mental lying has produced in society. When a man has so far corrupted and prostituted the chastity of his mind, as to subscribe his professional belief to things he does not believe, he has prepared himself for the commission of every other crime. (p. 666)

And here is a damning nugget on *The Bible* :

When we read the obscene stories, the voluptuous debaucheries, the cruel and torturous executions, the unrelenting vindictiveness, with which more than half the Bible is filled, it would be more consistent that we called it the word of a demon, than the word of God. It is a history of wickedness, that has served to corrupt and brutalize mankind; and, for my own

part, I sincerely detest it, as I detest every thing that is cruel.
(Paine, 1984, p. 677)

Philadelphia Convention. (1787). *United States Constitution* .
Philadelphia, PA. ✓

Plato. (4th Century B.C.E.). *Euthyphro* . Athens, Greece. ✓

A dialogue between Socrates and Euthyphro, a supposed religious expert. The two attempt to define piety. Socrates dismantles each of Euthyphro's attempts and in the process wrecks any notion that gods are necessary or that piety is a humble position. It was the first work to ask an important question, known as Euthyphro's dilemma: "Is what is morally good commanded by God(s) because it is morally good, or is it morally good because it is commanded by God(s)?"

Plato. (4th Century B.C.E.). *The republic* . Athens, Greece. ✓

One of the most influential works of political philosophy. The topics discussed are the best community, education, philosophy, justice, and forms of government.

Poe, Edgar. (1842). The pit & the pendulum. In *The gift: A Christmas & New Year's present for 1843* . Philadelphia, PA: Carey & Hart.

A tortuous description of suffering during the Spanish Inquisition by America's foremost horror author.

Putnam, Samuel. (1894). *400 years of freethought* . New York, NY: The Truth Seeker Company. ✓

Not just a history but a celebration of freethought, this work is an eloquent and triumphant perusal of bravery and truth-seeking. Putnam reminds us that "the thumbscrew could not vie with the telescope.

Rabelais, Francois. (1532-1564). *Five books of the lives, heroic deeds & sayings of Gargantua & Pantagruel* (La vie de Gargantua et de Pantagruel, Vols. 1-5). France.

The two titled giants, father and son, are used as vehicles for a critique of many practices and institutions of the time including education, superstition, religion, politics, marriage, and more.

al-Rawandi, Ibn. (9th Century). *The book of the emerald* .

A criticism and repudiation of Islam.

Reimarus, Hermann. (1774-1778). *Fragments* (Fragmentenstreit). Germany.

Helped launch serious modern scholarship on the historical life of Jesus.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. (1762). *Of the social contract, or principles of political right* (Du contrat social ou principes du droit politique). France.

Schopenhauer, Arthur. (1818). *The world as will & representation* (Die welt als wille und vorstellung, Vols. 1-2). Berlin, Germany.

Schopenhauer, Arthur. (1851). Religion: A dialogue. In *Parerga & Paralipomena: A Collection of Essays* . (Parerga und Paralipomena). Berlin, Germany: A.W. Hahn.

In this essay Arthur wrote:

Faith and knowledge are related as the two scales of a balance; when the one goes up, the other goes down... The power of religious dogma, when inculcated early, is such as to stifle conscience, compassion, and finally every feeling of humanity... For, as you know, religions are like glow worms; they shine only when it's dark. A certain amount of ignorance is the condition of all religions, the element in which alone they can exist... To free a man from error is to give, not take away. (pp. 26, 8, 25)

Shelley, Percy & Hogg, Thomas. (1811). *The necessity of atheism*. Worthing, United Kingdom: C. & W. Phillips.

Percy, husband of *Frankenstein* (1816) author Mary Shelley, was kicked out of Oxford for this little gem.

Shelley, Percy. (1814). *A Refutation of Deism: In a dialogue* . London, United Kingdom: Schultz & Dean .

A more mature defense of atheism, in the form of a dialogue between the characters Theosophus and Eusebes.

Spinoza, Baruch. (1670). *A theologico-political treatise* (Tractatus theologico-politicus). Amsterdam, Netherlands: Jan Rieuwertsz.

A preemptive defense of his *magnum opus* found below.

Spinoza, Baruch. (1677). *The ethics* (Ethica ordine geometrico demonstrata). Amsterdam, Netherlands. ✓ **#4**

George Eliot made the first English translation in 1856, though it was not published until 1981.

Southwell, Charles. (1846). *An apology for atheism: Addressed to religious investigators of every denomination by one of its apostles* . London, United Kingdom: J. Watson.

Indeed, Southwell writes: “Tis man’s base groveling nature makes the priest, / Who always rides a superstitious beast.”

Southwell, Charles. (1854). *Superstition unveiled* . London, United Kingdom: Edward Truelove.

Stanton, Elizabeth, Chapin, A., Blake, L., Gage, M., Brown, O., Gripenberg, A....Bogelot, I. (1895-1898). *The woman's bible* (Vols. 1-2). New York, NY: European Publishing Co.

Twenty-six women helped pen this criticism of The Bible which they viewed as a patriarchal tool for the oppression of women and suppression of freethought. This work did much to advance the promotion of women's rights by directly challenging scriptural justification for the second class status of women. It was also a reason Stanton has been largely written out of the history of the women’s movement.

Stephen, Leslie. (1893). *An agnostic’s apology* . London, United Kingdom: Smith, Elder.

Famed biographer of Samuel Johnson, Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, George Eliot, Thomas Hobbes, and father of Virginia Woolf gives his reasons for being an agnostic.

Strauss, David. (1835). *The life of Jesus, critically examined* (Das leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet). Tübingen, Germany.

An important work to the history of biblical criticism. He demolished the notion of much of the historical claims of the New Testament and in doing so reduced it to mere philosophy. This was George Eliot's (Mary Ann Evans) first translated and published book so should also be counted among the milestones of women's literature.

Swift, Jonathan. (1704). *A tale of a tub: Written for the universal improvement of mankind, to which is added, an account of a battle between the antient & modern books in St. James's library* . London, United Kingdom: John Nutt.

Jonathan Swift's first novel is a satire of religious excess.

Theodorus. (4th – 3rd Century B.C.E.). *On the gods* . Greece.

Known simply as "the atheist." He thought joy and grief produced knowledge and ignorance respectively.

Tindal, Matthew. (1730). *Christianity as old as creation; Or, the gospel of the religion of nature* . London, United Kingdom.

One of the most important works of deism. Considered "the deist Bible."

Toland, John. (1696). *Christianity not mysterious: Or, treatise shewing, that there is nothing in the Gospel contrary to reason, nor above it: And that no Christian doctrine can be properly called a mystery* . London, United Kingdom.

A extremely influential work of deism.

See also: John Locke's preemptive response to the above work.

Locke, John. (1695). *The reasonableness of Christianity, as delivered in the scriptures*. London, United Kingdom: Awnsham & John Churchill.

Turgenev, Ivan. (1862). *Fathers & sons* (Otzy i deti). Moscow, Russia: The Russian Messenger.

Humanitarian ethics shine throughout Turgenev's books and he had very little interest in religion. He wrote in his *Poetry in Prose* (1878) that: "Whatever a man prays for, he prays for a miracle. Every prayer reduces itself to this: Great God, grant that twice two be not four."

Turner, Matthew. (1782). *Answer to Dr. Priestley's letters to a philosophical unbeliever* (W. Hammon, Ed.). London, United Kingdom.

This text is addressed to scientist and Unitarian minister Joseph Priestly and his *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever* (1780). Priestly is an interesting figure worth exploring further.

Twain, Mark. (1884). *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* . London, United Kingdom: Chatto & Windus.

One of America's greatest novels (which was ironically first published in Canada and the United Kingdom) is a scathing indictment of dogmatic ideas, particularly related to racism. Huck must choose between acting morally or looking forward to Hell.

Tzu, Sun. (2nd Century B.C.E.). *The art of war* (Sūnzǐ Bīng Fǎ). China.

Much in the vein of Machiavelli's *The Prince* , military strategist Sun Tzu lays out a rational approach for executing war.

Underwood, Sara. (1876). *Heroines of freethought* . New York, NY: Charles P. Somerby.

Biographies of such notable freethinking women as Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, Ernestine Rose, George Eliot, and Harriet Martineau.

Vesalius, Andreas. (1543). *On the fabric of the human body* (De hominis corporis fabrica). Basel, Switzerland.

The first great anatomy textbook.

Voltaire. (1733). *Letters concerning the English nation* (Lettres philosophiques sur les Anglais). London, United Kingdom.

Essays on England in which he describes and comments on their religion, politics, economics, science, individuals, art, and philosophy. It is in the same vein as Tocqueville's brilliant *Democracy in America* (1835-1840).

Voltaire. (1759). *Candide: Or, the optimist* (Candide, ou l'optimisme). Paris, France: Sirene.

A hilarious romp around the world with a young man who keeps up a delusional hope in a perfect world despite one disaster after another.

Voltaire. (1764). *Philosophical dictionary* (Dictionnaire philosophique). Geneva, Switzerland: Gabriel Grasset.

An alphabetically ordered collection of 73 essays on a number of topics including religion, God, and morality.

Vroesen, Jan. (1719). *The treatise of the three imposters* (Traité sur les trois imposteurs). Paris, France: M.M. Rey.

Claims that Muhammad, Jesus, and Moses were frauds. This is the first compendium of freethought and was influential to the Enlightenment.

Wheeler, Joseph. (1889). *A biographical dictionary of freethinkers of all ages & nations*. London, United Kingdom: Progressive Publishing Company.

White, Andrew. (1896). *History of the warfare of science with theology in Christendom* (Vols. 1-2). D. New York, NY: Appleton & Co.

Andrew Dickinson White and John William Draper popularized the “conflict thesis” which proposed that there is an inherent conflict between religion and science. This has been, I think unjustifiably, criticized by many modern scholars under the argument of Stephen J. Gould’s “non-overlapping magisteria.”

Woolston, Thomas. (1727-1729). *Discourses on the miracles of our savior* (Vols. 1-6). London, United Kingdom.

The work of a deistic priest who rejected miracles and advocated an allegorical reading of the *Bible*. In 1729 he was found guilty of blasphemy and sentenced to prison where he died.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. (1792). *A vindication of the rights of women: With structures on political & moral subjects*. London, United Kingdom: J. Johnson.

This is a landmark work of women’s rights in which she wrote:

to assert that, whatever effect circumstances have on the abilities, every being may become virtuous by the exercise of its own reason; for if but one being was created with vicious inclinations... what can save us from atheism? or if we worship a God, is not that God a devil? (p. 15)

Zola, Emile. (1871-1893). *The Rougon-Macquart: Natural & social history of a family under the Second Empire* (Les Rougon-Macquart: Histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le Second Empire). Paris, France.

A cycle of twenty novels inspired by Honoré de Balzac’s *The Human Comedy* (1799-1850) and Charles Darwin. His work is classified as French naturalism. Especially recommended is *Nana* (1880) which is about a woman’s rise to prominence and fall to prostitution.

Zola, Emile. (1894-1898). *The three cities* (Les trois villes, Vols. 1-3). Paris, France: Bilbiotheque-Charpentier.

The trilogy of *Lourdes* (1894), *Rome* (1896), and *Paris* (1898). Promotes scientific progress and humanitarianism. Not as highly recommended as the series above.

History

- Allen, Don. (1964). *Doubts boundless sea* . Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.
- Berman, David. (1988). *A history of atheism in Britain: From Hobbes to Russell* . New York, NY: Croom Helm. ✓
- Blom, Philipp. (2012). *A wicked company: The forgotten radicalism of the European Enlightenment* . New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Buckley, Michael. (1987). *At the origins of modern atheism*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Budd, Susan. (1977). *Varieties of unbelief: Atheists & agnostics in English society , 1850-1960* . London, United Kingdom: Heinemann.
- Bullock, Allan. (1988). *The humanist tradition in the West* . New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Burnyeat, Miles. (1983). *The skeptical tradition* . Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. ●

One of the few text that might be considered an introduction to the specific history of skepticism.

- Bury, J.B. (1952). *A history of freedom of thought* (H. Blackman, Ed.). New York, NY: Oxford.
- Cady, Linell & Hurd, Elizabeth. (Eds.). (2010). *Comparative secularisms in a global age* . Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Carter, Stephen. (1993). *The culture of disbelief* . New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Cooke, Bill. (2004). *The gathering of infidels: A hundred years of the Rationalist Press Association* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Cooke, Bill. (2009). *A wealth of insights: Humanist thought since the Enlightenment* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

- Dooley, Brendan. (1999). *The social history of skepticism: Experience & doubt in early modern culture* . Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Drachmann, A.B. (1922). *Atheism in pagan antiquity* . London, United Kingdom: Ares.
- Febvre, Lucien. (1947). *The problem of unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The religion of Rabelais* (B. Gottlieb, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gaskin, J.C.A. (1989). *Varieties of unbelief: From Epicurus to Sartre* . Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Gay, Peter. (1996). *The enlightenment: The science of freedom* . New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company. ✓
- Grant, Edward. (2001). *God & reason in the Middle Ages* . Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Hecht, Jennifer. (2003). *Doubt: A history: The great doubters & their legacy of innovation from Socrates & Jesus to Thomas Jefferson & Emily Dickinson* . New York, NY: HarperCollins. • +

☺ ☹ ✨ ✨ #3

A world history tour of freethinkers and their struggles.

- Hecht, Jennifer. (2003). *The end of the soul: Scientific modernity, atheism, & anthropology in France* . New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Herrick, Jim. (1982). *Vision & realism: A hundred years of The Freethinker*. London, United Kingdom: GW Foote & Company.
- Herrick, Jim. (1985). *Against the faith: Essays on deists, skeptics & atheists*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Hunter, Michael & Wootton, David. (Eds.). (1992). *Atheism from the reformation to the enlightenment*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Clarendon Press. ✓
- Hyman, Gavin. (2010). *A short history of atheism* . New York, NY: I. B. Tauris & Co. •
- Israel, Jonathan. (2006). *Enlightenment contested: Philosophy, modernity, & the emancipation of man 1670-1752* . Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- Israel, Jonathan. (2001). *Radical enlightenment: Philosophy & the making of modernity 1650-1750* . Oxford, United Kingdom:

Oxford University Press.

Jacoby, Susan. (2004). *Freethinkers: A history of American secularism* . New York, NY: Henry Holt & Company. ● + ✓ **#1**

Simply a must have for anyone interested in the contribution of freethinkers to development of American society and its secular foundations.

Jacoby, Susan. (2008). *The age of American unreason* . New York, NY: Random House.

Joshi, S.T. (2011). *The unbelievers: The evolution of modern atheism* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. **#2**

Kirkley, Evelyn. (2000). *Rational mothers & infidel gentlemen: Gender & American atheism 1865-1914* . Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Koch, G. (1968). *Religion of the American enlightenment* . Thomas Crowell.

Kraemer, Joel. (1986). *Humanism in the renaissance of Islam: The cultural revival during the Buyid age* . Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill.

Kraye, Jill. (1996). *The Cambridge companion to Renaissance humanism* . Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Larue, Gerald. (1996). *Freethought across the centuries: Toward a new age of enlightenment* . Washington, DC: American Humanist Association.

Lawson, Thomas. (2011). *Letters from an atheist nation: Godless voices of America in 1903* . Charleston, SC: CreateSpace.

A collection of atheist letters from the early twentieth century explaining why they turned away from theistic belief.

Lightman, Bernard. (1987). *The origins of agnosticism: Victorian unbelief & the limits of knowledge* . Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Lubac, Henri. (1963). *The drama of atheist humanism*. New York, NY: World Publishing.

- Macdonald, George. (1929). *Fifty years of freethought* (Vols. 1-2). New York, NY: Arno Press.
- Mencken, H.L. (2002). *H.L. Mencken on religion* (S. Joshi, Ed.). Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Neusch, Marcel. (1982) *The sources of modern atheism: One hundred years of debate over God* (M. O'Connell, Trans.). New York, NY: Paulist Press.
- Popkin, Richard. (2003). *The history of scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Popkin, Richard & Neto, Jose. (Ed.). (2004). *Skepticism in Renaissance & post-Renaissance thought: New interpretations* . Amherst, NY: Humanity Books.
- Post, Albert. (1974). *Popular freethought in America, 1825-1850* . New York, NY: Octagon Books.
- Reipe, Dale. (1982). *The naturalistic tradition in Indian thought* . Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Rinaldo, Peter. (2000). *Atheists, agnostics, & deists in America: A brief history* . New York, NY: Dorpete Press.
- Robertson, J.M. (1929). *A History of freethought in the Nineteenth Century* . London, United Kingdom: Watts & Co.
- Robertson, J.M. (1936). *A history of freethought, ancient & modern, to the period of the French Revolution* (4th ed. Vols. 1-2). London, United Kingdom: Watts & Co.
- Royle, Edward. (1974). *Victorian infidels: The origins of the British secularist movement, 1791-1866* . Manchester, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press. ✓
- Royle, Edward. (1976). *The infidel tradition from Paine to Bradlaugh*. London, United Kingdom: MacMillan Press Ltd.
- Royle, Edward. (1980). *Radicals, secularists, & republicans: Popular freethought in Britain, 1866-1915* . Manchester, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press.
- Smith, George. (2007). *A short history of secularism* . London, United Kingdom: I. B. Tauris. ●
- Spink, J.S. (1969). *French freethought from Gassendi to Voltaire* . Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.
- Stroumsa, Sarah. (1999). *Freethinkers of medieval Islam: Ibn Al-Rawandi, Abu Bakr Al-Razi, & their impact on Islamic thought* .

- Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill.
- Thrower, James. (1980). *The alternative tradition: Religion & the rejection of religion in the ancient world* . New York, NY: Mouton Publishers.
- Thrower, James. (2000). *Western atheism: A short history* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. ●✓
- Todorov, Tzvetan. (2002). *Imperfect garden: The legacy of humanism* . Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Tribe, David. (1967). *100 years of freethought* . London, United Kingdom: Elek.
- Turner, James. (1985). *Without God, without creed: The origins of unbelief in America* . Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Vitzthum, Richard. (1995). *Materialism: An affirmative history & definition* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Warren, Sidney. (1966). *American freethought 1860-1914* . New York, NY: Gordian Press.

An excellent examination of the successes and failures of the “golden age” of freethought.

- Whitehead, Fred. (1992). *Freethought on the American frontier*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Williams, David. (1995). *A celebration of humanism & freethought* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Wilson, Edwin. (1995). *The genesis of a humanist manifesto* . Washington, DC: Humanist Press.

Autobiographies & Biographies

(see also: *Arts & Entertainment: Film: Documentary: Biographies & [History](#)* .)

The individuals in this section were selected on the basis of their contribution to human intellectual and/or cultural development *and* active promotion of or overwhelming importance to freethought. For ease of finding the individual you would like to learn more about, this section is configured a bit differently. The autobiographies are listed as usual (alphabetical order by author) and a biography of that figure

is listed directly below the entry. In the absence of an autobiography there is simply an entry followed by a biographical reference. Note that all individuals listed are deceased while memoirs of those still living may be found in the section: *Introduction: The Necessity of Freethought: Selected Bibliography: Memoirs & [Testimonies](#)* .

Adams, Douglas (1952-2001), comedic science fiction writer

Adams, Douglas. (2002). *The salmon of doubt: Hitchhicking the galaxy one last time* . New York, NY: Ballantine Books.

Not exactly an autobiography, this is a collection of diverse writings including: unfinished or previously unpublished works, ruminations, letters, and more.

Webb, Nick. (2005). *Wish you were here: The official biography of Douglas Adams* . New York, NY: Del Ray Books.

Asimov, Issac (1920-1992), science fiction and popular science writer

Asimov, Issac. (2002). *It's been a good life* (J. Asimov, Ed). Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

A version of his three volume autobiography edited by his wife.

Bayle, Pierre (1647-1706), philosopher

Labrousse, Elisabeth. (1983). *Bayle* (D. Potts, Trans.). Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Bennett, D.M. (1818-1882), founder: The Truth Seeker magazine

Bradford, Rod. (2006). *D.M. Bennett: The truth seeker* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Bentham, Jeremy (1748-1832), utilitarian philosopher, legal and social reformer

Everett, Charles. (1966). *Jeremy Bentham* . London, United Kingdom: Weidenfield & Nicholson.

Bergman, Ingmar (1918-2007), film director, writer, producer

Bergman, Ingmar. (2007). *The magic lantern: An autobiography* . Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Cowie, Peter. (1992). *Ingmar Bergman: A critical biography*. Milwaukee, WI: Limelight Editions.

Besant, Annie (1847-1933), women's rights activist

Nethercot, Arthur. (1960). *The first five lives of Annie Besant* . Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

de Beauvoir, Simone (1908-1986), existentialist philosopher, feminist

de Beauvoir, Simone. (2005). *Memoirs of a dutiful daughter* . New York, NY: Harper Perennial Modern Classics. (Original work published 1958)

Bunuel, Luis (1900-1983), film director

Bunuel, Luis. (1983). *My last sigh* (A. Israel, Trans.). New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.

Aranda, J. (1985). *Luis Buñuel: A critical biography*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press .

Bradlaugh, Charles (1833-1891), political activist, founder: National Secular Society

Tribe, David. (1971). *President Charles Bradlaugh, M.P* . New Haven, CT: Shoe String Press.

Bruno, Giordano (1548-1600), philosopher, mathematician, astronomer

Gatti, Hillary. (2002). *Giordano Bruno & Renaissance science*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Rowland, Ingrid. (2009). *Giordano Bruno: Philosopher/heretic* . Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

White, Michael. (2003). *The Pope & the heretic: The true story of Giordano Bruno, the man who dared to defy the Roman Inquisition* . New York, NY: Harper Perennial.

Camus, Albert (1913-1960), philosopher, writer

Zaretsky, Robert. (2010). *Albert Camus: Elements of a life*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Camus “In his Nobel address [he] declared that art’s nobility is rooted in ‘the refusal to lie about what one knows, and the resistance to oppression’” (Zaretsky, 2010, p. 5). It hardly gets more freethought than that!

Carlin, George (1937-2008), comedian

Carlin, George. (2009). *Last words: A memoir* . New York, NY: Free Press.

Clarke, Arthur C. (1917-2008), writer, inventor

McAleer, Neil. (1993). *Arthur C. Clarke: The authorized biography* . Chicago, IL: Contemporary Books.

Copernicus, Nicolaus (1473-1543), astronomer

Sobel, Dava. (2011). *A more perfect heaven: How Copernicus revolutionized the cosmos* . (2nd Ed.). New York, NY: Walker & Company.

Curie, Marie (1867-1934), physicist, chemist

This important scientist was the winner of 2 Nobel Prizes. Curie was also an agnostic, following the path of her contemporary, the coiner of the term, Thomas Huxley (Reid, 1974, p. 19).

Curie, Eve. (2001). *Madame Curie: A biography* (V. Sheean, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.

Crick, Francis (1916-2004), molecular biologist

Ridley, Matt. (2006). *Francis Crick: Discoverer of the genetic code*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

The co-discover of the structure of the DNA molecule with James Watson felt that “Christianity may be OK between consenting adults in private but should not be taught to young children” (Ridley, 2006, p. 158).

Darrow, Clarence (1857-1938), lawyer

Darrow, Clarence. (1932). *The story of my life* . New York, NY: Grosset & Dunlap.

Farrell, John. (2011). *Clarence Darrow: Attorney for the damned*. New York, NY: Doubleday.

Darwin, Charles (1809-1882), naturalist

Darwin, Charles. (1986). *Autobiographies* . London, United Kingdom: Penguin Books.

Includes several autobiographical pieces written throughout the naturalist’s life including his final mature assessment, *Recollections of the Development of My Mind and Character* (1876).

Browne, Janet. (1996-2003). *Charles Darwin: A biography* (Vols. 1-2). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

A two volume set topping 1200 pages which is deserving of such an important scientist.

Keynes, Randal. (2001). *Annie’s box: Darwin, his daughter, & human evolution* . New York, NY: Riverhead Books. 📖 (see: *Creation* [2010])

Darwin’s great-great grandson used personal family writings to illuminate Charles Darwin’s emotional and philosophical thoughts while coping with the death of his 10 year old daughter Annie.

Derrida, Jacques (1930-2004), philosopher

Hagglund, Martin. (2008). *Radical atheism: Derrida & the time of life* . Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Focuses on Jacques Derrida's work and refutes the claim that the philosopher turned to religion.

Diderot, Denis (1713-1784), philosopher, writer

Wilson, Arthur. (1971). *Diderot* . Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Dick, Philip K. (1928-1982), writer

He once said that "reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away" (as quoted in Stenger, 2003, p. 131).

Dick, Anne. (2009). *Search for Philip K. Dick, 1928-1982: Revised with new material* . Monterey, CA: Cypress Press.

A memoir by Philip's third wife.

Sutin, Lawrence. (2005). *Divine invasions: A life of Philip K. Dick*. New York, NY: Carroll & Graf Publishers.

Dickinson, Emily (1830-1886), poet

Sewall, Richard. (1998). *The life of Emily Dickinson* . Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Dirac, Paul (1902-1984), theoretical physicist

A Nobel Prize winner who contributed to quantum mechanics and other fields. Fellow theoretical physicist Wolfgang Pauli commenting on Dirac's view of religion humorously quipped: "Well, our friend Dirac has got a religion and its guiding principle is 'There is no God and Paul Dirac is His prophet'" (as cited in Heisenberg, 1971, p. 87).

Farmelo, Graham. (2009). *The strangest man: The life of Paul Dirac* . London, United Kingdom: Faber & Faber.

Du Bois, W.E.B. (1868-1963), sociologist, historian, civil rights activist

Du Bois, W.E.B. (1968). *The autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois* . New York, NY: International Publishers.

Eliot, George (Mary Ann Evans) (1819-1880), writer, translator

Ashton, Rosemary. (1997). *George Eliot: A life* . London, United Kingdom: Penguin Books.

Einstein, Albert (1879-1955), theoretical physicist

Einstein, Albert. (1979). *Autobiographical notes* (P. Schipp, Trans. Ed.). La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing Company.

Pais, Abraham. (1982). *Subtle is the Lord: The science & the life of Albert Einstein* . London, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Isaacson, Walter. (2007). *Einstein: His life & Universe*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Feuerbach, Ludwig (1804-1872), philosopher, anthropologist

Wartofsky, Marx. (1977). *Feuerbach* . Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Feynman, Richard (1918-1988), physicist

Feynman, Richard & Leighton, Ralph. (1985). *Surely you're joking Mr. Feynman!: Adventures of a curious character*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Feynman, Richard & Leighton, Ralph. (1988). *What do you care what other people think?: Further adventures of a curious character* . New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

A follow-up to the above work.

Gleick, James. (1992). *Genius: The life & science of Richard Feynman*. New York, NY: Pantheon.

Forster, E.M. (1879-1970), writer

The great English writer was Vice-President of the Ethical Union and member of the of the Advisory Council of the British

Humanist Association. In an essay Forster (1951) outlined his philosophy:

I do not believe in Belief. But this is an Age of Faith, and there are so many militant creeds that, in self-defence, one has to formulate a creed of one's own. Tolerance, good temper and sympathy are no longer enough in a world where ignorance rules, and Science, which ought to have ruled, plays the pimp. Tolerance, good temper and sympathy - they are what matter really, and if the human race is not to collapse they must come to the front before long.

These principles are the major themes which run through many of his novels.

Furbank, Phillip. (2011). *E.M. Forster: A life* . London, United Kingdom: Faber & Faber.

Franklin, Benjamin (1706-1790), scientist, inventor, an American founding father

Franklin, Benjamin. (1791). *The autobiography* . London, United Kingdom: J. Parson.

Isaacson, Walter. (2003). *Benjamin Franklin: An American life* . New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Freud, Sigmund (1856-1939), psychoanalyst, neurologist

Gay, Peter. (2006). *Freud: A life for our time* . New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Galilei, Galileo (1564-1642), physicist, astronomer

Wootton, David. (2010). *Galileo: Watcher of the skies*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Gora (1902-1975), atheist activist

Gora. (1975). *We become atheists* . Vijayawada, India: Atheist Centre.

Gibbon, Edward (1737-1794), historian

Gibbon, Edward. (1896). *Autobiographies of Edward Gibbon* (J. Murray, Ed.). London, United Kingdom: J. Murray.

The original but highly edited version.

Gibbon, Edward. (1969). *Edward Gibbon: Memoirs of my life* (G. Bonnard, Ed.). New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls.

The above work is recommended for its accessibility and because it arranges the memoirs in chronological order, eliminating repetition.

Heinlein, Robert (1907-1988), writer

Heinlein, Robert. (1989). *Grumbles from the grave* . New York, NY: Del Rey.

Hitchens, Christopher (1949-2011), journalist, debator

Hitchens, Christopher. (2010). *Hitch-22: A memoir* . New York, NY: Hachette Book Group. ✓ **#2**

We are very fortunate to have a memoir from this freethought icon and his extremely interesting and varied life.

Hitchens, Christopher. (2012). *Morality* . New York, NY: Twelve. **#1**

Written after he was diagnosed with cancer, Hitchens's short testimony is a reflection on disease, dying, and a meditation on the worth of human life.

Hobbes, Thomas (1588-1679), philosopher

Miller, Ted. (2011). *Mortal gods: Science, politics & the humanist ambitions of Thomas Hobbes*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.

d'Holbach, Paul-Henri Thiry (1723-1789), philosopher

Cushing, Max. (1914). *Baron d'Holbach: A study of eighteenth-century radicalism in France* . New York, NY: B. Franklin.

Kors, Alan. (1976). *D'Holbach's Coterie: An Enlightenment in Paris*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Holyoake, George (1817-1906), secularist

Holyoake, George. (1892). *Sixty years of an agitator's life* (Vols. 1-2). London, United Kingdom: T. Fisher Unwin.

McCabe, Joseph. (1908). *Life & letters of George Jacob Holyoake* (Vols. 1-2). London, United Kingdom: Watts & Co.

Hook, Sidney (1902-1989), philosopher

Kurtz, Paul. (1983). *Sidney Hook: Philosopher of democracy & humanism*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Hume, David (1711-1776), philosopher

Hume, David. (1776). *My own life* . London, United Kingdom: Adam Smith .

Intended as an appendix to an edition of one of his books, but was actually first published by economist Adam Smith. Very brief.

Mossner, Ernest. (2001). *The life of David Hume* . Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Huxley, Julian (1887-1975), biologist

He was grandson of Thomas Huxley and brother of Aldous Huxley.

Huxley, Julian. (1970). *Memories* (Vols. 1-2). New York, NY: Harper & Row.

Huxley, Thomas (1825-1895), biologist

Huxley, Thomas. (1900). *The life & letters of Thomas Henry Huxley* (Vols. 1-2) (L. Huxley, Ed.). London, United Kingdom: Macmillan.

Lyons, Sherrie. (1999). *Thomas Huxley: The evolution of a scientist*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Ingersoll, Robert G. (1833-1899), politician, orator

Jacoby, Susan. (2013). *The great agnostic: Robert Ingersoll & American freethought*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Jefferson, Thomas (1743-1826), an American founding father, 3rd U.S. President

Jefferson, Thomas. (1984). *Thomas Jefferson: Writings: Autobiography, Notes on the State of Virginia, public & private papers, addresses, letters*. New York, NY: Library of America.

This volume is highly recommended with his *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth* (1820) as an addendum.

Bernstein, R.B. (2003). *Thomas Jefferson*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Best introductory text about his life.

Malone, Dumas. (2006). *Jefferson & his time* (Vols. 1-6). Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.

Thirty-eight years in the making and perhaps the most comprehensive look at the 3rd President's journey. Won a Pulitzer Prize.

Keats, John (1795-1821), poet

Ward, Aileen. (1963). *John Keats: The making of a poet*. London, United Kingdom: Secker & Warburg.

Khayyam, Omar (1048-1131), philosopher, mathematician, astronomer, poet

Aminrazavi, Mehdi. (2005). *The wine of wisdom: The life, poetry, & philosophy of Omar Khayyam*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oneworld Publications.

Kubrick, Stanley (1928-1999), film director

Duncan, Paul. (2011). *Stanley Kubrick: The complete films*. Los Angeles, CA: Taschen.

While this book only gives a brief overview of Kubrick's life, it more than makes up for it by describing the making of his films, their meanings, and contains stunning photos. I wish I could recommend more books from Taschen because they are all beautiful and cheap.

Locke, John (1632-1704), philosopher

Woolhouse, R.S. (2007). *Locke: A biography*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

McCabe, Joseph (1867-1955), writer, speaker

McCabe, Joseph. (1897). *Twelve years in a monastery*. London, United Kingdom: Smith, Elder, & Co.

Memoir of his road to freethought from a very religious background.

Cooke, Bill. (2001). *A rebel to his last breath: Joseph McCabe & rationalism*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Mencken, H.L. (1880-1956), journalist, magazine editor, satirist

Teachout, Terry. (2002). *The skeptic: A life of H.L. Mencken*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Mill, John Stuart (1806-1873), philosopher, political economist

An early proponent and explicator of utilitarianism.

Mill, John. (1873). *Autobiography of John Stuart Mill*. London, United Kingdom: Longmans, Green, Reader, & Dyer.

Reeves, Richard. (2007). *John Stuart Mill: Victorian firebrand*. London, United Kingdom: Atlantic Books.

Nietzsche, Friedrich (1844-1900), philosopher

Nietzsche, Friedrich. (1979). *Ecce homo: How one becomes what one is* (R. Hollingdale, Trans.). London, United Kingdom: Penguin Books. (Original work published 1888)

Paine, Thomas (1737-1809), intellectual, writer, American revolutionary leader

Keane, John. (1995). *Tom Paine: A political life*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown.

Nelson, Craig. (2007). *Thomas Paine: Enlightenment, revolution, & the birth of modern nations*. New York, NY: Viking Press. ✓

Pauling, Linus (1901-1994), chemist

He was one of the greatest chemists in history and 2-time Nobel Prize winner, and privately an atheist.

Hager, Thomas. (1995). *Force of nature: The life of Linus Pauling*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Pavlov, Ivan (1849-1936), physiologist

He is most notable for pioneering work on conditioning. He won a 1904 Nobel Prize. E.M. Kreps claimed, when asked whether he was religious, Pavlov answered:

Listen, good fellow, in regard to [claims of] my religiosity, my belief in God, my church attendance, there is no truth in it; it is sheer fantasy. I was a seminarian, and like the majority of seminarians, I became an unbeliever, an atheist in my school years. (as cited in Windholz, 1986)

Russell, Bertrand (1872-1970), philosopher, social critic

Russell, Bertrand. (1951-1969). *The autobiography of Bertrand Russell* (Vols. 1-3). London, United Kingdom: George Allen & Unwin.

Ayer, A.J. (1988). *Bertrand Russell*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Sagan, Carl (1934-1996), astronomer, astrophysicist

Poundstone, William. (2000). *Carl Sagan: Life in the cosmos* . New York, NY: Holt Paperbacks.

Sanger, Margaret (1879-1966), sex educator, birth control activist

Sanger, Margaret. (2004). *The autobiography of Margaret Sanger* . New York, NY: Dover Publications.

Chesler, Ellen. (1992). *Woman of valor: Margaret Sanger & the birth control movement in America* . New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Schopenhauer, Arthur (1788-1860), philosopher

Cartwright, David. (2010). *Schopenhauer: A biography* . New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Shaw, George Bernard (1856-1950), playwright

Shaw, George. (1970). *Shaw: An autobiography* (Vols. 1-2) (S. Weintraub, Ed.). New York, NY: Weybright & Talley.

Holroyd, Michael. (2005). *Bernard Shaw: The one-volume definitive edition*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co.

Shelley, Percy Bysshe (1792-1822), poet

Bieri, James. (2008). *Percy Bysshe Shelley: A biography* . Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press.

Spinoza, Baruch (1632-1677), philosopher

Goldstein, Rebecca. (2006). *Betraying Spinoza: The renegade Jew who gave us modernity*. New York, NY: Schocken Books.

Nadler, Steven. (1999). *Spinoza: A life* . Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Nadler, Steven. (2011). *A book forged in Hell: Spinoza's scandalous treatise & the birth of the secular age* . Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Stanton, Elizabeth Cady (1815-1902), women's rights activist, social activist, abolitionist

Stanton, Elizabeth. (1898). *Eighty years & more: Reminiscences of Elizabeth Cady Stanton* . New York, NY: European Publishing Company.

Griffith, Elisabeth. (1984). *In her own right: The life of Elizabeth Cady Stanton* . New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1889-1951), philosopher

Ayer, A.J. (1986). *Wittgenstein* . Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Grayling, A.C. (2001). *Wittgenstein: A very short introduction*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Whitman, Walt (1819-1892), poet

Kaplan, Justin. (1980). *Walt Whitman: A life* . New York, NY: Simon & Schuster .

Woolf, Virginia (1882-1941), novelist

Woolf, Virginia. (1985). *Moments of being* (2nd ed.) (J. Schulkind, Ed.). London, United Kingdom: Hogarth Press.

Vinci, Leonardo da (1452-1519), painter, scientist sculptor, inventor

Bramly, Serge. (1988). *Leonardo: The artist & the man* (S. Reynolds, Trans.). New York, NY: Penguin Books.

Voltaire (1694-1778), writer, philosopher

Pearson, Roger. (2005). *Voltaire almighty: A life in pursuit of freedom* . New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Vonnegut, Kurt (1922-2007), writer

Vonnegut, Kurt. (1981). *Palm Sunday: An autobiographical collage*. New York, NY: Dial Press.

Shields, Charles. (2011). *And so it goes: Kurt Vonnegut: A life* . New York, NY: Henry Holt & Company.

Biographies: Compilation

Barker, Dan. (2011). *The good atheist: Living a purpose-filled life without God* . Berkeley, CA: Ulysses Press.

Quick-paced and spirited, Barker proudly proclaims, “if you do not believe in God, you are not alone,” but in fact, you are in very good company. The book is essentially “profiles in non-belief.”

Courtney, Janet. (1920). *Freethinkers of the nineteenth century... with seven portraits* . London, United Kingdom: Chapman & Hall, Ltd.

Dictionary of Unitarian & Universalist Biography

www25.uua.org/uuhs/duu

Joshi, S.T. (Ed.). (2008). *Icons of unbelief: Atheists, agnostics, & secularists* . Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

McCabe, Joseph. (1920). *A biographical dictionary of modern rationalists* . London, United Kingdom: Watts & Co.

McCabe, Joseph. (1945). *A biographical dictionary of ancient, medieval, & modern freethinkers* . Girard, KS: Haldeman-Julius Publications.

Smith, Warren. (2000). *Who's who in hell: A handbook & international directory for humanists, freethinkers, naturalists, rationalists, & non-theists* . Fort Lee, NJ: Barricade Books.

Smith, Warren. (2011). *Celebrities in hell* . New York, NY: ChelCpress.

A supplement to the above title.

Anthologies & Quotes

Blanshard, Paul. (1987). *Classics of free thought* . Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.

Foote, George & McLaren, A.D. (1930). *Infidel death-beds* . London, United Kingdom: Secular Society, Ltd.

An interesting collection of death-bed testimonies of many famous freethinkers.

Haught, James. (1996). *2000 years of disbelief: Famous people with the courage to doubt* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. ✓

Herrick, Jim & Knight, Margaret. (Eds.). (1995). *Humanist anthology: From Confucius to Attenborough* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Hitchens, Christopher. (2007). *The portable atheist: Essential readings for the nonbeliever* . Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.

• ✓ **#1**

An enjoyable collection of Hitchens' favorite writings from other nonbelievers.

Huxley, Julian. (Ed.). (1961). *The humanist frame* . New York, NY: Harper & Brothers.

Twenty-five distinguished scientists and writers express their views of evolutionary humanism. Huxley wrote :

Humanism... will have nothing to do with Absolutes, including absolute truth, absolute morality, absolute perfections and absolute authority, but insists that we can find standards to which our actions and our aims can properly be related. It affirms that knowledge and understanding can be increased, that conduct and social organization can be improved, and that more desirable directions for individual and social development can be found. (p. 14)

Joshi, S.T. (2000). *Atheism: A reader* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. •

A collection of historical defenses of atheism.

Joshi, S.T. (2007). *The agnostic reader* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Kogel, Renee & Katz, Zev. (Eds.). (1995). *Judaism in a secular age: An anthology of secular humanistic Jewish thought* . Jersey City, NJ: KTAV Publishing. ✨

Kramnick, Isaac. (1995). *The portable Enlightenment reader* . New York, NY: Penguin Books.

A good collection of writings during the age of the reemergence of freedom, democracy, and rational thought.

Lehto, Bill. (Ed.). (2012). *Atheist voices of Minnesota: An anthology of personal stories* . Freethought House.

36 Minnesota atheists tell their stories, including PZ Meyers. The forward is by Greta Christina.

Palmer, Michael. (2010). *The atheist's creed* . London, United Kingdom: Lutterworth Press. ●

An anthology and analysis of the primary arguments for atheism throughout history. Palmer focuses on the writing of Hume, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud.

Sanford, James. (2004). *Great freethinkers: Selected quotations by famous skeptics & nonconformists* . Providence, RI: Metacomet Books.

Stein, Gordon. (1980). *An anthology of atheism & rationalism* . Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.

A large collection of essays from the likes of Charles Bradlaugh, Annie Besant, Thomas Huxley, George H. Smith, Chapman Cohen, Joseph McCabe, the Baron d'Holbach, G.W. Foote, Robert Ingersoll, Thomas Paine, Voltaire, and many more.

Stein, Gordon. (1987). *A second anthology of atheism & rationalism*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.

Continues the theme above with more essays from historical freethinkers. Not quite as good as the first anthology but well worth the read if you want to read further.

Warrag, Ibn. (Ed.). (2003). *Leaving Islam: Apostates speak out* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. ☺ ✓

Bibliographies

Stein, Gordon. (1969). *Robert G. Ingersoll: A checklist* . Kent, OH: Kent State University Press.

Stein, Gordon & Brown, Marshall. (1978). *Freethought in the United States: A descriptive bibliography* . Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Stein, Gordon & Brown, Marshall. (1981). *Freethought in the United Kingdom & the Commonwealth: A descriptive bibliography* . Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Stein, Gordon. (1990). *Atheism: A world bibliography* . New York, NY: Garland.

Stein, Gordon. (1990). *God pro & con: A bibliography of atheism* . New York, NY: Garland.

Warring, E. (1967). *Deism & natural religion: A sourcebook* . New York, NY: Ungar Publishing Co.

Additional Resources

“If learning of other people’s faith causes relativism and doubt, learning of other people’s doubt redoubles it” (Hecht, p. 264).

-Jennifer Michael Hecht (1965-), poet, historian

Libraries/E-Libraries

“In the long run of history, the censor and the inquisitor have always lost. The only sure weapon against bad ideas is better ideas. The source of better ideas is wisdom. The surest path to wisdom is a liberal education” (Griswold, 1954) .

-Alfred Whitney Griswold (1906-1963), historian, educator

American Philosophical Society

Has a large Thomas Paine collection.

amphilsoc.org/library

The Atheist Scholar

“An online academic resource for those interested in the serious, interdisciplinary study of atheism.”

atheistscholar.org

Bank of Wisdom

This site claims to have available some 2200 books pamphlets, and rare newspapers, etc. Also, has freethought CDs, busts of famous freethinkers, and posters.

bankofwisdom.com

Charles E. Stevens American Atheist Library & Archives: A Free Public Service from American Atheists

atheists.org/Library

Clandestine E-Texts from the Eighteenth Century

vc.unipmn.it/~mori/e-texts

Freethought Archives

“Dedicated to placing rare and out-of-print classics of freethought online.”

ftarchives.net

Harvard University Library

Good collection with some periodicals.

lib.harvard.edu

Humanist Texts

A large collection of historical humanist literature.

humanistictexts.org

Internet Archive: Universal Access to All Knowledge ✓

Massive collection of public domain media.

archive.org

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy

iep.utm.edu

Library of Congress ✓

A national treasure housing a very large freethought collection including most of Robert G. Ingersoll's papers. Also, has tens of thousands of free resources including eBooks and pictures.

loc.gov

New York Public Library

Hundreds of freethought pamphlets and a good general collection of books and periodicals.

nypl.org

Project Gutenberg ✓

Thousands of free e-books!

gutenberg.org

Secular Web Library: Essays on Atheism, Agnosticism, Naturalism, Skepticism, & Secularism

A good collection of modern and historical documents, many of which are difficult to find elsewhere.

infidels.org/library

The Skeptic's Dictionary: Exploring Strange Beliefs, Amusing Deceptions & Dangerous Delusions Since 1994 • ✓ #1

A great straightforward description and analysis of many kinds of pseudoscience, alternative medicine, and unconfirmed claims.

skepdic.com

Skeptics on the .Net: The Online Directory for Everything Skeptical •

✓

“Aims to be the premier directory for all things skeptical on the internet. Our goal is to help those just starting to learn about Skepticism and to expand the knowledge of those who already consider themselves Skeptics.”

skepticonthe.net

The Sceptiseum

Run by Joe Nickell and hosted by CSICOP. “Supernatural, paranormal and pseudoscientific beliefs proliferate worldwide. This virtual museum includes descriptions and images of artifacts and souvenirs associated with such beliefs from around the world.”

skeptiseum.org

University of California-Santa Barbara: Davidson Library
library.ucsb.edu/davidson-library

University of Minnesota

A collection of ethnic freethought works.

lib.umn.edu

University of Wisconsin-Madison

This is where atheist scholar Gordon Stein donated his collection of freethought material.

library.wisc.edu/#books

Lists of Freethinkers & Quote s

Atheists of Color

freethoughtblogs.com/greta/2011/03/21/atheists-of-color/

Celebrity Atheist List: An Offbeat Collection of Notable Individuals Who Have Been Public About Their Lack of Belief in Deities

celebatheists.com/wiki/Main_Page

Famous Black Freethinkers

infidelguy.com/article75.html

Freethought Almanac: 365 Days to Remember in the History of Freethought ✓

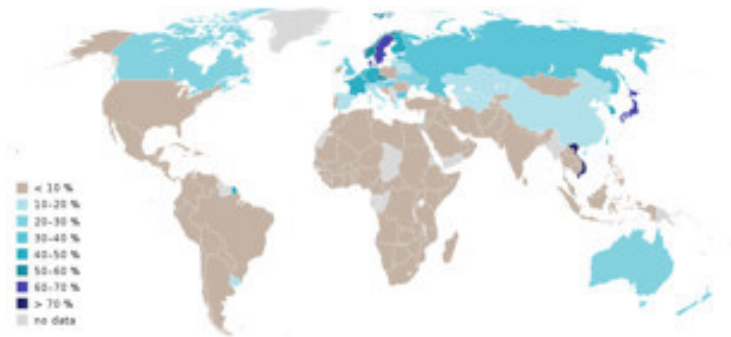
Brush up on your history each day of the year!

freethoughtalmanac.com

Positive Atheism

positiveatheism.org/hist/quotes

STUDIES & STATISTICS



“Atheist/Agnostic Nations of the World”

from en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Atheists_Agnostics_Zuckerman_en.svg

The following is a variety of studies and statistics which may prove useful to understanding the numbers and perspectives of freethinkers throughout the world. I hesitantly present the following information for two important reasons. First, gathering accurate statistics on freethinkers has proven to be a notoriously difficult task. Most, but certainly not all, surveys include only one freethought appropriate option of “non-affiliated” or “non-religious” when asking about “religious preference.” This “preference” may include individuals who, while not associated with any organized religion, may consider themselves theists (e.g. deists, spiritualists). I have decided to include independent theists because of their shared disregard or rejection of institutionalized dogma and primary reliance on independent thinking. Within this section, I will refer to this broad non-affiliated group, both independent theists and non-theists, as “Nones.” Second, there are other stumbling blocks to statistical accuracy. These include, but are not exclusive: cultural differences in the perception of religion and/or God(s), diversity of self-identification, and the reluctance of individuals to identify with certain freethought branches such as atheism, despite perhaps being technically atheist/agnostic with regards to actual belief.

Despite these difficulties, there is enough information to paint a general picture of irreligious populations of the world and their views on a number of topics. It is hoped that insights may be gleaned in order to support, improve, and expand our community. This section is divided into three categories: 1) World and national population statistics, 2) intelligence, education, and character traits, and 3) moral stances and world-views .

Population Statistics

World

Top-five “Religious Preference” Populations of the World

| Affiliation | Adherents | % of World Pop. |
|------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| Christianity | 2.1 Billion | 33 |
| Islam | 1.5 Billion | 21 |
| Nones | 1.1 Billion | 16 |
| Hinduism | 900 Million | 14 |
| Atheist/Agnostic | 500-750 Million | 8-12 |
| Chinese Traditional Religion | 394 Million | 6 |
| Buddhism | 376 Million | 6 |

Adapted from *Major religions of the world ranked by number of adherents* , by Adherents.com 2007, Adherents.com.

Half of the above Nones are theistic but nonreligious. Phil Zuckerman (2010) puts the total world population of non-theists at approximately 500-750 million making it the 4th largest “religious preference” group behind Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism (p. ix). These two numbers represent the lower and upper range found in the numerous surveys reviewed. Even at the low end of 500 million the data demonstrates that this group constitutes a significant portion of the world population and should be taken seriously.

National

According to Adherents.com (2005) the top five nations with the highest percentage of the population identifying as either atheist, agnostic, or non-believers are: 1) Sweden (46-85%, 4,133,560-7,638,100), 2) Vietnam (81%, 66,978,900), 3) Denmark (43-80%, 2,327,590-4,330,400), 4) Norway (31-72%, 1,418,250-3,294,000), and 5) Japan (64-65%, 81,493,120-82,766,450). The United States of America is often considered one of the most religious nations in the developed world. However, the Nones still constitute a significant portion of the population .

“Religious” Populations in the United States from 1990-2008

| Affiliation | 1990 Est. U.S. Adult Pop. Over 18 | % of U.S. Pop. 1990 | 2008 Est. U.S. Adult Pop. Over 18 | % of U.S. Pop. 2008 | % Growth of Pop. 1990-2008 | % Change of total U.S. Pop. 1990-2008 |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------|------------|-------------------|-------------|------------|------------|
| Christian | 151,225,000 | 86.2 | 173,402,000 | 76 | 34 | -10.2 |
| Other Religions | 5,853,000 | 3.3 | 8,796,000 | 3.9 | 50 | 0.6 |
| Nones | 14,331,000 | 8.2 | 34,169,000 | 14.1 | 138 | 5.9 |
| Agnostic/Atheists | 1,186,000 | 0.7 | 3,606,000 | 1.6 | 204 | 0.9 |
| t | | | | | | |
| Don't Know/Refused | 4,031,000 | 2.3 | 11,815,000 | 5.4 | 193 | 3.1 |
| Total | 175,440,000 | 100 | 228,182,000 | 100 | | |

Adapted from *American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS 2008) Summary Report* by Kosmin & Keyser, 2009.

The above ARIS survey shows that the Nones are the population with the largest percentage growth since 1990, a continuation of a trend stretching back to the 1950's (Zuckerman, 2010, p. x). So what is the cause of this increase?

Much of the growth in None affiliation appears to be generational. According to Pew Research Center (2010) each generation since 1928 has grown progressively less affiliated. Interestingly, each generation has also remained relatively stable in their affiliation. For instance, the Greatest generation (those born before 1928) has gone from 3% unaffiliated in the early 1970s to 5% today. All four successive generations are equally stable. So today we have a progression of those who are unaffiliated. Silent (born 1928-1945) 8%, Boomer (born 1945-1964) 13%, Gen X (born 1965-1980) 20%, and the Millennials at a whopping 26%. It appears that individual attitudes do not change much over time, but generational differences can be enormous, accounting for nearly the entire increase in the population of Nones. I was heartened to see the national numbers trending towards unaffiliated but dismayed by how little individual views change over time. In the next section, *Activism*, I will outline some theories as to why certain societies have become more secular that might help explain these generational changes.

Breaking down the None population, one is immediately struck by the gulf between identification and actual belief. According to the U.S. Religious Landscape Survey conducted by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life (2007) about 5% of the total U.S. population does not believe in God. Of that group, 24% identify with atheism and 15% are agnostics. It is interesting to note that, although the ARIS survey showed only 1.6% of Americans identifying as either atheist or agnostic in 2008, when based on stated beliefs the number of technical atheists/agnostics rose dramatically to roughly 12%. This

constitutes a majority position within the None affiliated population, but demonstrates that the terms atheist and agnostic are avoided by a majority of like-minded individuals.

A recent Pew Research poll conducted by Funk and Smith (2012) specifically examining the views of Nones shows that in America the trend away from organized religion continues. The Nones now constitute just under 20% of the U.S. population with atheists and agnostics ticking up to 6% (p. 9). Correlating to their 2010 survey above, Pew again found that there are generational differences with 32% of 18-29 year olds reporting as Nones on one end and only 9% of those 65+ (p. 10). I encourage the reader to check out this particularly interesting survey for many more findings including theories on the causes for increasing numbers of Nones and an analysis of those who are unaffiliated but consider themselves spiritual.

Of concern are certain demographic gulfs in relation to the general population. For instance, Kosmin and Keysar (2009) note that there is a significant gender gap among Nones with only 40% being female. The survey also highlights that only 11% of the “Black Non-Hispanic” population were Nones in 2008 as opposed to “Asian” (27%), “White Non-Hispanic” (16%), and “Hispanic” (12%). While many of these figures may not come as a surprise to active freethinkers, they are disturbing enough to warrant continued dialogue about why these differences exist and what can be done to bridge them.

Intelligence, Education, & Character Traits

IQ & Education

Paul Bell (2002), after analyzing 43 studies, carried out since 1927, exploring the possible correlation between intelligence and religious belief concluded that all but four supported the conclusion that “the higher one's intelligence or education level, the less one is likely to be religious or hold ‘beliefs’ of any kind.” A 2008 study bolstered such a conclusion in finding that atheists scored 1.95 IQ points higher than agnostics, 3.82 points higher than liberal persuasions, and 5.89 IQ points higher than dogmatic persuasions (Nyborg, 2008). Lynn, Harvey, and Nyborg (2009) collected data from 6,825 adolescents from 137 countries found atheists scored six g-IQ points higher than religious folks while higher IQ nations tend to be less religious as well. A recent study shows that the students:

at the University of Oxford are among the most godless groups ever studied in the UK. Of 728 students surveyed in 2007, 48.9 per cent claimed not to believe in any god, with 49.6 per cent claiming no religious affiliation. And while a very small number of Britons typically label themselves as "atheist" or "agnostic" (most surveys put it at about 5 per cent), an astonishing 57.3 per cent of the Oxford sample did. (Lee & Bullivant, 2010, p. 26)

Scientists & Religious Belief

Edward J. Larson and Larry Witham (1998) replicated a series of surveys done in 1914 and 1933 by psychologist James H. Leuba asking scientists and "eminent" scientists about God and immortality. Larson and Witham asked members of the National Academy of Science whether they believed in a "personal god" and "immortality." A side-by-side comparison of the results are shown below:

Comparison of survey answers among "eminent" scientists

| Belief in personal God | 1914 | 1933 | 1998 |
|-----------------------------|-------|------|------|
| Personal belief | 27.7% | 15.0 | 7.0 |
| Personal disbelief | 52.7 | 68.0 | 72.2 |
| Doubt or agnosticism | 20.9 | 17.0 | 20.8 |
| -- | | | |
| Belief in human immortality | 1914 | 1933 | 1998 |
| Personal belief | 35.2 | 18.0 | 7.9 |
| Personal disbelief | 25.4 | 53.0 | 76.7 |
| Doubt or agnosticism | 43.7 | 29.0 | 23.3 |

Religious Literacy

It turns out that overall atheists/agnostics know more about the world's religions than the average theist. That is according to the Pew Forum's 2010 *U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey*. Sampled Americans answered 16 of the 32 questions correctly. In total, atheists/agnostics scored 20.9 with Jews and Mormons following close behind. Mormons (7.9) and white evangelicals (7.3) scored higher on Christian specific questions with atheists/agnostics coming in 3rd with 6.7.

Atheists/agnostics excelled in the two other categories of “world religions” and “religion in public life.”

Character Traits

According to Bob Altemeyer (2010), “when tested, atheist showed more integrity, open-mindedness, acceptance of others, independence, and so on than fundamentalists did, who showed instead double standards, closed-mindedness, prejudice, and authoritarianism” (p. 20).

Indicators of Belief

A study conducted by Harvard University explored the link between belief and intuition. Eight hundred eighty-two American adults were asked three math questions. If the respondents used their intuition they were 1.5 times more likely to believe in God. A second study involving 373 participants concluded that “triggering intuitive thinking boosts belief” beyond normal levels (Pappas, 2011).

Moral Stances & World-Views

(for more information on the views of secular Americans on a variety of important issues visit this page of the American Secular Census: secularcensus.us/analysis/2012-03-30)

Here I have focused on a few of the more salient and controversial moral and world-view issues being debated in the United States today.

Public Perceptions of Atheists

Decades of surveys conclude that atheists are one of the most distrusted and despised minorities in America. The University of Minnesota compiled 40 years of data on American’s views on whether or not they would vote for individuals based on a single identifier (Edgell, Gerteis & Harman, 2006). In 1999, Atheists came in last with slightly less than 50% of respondents saying they would refuse to vote for “a generally well-qualified person for president” who was an atheist. This same poll found atheists viewed less favorably than homosexuals (37% negative), Muslims (38%) and Mormons (17%). Thankfully, for atheists, the voting prejudice is down from a peak of 77% in 1958. Perhaps unsurprisingly then only 1% of Congress is unaffiliated with religion (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2011). Representative Pete Stark has said he is an atheist, the only Congressman to do so, but lists his affiliation as Unitarian. The unaffiliated are by far the most

under represented “religious preference” population in America. What are the reasons for such a negative attitude towards atheists?

The answer appears to be multifaceted. Sixty-eight percent of Americans think atheists can be moral, while 40% stated that atheists do not “at all agree with my vision of American society” (compared to 26% for Muslims, 23% for homosexuals, and 13.5% for Conservative Christians) (Edgell, Gerteis & Harmann, 2006). Forty-eight percent of Americans “would disapprove if my child wanted to marry” an atheist (Muslims at 33.5% and African Americans at 27%) (2006, p. 219). It is hard to draw strong conclusions from these statistics. Yet, I propose that the prejudice has less to do with Americans viewing atheists as necessarily bad people than a level of discomfort or uncertainty towards groups they view as “different” from their own.

Below are some the more interesting results from Pew’s *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey* .

| Affiliation | % Responding yes to the following - Abortion should be legal in all cases | Society should accept homosexuality | There are clear & absolute standards for what is right & wrong - Completely agree | Evolution is the best explanation for the origins of human life on earth - Completely agree |
|-----------------------|---|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| Nones | 29 | 71 | 28 | 38 |
| Evangelical Christian | 9 | 26 | 51 | 7 |
| Mainline Christian | 20 | 56 | 33 | 18 |
| Muslim | 13 | 27 | 37 | 16 |
| Hindu | 23 | 48 | 21 | 41 |
| Buddhist | 35 | 82 | 15 | 49 |

Adapted from *U.S. Religions Landscape Survey: Religious Affiliation: Diverse & Dynamic* by Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008.

Abortion

When 1,003 Americans were asked whether they thought abortion should be illegal in all cases, 61% of evangelicals said it should and only 7% of atheists agreed (Barna Group, 2001). Should abortion be legal in all cases? Forty percent of atheists said yes, while 1% of evangelicals marked yes as well.

Homosexuality

In regards to homosexuality, 72% of atheists and 2% of Evangelicals think that it is an acceptable lifestyle (Barna Group, 2001).

Torture

Pew (2009, May) found that 62% of evangelical Protestants thought that “the use of torture against terrorists to gain important information” can be often or sometimes justified as opposed to Nones (40%) and mainline Protestants (46%).

Evolution

A 2011 side-by-side comparison of two studies of Canadian and American thoughts on the origins of humanity found that 58% of Canadians believe that humans evolved through evolution as opposed to only 16% of Americans. The belief that “humans were created by God in the last 10,000 years” is held by 40% of Americans and 14% of Canadians (Ekos, 2011). A 2009 Gallup poll claimed that 39% of its American respondents said they believed in evolution. In this same study education significantly increased belief in evolution from 21% of “high school or less” to 74% of “postgraduate.”

End-of-Life Care

A small survey looked into end-of-life care preferences for atheists and found that 95% of the respondents supported physician assisted-suicide options (Smith-Stoner, 2007). Not surprisingly other results lead to a conclusion that atheists want control over their care without interference from others with the exception of close family.

Societal & Individual Health

“The fact that a believer is happier than a skeptic is no more to the point than the fact that a drunken man is happier than a sober one. The happiness of credulity is a cheap and dangerous quality” (Shaw, 2010, p. 94).

-George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), playwright

A common argument is that societies must have religion in order to be healthy and function properly. Politicians and religious commentators continuously deplore the break-down of American society. Their solution is often more religion. The United Nations Human Development Report of 2004, which “ranks 177 nations on a ‘Human Development Index,’ which measures societal health through a weighing of such indicators as life expectancy at birth, adult literacy rate, per capita income, and educational attainment” (Zuckerman, 2007, p. 58). The report found that 24 of the top 25 nations “are characterized by notably high degrees of organic atheism [individuals are free to choose]” and “conversely, of those countries ranked at the bottom... the bottom fifty—all are countries lacking statistically significant percentages of atheism” (p. 58).

Gregory S. Paul gathered extensive data on societal health and religiosity and attempted to see if there were any correlations. He found that the trend towards secularization in the developed Western world has seen increasing levels of societal health. Indeed,

the data examined in this study demonstrates that only the more secular, pro-evolution democracies are, for the first time in history closest to achieving practical ‘cultures of life’ that feature low rates of lethal crime, juvenile-adult mortality, sex related dysfunction, and even abortion. (Paul, 2005, para. 19)

In terms of societal health, the more religious a nation the less healthy it tends to be.

In general, higher rates of belief in and worship of a creator correlate with higher rates of homicide, juvenile and early adult mortality, STD infection rates, teen pregnancy, and abortion in the

prosperous democracies. The most theist prosperous democracy, the U.S. is exceptional... sometimes spectacularly so, and almost always scores poorly. (Paul, 2011, para. 18)

Furthermore high infant mortality rates, poverty, illiteracy, and gender inequality are all correlated to high national religiosity (Zuckerman, 2007, pp. 58-59). Suicide is one of the exceptions in that the rates are higher in more irreligious countries. The United States and Ireland are the only highly developed nations with high religiosity. These findings help to dispel the myth that religion positively correlates with improved societal function and health.

According to Ruut Veenhoven of Erasmus University, Denmark is the happiest country on earth while also being one of the least religious (as cited in Zuckerman, 2008, p. 7). Veenhoven conducted an international happiness scale survey in 91 countries and Denmark came in at number one, with the other highly secular Scandinavian countries ranking high as well. The U.S. came in at 23rd . Furthermore, 82% of Danes accept evolution and only 10% believe in Hell (pp. 10-11).

Crime

Rod Swift (1997) claims that according to The Federal Bureau of Prison statistics for 1997, 0.209% of prison inmates were atheists, despite numbering anywhere from 0.5%-16% of the general population. Note that the upper limit is the percent of American's self-identifying as unaffiliated with religion. The range exemplifies the difficulty in pin-pointing exact belief within the population of Nones.

Religious Affiliation of Adult Sex Offenders

In an Australian study of 111 incarcerated adult male sex offenders, Eshuys and Smallbone (2006) found that atheist participants had fewer victims and that the age of their youngest victim was nearly 1.5 years older than any of the religious groups (p. 284). They also found that increased religious affiliation positively correlated with greater numbers of victims and younger ages of first victim (p. 284).

Selected Bibliography

Hunsberger, Bruce & Altemeyer, Bob. (2006). *Atheists: A groundbreaking study of America's nonbelievers*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. ✓

Hunsberger and Altemeyer set out to understand active atheists or non-believers who participate in atheist organizations. Their research discovered that, out of the 253 San Francisco active atheists who responded to their survey, most left religion, not because they were hurt by it or because of the death of a loved one, but for intellectual reasons: "it is all so unbelievable." Among other findings, the respondents came to identify with atheism because they possessed the integrity to pursue truth, no matter the cost to their personal or professional lives. When compared to a sample of religious fundamentalists, the atheists rated slightly lower in dogmatism but considerably lower in terms of zealotry.

While the author's methods and conclusions contain some glaring flaws (notably the example used to determine dogmatism), the book is a noble contribution to an understanding of a rarely explored segment of the population. Let's hope it spurs further investigation.

Norris, Pippa & Inglehart, Ronald. (2011). *Sacred & secular: Religion & politics worldwide* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. ✓

Zuckerman, Phil. (2008). *Society without God: What the least religious nations can tell us about contentment*. New York, NY: New York University Press. ● + ✓

Zuckerman spent time living in Denmark and conducted hundreds of interviews with Swedes and Danes. What he found in these largely secular societies was not only a lack of religiosity but also, perhaps surprisingly to many Americans, that religion was mostly a *non-issue* and their happiness is not contingent on any supernatural belief.

Zuckerman, Phil. (Ed.). (2010). *Atheism & secularity: Issues, concepts, & definitions* (Vol. 1). Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.

Zuckerman, Phil. (Ed.). (2010). *Atheism & secularity: Global expressions* (Vol. 2). Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.

Additional Resources

Adherents.com

“Adherents.com is a growing collection of over 43,870 adherent statistics and religious geography citations: references to published membership/adherent statistics and congregation statistics for over 4,200 religions, churches, denominations, religious bodies, faith groups, tribes, cultures, movements, ultimate concerns, etc. The religions of the world are enumerated here.”

adherents.com

American Secular Census: The Independent National Registry of Demographic & Viewpoint Data Recorded by Secular Americans ✓

I encourage everyone to explore and contribute to this growing database!

secularcensus.us

The ARDA: Association of Religion Data Archives

A large collection of surveys, studies, and other data on numerous religious topics.

thearda.com

ARIS 2008: American Religious Identification Survey 2008

commons.trincoll.edu/aris

Gallup

gallup.com

Pew Research Center: Numbers, Facts, & Trends Shaping Your World

pewresearch.org

The Science of Religion

A site by paleontologist Gregory S. Paul which has a number of technical and popular articles on the correlation and possible causation of religiosity and poor societal health and well-being.

gspaulscienceofreligion.com

Serving Atheists

Take the survey to help us better understand ourselves.

servingatheists.org

ACTIVISM



"True Atheists"

Reprinted with kind permission from Tracie Harris.

Why continue? Because we must. Because we have the call. Because it is nobler to fight for rationality without winning than to give up in the face of continued defeats. Because whatever true progress humanity makes is through the rationality of the occasional individual and because any one individual we may win for the cause may do more for humanity than a hundred thousand who hug their superstitions to their breast. (as cited in Positive Atheism, 2011)

-Isaac Asimov (1920-1992), scientist, writer

Freethinkers, of all persuasions, cannot afford to dismiss or ignore religion. We cannot be apathetic to beliefs, no matter how innocent. We must speak out against irrationality and stand up for reason. While irrational belief may be comforting to many, quaint to some, and frustrating to others, it is vitally important to us all. We must become active not only because religion can be dangerous but also because there is a pressing need to have the general public understand and accept the proven potential of science in explaining the world and helping to solve our most critical problems.

The following is merely food-for-thought. It is a collection of condensed observations on how the freethought community might

proceed to engage and persuade the general public. My aim is to call the apathetic freethinker to action and spark ideas and debate amongst those already active. I will begin by briefly introducing a few theories as to why societies may become more secular and end with some strategies that might prove helpful to our cause. By understanding why some societies are not religious we may be in a better position to help improve humanity.

Secularization Hypotheses

Secure Societies

In Holland... the whole nation, at its core, seemed so ungodly. Here one could (and many did) contest the very existence of God at every turn. People openly disbelieved every aspect of religion... and yet nobody was struck by a thunderbolt. Society worked without reference to God, and it seemed to function perfectly. This man-made system of government was so much more stable, peaceful, prosperous, and happy than the supposedly God-devised systems I had been taught to respect. (Ali, 2007, pp. 239-240)

-Ayaan Hirsi Ali (1969-), feminist, atheist activist, politician

Secure societies, as proposed by Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, is a model for explaining the secularization of societies. They argue “that the erosion of religious values, beliefs, and practices is shaped by long-term changes in the existential security, a process linked with human development and socioeconomic equality, and with each society’s cultural legacy and religious traditions” (Norris & Inglehart, 2011, p. 53). Security “denotes freedom from various risks and dangers” such as the level of safety, comfort, and predictable conditions individuals actually or perceptually live with (p. 14). What Norris and Inglehart (2011) found was that the nations which enjoy the greatest security are also the most secular.

The social sciences have held for centuries that industrialization, education, or scientific advancement would eventually rid the world of superstition, supernatural explanation, and religion in general.

However, while these may play a role in fostering secular societies, Norris and Inglehart's research suggests that giving individuals prosperous and safe environments may be the most important catalyst for eliminating or at least diminishing the need for religion, of which the above factors play role. Freethinkers would be wise to examine how the most secular societies are structured and push to apply them to their own nations.

Other Secularization Hypotheses

Lazy Monopoly – Suggests that in religiously homogeneous societies (e.g. a single state-sponsored religion with little to no competition between religions) religious authorities become apathetic and do not strive to increase their congregations, therefore religiosity decreases and secularity increases within the society. A possible mitigating factor may be found in certain states which concoct or inflate an external insecurity (e.g. an enemy, some danger) in order to increase loyalty of and participation in the state religion out of fear.

See also:

Finke, Roger & Starke, Rodney. (2000). *Acts of faith: Explaining the human side of religion* . Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Working Women – As women are often the strongest traditional proponents of religious adherence, this theory hypothesizes that as women are given more equality and more opportunities religion will decline. The reason being that many more women will choose a lifestyle different than homemaker, therefore, their role as religious taskmaster will wane as a general influence within society.

See also:

Brown, Callum. (2001). *The death of Christian Britain* . New York, NY: Routledge.

Functional Evolution – Sociologist Emile Durkheim noticed that religion serves many functions in the life of the individual such as major life passages, marriage, death, celebrations, etc. He thought that since industrial societies serve many of the same functions for the individual religion would lose its role and inevitably disappear.

See also :

Durkheim, Emile. (1915). *The elementary forms of the religious life*. London, United Kingdom: Allen & Unwin, Ltd.

Activist Strategies

I. Visibility

Public awareness is the most important aspect of activism. There are few institutions and world-views as conspicuous as religion. This pervasiveness has entangled religion in the fabric of world community to such an extent that it has become synonymous with collective identity and some of our highest ideals and conceptions. Research indicates that in America many citizens who consider themselves religious do so because they believe that morality, patriotism, and generally being a good person are wrapped up in a religious identity. None of these attitudes are dependent upon the others. One major problem is that these individuals do not have access to alternative identifications which can be just as easily associated with the values of the individual and community. Consider, for example, that several studies have found that Americans may be over-reporting their church attendance by as much as 50% (Vedantam, 2010, para. 11). Religion, Vedantam continues,

seems tied up with questions of identity in ways that are not the case in other industrialized countries. When you ask Americans about their religious beliefs, it's like asking them whether they are good people, or asking whether they are patriots. (¶ 5)

This is a potentially hopeful finding. In these cases, identifying with religion seems to be more of a misunderstanding rather than actual

belief. A more intractable problem involves those who actually believe. We must remain visible in the public arena so that others recognize freethought and humanism as viable alternatives to theism. Americans must be aware that they can be good and patriotic without being irrational. So get out there and demonstrate that you are a good citizen, a good person, and a freethinker!



"Atheist Bus Campaign"

From Jon Worth: British Humanist Association – atheistbus.org.uk

II. Support Silent Freethinkers

More often than not, giving up religion entails much more than rejecting a system of belief and superstition. Becoming a freethinker is more than an intellectual shift in perspective. It can mean the possibility of losing a sense of community, family ties, societal status, and cultural heritage. For these reasons and more, the process of abandoning religion can be a difficult decision fraught with deep emotional misgivings. We must be supportive and encouraging to those wavering between personal and intellectual integrity and the powerful societal pressure to conform.

Yet, does freethought require abandoning religion entirely? For some it may, for others this does not have to be the case. An individual can be a freethinker and culturally religious. A freethought goal should be to produce reasonable citizens, not culture destroyers. One of the most attractive features of the Unitarian

Universalist church and others like it, is the possibility to participate in a dogma-free community, which still honors myth, rites, rituals, and human cultural history. Religion is only a negative force in society when it is taken literally. Metaphorically, religion can be a tremendously positive institution. Freethought and religion do not have to be mutually exclusive.

Below are three good sites and a book with advice for helping individuals “come out” as freethinkers.

The Out Campaign ✓

outcampaign.org

We Are Atheism: Stand Up, Speak Out, Be Counted

A place where atheists can safely and openly express themselves.

weareatheism.com

Austin Cline at about.com has a few pages that might be helpful on coming out:

atheism.about.com/od/atheistactivism/p/ComingOut.htm

Winell, Marlene. (2006). *Leaving the fold* . Berkeley, CA: Apocryphile Press.

III. Organize

Freethinkers should to come together to dialogue about how to promote reason and defend science and the separation of church and state. See the [Organizations](#) section for a listing of groups throughout the world.

IV. Debate

Though I am a strong advocate for free thought on all subjects, yet it appears to me (whether rightly or wrongly) that direct arguments against Christianity and theism produce hardly any effect on the

public; and freedom of thought is best promoted by the gradual illumination of men's minds which follows from the advance of science. (Darwin, 1880)

-Charles Darwin (1809-1882), naturalist

The so called “new atheists” are the blunt edge of the modern freethought movement. Their arguments are not new; the criticisms of religion have been around for ages. They are relevant because they have helped keep religious skepticism in the spotlight and highlight the ridiculousness of extreme theist positions, beliefs, and influence throughout history and in the contemporary world. They have garnered much of the freethought spotlight, but do they go too far in their attacks? There is a sound argument to be made for the counterproductivity of critically objecting to religion. Yet, many people can and do change their minds and debate should remain an important strategy of freethought activism.

Freethought activists would be wise to remember the education level of their audience. Most of the philosophical arguments for or against the existence of god or gods have already been articulated and debated. For those individuals or groups, which have not been exposed to those arguments it is certainly appropriate to inform them. However, for those who are well versed in the historical debates, reiteration will probably fall on deaf ears. And the terms we use also matter. Consider Bertrand Russell’s (1947) advice:

As a philosopher, if I were speaking to a purely philosophic audience I should say that I ought to describe myself as an Agnostic, because I do not think that there is a conclusive argument by which one can prove that there is not a God. On the other hand, if I am to convey the right impression to the ordinary man in the street I think I ought to say that I am an Atheist, because when I say that I cannot prove that there is not a God, I ought to add equally that I cannot prove that there are not the Homeric gods.

We don’t want to beat dead cats or fail to appreciate types of audiences.

What freethinkers have been less vocal about are the viability and positive consequences of a freethought world-view. We should earnestly and clearly inform people which morals and values we positively affirm. What do freethinkers stand for and what do we find objectionable?

V. Offer Alternative Life-Philosophies to Theology

An authentic prophet is one who prophesies in fashion that does not comfort people, but actually calls them to make some new sacrifices. That's an authentic prophet, whether one speaks in the name of God or whatever. A great deal of authentic prophetism in the modern world is to be found in nonreligious terms and in nonchurch configurations, often even hostile to the church. The churches themselves have broadly failed in the prophetic function. Therefore a good deal of so-called atheism is itself, from my point of view, theologically significant. It is the working of God in history, and judgment upon the pious. An authentic prophet can and should be a radical critic of spurious piety, of sham spirituality. (Adams, 1986, p. 57)

-James Luther Adams (1901-1994), professor, Unitarian minister

Sociologist Emile Durkheim noted that religion provides many things, which have very little to do with its supernatural and irrational aspects that many freethinkers find particularly disturbing. In order for freethought to succeed, it must understand and attempt to satisfy those important and natural needs religion has served for thousands of years. There are numerous ways this can be accomplished and hopefully this guide is sprinkled with clues to many of them. Here, I merely would like to put out the importance of the strategy of offering alternatives to religion. Among the perspectives that we can positively stand up for is the scientific method. Another is humanism.

VI. Other Strategies

My only wish is... to transform friends of God into friends of man, believers into thinkers, devotees of prayer into devotees of work, candidates for the hereafter into students of the world, Christians

who, by their own admission, are 'half animal, half angel' into persons, into whole persons. (as cited in Konner, 2007, p. 87)

-Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872), philosopher, anthropologist

I think that advocating for comparative mythology classes in public education would be very productive. If done in an unbiased fashion, not only will religious instruction broaden students' multicultural acumen but it will also demonstrate the arbitrary nature of specific religious claims.

See also:

Dodd, Patton. (2007). Should the Bible be taught in public schools? *Beliefnet.com*. Retrieved August 25, 2011, from beliefnet.com/News/Politics/2007/06/Should-The-Bible-Be-Taught-In-Public-Schools.aspx

We cannot succeed alone, nor should we want to. Freethinkers need to find allies amongst the faithful. This will help build bridges of understanding that will help dispel misconceptions, and find common ground (e.g. supporting common causes or potential joint community service for issues that both sides value). This will also facilitate compassion and access to awareness of new options for everyone involved.

See also:

The Clergy Letter Project

"The Clergy Letter Project is an endeavor designed to demonstrate that religion and science can be compatible and to elevate the quality of the debate of this issue." While I don't agree with the above sentiment in most cases where science and religion are actually in conflict, this is noble effort to at least recognize that evolution is real, important, and necessary for the proper education of humanity.

theclergyletterproject.org

On activism in general:

atheism.about.com/od/atheistactivism/p/Activism.htm

Legal History & Issues



"Ernestine Rose"
From <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/19/ErnestineRose.jpg>

Do you tell me that the Bible is against our rights? Then I say that our claims do not rest upon a book written no one knows when, or by whom.... Books and opinions, no matter from whom they came, if they are in opposition to human rights, are nothing but dead letters. (Stanton et al. 1881, pp. 661-663)

-Ernestine Rose (1810-1892), abolitionist, feminist

In this section, I address a few important historical freethought related legal debates and cases. A legal services directory is also included.

Some Issues & Historical Considerations

Anaxagoras of ancient Greece was the first person known to have been indicted for atheism in 438 B.C.E. Historian Jennifer Hecht relates (2003) that "the law against Anaxagoras's (written specifically for him) atheism held that society must denounce those who do not believe in the divine beings or who teach doctrines about things in the sky" (p. 10). Since then there have been countless freethinkers who have been imprisoned, tortured, and executed for questioning or disobeying dogmatic ideologies.

In America, law and governance revolve primarily around interpretation of *The Constitution* and *The Bill of Rights*. A common

and fundamental misunderstanding is that the Founding Father's views were monolithic. Their ideas about American law and government were nearly as diverse as they are today. Indeed, many early American leaders, such as Benjamin Rush, Supreme Court Justice John Storrey, and even freethinker James Madison believed that religion was essential to the moral, ethical, and civil virtue of citizens and necessary for a healthy republic. While it may have been justified for these individuals to assume this was the case in the early 19th century, modern science, philosophy, and the personal conduct of freethinkers have demonstrated that this position is no longer tenable. Yet, freethinkers such as Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Ethan Allen, and Thomas Paine clearly saw much to be wary about in religion and other forms of subjugation. Writing to his nephew Peter Carr, Jefferson (1787) gave this piece of advice on religion:

Your reason is now mature enough to examine this object. In the first place, divest yourself of all bias in favor of novelty and singularity of opinion. Indulge them in any other subject rather than that of religion. It is too important, and the consequences of error may be too serious. On the other hand, shake off all the fears and servile prejudices, under which weak minds are servilely crouched. Fix reason firmly in her seat, and call to her tribunal every fact, every opinion. Question with boldness even the existence of a God; because, if there be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason, than that of blindfolded fear. (§ 5)

The plurality of views held by the Founding Fathers makes a strong case that "Originalism" is both naïve and impossible. Viewing the Constitution as a "living document" allows a flexibility of judicial judgment necessary for addressing contemporary issues, which could not have been foreseen during the early republic.

Religious Freedom

Freedom of religion and freedom from religion are cornerstones of the United States. In 1777 Thomas Jefferson wrote the *Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom*, a landmark religious freedom document which became the inspiration for the 1791 1st Amendment

, contained in *The Bill of Rights* . The *Amendment* in part reads: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...” Furthermore, Article VI, paragraph 3 of the *Constitution* states that:

The Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the Members of the several State Legislatures, and all executive and judicial Officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound by Oath or Affirmation, to support this Constitution; but *no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States* . [emphasis added]

However, the doctrine of states rights continued to allow states to discriminate against non-believers for decades. In fact nine states continue to have discriminatory language in their constitutions or declaration of rights (ironically enough) that prohibit non-believers from serving in a public office. Those states are Arkansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas. For example, the Texas *Bill of Rights* , section 4 states:

No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office, or public trust, in this State; nor shall any one be excluded from holding office on account of his religious sentiments, *provided he acknowledge the existence of a Supreme Being* . [emphasis added]



“Christian Persecution”

Reprinted with kind permission from Tracie Harris.

Thankfully, the Supreme Court ruled on a number of cases beginning in 1868 with the incorporation doctrine of the 14th *Amendment* which set a precedent that the *Bill of Rights* could be increasingly applied to the states as well as the federal government. This should have affectively eliminated such discrimination. However, those who think that the laws in these states are simply archaic remnants with no real world implications should consider the case of Maryland man, Roy Torcaso, who refused to take a religious oath as a condition of becoming a notary public. In his 1961 case, *Torcaso v. Watkins*, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously struck down such “religious tests” for public office as they violated both the 1st and 14th Amendments. These cases, though rare, still crop up occasionally. Atheist Herb Silverman of South Carolina deliberately wanted to challenge his state’s discriminatory policy. After eight years of struggle, Silverman won the court battle in 1997, when South Carolina's highest court granted him the right to be appointed as a notary despite the state's law.

Separation of Church & State

Thomas Jefferson, in an 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptist Association, wrote that he contemplated “with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should ‘make no law respecting an establishment of

religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between Church & State." The phrase is not present in *The Constitution* . As a result, it did not apply to the states. It wasn't until 1948 that there was federal action with *McCullum v. Board of Education Dist. 71*. The court upheld the exclusion of religious instruction in public schools based on the *Establishment Clause* of the *First Amendment* . In *Torcaso v. Watkins* (1961), the Supreme Court made clear that Maryland or any other state could not require applicants for public office to swear that they believed in God. *Murray v. Curlett* (1963) banned forcing students to pray or read *The Bible* . *Stone v. Graham* (1980) declared that posting the Ten Commandments in schools was unconstitutional.

Evolution v. Creationism

In 1925, a Tennessee law forbidding the teaching of evolution brought about the famous Scopes "monkey" trial pitting prosecuting attorney William Jennings Bryan against America's most celebrated lawyer, agnostic Clarence Darrow. Although John Scopes lost the trial, Darrow so utterly demolished Bryan's arguments that many American's considered it a final triumph over creationism. However, such optimism was premature, as evidenced by *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District* (2005) which was the first serious challenge to the teaching of creationism along-side evolution in school. Thankfully, creationism was declared to be unscientific and therefore not appropriate for science curriculum.

See also:

Secular Web. (n.d.) *U.S. Supreme Court decisions* . Retrieved November 2, 2011, from infidels.org/library/modern/church-state/decisions.html

Other Issues



"Clarence Darrow"
From Library of Congress Collection

Two relatively innocuous yet symbolically important issues are that of "In God We Trust" on American currency and "under God" in the pledge of allegiance. Contrary to popular assumption, the inclusion of these phrases is a relatively recent occurrence. While "In God We Trust" has appeared on U.S. coinage since 1864, it was only adopted on paper money in 1956 when it also, and more significantly, replaced the previous U.S. motto "E Pluribus Unum," which is Latin for "from many, one." The change was a reaction to Cold War paranoia as a way for America to further differentiate itself from communist and ostensibly atheist Soviet Union. Two years earlier, the *Pledge of Allegiance*, first adopted in 1942, was changed to include "under God."

There are certainly a host of other legal issues that are important to freethinkers and I encourage you to explore them. A true legal history is far beyond the scope of this work. One thing is certainly clear, from even a cursory perusal of freethought legal history: we must be vigilant and active to assure our freedoms. Perhaps the most recent disturbing evidence of the need for freethinkers to be continuously aware comes from current Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia. The ultra-conservative and Constitutional originalist gave a speech in 2002 at the University of Chicago Divinity School entitled "God's Justice and Ours." *The Constitution*, he said, is:

not living but dead—or, as I prefer to put it, enduring. It means today not what current society (much less the Court) thinks it ought

to mean, but what it meant when it was adopted. (as cited in Jacoby, 2004, pp. 348-349)

For Scalia and many other conservatives *The Constitution* , and by extension *The Bible* , must be literal and immutable, otherwise, Scalia continues “How can [elected representatives’] power to avenge—to vindicate the ‘public order’—be greater than our own?” (as cited in Jacoby, 2004, p. 350). For freethinkers who understand law and society as human creations, these chilling views should be catalysts for renewed energy to remain vigilant and active.

Here are some thoughts to consider from an 1872 document by freethinkers:

The Nine Demands of Liberalism

1. Churches and other ecclesiastical property should no longer be exempt from taxation.
2. The employment of chaplains in Congress, in the state legislatures, in the army, navy and militia, and in prisons, asylums and all other institutions supported by public money should be discontinued.
3. All public appropriations for sectarian, educational and charitable institutions should be discontinued.
4. All religious services sustained by the government ought to be abolished; especially the use of the Bible in the public schools, whether ‘ostensibly’ as a textbook or ‘avowedly’ as a book of religious worship should be prohibited.
5. Appointments by the President of the United States or by the Governors of the various states of all religious festivals and fasts should be discontinued.
6. Abolition of the judicial oath in the courts and in all other departments of the government, and the substitution of simple affirmation.
7. The repeal of all laws directly or indirectly enforcing the observance of Sunday as the Sabbath.
8. The abrogation of all laws looking to the enforcement of ‘Christian morality;’ instead they should conform to the requirements of natural morality, equal rights and impartial liberty.

9. 'Not only in the Constitution of the United States and of the several States, but also in the practical administration of the same, no privilege or advantage should be conceded to Christianity or any other special religion; that our entire political system shall be founded and administered on a purely secular basis; and that whatever changes shall prove necessary to this end shall be consistently, unflinchingly and promptly made.' (Abbot, 1872)

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Philosophy

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John was a naturalist who helped cultivate America's love of the physical world. Here he advocates abandoning supernatural obsessions and rejoice in the real.

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"There is only one serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide" (p. 3). Humans commit suicide, according to Camus, because they cannot face "nothing," that is, the fact that there is no meaning except through our own creation. Human beings give meaning to life. Sisyphus is the mythological character resigned to push a stone up a mountain which the gods ever tumble back. He finds meaning in the struggle not the objective.

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The eminent existential philosopher asks the question “What is the meaning of being... What is existence?”

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“Russell held progressive, often controversial views on social issues, including sexuality. Vigorously opposed to conventional or

religious morality, he sets forth here a rationalist approach to achieving a happy life” (Amazon.com book description).

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A criticism of the philosophies of Plato, Hegel, and Marx as totalitarian. Instead, he advocated for open liberal democracies.

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Based on a lecture given by the famed philosopher.

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Perhaps the finest introduction and history of Western thought available.

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A brief treatise on existential moral philosophy.

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Women

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Supposedly the most faithful translation of a work that had the distinction of being placed on the Vatican's restricted book list.

Brownmiller, Susan. (1999). *In our time: Memoir of a revolution* . New York, NY: Dial Press.

"If conditions are right, if the anger of enough people has reached the boiling point, the exploding passion can ignite a societal transformation" (p. 1).

Faulkenberry, Carol. (1998). *The uppity old atheist woman's dictionary* . Atlanta, GA: Atlanta Freethought Society.

Friedan, Betty. (1963). *The feminine mystique* . New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company. **#2**

A classic in women's liberation which helped ignite the second-wave feminism. She challenges the dogma of a male dominated society.

Gaylor, Annie. (Ed.). (1997). *Women without superstition: 'No gods —no masters:' The collected writings of women freethinkers of the nineteenth & twentieth century* . Madison, WI: Freedom From Religion Foundation. **#3**

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A veteran of feminism discusses the issues women continue to face.

McElroy, Wendy. (1991). *Freedom, feminism, & the state: An overview of individualist feminism* . New York, NY: Holmes & Meier Publishers.

McElroy, Wendy. (1999). *Queen silver: The godless girl* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books .

“This is a fiery and profound biography of one of America's most amazing feminist thinkers, a woman who remained an active advocate of intellectual independence to the moment of her death in 1998 at the age of 86” (Amazon book description).

McElroy, Wendy. (1998). *The reasonable woman: A guide to intellectual survival* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Sultan, Wafa. (2009). *A god who hates: The courageous woman who inflamed the Muslim world speaks out against the evils of Islam* . New York, NY: St. Martin's Press. ☺

When speaking is a taboo sanctioned by religion it is time to speak up.

On Feb. 21, 2006, the Syrian-born and raised Wafa Sultan gave one of the most provocative interviews ever given by a Muslim woman on the Al Jazeera network. In the middle of the interview she told her male Muslim interviewer that it was her turn to speak. And, she did. She told him to “shut up”. This simple, yet radical, act of a Muslim woman asserting herself in the face of a Muslim man, catapulted her to fame. (Amazon.com book description)

Tavris, Carol. (1993). *The mismeasure of woman* . New York, NY: Touchstone.

As a dwarf I can relate to the cultural reality that some natural aspects of individuality (gender, height, etc.) are tied to concepts

such as intelligence, ability.

Black

Why fear? The stuff of my being is matter, ever changing, ever moving, but never lost; so what need of denominations and creeds to deny myself the comfort of all my fellow men? The wide belt of the universe has no need for finger-rings. I am one with the infinite and need no other assurance. (Hurston, 1942, p. 226)

-Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960), folklorist, anthropologist, author

Allen, Norm. (1991). *African American humanism: An anthology* . Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books. ✓

A wonderful collection of essays chronicling the affect and purposes of religion on African Americans. Very interesting.

Allen, Norm. (2002). *The black humanist experience: An alternative to religion* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

A very necessary work giving a voice to those who have left the fold and embraced humanism.

Baldwin, James. (1993). *The fire next time* . New York, NY: Vintage.

James Baldwin was the author of powerful works such as *Go Tell it on the Mountain* (1953) and *Notes on a Native Son* (1955). This essay, originally published in 1963, explores issues of integration and also Baldwin's rejection of religion because as a young preacher he realized that "Being in the pulpit was like being in the theatre; I was behind the scenes and knew how the illusion worked" (p. 37). And "if the concept of God has any validity or any use, it can only be to make us larger, freer, and more loving. If God cannot do this, then it is time we got rid of him" (p. 47).

Barbera, Don. (2003). *Black & not Baptist: Nonbelief & freethought in the black community* . New York, NY: iUniverse, Inc.

Hutchinson, Sikivu. (2011). *Moral combat: Black atheists, gender politics, & the values wars* . Infidel Press. ✓ **#2**

I really liked this book. Indeed,

drawing on a rich tradition of African American free thought, a growing number of progressive African American non-believers are openly questioning black religious and social orthodoxies. *Moral Combat* provides a provocative analysis of the political and religious battle for America's soul. (Amazon.com book description)

Johnson, Brian. (2008). *W.E.B. Du Bois: Toward agnosticism, 1868-1934* . Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Charts the activist and freethinker's views on religion.

Lackey, Michael. (2008). *African American atheists & political liberation: A study of the sociocultural dynamics of faith* . Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida.

Pinn, Anthony. (2001). *By these hands: A documentary history of African American humanism* . New York, NY: NYU Press. ✓ **#1**

A good series of essays dealing with different issues of African American humanism, including its relation to the black church, personal testimonies, slavery, and much more.

Pinn, Anthony. (2012). *The end of God talk: An African American humanist theology* .

Anthony Pinn explores the issues surrounding how traditional African American theology has excluded non-theists and sees a way forward.

Wright, Donald. (2009). *The only prayer I'll ever pray: Let my people go* . Dog Ear Publishing. **#3**

Challenges theists to think critically about the dogma which has kept them mentally oppressed.

Legal & Activism

Baird, Robert & Rosenbaum, Stuart. (Ed.). (1988). *Morality & the law* . Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.

Baird, Robert & Rosenbaum, Stuart. (Eds.). (1989). *Euthanasia: The moral issues* . Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.

See also the website: *Choice in Dying* at choiceindying.com

Baird, Robert & Rosenbaum, Stuart. (Eds.). (1991). *Animal experimentation* . Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.

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Boston, Rob. (2003). *Why the religious right is wrong about separation of church & state*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Dershowitz, Alan. (2007). *Blasphemy: How the religious right is hijacking the Declaration of Independence* . Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Faircloth, Sean. (2012). *Attack of the theocrats!: How the religious right harms us all—and what we can do about it* . Charlottesville, VA: Pitchstone Publishing. ●✓#1

A powerful and informed explanation of how the religious right has been very successful in inserting their fundamentalist agenda into American law. Sean is an eloquent advocate for secular rights and outlines how secular Americans can reach out to liberal theists and stand up for Constitutional values.

Konvitz, Milton. (1963). *First Amendment freedoms: Selected cases on freedom of religion, speech, press, assembly* . Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Larson, Edward. (2006). *Summer for the gods: The scopes trial & America's Continuing debate over science & religion* . New York, NY: Basic Books.

Lynn, Barry, Stern, Marc, & Thomas, Oliver. (1995). *The right to religious liberty: The basic ACLU guide to religious rights* (2nd ed.). Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

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- Niose, David. (2012). *Nonbeliever nation: The rise of secular Americans* . Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan

20% of Americans are now unaffiliated and Mr. Niose, President of the American Humanist Association, thinks that we need to stand and be heard. This is a clear call to action and organization.

- Peters, Shawn. (2007). *When prayer fails: Faith healing, children, & the law* . New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Sehat, David. (2011). *The myth of American religious freedom*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

A necessary history of American's uncomfortable and not so consistent application of the 1st Amendment .

- Walker, Samuel. (1999). *In defense of American liberties: A history of the ACLU* . Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Additional Resources

“Toleration is not the *opposite* of intolerance but the *counterfeit* of it. Both are despotisms. The one assumes to itself the right of withholding Liberty of Conscience, and the other of granting it” (Paine, 1984, p. 482, emphasis in original).

-Thomas Paine (1791)

Activist & Legal Contacts

Appignani Humanist Legal Center

American Humanist Association
ATTN: AHLC
1777 T Street, NW
Washington, DC 20009-7125

Phone: 1.202.238.9088
Toll free: 1.800.837.3792
Fax: 1.202.238.9003

humanistlegalcenter.org

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU): Because Freedom Can't Protect Itself ✓

132 W 43rd St
New York, NY 10036

Phone: 1.212.944.9800
Fax: 1.212.359.5290

aclu.org

Lawyers' Secular Society

Provides “advice and assistance to individuals affected by laws which give special advantages to those who assert religious beliefs. We seek to help people and organisations campaigning against religious privilege of all kinds.”

lawyerssecularsociety.org

National Center for Science Education: Defending the Teaching of Evolution in Public Schools ✓ #1

420 40th Street Suite 2
Oakland, CA 94609-2688

Phone: 1.510.601.7203
Toll Free: 1.800.290.6006
Fax: 1.510.601.7204
Email: info@ncse.com

ncse.com

White House Switchboard

Phone: 1.202.456.1414

U.S. Senate

Phone: 1.202.224.3121

U.S. House of Representatives

Phone: 1.202.225.3121

Therapy & Addiction Services

Secular Organizations for Sobriety (SOS)

A network of groups serving as an alternative to Alcoholics Anonymous.

sossobriety.org

The Secular Therapist Project

“There are many secular people in your community that have mental health needs. Unfortunately, many secularists report that they cannot

find a secular counselor in their community... By registering you increase the likelihood that secular clients will find you and they will be able to avoid therapists who allow their religious, spiritual or supernatural beliefs to inform their therapeutic approach.”

seculartherapy.org

SMART Recovery: Self Help for Addiction & Alcohol Abuse

smartrecovery.org

Secular Charities

Atheists for Human Rights

5146 Newton Ave. N.
Minneapolis, MN 55430-3459

Phone: 1.612.529.1200

Phone: 1.866.ATHEIST

Email: communications@atheistsforhumanrights.org

atheistsforhumanrights.org

Atheists Helping the Homeless

An Austin, TX based group.

atheistshelpingthehomeless.org

Amnesty International

Fights human rights abuses and adheres to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

amnesty.org

British Humanist Association: Good Causes & Charities

A good guide to secular charity giving.

humanism.org.uk/humanism/humanism-today/humanists-doing/charities

Doctors Without Borders

“An international medical humanitarian organization created by doctors and journalists in France in 1971.”

doctorswithoutborders.org

Foundation Beyond Belief: Humanity at Work

P.O. Box 4882
Alpharetta, GA 30023

foundationbeyondbelief.org

Freethought Books Project: Secular & Freethought Books for Prisoners

freethoughtbooks.org

Humanist Charities

1777 T St NW
Washington, DC 20009

Phone: 1.800.837.3792

Fax: 1.202.238.9088

Email: info@humanistcharities.org

humanistcharities.org

Human Rights Watch ✓

Works to defend and protect human rights by raising awareness and laying the legal groundwork for prosecution of rights abuses.

hrw.org

Non-Believers Giving Aid: Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason & Science #1

11605 Meridian Market View
Unit 124 PMB 381
Falcon, CO 80831

Phone: 1.202.251.0754

Email: donations@richarddawkins.net

givingaid.richarddawkins.net

Planned Parenthood

A vital reproductive healthcare and education provider in the U.S.

plannedparenthood.org

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Focuses on evidence-based disease treatment and prevention, education, and child protection.

unicef.org

Union of Concerned Scientists: Citizens & Scientists for Environmental Solutions

“The leading science-based nonprofit working for a healthy environment and a safer world.”

2 Brattle Square
Cambridge, MA 02138-3780

csusa.org

Skeptics & Humanists Aid & Relief Effort: Center for Inquiry

Phone: 1.716.636.4869, ext. 427
Email: srook@centerforinquiry.net

centerforinquiry.net/share

Charity Watchdogs

Charity Navigator

charitynavigator.org

Charity Watch

charitywatch.org

Philanthroper

philanthroper.com

Conventions

The Amazing Meeting #2

Hosted by the James Randi Educational Foundation.

amazingmeeting.com

American Humanist Association Annual Conference

americanhumanist.org/What_We_Do/Annual_Conference/2012

The Annual Convention of American Atheists #1

atheists.org/events/National_Convention

Freedom From Religion Foundation National Convention

ffrf.org/outreach

Global Atheist Convention: Celebration of Reason #3

Hosted by Atheist Foundation of Australia.

atheistconvention.org.au

Global Atheist Convention: Secular Students Alliance Annual Conference

secularstudents.org/conference

Imagine No Religion

A Canadian event put on by CFI Canada, The James Randi Foundation, and Kamloops Centre for Rational Thought.

imaginenoireligion.ca

The Reason Rally

First rally was held on the Mall in Washington D.C. March 24th 2012. Hopefully there will be many more.

reasonrally.org

SkeptiCamp

“Informal, community-organized conferences borne from the desire for people to share and learn in an open environment.”

A how-to guide on setting up your own local conference.

skepticamp.org

Texas Freethought Convention

Hosted by Atheist Alliance of America.

texasfreethoughtconvention.com

Political Information & Parties

American Secular Mainstream: Secular Voters Renewing America Through Reason & Democracy ✓

This site draws up a platform “primarily [based] upon the opinions of individuals registered with the American Secular Census... Areas of public policy addressed by the platform concern legislation, funding

streams, and government practices.” The platform changes depending on growing and evolving opinions of secular Americans.

secularmainstream.us

Enlighten the Vote: The Place to Find “Reason”able Politicians

PO Box 5674
Parsippany, NJ 07054

enlightenthevote.com

International Humanist Party: Something More Than a Party

A consortium of parties active in at least 22 countries.

internationalhumanistparty.org

National Atheist Party: From Diversity & Reason, Unity

usanap.org

Science Debate: An Independent Citizens’ Initiative Asking Candidates for Office to Discuss the Top Science Questions Facing America

sciencedebate.org

Secular Party of Australia: Freedom of Religion & Freedom from Religion

PO Box 6004
Melbourne Vic 8008
Australia

Email: info@secular.org.au

secular.org.au

Freethought Promotion, Think Tanks, & Misc

Atheist Campaign.org: Official Website of the Atheist Bus Campaign

atheistbus.or.uk

The Critical Thinking Community

Their “aim [is] to improve education in colleges, universities and primary through secondary schools. We present publications, conferences, workshops and professional development programs, emphasizing instructional strategies, Socratic questioning, critical reading and writing, higher order thinking, assessment, research, quality enhancement, and competency standards.”

criticalthinking.org

Cyberguy's Atheist Resource Page

A great collection of free pamphlets and posters you can hand out to theists and the rationally challenged you encounter.

homepages.ihug.co.nz/~edmin/Pamphlets

Edge: To Arrive at the Edge of the World's Knowledge, Seek Out the Most Complex & Sophisticated Minds, Put Them in a Room Together, & Have Them Ask Each Other the Questions They Are Asking Themselves #1

A modern salon for freethinking intellectuals and scientists. For more about what these thinkers are thinking check out *This Will Change*

Everything (2009) which is a collection of 136 answers to the question, “What game-changing scientific ideas and developments do you expect to live to see?”

edge.org

FreeThoughtAction: For a Rational America

freethoughtaction.org

Humanist Community Project ✓

“A laboratory for the study of how Humanism can be most effectively practiced in communities anywhere in the world, and an incubator of future humanist leadership and best practices anywhere in the world.”

harvardhumanist.org

Institute for Humanist Studies: A Humanist Think Tank

1777 T Street NW
Washington, DC 20009

Phone: (202) 238-9088
Fax: (202) 238-9003
Email: info@humaniststudies.org

humaniststudies.org

Project Reason

project-reason.org

Freethinkers: A Source Guide to Atheists, Humanists, & other Nontheists ✓

An information site intended for journalists.

religionlink.com/tip_100921.php

Restore Our Pledge of Allegiance

restorethepledge.com

Stiefel Freethought Foundation

“Provides financial support and volunteer strategy consulting to the Freethought Movement.”

stiefelfreethoughtfoundation.org

EDUCATION & PARENTING

“There is in every village a torch— the teacher; and an extinguisher — the clergyman.”

-Victor Hugo (1802-1885), writer

It is the role of the educator to equip the student to become an independent human being. A crucial characteristic of maturity is the extent to which the individual is able to distinguish the real from the imagined, the true from the false. Critical thinking, the ability to properly assess the claims of others and judge one's own conclusions, is an important freethought value. Therefore, honest freethinkers are well-equipped to be good parents and teachers. This section begins with resources to help develop your critical thinking skills followed by books for parents/teachers, children, and young readers. I present the following resources because I believe it is far better to be read into a perspective than bred into one. Here are some sound suggestions from the secular humanist community:

Humanist Family Values

- 1) People should be free to choose their own family structure without fear of discriminations, whether they be nuclear family, single parent, extended family, married, or unmarried.
- 2) People should be able to marry across any racial, religious, or creedal divide. People of the same sex should also be able to marry.
- 3) All marriages, regardless of their structure, should be based on the equality of each partner.
- 4) Family members should be free from all forms of mental, physical, and sexual abuse, including marital rape.
- 5) Children have a right to the full love, care, and attention of their caregivers.
- 6) Adoption or custody decisions should be made in the interests of the children's welfare, not on some religious or social test.
- 7) Children have the right to proper medical care and caregivers do not have the right to withhold treatment or impose bizarre

treatments in accordance with their religious beliefs.

8) Children have the right to an education free from indoctrination and with as little regard to the financial circumstances of the caregivers as possible.

9) People must be free to choose the birth control methods best suited to their needs and sexual health, without being subjected to outside interference.

10) In a world of rapid change, we must not become bogged down in stale formulas from the past as to how families should be constituted. (Cooke, 2006, p. 262)

Affirmation of Humanism for Kids

1) Be the best person you can be.

2) Hurting people is wrong, and helping people is good.

3) Be nice and fair to everyone, including people who are different from you.

4) Be kind and careful with animals.

5) Take care of the Earth.

6) The arts are important for sharing how we feel and for developing talents

7) Get all the facts. Test claims against reality, and don't jump to conclusions.

8) Science is the best way to find out about stuff and it makes our world better.

9) Everything that exists follows natural laws and is not magical. (Cooke, 2006, p. 22)

Selected Bibliography

Note that since many of the following children's books are written in story form there is no fiction section for those under 13 years of age.

Children/Family: Film

Animal Farm (1955) 🐷 (see below: [Orwell](#) [1945] under *Young Adult: Ages 13+: Fiction*)

An adaptation of the George Orwell classic. Although offering a happier less ironic ending than the novel, this animated version is still worth a view.

Halas, J., Batchelor, J., & de Rochemont, L. (Producers), & Halas, J. & Batchelor, J. (Directors). (1955). *Animal farm* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom: Associated British Picture Corporation.

Bill Nye, the Science Guy (1993-1998) **#1**

A show designed to get kids interested in science!

Nye, B., McKenna, J., & Gottlieb, E. (Creators). (1993-1998). *Bill Nye, the science guy* [Television series]. United States: PBS.

Dumbo (1941)

A charming tale about the intrinsic ability of individuals and the nonsense of the crutch that is superstition.

Disney, W. (Producer), & Sharpsteen, B. (Director). (1941). *Dumbo* [Motion Picture]. United States: RKO Radio Pictures.

The Golden Compass (2007) ➔ (see below: [Pulman](#) [1995-2000] under *Young Adult: Ages 13+: Fiction*)

This is the first installment of what was to be a series adapting the books. It is a shame that the sequels were never made.

Carraro, B. & Forte, D. (Producers), & Weitz, C. (Director). (2007). *The golden compass* [Motion Picture]. United States: New Line Cinema.

Happy Feet (2006) ✓

A surprisingly fun and charming animated musical about a young penguin's search for self-expression. Rejects dogma and

conformity.

Miller, G., Miller, B., & Mitchell, D. (Producers), & Miller, G. (Director). (2006). *Happy feet* [Motion Picture]. United States: Warner Brothers.

Just So Darwin (2009)

An animated series about animals told from an evolutionary perspective.

Neil, B. (Producer). (2009). *Just so Darwin* [Television]. United Kingdom: CBBC.

The Little Mermaid (1989)

On the surface a tale about growing up and finding one's own path, underneath is a fairly sophisticated retelling of the biblical story of the garden of eden representing the "fall" as a positive and necessary event.

Musker, J. (Producer), & Musker, J. & Clements, R. (Directors). (1989). *The little mermaid* [Motion Picture]. United States: Buena Vista.

The Wizard of Oz (1939) ✓ ➡ (see below: [Baum](#) [1900] under *Young Adult: Ages 13+: Fiction*)

Almost certainly intended as an allegory for class interaction (Scarecrow = farmers, Tinman = factory workers, Cowardly Lion = William Jennings Bryan (ironically for our purposes) and the Wizard of Oz = business owners) but I think the Wizard can be seen as part of the veil of religious illusion as well. In any case, the Yellow Brick Road is a perfect metaphor for personal growth and the path towards truth.

LeRoy, M. (Producer), & Fleming, V. (Director). (1939). *The Wizard of Oz* [Motion Picture]. United States: MGM.

Children/Family: Music

Chapin, Tom. (2005). Questions. On *Some assembly required* [CD]. New York, NY: Razor & Tie.

A fun song about asking questions.

Reynolds, Malvina. (2005). Little boxes. On *Weeds: music from the original series* . Salem, MA: Rykodisc Records.

A great little ditty about the dullness of conformity.

They Might Be Giants. (2009). *Here comes science* [CD]. Burbank, CA: Walt Disney.

Here is a great band who sings about science in a way children can connect with.

Parents & Teachers

Brisk, Marion. (1997). *50 simple things you can do to raise a child who loves science & nature* . New York, NY: Macmillan.

Calkins, Lucy. (1998). *Raising lifelong learners: A parent's guide* . New York, NY: Da Capo.

Curley, Sean. (2007). *Humanism for parents: Parenting without religion* . Lulu.com.

Fay, Martha. (1993). *Do children need religion?: How parents today are thinking about the big questions* . New York, NY: Pantheon.

- A thoughtful discussion of this central question with many comments from parents of all walks of life. The author focuses particular attention on the views of non-believers, as this is her perspective as well.

Gordon, Sol & Gordon, Judith. (1992). *Better safe than sorry book: A family guide for sexual assault prevention* (V. Cohen, Illust.). Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.

Heimlich, Janet. (2011). *Breaking their will: Shedding light on religious child maltreatment* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Hooks, Bell. (2010). *Teaching critical thinking: Practical wisdom* . New York, NY: Routledge.

McGowan, Dale. (Ed.). (2007). *Parenting beyond belief: On raising ethical, caring kids without religion* . New York, NY: AMACOM. ●

✓ #1

McGowan's two books should be considered companions with this one as a philosophical collection of essays from a wide variety of contributors .

McGowan, Dale. (Ed.). (2009). *Raising freethinkers: A practical guide for parenting beyond belief* . New York, NY: AMACOM. ● ✓

#2

A “meat and potatoes” or practical application guide of secular parenting. The book includes over 100 activities to engage with your child in order to help them become skilled and informed freethinkers.

Meighan, Roland. (1995). *The freethinkers' pocket directory to the educational universe* . Bramcote, United Kingdom: Educational Heretics Press.

Narisetti, Innaiah. (2008). *Forced into faith: How religion abuses children's rights* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. ●

A concise work that clearly argues that religion violates the basic human rights of children as laid out by the United Nations. Also outlines why and how the U.N. and other governmental bodies need to address child abuse by directly confronting religion as a root cause.

Paul, Richard. (1993). *Critical thinking: How to prepare students for a rapidly changing world* . Santa Rosa, CA: Foundation for Critical Thinking. ●

Stewart, Katherine. (2012). *The good news club: The Christian right's stealth assault on America's children* . New York, NY: PublicAffairs. #3

Zahler, Kathy. (1997). *50 simple things you can do to raise a child who loves to read* . New York, NY: Arco.

Children: Ages 0-12: General

Apple, Margot. (1999). *Brave Martha* . Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin. (ages 4-8)

A young girl bravely confronts her fears of the unknown and discovers the truth through direct observation.

Allosso, Steph & Allosso, Dan. (2007). *Onion breath* . Minneapolis, MN: Stay Outside the Box Publishing. (ages 4-8)

A cute story about an atheist family and trying new things .

Barton, Judy. (1998). *Little feelings* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. (ages 3-8)

Helps children understand emotions and self-expression.

Bennett, Helen. (2005). *Humanism, what's that?: A book for curious kids* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. (ages 10+)

Cole, Babette. (2000). *Mummy laid an egg! Or where do babies come from!* . New York, NY: Red Fox. (ages 4-8)

Gordon, Sol. (1991). *Girls are girls, & boys are boys: So what's the difference?* Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books. (ages 6-10)

Gordon, Sol. (2000). *All families are different* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. (Ages 4-8)

A book with a strong humanist message about how and why there are many different types of families and why they are ok.

Hardesty, Michael. (2011). *Who made the sun, mommy?* (K. Kerber, Illust.). AuthorHouse. (ages 3-8)

Harris, Robie. (2004). *It's so amazing!: A book about eggs, sperm, birth, babies, & families* (M. Emberley, Illust.). Somberville, MA: Candlewick. (ages 9-12)

Rothman, Juliet. (2001). *A birthday present for Daniel: A child's story of loss* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. (ages 9-12)

Romain, Trevor. (1999). *What on earth do you do when someone dies?* Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit. (ages 4-8)

Schoen, Mark. (2008). *Bellybuttons are navels* (M. Quay, Illust.). Charleston, SC: BookSurge Publishing. (ages 3-6)

An engaging lesson on the physical similarities and differences between the genders.

Children: Ages 0-12: Critical Thinking

Andersen, Hans. (1837). The emperor's new clothes. In *Fairy Tales Told for Children*. Denmark: C.A. Reitzel. (ages 3-10) ● ✓

Dale McGowan (2009) briefly summarized the merits of the story :

In a few short pages, the story satirizes vanity, power, conformity, self-doubt, and human gullibility while praising evidence, courage, and honest dissent. If you can find a tale that more neatly captures the values of freethought, I'll eat my miter. (p. 9)

Barker, Dan. (2002). *Just pretend: A freethought book for children*. Madison, WI: Freedom from Religion Foundation. (ages 9-12)

Barker, Dan. (1990). *Maybe yes, maybe no: A guide for young skeptics* (B. Strassburg, Illust.). Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books. (ages 9-12)

Describes the traits of a good skeptic and the basic processes of science. Barker (1990) rightly assesses that parents cannot always be there to help children distinguish the true from the false, to be a good skeptic, so

Children need to be taught to develop their own minds at an early age so that a foundation of self-confidence and self-reliance grows with them as they mature. Allowing children to be curious, teaching them to ask questions, and motivating them to figure things out for themselves will enable them to thrive in all areas of life. (p. 7)

Barker, Dan. (1992). *Maybe right, maybe wrong: A guide for young thinkers* (B. Strassburg, Illust.). Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.

(ages 9-12)

Outlines humanistic principles as a hierarchy of values in moral decision making through a variety of examples. Also, describes the difference between commands and principles. Demonstrates why commands must have reasons in order to be judged as either good or bad, sound or unnecessary. Ultimately, a person must think and not simply think “definitely right, definitely wrong.”

Clayton, John. (1998). *Alexander Fox & the amazing mind reader* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. (ages 8-12)

Galens, Judy & Pear, Nancy. (2002). *The handy answer book for kids (& parents)* . Canton, MI: Visible Ink. (ages 8-12)

Humphrey, Sandra. (1995). *If you had to choose, what would you do?* (B. Strassburg, Illust.). Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. (ages 4-8)

Twenty-five open-ended “problem situations” are used to highlight various moral and/or ethical dilemmas. The author emphasizes the process of coming to a good decision based on the values of the individual while helping to minimize the role of peer or authority pressure. Each situation is followed by a few questions to help facilitate dialogue between individuals about what to do.

Humphrey, Sandra. (1998). *It's up to you...what do you do?* Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. (ages 8-12)

Muth, Jon. (2003). *Stone soup* . New York, NY: Scholastic Press. (ages 4-8)

Based on an old European folk tale about hungry travelers convincing the locals to make a soup from stones. Skepticism and cooperation are major themes.

Nickell, Joe. (1991). *Wonder-workers!: How they perform the impossible* . Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books. (ages 8-12)

Nickell, Joe. (1989). *The magic detectives: Join them in solving strange mysteries* . Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books. (ages 8-12)

Phillips, Christopher. (2004). *The philosopher's club* (K. Doner, Illust.). New York, NY: Tricycle Press. (ages 8-12)

Teaches the Socratic method.

Swanson, Diane. (2009). *Nibbling on Einstein's brain: The good, the bad, & the bogus in science* (F. Blake, Illust.). Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Annick Press. (ages 8-12)

Waters, Virginia. (1980). *Rational stories for children* . New York, NY: Institute for Rational Emotive Therapy. (ages 4-8)

Yule, Tim. (2000). *Sasquatches from outer space: Exploring the weirdest mysteries ever* (K. Baxter, Illust.). Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. (ages 8-12)

Children: Ages 0-12: Science

Ardley, Neil. (2006). *101 great science experiments* . New York, NY: DK Children. (ages 10+)

DeCristofano, Carolyn. (2005). *Big bang! The tongue-tickling tale of a speck that became spectacular* (M. Carroll, Illust.). Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge. (ages 8-12)

DK Children. (2010). *Children's illustrated encyclopedia* . New York, NY: DK Children. (ages 8-12)

Floca, Brain. (2009). *Moonshot: The flight of Apollo 11* . New York, NY: Atheneum Books. (ages 4-8)

Gamlin, Linda. (2009). *Evolution* . New York, NY: DK Children. (ages 8-12)

Gordon, Sol & Gordon, Judith. (1992). *Did the sun shine before you were born?* Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books. (ages 4-8)

Green, Dan. & Basher, S. (2008). *Biology: Life as we know it!* (S. Basher, Illust.). New York, NY: Kingfisher Books. (ages 8-12)

Haught, James. (1991). *Science in a nanosecond: Illustrated answers to 100 basic science questions* . Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books. (ages 8-12)

Henderson, Douglas. (1999). *Dinosaur tree* . New York, NY: Aladdin. (ages 8-12)

Hoberman, Mary & Winston, Linda. (2009). *The tree that time built: A celebration of nature, science, & Imagination* (B. Fortin,

- Illust.). Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks Jabberwocky. (ages 8-12)
- Jackson, Ellen. (1997). *The winter solstice*. Minneapolis, MN: Millbrook Press. (ages 4-8)
- Jackson, Ellen. (2003). *The autumn equinox: Celebration the harvest* (J. Ellis, Illust.). Minneapolis, MN: Millbrook Press. (ages 4-8)
- Jackson, Ellen. (2003). *The spring equinox: Celebration the greening of the earth* (J. Ellis, Illust.). Minneapolis, MN: Millbrook Press. (ages 4-8)
- Jackson, Ellen. (2003). *The summer solstice* (J. Ellis, Illust.). Minneapolis, MN: Millbrook Press. (ages 4-8)
- Jackson, Ellen. (2004). *The tree of life: The wonders of evolution*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. (ages 4-8)
- Lawson, Kristan. (2003). *Darwin & evolution for kids: His life & ideas with 21 activities*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press. (ages 8-12)
- Martin, Theresa. (2002). *Flat earth? round earth?* Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. (ages 4-8)
- Morgan, Jennifer. (2002). *Born with a bang: The universe tells our cosmic story* (D. Andersen, Illust.). Nevada City, CA: Dawn Books. (ages 4-8)

This is the first in a trilogy (the rest below) of books that tell the story of existence from the birth of the universe, creation of earth, to the evolution of life.

- Morgan, Jennifer. (2003). *From lava to life: The universe tells our earth's story* (D. Andersen, Illust.). Nevada City, CA: Dawn Books. (ages 4-8)
- Morgan, Jennifer. (2006). *Mammals who morph: The universe tells our evolution story* (D. Andersen, Illust.). Nevada City, CA: Dawn Books. (ages 4-8)
- Peters, Lisa. (2003). *Our family tree: An evolution story* (L. Stringer, Illust.). New York, NY: Harcourt. (ages 4-8)
- Robinson, Tom. (2001). *The everything kids' science experiments book: Boil ice, float water, measure gravity-challenge the world around you!* Avon, MA: Adams Media Corporation. (ages 8-12)

Ryan, Pam. (1997). *A pinky is a baby mouse & other baby animal names* . New York, NY: Hyperion. (ages 4-8)

100 animals and their offspring are beautifully and informatively alphabetically explored.

Spangler, Steve. (2010). *Naked eggs & flying potatoes: Unforgettable experiments that make science fun* . Austin, TX: Greenleaf Book Group Press. (ages 8-12)

Thimmesh, Catherine. (2006). *Team Moon: How 400,000 people landed Apollo 11 on the Moon* . New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company. (ages 8-12)

Matsen, Bradford & Troll, Ray. (1995). *Planet ocean: A story of life, the sea, & dancing to the fossil record* . Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press . (ages 8-12)

VanCleave, Janice. (2000). *Janice VanCleave's science around the year* . New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons. (ages 4-8)

Children: Ages 0-12: Religion

Bedrick, Peter. (2000). *The Peter Bedrick young people's encyclopedia: Religions of the world* . Peter Bedrick. (ages 8-12)

Brockman, Chris. (1989). *What about gods?* (2nd ed.). Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books. (ages 8-12)

Chodzin, Sherab & Kohn, Alexandra. (1997). *The wisdom of the crows & other Buddhist tales* (M. Cameron, Illust.). Hong Kong, China: Tricycle Press. (ages 4-8)

Dant, Jennifer. (2006). *Unitarian Universalism is a really long name* (A. Carter, Illust.). Boston, MA: Skinner House Books. (ages 8-12)

Dasi, Visakha. (1996). *Our most dear friend: An illustrated Bhagavad-gita for children* . India. (ages 8-12)

Fahs, Sophia & Cobb, Alice. (1992). *Old tales for a new day* (G. Stair, Illust.). Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books. (ages 8-12)

Gellman, Marc. (1989). *Does God have a big toe?: Stories about stories in the Bible* (O. de Mejo, Illust.) New York, NY: HarperCollins. (ages 8-12)

- Glossop, Jennifer. (2003). *The kids book of world religions* (J. Mantha, Illust.). Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Kids Can Press. (ages 8-12)
- Gunney, Lynn. (2007). *Meet Jesus: The life & lessons of a beloved teacher* (J. Conteh-Morgan, Illust.). Boston, MA: Skinner Publishing. (ages 8-12)
- Miller, Gail & Eagle, Rosalind. (2010). *Why don't we go to church* (A. Seear, Illust.). Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada: Art Bookbindery. (ages 4-8)
- O'Hair, Madalyn. (1978). *Atheist primer: Did you know all the gods came from the same place?* Austin, TX: American Atheist Press. (ages 8-12)
- Osborne, Mary. (1996). *One world, many religions: The ways we worship* . New York, NY: Random House. (ages 8-12)
- Philip, Neil. (2007). *Illustrated book of myths* (N. Mistry, Illust.). New York, NY: DK Children. (ages 8-12)

Young Adult: Ages 13+: General

- Donovan, Paul. (2007). *Happily godless: A young adult's guide to atheism* . Frederick, MD: PublishAmerica.
- Hitchcock, S.C. (2009). *Disbelief 101: A young person's guide to atheism* . Tucson, AZ: See Sharp Press.
- Shaha, Alom. (2012). *The young atheist's handbook* . Biteback Publishing.

Young Adult: Ages 13+: Critical Thinking

- Hitchens, Christopher. (2001). *Letters to a young contrarian* . New York, NY: Basic Books. **#1**

Written as a series of letters to students in which he promotes dissent as an essential moral act.

- Ruchlis, Hy. (1991). *How do you know it's true?: Discovering the difference between science & superstition* . Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Schick, Theodore & Vaughn, Lewis. (2010). *How to think about weird things: Critical thinking for a new age* . Columbus, OH:

The McGraw-Hill Companies.
Gula, Robert. (2002). *Nonsense: A handbook of logical fallacies* .
Axios Press.

Young Adult: Ages 13+: Science

Beres, Samantha. (1998). *101 things every kid should know about science* (A. Friedman, Illust.). Los Angeles, CA: Lowell House.
Dawkins, Richard. (2011). *The magic of reality: How we know what's really true* . New York, NY: The Free Press. **#1**
Karnes, Frances & Stephens, Kristen. (2002). *Young women of achievement: A resource for girls in science, math, & technology* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Young Adult: Ages 13+: Fiction

Baum, Frank. (1900). *The wonderful wizard of Oz* . Chicago, IL: George M. Hill Company. (ages 8+) ✓ (see : *Education & Parenting: Children/Family: Film*)
Haddon, Mark. (2004). *Curious incident of the dog in the nighttime*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
Hautman, Pete. (2005). *Godless* . New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.
Heinlein, Robert. (1963). *Orphans of the sky* . London, United Kingdom: Gollancz.

About the inhabitants of a “generational ship” who are ignorant of their situation or the nature of the ship. The routine of maintaining the vessel have, over the course of generations, been turned into a religion. However, one curious young man is eager to find the truth.

Orwell, George. (1945). *Animal farm: A fairy story* . London, United Kingdom: Secker & Warburg. ✓ (see : *Education & Parenting: Children/Family: Film*)

An anti-Stalinist allegory of the Soviet Union.

Pullman, Philip. (1995-2000). *His dark materials* (Vols. 1-3). New York: Scholastic. (Only the first book of the series, [The Golden Compass](#) (2007) has been adapted to film which can be found above under *Children/Family: Film*) **#1**

Pratchett, Terry. (1983-2011). *Discworld* (Vols. 1-39).

At a whopping 39 books, this series is comic fantasy aimed at young-adults.

Pratchett, Terry. (1989-1990). *The nome trilogy* (Vols. 1-3). New York, NY: HarperCollins Children's Books.

Taylor, Stuart. (2012). *Tales from Pareidolia* . London, United Kingdom: Chain Bear Publishing.

A great collection of original fairy tales “born from the wonder of skepticism and science.” The stories affirm independent critical thinking, equality, and decry superstition, bigotry.

Additional Resources

For more educational tools the reader may also want to consult the section: *A Brief History of Freethought: Additional Resources: Libraries & [E-Libraries](#)* .

Parents & Teachers

“All children are atheists— they have no idea of God” (d’Holbach, 2007, p. 26).

-Paul-Henri Thiry, Baron d’Holbach (1723-1789)

Atheist Parent

atheist-parent.blogspot.com

Atheist Parents.org

Contains a forum, common questions, book reviews, interviews, and more .

atheistparents.org

Atheist Questions & Answers: For Parents & Children

questioner.www2.50megs.com

British Humanist Association Resources for Parents & Teachers

humanism.org.uk/education/parents

humanism.org.uk/education/teachers

Charlie's Playhouse: Evolution for Kids

Offers toys and games that help children learn about evolution.

charliesplayhouse.com

Children's Healthcare Is a Legal Duty (CHILD), Inc

“A membership organization founded in 1983 to protect children from harmful religious and cultural practices, especially religion-based medical neglect.”

Box 2604

Sioux City, IA 51106

Phone: 1.712.948.3500

Email: admin@childrenshealthcare.org

childrenshealthcare.org

The Continuum of Humanist Education

humanisteducation.com

Humanism for Schools

humanismforschools.org.uk

Humanistic Parenting: Helping to Raise the Next Generation of Ethical, Compassionate & Responsible Adults

humanisticparenting.info

Kids Without God: You're Not the Only One ✓

Run by the American Humanist Association, this site is great for kids, teens, and parents. It is a great place to connect, learn, and ask questions.

kidswithoutgod.com

Kochhar Humanist Education Center

americanhumanist.org/What_We_Do/Education_Center

National Science Teachers Association: Outstanding Science Trade Books for Students K-12

“The largest organization in the world committed to promoting excellence and innovation in science teaching and learning for all.”

This organization puts out a list of their favorite science books for young readers.

nsta.org

Open Culture: The Best Free Cultural & Educational Media on the Web

Highly recommended simply for links to over 450 online courses. Also a great source for free audio books, textbooks, language lessons, and ebooks. Has a variety of free films as well.

openculture.com

Parenting Beyond Belief: On Raising Ethical, Caring Kids Without Religion

parentingbeyondbelief.com

Parenting Science: Evidence-Based Information for the Thinking Parent

Contains Dale McGowan's blog "The Meming of Life: On Secular Parenting and Other Natural Wonders."

parentingscience.com

Religious Child Maltreatment: Religion Can Bring Children Great Comfort. It Can Also Turn Their Lives Into a Living Hell.

religionschildmaltreatment.com

Religious Tolerance: Section on Children's Books

religioustolerance.org/reledchil.htm

Secular Homeschool

atheistview.com/secular_homeschool.htm

The Secular Homeschool Community

secularhomeschool.com

The Secular Parent: Parenting for the 21st Century

theseccularparent.com

Teach Them Science: Science Education Matters

Has the stated goal of “furthering science education and encouraging discussion about science education.”

teachthemscience.org

Schools

Center for Inquiry

centerforinquiry.net/education

Coursera: Take the World’s Best Courses, Online, for Free

An exceptional effort by Stanford University Professors Andrew Ng and Daphne Koller to make education available to anyone who is willing and dedicated.

coursera.org

European Humanist Professionals: Association of Humanist Educators, Counsellors & Leader

humanistprofessionals.org

Hivos: Humanist Institute for Development Cooperation

P.O. Box 85565
2508 CG The Hague,
Netherlands

Phone: 31.0.70.376 5500

Fax: 31.0.70.362.46.00

E-mail: info@hivos.nl

hivos.nl

The Humanist Institute: We Explore Humanist Values & Train Future Leaders

humanistinstitute.org

International Humanist & Ethical Youth Organisation

iheyo.org

Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society & Culture: Trinity College

Trinity College
300 Summit St.
Hartford, CT 06106

Phone: 1.860.297.2381

Fax: 1.860.297.5125

Email: issc@trincoll.edu

trincoll.edu/Academics/centers/issc/Pages/default.aspx

New College of the Humanities

27 Old Gloucester St.
London, UK WC1N 3AX

Phone: 0800.955.0212
Email: info@nchum.org

nchum.org

University of Humanism (Universiteit Voor Humanistiek)

Postbus 797
3500 AT Utrecht,
Netherlands

Phone: 030.239.01.00
Fax: 030.234.07.38
Email: info@uvh.nl

uvh.nl

Students

Atheism Central for Secondary Schools: Help & General Support for Atheists Students Attending Religious Studies Courses in Secondary Schools in the United Kingdom

eclipse.co.uk/thoughts

Atheist, Agnostic, & Freethinker Scholarships

collegescholarships.org/scholarships/atheist.htm

Skeptic's Dictionary for Kids #1

sd4kids.skepdic.com

Student Organizations

Secular Student Alliance: Mobilizing Students for a New Enlightenment

PO Box 2371
Columbus, OH 43216

Phone: 1.614.441.9588
Fax: 1.877.842.9474
Email: ssa@secularstudents.org

For over 140 affiliates visit:

secularstudents.org

Center for Inquiry on Campus

Dozens of affiliates in the US and Canada:

centerforinquiry.net/oncampus

Summer Camps

Camp Inquiry

Phone: 1.716.636.4869 ext. 408
Email: isponeybarger@atlanticbb.net

campinquiry.org

Camp Quest: Summer Camp Beyond Belief

PO Box 2552

Columbus, OH 43216

Phone: 1.614.441.9534

campquest.org

Scouting for All: Committed to Scouting, Open to Diversity

scoutingforall.org

SCIENCE RESOURCES



“Evolution”

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“The aim of science is not to open the door to infinite wisdom, but to set a limit to everlasting error” (Brecht, 2008, p. 171).

-Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), playwright

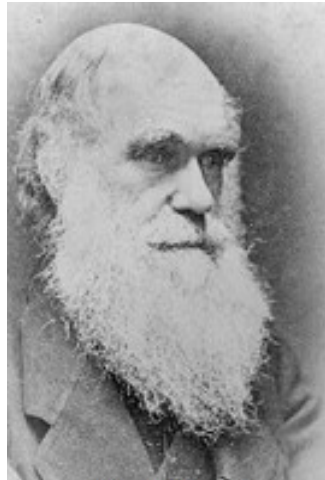
Science is the most powerful and reliable tool humanity wields for illuminating what *is* about our world. The primary success of science is that it has offered innumerable naturalistic alternatives to speculative philosophy. These more plausible explanations are the theories, which can be proved through evidence and replicable testing. The scientific method is the most reliable tool for describing what *is* while moral contemplation advises what *ought* to be in the application of knowledge. The two are interwoven in what is called wisdom. Through this coupling we can effectively decide how to solve the pressing issues of our time. Only when we understand reality, as it is and not what we wish it to be, can we begin to create a world compatible with our highest values and ideals.

Furthermore, the grandeur of known reality is more vast, strange, and interesting than any mythological concept. Physicist Richard Feynman (1998) found that :

The imagination of nature is far, far greater than the imagination of man... If you look closely enough at anything, you will see that there is nothing more exciting than the truth... No matter what you look at, if you look closely enough, you are involved in the entire universe. (pp. 10, 12, 13)

No doubt, science has revealed some unsettling things about our universe and ourselves. Nevertheless, we should not bury our head in the sand if scientific findings prove to be unpleasant because:

Even if the open windows of science at first make us shiver after the cozy indoor warmth of traditional humanizing myths, in the end the fresh air brings vigor, and the great spaces have a splendor of their own. (Russell, 1925, p. 13)



"Charles Darwin"
From Library of Congress Collection

There is a dignity, beauty, and exhilaration in pursuing truths, which can be used to help rather than stultify the physical and psychological well-being of humanity and the planet.

While I do not agree with Stephen J. Gould's notion of "non-overlapping magisteria," the idea that science and religion occupy separate realms of human experience, we should not disregard the unique role religion can play in understanding our psychological nature, in much the same way the works of Shakespeare or philosophy are potentially informative. All reality is overlapping. However, a matter of degree rather than kind exists between the ranges of experience, and it is disingenuous, condescending, and

intellectually crippling to say that science may not encroach on religion.

Science shirks at nothing, however disturbing or limited, and accepts the unknown as yet another tantalizing residence of discovery. In the realm of psychological understanding and moral contemplation religious mythology can and should play a role. We must be clear, however, to what each form of understanding is contextually appropriate, while recognizing reality is a cohesive interwoven whole with no domain entirely the pervue of a specific way of thinking.

I hope you find the following resources helpful in educating yourself and others about the usefulness and necessity of scientific inquiry.

Selected Bibliography

Below is a list of popular science books. I have given more weight to freethought authors. This may seem odd and redundant since scientists tend to be a freethinking lot, perhaps by definition. I have also excluded certain scientific books on topics, which are not particularly controversial outside the scientific community (e.g. chemistry). It appears humans are primarily contentious about their origins and location in the cosmos.

General

Bryson, Bill. (2003). *A short history of nearly everything* . New York, NY: Broadway Books. 

As the title suggests, this is a brief, very clear, and surprisingly informative stroll through the history of our universe and how we mere humans have come to understand much of it.

Cohen, Bernard. (1995). *Science & the founding fathers: Science in the political thought of Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, & James Madison* . Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Dawkins, Richard. (1998). *Unweaving the rainbow: Science, delusion, & the appetite for wonder* . New York, NY: Houghton

Mifflin Company. • **#1**

Makes a compelling, and to many a scientist and freethinker an obvious, case that understanding nature adds rather than subtracts from the beauty of experience .

Dawkins, Richard. (2003). *A devil's chaplain: Reflections on hope, lies, science, & love* . Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

A collection of essays on pseudoscience, religion, memetics, and Stephen J. Gould, among others.

Edis, Taner. (2008). *Science & nonbelief* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

The perhaps obvious link between scientific understanding and nonbelief is explored.

Feynman, Richard. (1998). *The meaning of it all: Thoughts of a citizen-scientist* . New York, NY: Perseus Books. **#5**

The physicist shares his views on religion, science, politics, their relevance, relations, and more.

Gamow, George. (1947). *One, two, three... infinity: Facts & speculations of science* . Toronto, Ontario, Canada: General Publishing Company. ✓

Gould, Stephen. (1999). *Rocks of ages: Science & religion in the fullness of life* . New York, NY: Ballantine.

This is where Stephen Gould outlines his “non-overlapping magisteria” (NOMA) idea that science and religion occupy separate realms of human experience and knowledge. The thesis is compelling only if religion is taken in its most liberal and metaphorical form.

Kuhn, Thomas. (1962). *The structure of scientific revolutions* . Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. ✓

Perlman, James. (1995). *Science without limits: Toward a theory of interaction between nature & knowledge* . Amherst, NY:

Prometheus Books.

Popper, Karl. (1935). *Logic of scientific discovery* . Vienna, Austria: Verlag von Julius Springer. ✓ **#4**

Roach, Mary & Folger, Tim. (Eds.). (2011). *The best American science & nature writing 2011* . Manner Books.

An annual series of books which are edited selections of science articles primarily geared toward the general public.

Stenger, Victor. (2012). *God & the folly of faith: The incompatibility of science & religion* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. **#3**

Strahler, Arthur. (1992) *Understanding science: An introduction to concepts & issues* . Buffalo, NY: Prometheus. ●

Trefil, James. (1993). *1001 things everyone should know about science* . New York, NY: Doubleday. ●

Tyson, Neil. (2007). *Death by black hole: & other cosmic quandaries* . New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Wilson, E.O. (1999). *Consilience: The unity of knowledge* . New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf. ● ✓ **#2**

Wilson makes the case that nothing is beyond the purview of science, nothing.

Wolpert, L. (2000). *The unnatural nature of science: Why science does not make (common) sense* . Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. ●

Astronomy & Physics

Consolmagno, Guy & Davis, Dan. (2000). *Turn left at Orion: A hundred night sky objects to see in a small telescope & how to find them* (K. Sepp, A. Drogin, & M. Skirvin, Illusts.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Einstein, Albert. (1920). *Relativity: The special & general theory* (R. Lawson, Trans.). New York, NY: Henry Holt & Company. (Original work published 1916) ✓

Feynman, Richard. (1963). *The Feynman lectures on physics* . Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley. ✓

Green, Brian. (1999). *The elegant universe: Superstrings, hidden dimensions, & the quest for the ultimate theory* . London, United Kingdom: Jonathan Cape.

Hawking, Stephen. (1988). *A brief history of time* . New York, NY: Bantam Books. ✓ 📖 **#1** ([see](#))

A modern classic of popular science from one of today's greatest minds .

Hawking, Stephen. (2001). *The Universe in a nutshell* . New York, NY: Bantam Books. **#5**

Hawking, Stephen & Mlodinow, Leonard. (2010). *The grand design* . New York, NY: Bantam Books.

An explanation of why the universe needed no designer to come into existence and other deep questions in an easily accessible format.

Krauss, Lawrence. (2012). *A universe from nothing: Why there is something rather than nothing* . New York, NY: The Free Press.

🟢 + 🔄 ✨ **#3**

New evidence is employed in a clear and often witty way to explain how science is discovering how our universe came to be and how it might end. Krauss writes: "Forget Jesus, the stars died so you could be born." Solar cults might have been on to something!

Rees, Martin. (1999). *Just six numbers: The deep forces that shape the universe* . New York, NY: Basic Books.

Sagan, Carl. (1973). *The cosmic connection: An extraterrestrial perspective* . Garden City, NY: Anchor Press. ✓

Sagan, Carl. (1985). *Cosmos* . New York, NY: Ballantine Books. 🟢 📖 ✓ **#2** ([see](#))

The best-selling science book ever lead to the equally provocative, beautiful, and popular documentary series by the same name.

Sagan, Carl. (1994). *Pale blue dot: A vision of the human future in space* . New York, NY: Random House Publishing.

The sequel to *Cosmos* (1985) delves into humanity's baby steps into space and how we may come to settle beyond earth as means of survival. The recent cancellation of NASA's shuttle program places Sagan's call to exploration at a cross-roads of how our society values the pioneering spirit.

Sagan, Carl. (1998). *Billions & billions: Thoughts on life & death at the brink of the millennium* . New York, NY: Ballantine Books.

#4

Sobel, Dava. (2005). *The planets* . London, United Kingdom: Penguin Books.

Stenger, Victor. (2011). *The fallacy of fine-tuning: Why the universe is not designed for us* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Weinberg, Steven. (1977). *The first three minutes*. New York, NY: Basic Books. ✓

Biology, Psychology, & Anthropology

Buss, David. (Ed.). (2005). *The handbook of evolutionary psychology* . Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

A selection of excellent essays on a burgeoning and highly intriguing new scientific field.

Coyne, Jerry. (2010). *Why evolution is true* . New York, NY: Penguin Books. ● † ☺ ☹ ✨ ✓ **#1**

Crick, Francis. (1994). *The astonishing hypothesis: The scientific search for the soul*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

The co-discoverer of the structure of DNA, suggests that everything about you, from feelings, senses, and actions are due to the action of neurons inside your brain.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. (1996). *Creativity: Flow & the psychology of discovery & invention* . New York, NY: HarperCollins.

100 interviews with creative persons are just the tip of the iceberg on Mihaly's observation and explanation of the inspired mind.

Dawkins, Richard. (1976). *The selfish gene* . Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press. ✓ #3

Posits that we are vehicles for the survival and spread of genes.

Dawkins, Richard. (1986). *The blind watchmaker: Why the evidence of evolution reveals a universe without design* . New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company. ● ✓ ✎ (see)

Dawkins, Richard. (1997). *Climbing mount improbable* . New York, NY: W.W. Norton Company.

Dawkins, Richard. (2004). *The ancestor's tale: A pilgrimage to the dawn of evolution* . New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Dawkins, Richard. (2009). *The greatest show on earth: The evidence for evolution* . New York, NY: Free Press. #2

Dennett, Daniel.(1995). *Darwin's dangerous idea: Evolution & the meanings of life*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster. #4

Diamond, Jared. (1992). *The third chimpanzee: The evolution & future of the human animal* . New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Diamond, Jared. (1997). *Guns, germs, & steel: The fates of human societies* . New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company. ✓ ✎ (see)

Jared Diamond's thesis for why Eurasian societies have come to dominate the world through accidents of climate, geography, and biological circumstance, among others. Debunks long-held myths about cultural or racial superiority.

Diamond, Jared. (2005). *Collapse: How societies choose to fail or succeed* . New York, NY: Penguin Books. ✓

Gould, Stephen. (1990). *Wonderful life* . New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Huxley, Julian. (1992). *Evolutionary humanism* . Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.

Originally published as *Essays of a Humanist* (1964).

Lewis, Thomas. (1974). *The lives of a cell: Notes of a biology watcher* . New York, NY: Viking Press. ✓

Lovelock, James. (1979). *Gaia: A new look at life on Earth* . Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press. ✓

Mayr, Ernst. (1993). *One long argument: Charles Darwin & the genesis of modern evolutionary thought* . Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Mayr, Ernst. (2001). *What evolution is* . New York, NY: Basic Books.

• + ↻ ⌘ ✨ ✓

A wonderful introduction to evolutionary biology!

Pinker, Steven. (1997). *How the mind works* . New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Pinker, Steven. (2002). *The blank slate: The modern denial of human nature* . New York, NY: Penguin Books.

Pinker, Steven. (2011). *The better angels of our nature: Why violence has declined* . New York, NY: Viking Press. + ↻ ⌘ ✨ ✓ **#5**

Many people might be surprised by cognitive scientist Steven Pinker's thesis that we live in the most peaceful and safe time in human history by nearly every measurement. He also offers sound explanations for why this is so.

Ridley, Matt. (2000). *Genome: The autobiography of a species in 23 chapters* . New York, NY: Harper Perennial.

Schrodinger, Erwin. (1944). *What is life?* Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press. ✓

Shermer, Michael. (2006). *Why Darwin matters: The case against intelligent design* . New York, NY: Owl Books.

Sousa, Ronald. (2007). *Why think?: The evolution of the rational mind*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Swimme, Brian. (1998). *A walk through time from stardust to us: The evolution of life on earth* . New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.

Watson, James. (1968). *The double helix: A personal account of the discovery of the structure of DNA* (G. Stent, Ed.). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company. ✓

Watson, James. (2003). *DNA: The secret of life* . New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.

Wilson, David. (2002). *Darwin's cathedral: Evolution, religion, & the nature of society*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Wilson, E.O. (1971). *The insect societies* . Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wilson, E.O. (1975). *Sociobiology: The new synthesis* . Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Additional Resources

“Science is a way of trying not to fool yourself.”

-Richard Feynman (1918–1988), physicist

American Association for the Advancement of Science: Advancing Science, Serving Society

aaas.org

American Museum of Natural History

amnh.org

Big Picture Science

“A one-hour science program produced at the SETI Institute’s radio studio in Mountain View, California.”

radio.seti.org

Encyclopedia of Life

eol.org

Evolution of DNA

evolutionofdna.com

Howstuffworks

howstuffworks.com

James Randi Educational Foundation: An Educational Resource on the Paranormal, Pseudoscientific, & the Supernatural #1

randi.org

Khan Academy: Learn Almost Anything for Free # 3

A huge collection of educational videos.

khanacademy.org

Nature: The World's Best science & Medicine on Your Desktop

nature.com

National Aeronautics & Space Administration (NASA)

I especially loved the “Eyes on the Solar System” interactive 3d map where you can not only explore the solar system but hop a ride on a NASA mission.

nasa.gov

Non-Religion & Secularity Research Network

nsrn.co.uk

The Planetary Society: Making You a Part of the Next Age of Exploration

“The world’s largest space-interest group” dedicated to promoting science, space exploration, and the search for life.

planetary.org

Science Daily: Your Source for the Latest Research News #2

sciencedaily.com

The Science Network

Their mission “is to build an online science and society agora, or public square, dedicated to the discussion of issues at the intersection of science and social policy. By engaging a diverse community of concerned constituencies in conversation, on and offline through signature meetings, video programming, and in developing partnerships with public television stations, TSN is creating a scientific no-spin zone - a trusted destination free from the tyranny of the sound bite.”

thesciencenetwork.org

Scirus: For Scientific Information Only

An impressive search engine for scientific research.

scirus.com

Sense About Science: Equipping People to Make Sense of Science & Evidence •

I especially recommend the brief, clear, well informed, and absolutely free guides to important scientific concepts such as testing, statistics, weather and climate change, peer review, and more. They can be found on the site's "Publications" page.

senseaboutscience.org

Smithsonian

si.edu

Space

space.com

Tree of Life

wellcometreeoflife.org

RELIGION & PSEUDOSCIENCE RESOURCES

“We should have a great many fewer disputes in the world if words were taken for what they are, the signs of our ideas only, and not for things themselves” (Locke, 1979, p. 499).

-John Locke (1632-1704), philosopher

“God used to be the best explanation we'd got, and we've now got vastly better ones. God is no longer an explanation of anything, but has instead become something that would itself need an insurmountable amount of explaining” (Adams, 2002, p. 97).

-Douglas Adams (1952-2001), science fiction writer

I want to make clear my appreciation for religious philosophy as expressed in the metaphors of mythology. This respect is similar to that which I hold for other great works of fiction from Leo Tolstoy's epic masterpieces, to Mark Twain's critical satire. What I do not respect are literal interpretations and applications of mythology. I think as well that religious texts should be open to criticism and debate, just as with all humanly created works of art. Even if the *Koran* or *Bible* were divinely inspired, they should not be closed to questioning, re-interpretation, or even dismissal.

Myths are important for understanding human psychology. When viewed from a metaphorical perspective the myths of our ancestors are great commentaries on the exploration and discovery of the complexity of our situation, the awe inspiring power and beauty of our inner spaces. Furthermore, religious insight has the ability to bind humanity together into the family which science has verified we are. I share the following view of comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell (1973) speaking of the potential of mythology, as with all fantasy novels:

We have not even to risk the adventure alone; for the heroes of all time have gone before us; the labyrinth is thoroughly known; we have only to follow the thread of the hero-path. And where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god; where we had

thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves; where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the center of our own existence; where we had thought to be all alone, we shall be with all the world. (p. 25)

As freethinkers it is especially important that we understand the well-worn paths of our ancestors. Our goal should not be the destruction of religion but an expansion of wisdom beyond stultifying dogma and unproven truth claims. If we are to create a future, which includes a scientific cosmology and a healthy society, we must learn from religion those things that capture the human imagination and make life meaningful.

As noted above, I have distinguished between works that deal primarily with the philosophy of theism/atheism (e.g. arguments for or against the existence of the supernatural, the benefits of freethought, etc.) found in the *Introduction: The Necessity of Freethought* section and those that describe religion as cultural and psychological phenomenon (e.g. explanations for the existence of religion, religious history, etc.), which can be found below.

Selected Bibliography

Primary Religious Texts

(In order of proportion of world population)

Christianity – *The Bible*

Islam – *The Quran, Hadiths*

Hinduism – *Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita*

Buddhism – *Buddhavadana*

Taoism – *Daodejing* & Confucianism – *Sishu Wujing*

Shinto – *Kojiki, Nihon-gi*

Sikhism – *Guru Granth Sahib Ji*

Judaism – *Torah* (Old Testament), *Talmud* .

Religion: Analysis & History

Allen, Steve. (1990). *Steve Allen on the Bible, religion, & morality* . Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.

Comedian, first host of the “The Tonight Show,” and former Chairman of the Council for Secular Humanism gives his take on a number of subjects, chiefly criticizing those who take the *Bible* literally.

Armstrong, Karen. (1993). *A history of God: The 4,000-year quest of Judaism, Christianity, & Islam* . London, United Kingdom: William Heinemann Ltd. ● † © ✨ #4 ([see](#))

Asimov, Issac. (1981). *Asimov’s guide to the Bible: The Old & New Testaments* . New York, NY: Random House.

Atran, Scott. (2002). *In gods we trust: The evolutionary landscape of religion, evolution & cognition*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Boyer, Pascal. (2002). *Religion explained: The evolutionary origins of religious thought*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Brodie, Fawn. (1995). *No man knows my history: The life of Joseph Smith* . New York, NY: Vintage Books.

The story of the founder of Mormonism.

Bruce, Steve. (2002). *God Is Dead: Secularization in the West* . Oxford, United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Makes a compelling case that despite high levels of theistic belief, the attitude of modern Americans towards religion is largely that of disinterest or apathy. Americans are now freely choosing or not choosing religion because numerous factors have opened other options which were formerly controlled and dominated by religion.

Burr, William. (2007). *Self-contradictions of the Bible* . Charleston, SC: Forgotten Books. †

One hundred forty-four quotations help show how *The Bible* doesn’t even agree with itself.

Callahan, Tim. (2002). *Secret origins of the Bible* . Agawan, MA: Millennium Press.

Campbell, Joseph. (1973). *The hero with a thousand faces* . Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

As much a work of poetic prose as it is intriguing comparative mythology, Joseph Campbell suggests a common psychology which creates similar myths to express the human experience. This was the single most important book which galvanized my skepticism of, and ingrained a deep appreciation for, the mythic traditions of humanity.

Carrier, Richard. (2009). *Not the impossible faith* . Lulu.com.

Carroll, James. (2001). *Constantine's sword: The Church & the Jews, a history* . New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Davis, Mike. (2008). *The atheist's introduction to the New Testament: How the Bible undermines the basic teachings of Christianity* . Parker, CO: Outskirts Press.

Dawes, Gregory. (2009). *Theism & explanation* . New York, NY: Routledge.

Dawkins, Richard. (2006). *The god delusion* . New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin. ● ✓ **#1**

This is certainly the most famous of the “new atheist” tracts.

Dennett, Daniel. (2006). *Breaking the spell: Religion as a natural phenomenon* . New York, NY: Viking Press.

There needs to be more works like this. Religion has been far too neglected from an evolutionary perspective.

Duffy, Eamon. (2006). *Saints & sinners: A history of Popes* (3rd ed.). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Ehrman, Bart. (2005). *Lost Christianities: The battles for scripture & the faiths we never knew* . New York, NY: Oxford University Press. +

Ehrman, Bart. (2007). *Misquoting Jesus: The story behind who changed the Bible & why* . New York, NY: HarperCollins. ● + **#3**

- Ehrman, Bart. (2010). *Jesus, interrupted: Revealing the hidden contradictions in the Bible (and why we don't know about them)* . New York, NY: HarperCollins. † **#5**
- Ehrman, Bart. (2011). *Forged: Writing in the name of God—why the Bible's authors are not who we think they are* . New York, NY: HarperOne. †
- Ellerbe, Helen. (1995). *The dark side of Christian history* . Orlando, FL: Morningstar & Lark. †
- Finkelstein, Israel & Silberman, Neil. (2002). *The Bible unearthed: Archaeology's new vision of ancient Israel & the origin of its sacred texts*. New York, NY: Touchstone.
- Freeman, Charles. (2005). *The closing of the Western mind: The rise of faith & the fall of reason* . New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Freud, Sigmund. (1928). *The future of an illusion* (W. Robson-Scott, Trans.). London, United Kingdom: Hogarth Press. (Original work published 1927) ✓

Though much of Freud's psychology has been refuted, this visionary treatise on religion is still essential to anyone interested in the human mind. Here, Freud argues that belief in God is an attempt at reconnecting with parental figures.

- Friedman, Richard. (1997). *Who wrote the Bible?* New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Green, Ruth. (1979). *The born again skeptic's guide to the Bible* . Madison, WI: Freedom from Religion Foundation.
- Hastings, Sean & Rosenberg, Paul. (2007). *God wants you dead* . Chicago, IL: Vera Verba.
- Haught, James. (1999). *Holy horrors: An illustrated history of religious murder & madness* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Heimlich, Janet. (2011). *Breaking their will: Shedding light on religious child maltreatment* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Hitchens, Christopher. (2007). *God is not great: How religion poisons everything* . New York, NY: Hachette Book Group. **#2**
- Howlett, Duncan. (1984). *The critical way in religion* . Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.

Huxley, Aldous. (1952). *The devils of Loudon* . London, United Kingdom: Chatto & Windus. ♣ (see: [The Devils](#) [1971])

A warning to theists and humanists alike that ideologies of certainty and an eye too focused on utopian delusions of grander can lead to horrible results.

James, Craig. (2010). *The religion virus: Why we believe in God: An evolutionist explains religion's incredible hold on humanity* . John Hunt Publishing.

James, William. (1902). *The varieties of religious experience: A study in human nature*. London, United Kingdom: Longmans, Green, & Co.

Johnson, Paul. (1976). *A history of Christianity* . New York, NY: Simon & Schuster. ●

Kimball, Charles. (2008). *When religion becomes evil: Five warning signs* . New York, NY: HarperOne.

Kirkpatrick, Lee. (2005). *Attachment, evolution, & the psychology of religion*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Kirsch, Jonathan. (1997). *Harlot by the side of the road: Forbidden tales of the Bible* . New York, NY: Ballantine Books.

Kirsch, Jonathan. (2004). *God against gods: The history of the war between monotheism & polytheism* . New York, NY: Penguin Books. ● † ☺ ☹ ✨

Kirsch, Jonathan. (2006). *A history of the end of the world: How the most controversial book in the Bible changed the course of Western Civilization* . New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Examines the creation, history, and lasting influence of the *Book of Revelations* , the final apocalyptic chapter of *The Bible* .

Kirsch, Jonathan. (2009). *The Grand Inquisitor's manual: A history of terror in the name of God* . New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Krakauer, Jon. (2004). *Under the banner of heaven: A story of violent faith* . New York, NY: Anchor Books.

Lifton, Robert. (1961). *Thought reform & the psychology of totalism: A study of brainwashing in China* . New York, NY: W.W. Norton.

Mack, Burton. (1995). *Who wrote the New Testament?: The making of the Christian myth* . New York, NY: HarperCollins. ● †

Parenti, Michael. (2010). *God & his demons* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Rauch, Jonathan. (1995). *Kindly inquisitors: The new attacks on free thought* . Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Ray, Darrel. (2009). *The god virus: How religion infects our lives & culture* . Bonner Springs, KS: IPC Press. ●✓

In this easily accessible volume, the concept of the meme or “mental virus” is applied to the spread and endurance of irrational and often destructive religious ideas.

Ray, Darrel. (2012). *Sex & God: How religion distorts sexuality* . Bonner Springs, KS: IPC Press. ●✓

Dr. Ray argues that the views of many theists make them into liars and hypocrites through their unnatural and restrictive views of sex.

Rosen, Christine. (2004). *Preaching eugenics: Religious leaders & America eugenics movement* . New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Rowe, William. (2006). *Can God be free?* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Rue, Loyal. (2005). *Religion is not about God: How spiritual traditions nurture out biological nature and what to expect when they fail* . Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Schellenberg, J.L. (2005). *Prolegomena to a philosophy of religion* . Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Sharlet, Jeff. (2009). *The Family: The secret fundamentalism at the heart of American power* . New York, NY: Harper Perennial.

A disturbing look at the small group of fundamentalist Washington power brokers and legislators who adhere to the Prosperity Gospel which preaches that wealth and influence are blessings bestowed by God. This is a look at the ultimate expression of that particular American Christianity that has embraced immoral and destructive capitalism.

- Smith, Ken. (1995). *Ken's guide to The Bible* . New York, NY: Blast Books.
- Smith, Mark. (2002). *The early history of God: Yahweh & the other deities in ancient Israel* . Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Stevens, Anthony & Price, John. (2000). *Prophets, cults, & madness*. London, United Kingdom: Duckworth. ✓
- Wade, Nicholas. (2009). *The faith instinct: How religion evolved & why it endures* . New York, NY: Penguin Books.
- Ward, Keith. (1996). *God, chance, & necessity*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oneworld.
- Warrag, Ibn. (1998). *The origins of the Koran* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. †
- Warrag, Ibn. (2000). *The quest for the historical Muhammad* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Warrag, Ibn. (2002). *What the Koran really says* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. †
- Wells, George. (1988). *The historical evidence for Jesus* . Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books. †
- Wright, Robert. (2009). *The evolution of God* . New York, NY: Little, Brown, & Company.
- Zernov, Nicolas. (1961). *Eastern Christendom: A study of the origin & development of the Eastern Orthodox Church* . New York, NY: G.P. Putman's Sons.

Skepticism & Counter-Apologetics

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An anthology of numerous arguments from modern luminaries such as Sigmund Freud, John Dewey, Bertrand Russell, and many others.

- Barnet, Sylvan & Bedau, Hugo. (Eds.). (2011). *Critical thinking, Reading & writing: A brief guide to argument* (7th ed.). Boston,

MA: Bedford/St. Martins.

Bennett, Bo. (2012). *Logically... fallacious: The ultimate collection of over 300 logical fallacies* . Sudbury, MA: eBookIt.com. ● + ↻ ⌂ ✨ ✓

A perfectly concise introduction to logical fallacies.

Best, Joel. (2001). *Damned lies & statistics: Untangling numbers from the media, politicians, & activists* . Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Browne, M. & Keeley, Stuart. (2011). *Asking the right questions: A guide to critical thinking* (10th ed.). London, United Kingdom: Longman.

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Diestler, Sherry. (2000). *Becoming a critical thinker: A user friendly manual* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Doherty, Earl. (2005). *The Jesus puzzle: Did Christianity begin with a mythical Christ? Challenging the existence of an historical Jesus* . Ottawa, ON, Canada: Age of Reason Publications.

Drange, Theodore. (1998). *Nonbelief & evil: Two arguments for the nonexistence of God*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. ✓

Epstein, Richard. (2011). *The pocket guide to critical thinking* (4th ed.). Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth.

Everitt, Nicholas. (2003). *The nonexistence of God* . New York, NY: Routledge.

Flew, Antony. (1966). *God & philosophy* . London, United Kingdom: Hutchinson. ✓

A classic introduction to the philosophy of religion.

Frazier, Kendrick. (1991). *The hundredth monkey: & other paradigms of the paranormal* . Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.

Gale, Richard. (1991). *On the nature & existence of God* . Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Gilovich, Thomas. (1991). *How we know what isn't so: The fallibility of human reason in everyday life* . New York, NY: The Free

Press. ✓

Goldacre, Ben. (2010). *Bad science: Quacks, hacks, & big pharma flacks* . London, UK: Faber & Faber.

Harrison, Guy. (2011). *50 popular beliefs that people think are true* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. ● ✓

Harrison, Guy. (2008). *50 reasons people give for believing in a god* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. ● † ☺ ☹ ✨ ✓ **#4**

An interesting and necessary book that gives responses not to abstract claims but to common reasons which average people give for believing. Both the writing style and tone make it accessible to atheists and theists alike.

Hughes, William, Lavery, Jonathan, & Doran, Katheryn. (2010). *Critical thinking: An introduction to the basic skills* (6th ed.). New York, NY: Broadview Press.

Humphrey, Nicholas. (1996). *Leaps of faith: Science, miracles, & the search for supernatural consolation* . New York, NY: Copernicus. ●

Johnson, B.C. (1983). *The atheist debator's handbook* . Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books. ●

Pigliucci, Massimo. (2000). *Tales of the rational: Skeptical essays about nature & science* . Salem, OR: Freethought Press.

Pigliucci, Massimo. (2010). *Nonsense on stilts: How to tell science from bunk* . Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Plait, Phil. (2002). *Bad astronomy: Misconceptions & misuses revealed, from astrology to the moon landing* . New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.

Planer, Felix. (1988). *Superstition*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.

Popkin, Richard & Stroll, Avrum. (2002). *Skeptical philosophy for everyone* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. ●

Mackie, J.L. (1982). *The miracle of theism: Arguments for & against the existence of God* . New York, NY: Oxford University Press. ✓

A summary and analysis apologetics. Highly recommended for those who already have a grounding in philosophy and the issues presented.

Martin, Michael. (1990). *Atheism: A philosophical justification* . Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Comprehensive overview of the varieties of atheism and their logical justifications.

Martin, Michael. (2003). *The impossibility of God* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Press.

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Oppy, Graham. (2006). *Arguing about gods* . New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Paul, Richard & Elder, Linda. (2009). *The miniature guide to critical thinking: Concepts & tools* . Santa Rosa, CA: Foundation for Critical Thinking. ●

A concise 20 page intro .

Paulos, John. (2001). *Innumeracy: Mathematical illiteracy & its consequences* . New York, NY: Hill & Wang. ● + ☺ ☹ * ✓ **#5**

Paulos, John. (2007). *Irreligion: A mathematician explains why the arguments for God just don't add up* . New York, NY: Hill & Wang.

Randi, James. (1982). *Flim-flam!: Psychics, e.s.p. unicorns, & other delusions*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books. ✓

Randi, James. (1989). *The faith healers* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Sagan, Carl. (1996). *The demon-haunted world: Science as a candle in the dark* . New York, NY: Ballantine Books. ● + ☺ ☹ * ✓

#1

A landmark in popular science writing. There have been few authors who have explained the skeptical attitude and expressed the excitement of rational discovery as clearly as Carl Sagan.

Schiffman, Nathaniel. (2005). *Abacadabra!: Secret methods magicians & others use to deceive their audience*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Shermer, Michael. (2000). *How we believe: Science, skepticism, & the search for God*. New York, NY: Henry Holt & Company.

Shermer, Michael. (1997). *How to debate a creationist*. Agawam, MA: Millenium Press.

Shermer, Michael. (2001). *The borderlands of science: Where science meets nonsense*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. ●

“Shermer argues that while science is the best lens through which to view the world, it is often difficult to decipher where valid science leaves off and borderland, or ‘fuzzy’ science begins” (Amazon.com book description). Science can be difficult, our own biases can cloud perceptions and practices. Shermer’s book is a necessary lesson for those who are misled, but don’t want to be.

Shermer, Michael. (2002). *Why people believe weird things: Pseudoscience, superstition, & other confusions of our time*. New York, NY: Henry Holt. ● #2

Slim, Stuart. (2006). *Empires of belief: Why we need more skepticism & doubt in the twenty-first century*. Edinburgh, United Kingdom: Edinburgh University Press.

Sobel, Jordan. (2004). *Logic & theism: Arguments for & against beliefs in God*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

A large collection of historical writings. It is also a bit pricey.

Stenger, Victor. (2003). *Has science found God?: The latest results in the search for purpose in the universe*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Stenger, Victor. (2007). *God: The failed hypothesis: How science shows that God does not exist*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. ✓ #3

Takes the scientific, rather than the more common philosophical, path towards demonstrating that science can test claims of the supernatural and that idea of God fails these tests.

Wheeler, Robert. (1993). *Dragons For sale: Studies in unreason* . Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.

Evolution v. Creationism

Academy of Sciences. (1999). *Science & creationism: A view from the National Academy of Sciences* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Berra, Tim. (1990). *Evolution & the myth of creationism: A basic guide to the facts in the evolution debate*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.

Birx, H. (1991). *Interpreting evolution: Darwin & Teilhard de Chardin*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.

A history of the controversy raised by Darwin's theory.

Clements, Tad. (1990). *Science versus religion* . Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.

Forest, Barbara & Gross, Paul. (2004). *Creationism's Trojan horse: The wedge of intelligent design* . Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press. ✓

Futuyma, Douglas. (1995). *Science on trial: The case for evolution* . Sunderland, MA: Sinauer Associates.

Godfrey, Laurie & Petto, Andrew. (Eds.). (2008). *Scientists confront creationism: Intelligent design & beyond*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Isaak, Mark. (2007). *The counter-creationism handbook* . Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. ●

Kitcher, Philip. (1982). *Abusing science: The case against creationism* . Boston, MA: The MIT Press.

Matsumura, Molleen. (Ed.). (1995). *Voices for evolution* . Oakland, CA: National Center for Science Education.

McGowan, Christopher. (1984). *In the beginning: A Scientist shows why the creationists are wrong* . Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.

- Otto, Shawn. (2011). *Fool me twice: Fighting the assault on science in America* . New York, NY: Rodale Books.
- Pennock, Robert. (2000). *Tower of Babel: The evidence against the new creationism* . Boston, MA: The MIT Press.
- Scott, Eugenie. (2009). *Evolution vs. creationism: An introduction* (2nd ed). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. •
- Strahler, Arthur. (1999). *Science & earth history: The evolution/creation controversy* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Tiffin, Lee. (1994). *Creationism's upside-down pyramid: How science refutes fundamentalism* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Religion & America's Founding Fathers

- Allen, Brooke. (2007). *Moral minority: Our skeptical founding fathers* . Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee.
- Church, F. (2011). *The separation of church & state: Writings on a fundamental freedom by America's founders* . Boston, MA: Beacon Press Books. +
- Greeley, Roger. (1995). *Thomas Jefferson's freethought legacy: A saying per day by the sage of Monticello* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Kramnick, Isaac & Moore, Laurence. (2005). *The godless Constitution: A moral defense of the secular state* . New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Steiner, Franklin. (1995). *The religious beliefs of our presidents: from Washington to F.D.R.* Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Additional Resources

Christianity

“A creed is an ossified metaphor” (Hubbard, 1998, p. 111).

-Elbert Hubbard (1856-1915), publisher, artist, philosopher

Bible.org: World's Largest Online Resource for Biblical Material

bible.org

The Bible Page

uib.no/zoo/brage/bible

Evil Bible: Fighting Against Immorality in Religion

evilbible.com

The Skeptic's Annotated Bible #1

Nearly every passage in the Bible is scrutinized through comparison to scientific findings.

skepticsannotatedbible.com

The Vatican

vatican.va/phome_en.htm

Islam

Faith Freedom.org: Busting the Islamic Myths for 10 Years Now

faithfreedom.org

The Skeptic's Annotated Quran #2

The Koran scrutinized through comparison to scientific findings.

skepticsannotatedbible.com/quran

Judaism

Judaism 101

jewfaq.org

Other or Multiple Religions

Internet Sacred Text Archive

A good resource for free mythology texts.

sacred-texts.com

Operation Clambake: Undressing the Church of Scientology Since 1996

xenu.net

ReligionFacts: Just the Facts on Religion

religionfacts.com

Religious Tolerance: Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance #3

religioustolerance.org

The Skeptic's Annotated Book of Mormon

skepticsannotatedbible.com/BOM

World Religions & Spirituality Project VCU

Their mission is “to provide objective, reliable and comprehensive information about the diverse array of religious and spiritual groups currently found in North America.”

has.vcu.edu/wrs

Religion & Pseudoscience Watchdogs

“The less reasonable a cult is, the more men seek to establish it by force” (as cited in Haught 1996, p. 72).

-Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), philosopher

Concordat Watch: Human rights, Separation of Church & State

concordatwatch.eu

Cult Awareness & Information Library: Switching the Light on Since 1995

culthelp.info

Cult Watch

cultwatch.com

English Pen: Mightier Than the Sword

englishpen.org

Ex-Cult Resource Center

ex-cult.org

Freedom of Mind Center

freedomofmind.com

Human Rights First: Blasphemy Cases

A great pdf of recent cases around the world about blasphemy.

humanrightsfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/Blasphemy_Cases.pdf

International Cultic Studies Association

“Global network of people concerned about psychological manipulation and abuse in cultic groups, alternative movements, and other environments.”

Also publishes *ICSA Today* and *International Journal of Cultic Studies* , and the *Cult Observer* .

icsahome.com

International Humanist & Ethical Union

Here is an important report on discrimination against the nonreligious:

iheu.org/new-global-report-discrimination-against-non-religious

Email any cases of discrimination to:

report@iheu.org

The Miviludes

A religious watchdog group in France.

miviludes.gouv.fr

Quackwatch: Your Guide to Quackery, Health Fraud, & Intelligent Descisions #1

Operated by Dr. Stephen Barrett.

quackwatch.com

Religion Dispatches

“A daily online magazine that publishes a mix of expert opinion, in-depth reporting, and provocative updates from the intersection of religion, politics and culture.”

religiondispatches.org

The Religion of Peace: Politically Incorrect Truth About Islam, One Really Messed Up Religion #2

thereligionofpeace.com

Scientific Review of Alternative Medicine: And Aberrant Medical Practices

Email: bkarr@centerforinquiry.net

sram.org

Skeptical Science: Getting Skeptical About Global Warming Skepticism ✓

A fantastic site with a large cache of info and scientists' responses to climate change doubters' common arguments.

skepticalscience.com

Theocracy Watch ✓

theocracywatch.org

United States Commission on International Religious Freedom

uscirf.gov

U.S. Congress Votes Database

projects.washingtonpost.com/congress/112

What's the Harm? #3

“368,379 people killed, 306,096 injured and over \$2,815,931,000 in economic damages.”

This is a site with stories of how irrationality is detrimental to individuals and societies.

whatstheharm.net

Skepticism & Counter-Apologetics

600+ Atheism vs. Theism Debates: Common Sense Atheism ✓

A fantastic site with hundreds of videos of debates between atheists and theists.

commonsenseatheism.com?p=50

DebateGod: The Best of the Best When it Comes to Fair Debates About God, Religion, & Faith

Come test out your skills.

debategod.org

The Fallacy Files ✓

A large and well organized collection of logical fallacies.

fallacyfiles.org

A Field Guide to Critical Thinking • ✓

An article by anthropologist James Lett about his six rules of evidential reasoning he calls “FiLCHeRS.” A good introduction.

csicop.org/si/show/field_guide_to_critical_thinking

Freethoughtpedia: Common Theist Arguments ✓

A good site with a huge database of theist arguments and why they are false.

freethoughtpedia.com/wiki/Common_Theist_Arguments

God is Imaginary •

50 simple proofs.

godisimaginary.com

Iron Chariots: The Counter-Apologetics Wiki #1

A growing collection of apologist and counter arguments, sleek and easy to navigate.

ironchariots.org

RationalWiki

rationalwiki.org

Why Won't God Heal Amputees?: The Most Important Question That We Can Ask About God #2

whywontgodhealamputees.com

Evolution v. Creationism

The TalkOrigins Archive: Exploring the Creation/Evolution Controversy 🟢 + 🔄 🚫 🌟 ✓ **#1**

talkorigins.org

Panda's Thumb

pandasthumb.org

Religion & America's Founding Fathers

Founding Fathers Were Not Christian

freethought.mbdojo.com/foundingfathers.html

Religious Affiliation of the Founding Fathers of the United States of America

adherents.com/gov/Founding_Fathers_Religion.html

LIFE PASSAGES: CELEBRATION & REFLECTION



“Atheist Holiday Traditions”

Reprinted with kind permission from Brian McFadden.

Holidays & Observances

“I wanted to become an atheist but I gave up. They have no holidays.”

-Henny Youngman (1906-1998), comedian

Youngman couldn't have been more wrong. Although many of humanity's celebrations are religious in nature, there are plenty of secular ones as well. New Years, Memorial Day, the 4th of July, Labor Day, and Thanksgiving Day are just a few in the U.S. Yet, what about those times of the year which do seem overwhelmingly religious? There are alternatives and more than enough to celebrate for any freethinker with an appetite for good times and marking the annual rhythms of life and community. Below are some freethought specific holidays and observances.

January

New Year Reality Revival - Month of January

Thomas Paine Day - January 29th

Honors the great American patriot iconoclast, and celebrates his continuing legacy of the connection between freethought and the American secular democracy.

February

Darwin Day - February 12th **#1**

Charles Darwin was born on this day in 1809. This also happens to be the same date of birth as Abraham Lincoln, so you can throw him in there if you wish. The American Humanist Association administers the International Darwin Day foundation.

darwinday.org

March

International Women's Day - March 8th

Celebrates the achievements of women.

internationalwomensday.com

Pi Day - March 14th

All about math and its importance to humanity.

piday.org

Freedom of Information Day - March 16th

The 4th president of the U.S. was James Madison who was also a Father of the *Constitution* , author of the *Bill of Rights* , and proponent of freedom of information.

Sunshine Week: You're Right to Know - March 16th - March 22nd

“Sunshine Week is a national initiative to promote a dialogue about the importance of open government and freedom of information. Participants include news media, civic groups, libraries, nonprofits, schools and others interested in the public's right to know.”

sunshineweek.org

Spring Equinox (Northern Hemisphere)

Autumn Equinox (Southern Hemisphere)

April

April Fool's Day - April 1st

A day celebrated world-wide for the trickster in all of us!

Yuri's Night , or Cosmonaut's Day - April 12th

Commemorates all space exploration milestones .

yurisnight.net

Earth Day - April 22nd

earthday.org

May

National Day of Reason - First Thursday in May



"Robert G. Ingersoll"
From Library of Congress
Collection

Created in response to *The National Day of Prayer* .

nationaldayofreason.org

June

World Environment Day - June 5th

A global day for positive environmental action.

unep.org/wed

World Humanist Day - June 21st

Intended to spread awareness about humanism .

iheu.org/world-humanist-day-21-june

Summer Solstice (Northern Hemisphere)

Winter Solstice (Southern Hemisphere)

July

Chevalier de la Barre Day - July 1st

Meant to raise awareness about religious oppression.

Indivisible Day - July 4th

Former MN Governor Jesse Ventura created this holiday in conjunction with Independence Day in order to raise awareness of the importance of the separation of church and state.

August

Robert G. Ingersoll Day - August 11th

Ingersoll was one of the most important freethinkers in U.S. history and this day celebrates his life and contributions.

September

Autumn Equinox (Northern Hemisphere)

Spring Equinox (Southern Hemisphere)

International Talk Like a Pirate Day – September 19th **#3**

A holiday for the congregation of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster. “Ahoy, ye Pastafarians!”

talklikeapirate.com

Banned Books Week - Last week of September

Celebrates the freedom to read!

bannedbooksweek.org

International Blasphemy Rights Day - September 30th #2

Commemorates the publishing of the Jyllands-Posten Muhammad cartoons. The day is intended, as well, to support free speech and the right to criticize and satirize religion.

October

Freethought Month - October 1-31st

Freethought Day - October 12th

Commemorates an Oct. 12, 1692, evidentiary based decision by William Phipps, governor of the Colony of Massachusetts, that ended the Salem witch trials.

November

Church/State Separation Week - November 24-28th

December

International Human Rights Day - December 10th

un.org/en/events/humanrightsday

Winter Solstice (Northern Hemisphere)

Summer Solstice (Southern Hemisphere)

Human Light Celebration - December 23rd

An alternative to Christmas .

humanlight.org

Holiday Music

I included only those songs which focus on the natural change of season, family, or has a particularly freethought feel. Admittedly, there are many others so let me know what you think of this brief list and what you would like to see listed. Most of the songs have been covered by numerous artists, so I have only referenced original date and title.

(1788). Auld lang syne.

(1963). It's the most wonderful time of the year.

(1857). Jingle bells.

Written by James Pierpont whose father was a Unitarian pastor.

(1957). Jingle bell rock.

(1945). Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow!

Minchin, Tim. (2011). White wine in the sun. On *Tim Minchin & the Heritage Orchestra recorded live, Manchester Area UK* [CD]. London, United Kingdom: Inertia Records.

Nelson, Willie. (1979). Pretty paper. On *Pretty paper* [Cassette]. CBS.

Willie presents the humanist theme of helping others.

Nerdstock: 9 Lessons & Carols for Godless People (2009)

This is a televised Bloomsbury Theatre production which celebrates science and continues to be performed every holiday season.

Bloomsbury Theatre. (Producer). (2009). *Nerdstock: 9 lessons & carols for godless people* [Television broadcast]. United Kingdom: BBC Four.

(1948). Sleigh ride.

(1954). (There's no place like) home for the holidays.

(1934). Winter wonderland.

A playful jab at ministers and a carefree romp through nature .

Visit the following sites and book for more info on holidays, ceremonies and a vacation destination: Note: If you are looking for a secular officiant to help perform ceremonies such as weddings search for celebrants near you.

Graham-Cumming, John. (2009). *The geek atlas: 128 places where science & technology come alive* . Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly Media.

Humanist Ceremonies: British Humanist Association

humanism.org.uk/ceremonies

Lake Hypatia Advance (“Not Retreat!”)

ffrf.org/outreach/lake-hypatia

Secular Seasons: Dedicated to the Celebration of Secular Living...

secularseasons.org

On Loss, Mourning, & Remembrance

“The cradle rocks above an abyss, and common sense tells us that our existence is but a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness” (Nabokov, 1996, p. 355).

-Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977), novelist

The death of a loved one is perhaps the most difficult ordeal a person can go through. Without the myths and rituals that offer believers support, how do freethinkers manage to cope? The most common way is to use the religious systems that are already in place. Yet, many freethinkers feel they are compromising their integrity if they “resort” to religion in times of despair. There is also the matter of one’s own death, how to be honored, and how to be remembered. Below are some humanistic alternatives along with a few poems that I found inspiring. At a child’s funeral Robert G. Ingersoll (1900) consoled:

Every cradle asks us ‘Whence?’ and every coffin ‘Whither’ The poor barbarian, weeping above his dead can answer these questions just as well as the robed priest of the most authentic creed. The tearful ignorance of the one, is as consoling as the learned and unmeaning words of the other... If those we press and strain within our arms could never die, perhaps that love would wither from the earth. May be this common fate treads from out the paths between our hearts the weeds of selfishness and hate... They who stand with breaking hearts around this little grave, need have no fear. The larger and nobler the faith in all that is, and is to be, tells us that death, even at its worst, is only the perfect rest. (p. 400)

Here is the inscription *Requiem* on poet and novelist Robert Louis Stevenson’s gravestone:

Under the wide and starry sky / Dig the grave and let me lie. / Glad did I live and gladly die, / And I laid me down with a will. / This be the verse you ‘grave for me: / Here he lies where he long’d to be; /

Home is the sailor, home from the sea, / And the hunter home from the hill. (as cited in Barker, 2011, p. 145)

George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) (1819-1880)

“O May I Join the Choir Invisible”

O may I join the choir invisible / Of those immortal dead who live again / In minds made better by their presence: live / In pulses stirred to generosity, / In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn / For miserable aims that end with self, / In thoughts sublime that pierce the night like stars, / And with their mild persistence urge man's search / To vaster issues.

So to live is heaven: / To make undying music in the world, / Breathing as beautiful order that controls / With growing sway the growing life of man. / So we inherit that sweet purity / For which we struggled, failed, and agonised / With widening retrospect that bred despair. / Rebellious flesh that would not be subdued, / A vicious parent shaming still its child / Poor anxious penitence, is quick dissolved; / Its discords, quenched by meeting harmonies, / Die in the large and charitable air. / And all our rarer, better, truer self, / That sobbed religiously in yearning song, / That watched to ease the burthen of the world, / Laboriously tracing what must be, / And what may yet be better— saw within / A worthier image for the sanctuary, / And shaped it forth before the multitude / Divinely human, raising worship so / To higher reference more mixed with love— / That better self shall live till human Time / Shall fold its eyelids, and the human sky / Be gathered like a scroll within the tomb / Unread for ever.

This is life to come, / Which martyred men have made more glorious / For us who strive to follow. May I reach / That purest heaven, be to other souls / The cup of strength in some great agony, / Enkindle generous ardour, feed pure love, / Beget the smiles that have no cruelty— / Be the sweet presence of a good diffused, / And in diffusion ever more intense. / So shall I join the choir invisible / Whose music is the gladness of the world.

Anonymous

The Atheist's Grave

I wandered among the churchyard dead / On a sunny Sabbath day, / And I marked a grave where the sexton said / An atheist's ashes lay. / A headstone pointed the lowly spot, / Inscribed with his age and name; / But other memorial there was not / To draw either praise or blame. / Yet the daisy there was as fresh in its hue, / The elm did as lightly wave, / And the springtide grass as greenly grew / As o'er the Christians grave. / And I marked that the sunbeams through the trees Fell as lightly on the sod, / As if its inmate had been of these / Who had lived in the faith of a God. / And o'er my mind the reflection came / Of a new and startling kind: / T'was whispered within me that man may blame / Where Nature can no fault find; / The bigot's curse from the Gothic pile / On the skeptical few may fall, / But Nature extends with a mother's smile / Her pity and love to all.

For additional information on coping with loss visit these sites:

Dying with Dignity: It's Your Life. It's Your Choice.

dyingwithdignity.ca

Godless Grief

godlessgrief.com

Sympathy 101 for Atheists

squidoo.com/sympathy-101-for-atheists

Selected Bibliography

Celebration Guides

Collins, Nigel, Herrick, Jim, & Pearce, John. (Eds.). (2000). *Seasons of life: Prose & poetry for secular ceremonies & private*

reflection . Amherst, NY: Rationalist Press Association.
Grayling, A.C. (2011). *The good book: A humanist bible* . New York, NY: Walker Publishing Company. ✓
Harvie, Robin & Meyers, Stephanie. (Eds.). (2010). *The atheist's guide to Christmas* . New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Light-hearted and often rather humorous, this is a collection of 42 famous atheist's thoughts on Christmas.

Lamont, Corliss. (1981). *A humanist wedding service* . Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.
Willson, Jane. (1991). *New arrivals: A practical guide to nonreligious naming ceremonies* (4th ed.). London, United Kingdom: British Humanist Association.
Willson, Jane. (1988). *Sharing the future: A practical guide to non-religious wedding & affirmation ceremonies* (4th ed.). London, United Kingdom: British Humanist Association.
Wine, Sherwin. (2003). *Celebration: A ceremonial & philosophical guide for humanists & humanistic Jews* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Book.*

Loss & Grief

Jones, Cathie. (2009). *Godless grief: An atheist discussion of death, grief, & other family loss* . Charleston, SC: CreateSpace.
Lamont, Corliss. (1977). *A humanist funeral service* . Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.
Willson, Jane. (1991). *Funerals without God: A practical guide to non-religious funeral ceremonies* . Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.
York, Sarah. (2000). *Remembering well: Rituals for celebrating life & mourning death* . San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Additional Resources

The Freethought Trail

“The Freethought Trail is a collection of locations in West-Central New York important to the history of freethought.”

freethought-trail.org

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Nobelprize.org: The Official Web Site of the Nobel Prize

Honors and celebrates the achievements of individuals from many different fields.

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Olympic.org: Official Website of the Olympic Movement

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olympic.org

SKP Freethinkers: A Birds of a Feather Group of Escapees RV Club

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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT



“Rodin’s The Thinker”

from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_Thinker,_Rodin.jpg

Visual Arts

Some of the more notable freethinking visual artists (in alphabetical order) are: painter Francis Bacon (1909-1992), painter Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825), painter Eugene Delacroix (1798-1863), surrealist painter Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), painter Francisco Goya (1746-1828), painter Frida Kahlo (1907-1954), painter Henri Matisse (1869-1954), painter Claude Monet (1840-1926), cubist painter Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), muralist Diego Rivera (1886-1957), sculptor Auguste Rodin (1840-1917), painter Mark Rothko (1903-1970), Joseph M.W. Turner (1775-1851), painter/inventor Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), painter James McNeill Whistler (1833-1903), architect Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-).

Literature



"Mary Ann Evans (George Eliot)"
From http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/8/81/George_Eliot_at_30_by_Fran%C3%A7ois_D%27Albert_Durade.jpg

"Heaven help us,' said the old religion; the new one, from its very lack of that faith, will teach us all the more to help one another" (as quoted in Haught, 2000, p. 143).

-George Eliot [Mary Ann Evans] (1819-1880), novelist

The only difference between a novel and scripture is the modesty of the author. Here are works by a few humble human beings .

Prose

Action/Adventure

Banks, Iain. (1995). *Whit, or, Isis amongst the unsaved*. London, United Kingdom: Little, Brown.

Iain Banks wrote that *Whit* is "a book about religion and culture by a dedicated evangelical atheist" (Mitchell, 1996, ¶ 2).

de Beauvoir, Simone. (1948). *The blood of others* (R. Senhouse, & Y. Moyses, Trans.). New York, NY: A.A. Knopf. (Original work published 1945)

About a pair of French resistance fighters during the Second World War struggling with confused loyalties. At the heart of the novel is the paradox of the freedom to resist or acquiesce in the face of oppression. For the author freedom must be an active as opposed to a passive engagement.

Heller, Joseph. (1961). *Catch-22: A novel* . New York, NY: Simon & Schuster. ♣ ([see](#))

The culture of the military and war are exaggerated to absurd proportions. It is the story of one sane man in a lose-lose situation. Is sanity merely a democratic position?

Hemingway, Ernest. (1929). *A farewell to arms* . New York, NY: Scribner.

Pick, J.B. (1959). *The last valley* . New York, NY: Little, Brown, & Company. ♣ ([see](#))

Two atheists, the Captain who is a brutal pragmatist and an ex-teacher named Vogel who is scholarly and gentle, attempt to survive the madness of the European wars of religion.

Vidal, Gore. (1981). *Creation: A novel* . New York, NY: Random House.

A sweeping tale of ancient philosophy which primarily ruminates on two questions that have been raised by humanity for thousands of years: the nature of creation and the existence of good and evil.

Comedy

Henderson, Bobby. (2006). *The gospel of the Flying Spaghetti Monster* . New York, NY: Villard Books. ✓ **#1**

The “scripture” of parody religion Pastafarianism was the response to the Kansas State Board of Education’s consideration of giving equal time in public schools to the non-scientific intelligent design belief.

Jillette, Penn. (2004). *Sock* . New York, NY: St. Martin's Press .

Dickie, an atheist sock monkey (yes... a sock monkey), and her best friend attempt to solve a murder.

Lee, Earl. (2007). *Raptured: The final daze of the late, great planet Earth* . Tucson, AZ: See Sharp Press.

A parody of the *Left Behind* series.

Lukes, Steven. (1996). *The curious enlightenment of professor Caritat: A novel of ideas* . Brooklyn, NY: Verso Press.

A funny tour of Enlightenment philosophy. The professor attempts to find a state where the ideas which have shaped our modern world have been fully applied.

Kesey, Ken. (1962). *One flew over the cuckoo's nest* . New York, NY: Viking Press & Signet Books. [\(see \)](#)

Patients of a mental health facility are subjected to subtle and oppressive coercion in this critique of institutionalized behaviorism ("sane" society with its pressure to conform) and affirmation of self-determination and humanism.

McGowan, Dale. (2002). *Calling Bernadette's bluff: A novel* . Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corporation.

From the author of *Parenting Beyond Belief* and *Raising Freethinkers* comes the story of an atheist professor in 21st century America.

Moore, Christopher. (2002). *Lamb: The gospel according to Biff, Christ's childhood pal* . New York, NY: William Morrow.

Drama/Romance

Armah, Ayi. (2000). *The healers: An historical novel* . San Francisco, CA: Per Ankh Publishers.

The author illustrates his own speculation about the subjugation of Africa and how it might be reversed. Unity is

Armah's answer.

Armah, Ayi. (2002). *Kmt: In the house of life* . San Francisco, CA: Per Ankh Publishers.

The novel asks:

How best can Africa's multimillennial history be envisioned as one continuous stream? Why did the society that invented literacy sink into the misery of illiteracy, ignorance and religion? What creative African values lie buried under the lethal debris of slavery, colonialism, structural adjustment and globalization? And why did the ancient scribes call the concept of Ma'at our best promise of regeneration? KMT is the narrative of an African woman's life-quest, and of the answers she uncovers. (Amazon.com book description)

Doucet, Therese. (2011). *A lost Argument: A latter-day novel* . Washington, DC: Strange Violin Editions.

A young Mormon (who thinks arguments are sexy!) falls in love with philosophy and an atheist. Many topics are explored as she loses her old beliefs while trying to reconcile with her heritage.

Fast, Howard. (1943). *Citizen Tom Paine* . New York, NY: Grove Press.

Historical fiction about the true revolutionary spirit that was Thomas Paine.

Forster, E.M. (1908). *A room with a view* . London, United Kingdom: Edward Arnold. [\(see\)](#)

A humanist romance rejecting sexual repression, class division, and the oppression of religion. The most attractive characters are the natural humanists who revel in the world and life, as it is, in the here and now.

Forster, E.M. (1910). *Howards end* . London, United Kingdom: Edward Arnold. [\(see\)](#)

Three social classes are divided by convention, attitude, and superficially distinctive behavior. Primarily about relations between individuals and the need to embrace multiple perspectives in order to see through the social constructs to the common humanity between people and within one's self.

His humanist themes can be thus summed:

Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer. Only connect, and the beast and the monk, robbed of the isolation that is life to either, will die. (p. 133)

Forster, E.M. (1924). *A passage to India* . London, United Kingdom: Edward Arnold. ♣ ([see](#))

Set in India during the 1920's, this novel highlights the racial conflicts and stereotypes between Indians and their colonial overlords, the British.

Fowles, John. (1969). *The French lieutenant's woman* . Boston, MA: Little, Brown. ♣ ([see](#))

Gaudia, Gil. (2003). *Outside, looking in* . Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corp.

An atheist's tale about growing up in a dysfunctional multi-religious family.

Golding, William. (1954). *Lord of the flies* . London, United Kingdom: Faber & Faber. ✓ ♣ ([see](#))

A group of school-boys are stranded on an island without adult supervision or care. As fear and ignorance become intertwined the well mannered and disciplined troupe begins to splinter and descend into anarchy. A brilliant allegory of the birth and purpose of religion. Also recommended is William Golding's other masterpiece of psychology and naturalism *The Inheritors* (1955) which is about a hypothetical interaction between Neanderthals and Homo Sapiens.

Goldstein, Rebecca. (2010). *36 arguments for the existence of God: A work of fiction* . New York, NY: Pantheon Books. ✓

A professor of psychology writes a best-selling atheist tract, and is dubbed “the atheist with a soul.” Modernity vs. tradition, culture vs. education, and the burdens, and gifts of genius are just some of the many themes interwoven into this lovely, at times heart-wrenching, and always thought provoking story. As an added bonus Goldstien includes an appendix with 36 common apologist arguments and very clear counter-responses.

Gordimer, Nadine. (1953). *The lying days* . New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

A middle-class white woman experiences the complex web of apartheid South Africa.

Joyce, James. (1916). *A portrait of the artist as a young man* . New York, NY: B.W. Huebsch. ✓ (see)

A semi-autobiographical novel. It deals with the intellectual liberation of Stephen Dedalus as he challenges the conventions of his conservative Catholic community. Written in his distinctive free indirect speech style, packed with metaphors, Joyce’s work is always a challenging and rewarding experience.

Koestler, Arthur. (1941). *Darkness at noon* . United Kingdom, London: The Macmillan Company.

About the Stalinist regimes ruthless pursuit to force their beliefs upon its ‘comrades.’

Lewis, Sinclair. (1922). *Babbitt* . New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace & Co.

A scathing critique of American middle-class conformity.

Lewis, Sinclair. (1927). *Elmer Gantry* . New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace & Co. (see)

McEwan, Ian. (2005). *Saturday* . New York, NY: Doubleday-Random House.

In response to Philip Larkin's poem "Water" (see *Poetry* section), the protagonist would, if he ever got called to construct a religion,

make use of evolution, What better creation myth? An unimaginable sweep of time, numberless generations spawning by infinitesimal steps complex living beauty out of inert matter, driven on by the blind furies of random mutation, natural selection and environmental change, with the tragedy of forms continually dying, and lately the wonder of minds emerging and with them morality, love, art, cities—and the unprecedented bonus of this story happening to be demonstrably true. (p. 54)

Nasrin, Taslima. (1993). *Shame!* (T. Gupta, Trans.). New Delhi, India: Penguin Books.

The terrible strife between religions and the innocent people caught up in the carnage are highlighted in this heartbreaking and eye opening novel.

Neill, Derrick. (1999). *Duck egg blue: A novel* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

A fictional story of the all-too-real attempts by the religious right to shove their fairy tales into public education.

Orwell, George. (1935). *A clergyman's daughter* . London, United Kingdom: Victor Gollancz.

The story of said daughter who begins as a self-mortifying young woman, experiences great hardship as a laborer, teacher, and ultimately loses her religious faith. This was George Orwell's first novel.

Proust, Marcel. (1992). *In search of lost time* (Vols. 1-7) (C. Moncrieff, T. Kilmartin, & A. Mayor, Trans.) New York, NY: Modern Library. (Original work published 1913-1931)

This million plus word magnum opus by French writer Marcel Proust is about memory, writing, and life. In it the freethinker

observed: “The kind of fraud which consists in daring to proclaim the truth while mixing it with a large share of lies that falsify it, is more widespread than is generally thought.”

Roy, Arundhati. (1997). *The god of small things* . New Delhi, India: Indialink.

Saramago, Jose. (1994). *The gospel according to Jesus Christ* (G. Pontiero, Trans.). Lisbon, Portugal: Editorial Caminho. (Original published in 1991)

A “fictional” re-telling of Jesus Christ’s life. More accurately it may be described as an alternate myth, depicting Jesus as a human character with all of our feelings and apprehensions.

Saramago, Jose. (1997). *Blindness*. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace & Company.

A guide leads many blind individuals through a world. The story reveals the darker aspects of human nature while acknowledging we also have the will to survive.

Saramago, Jose. (1999). *All the names* (M. Costa, Trans.). Lisbon, Portugal: Editorial Caminho. (Original published in 1997)

The desire for connection leads a lonely clerk on a journey to find a woman and himself.

Saramago, Jose. (2011). *Cain* (M. Costa, Trans.). Lisbon, Portugal: Editorial Caminho. (Original published in 2009)

A retelling of *The Bible* with the despised Cain as the hero and God as a malicious thug. So it is not much different than the original.

Steinbeck, John. (1945). *Cannery row* . New York, NY: Viking Press.

A humanist tale of a different sort of small town.

Steinberg, Milton. (1939). *As a driven leaf* . Springfield, NJ: Behrman House.

A fictional account of 2nd Century Jewish apostate Elisha ben Abuyah. Faith and reason are wrestled with.

Updike, John. (1986). *Roger's version* . New York, NY: Knopf.

Described as “a majestic allegory of faith and reason, ends also as a black comedy of revenge.”

Wells, H.G. (1925). *Christina Alberta's father* . New York, NY: Macmillan.

About a girl who's father believes he is the reincarnation of Sumerian King, Sargon the Great.

West, Morris. (2003). *The last confession* . New York, NY: Toby Press.

A fictional account, written in diary form, of the freethought martyr Dominican friar Giordano Bruno.

Winterson, Jeanette. (1985). *Oranges are not the only fruit* . London, United Kingdom: Pandora Press. [\(see \)](#)

The novel hinges on the tension between the main character's lesbian orientation and Pentecostal community.

Woolf, Virginia. (1925). *A simple melody* .

A short story. Woolf's first positive portrayal of a male atheist character.

Woolf, Virginia. (1927). *To the lighthouse* . London, United Kingdom: Hogarth Press.

Widely considered her best and most autobiographical novel. Themes include feminism, the passage of time, life over death, family dynamics, among many others. Here she delivers a more nuanced portrayal of belief and non-belief. The employment of stream-of-consciousness narrative and nonlinear plot may be difficult but ultimately rewarding.

Vidal, Gore. (1954). *Messiah* . New York, NY: Dutton.

A mortician starts a cult of death and it becomes more popular than Christianity or Islam .

Horror

Camus, Albert. (1948). *The plague* (S. Gilbert, Trans.). New York, NY: A.A. Knopf. (Original work published 1947)

Infidels.org (2012) wrote this great succinct summary:

A town named Oran experiences a revival of the Bubonic Plague. The clergy of the town tell people that the resulting misery and death are punishment for their sins. Dr Rieux, the main character, eventually emerges from the shadow of the plague to renounce religion on rational humanistic grounds. (¶ 3)

Lovecraft, H.P. (1929, January). The silver key. *Weird Tales* .

H.P. Lovecraft was a pioneer in science fiction and horror. His characters are often scientifically minded and indifferent to religion and human beliefs. Here is a short story about a man's search for meaning.

Science Fiction/Fantasy

Adams, Douglas. (2005). *The ultimate hitchhiker's guide to the galaxy: Five complete novels & one story* . New York, NY: Gramercy Books. ✓ 🏆 #1 ([see](#))

This is a hilarious philosophical romp about humanity's fruitless and misguided search for the meaning of life. First published in 1979, I have cited the full series which includes: *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* (1981), *So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish* (1985), *Mostly Harmless* (1992), and *Life, the Universe and Everything* (2001).

Adams, Scott. (2001). *God's debris: A thought experiment* . Kansas City, MO: Andrews McMeel Universal.

The creator of the Dilbert comic strip tells the story of a deliveryman who meets the world's smartest person and all reality

breaks loose.

Adams, Scott. (2004). *The religion war* . Kansas City, MO: Andrews McMeel Universal.

In this sequel to *God's Debris*, Adams delivers a potential future where Christianity and Islam are about to square off.

Alen Anthony, S.A. (2009). *The Infernova* . Bloomington, MN: Blackburnian Press. ✓

A parody of *Dante's Inferno* with Mark Twain as your guide.

Archer, Kevin. (2003). *In lieu of heaven* . Xlibris.

Two men search for God.

Asimov, Isaac. (1942-1993). *The foundation series* .

In order to protect the knowledge of humankind from a predicted 30,000 (or 1,000?) year dark age, scientist Hari Sheldon creates two small havens of wisdom to await the end of the tumultuous period to come. There are 7 books in the series.

Atwood, Margaret. (1985). *The handmaid's tale* . New York, NY: Ballantine Books. #4 ([see](#))

About the potential consequences of an America governed by Christian fundamentalists.

Bradbury, Ray. (1953). *Fahrenheit 451* . New York, NY: Simon & Schuster. #5 ([see](#))

Set in a future America where owning books is forbidden by law. Yet, there is a small underground of intellectuals who seek to preserve the wisdom of humankind, no matter the costs. Censorship and modern society's dismissal, appreciation for, and disdain of deep substantial knowledge and dissenting ideas are major themes. Poet and playwright Heinrich Heine wrote "Wherever they burn books they will also, in the end, burn human beings (Heine, 1823, I.245).

Burroughs, Edgar. (1917-1964). *Barsoom series* .

19th century Civil War veteran John Carter's adventures on Mars include the themes of honor, religious deception, resource wars, science, sacrifice, and much more. It is a series of 11 books. Don't bother with the film *John Carter* (2012). It is pretty awful.

Clarke, Arthur. (1953). *Childhood's end* . New York, NY: Ballantine Books. ✓

Powerful aliens appear over earth with a few demands. Humanity will never be the same.

Clarke, Arthur. (1967). *The nine billion names of God; the best short stories of Arthur C. Clarke* . New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World.

Clarke, Arthur. (1968). *2001: A space odyssey*. New York, NY: New American Library. ✎ ✓ ([see](#))

Clarke, Arthur. (1986). *The songs of distant Earth*. New York, NY: Del Rey Books.

A million earthlings arrive at paradise and that's the problem.

Dick, Philip. (1962). *The man in the high castle: A novel*. New York, NY: Putnam.

An alternate history novel depicting victorious Axis powers and the consequences of totalitarianism.

Dick, Philip. (1968). *Do androids dream of electric sheep?* New York, NY: Doubleday. ✎ (was the inspiration for the film [Blade Runner](#) (1982))

Examines the questions of what it means to be "alive," how we know what is real, and what is imaginary and more.

Dick, Philip. (1969). *Galactic pot-healer* . New York, NY: Berkley Books.

The god's need our help to raise a sunken city.

Dick, Philip. (1970). *A maze of death* . New York, NY: Doubleday.

14 individuals arrive on a dangerous planet inhabited (or perhaps not inhabited) by a god worthy of the biblical flood story.

Dick, Philip. (1978). *VALIS* . New York, NY: Bantam Books.

A schizophrenic man is either delusional or divinely inspired. The first in a religiously themed series.

Dick, Philip. (1982). *The transmigration of Timothy Archer* . New York, NY: Timescape Books.

The last in the series begun by *VALIS* .

Ellison, Harlan. (1975). *Deathbird stories : A pantheon of modern gods* . New York, NY: Harper & Row.

A collection of short stories connected by the theme of modern-day gods or the projection of contemporary concerns and anxieties.

Farasati, Adam. (2011). *The god killer* . CreateSpace.

A novella about an assassin tasked with taking out gods who have outlived their usefulness.

Findley, Timothy. (1984). *Not wanted on the voyage* . New York, NY: Viking Press.

An atheist's retelling of Noah's Ark.

Fitzpatrick, Dan. (Ed.). (2011). *Atheist tales* . Epic Saga Publishing.

An anthology of speculative (mostly science) fiction tales from an atheist perspective.

Flynn, Tom. (2000). *Galactic rapture* . Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Written by the Executive Director of the Council for Secular Humanism, this work is set in the year 2344 and lambasts religion as a form of entertainment for sophisticated societies and source of unscrupulous corruption and abuse for others.

France, Anatole. (1908). *Penguin island* . New York, NY: John Lane Company.

A thorough mocking of all sorts of institutions such as the church, military, socialism, the courts, you name it.

France, Anatole. (1914). *The revolt of the angels* (W. Jackson, Trans.). New York, NY: John Lane Company. ✓

The humorous tale of an angel who becomes an atheist.

Gaiman, Neil & Pratchett, Terry. (1990). *Good omens: The nice & accurate prophecies of Agnes Nutter, witch* . New York, NY: Workman Publishing.

A dark, zany, and funny look at the apocalypse. Here is a snippet of the macbre humor:

Human beings mostly aren't [evil]. They just get carried away by new ideas, like dressing up in jackboots and shooting people, or dressing up in white sheets and lynching people, or dressing up in tie-dye jeans and playing guitars at people. Offer people a new creed with a costume and their hearts and minds will follow. (p. 26)

Hayden, S.C. (2011). *American idol* . Antelope, CA: Black Bed Sheet Books.

Behold! The rise of corporate religion!

Heinlein, Robert. (1953). If this goes on—. In *Revolt in 2100* . Chicago, IL: Shasta Publishers.

Heinlein's first novel is a speculative story of Christianity given all the tools of modern society (e.g. mass communication, applied psychology, and a willing populace) and the backlash which follows.

Heinlein, Robert. (1961). *Stranger in a strange land* . New York, NY: Putnam.

An innocent human, born and raised on Mars, returns to earth and learns about our strange, disturbing, and wonderful ways. So he starts his own Church.

Heinlein, Robert. (1984). *Job: A comedy of justice* . New York, NY: Ballantine Books. ✓

One part a re-telling of the biblical myth of Job, one part religious bigot's transformation into a man who for the love of his hellbound wife abandons heaven to rescue her.

Heller, Joseph. (1984). *God knows* . Franklin Center, PA: Franklin Library.

A fictionalized re-telling of the fictional character King David.

Huxley, Aldous. (1932). *Brave new world* . New York, NY: Doubleday. ✎ ✓ **#2** ([see](#))

Set in a dystopian world 600 years in the future where individuals are forced to take mind-controlling drugs, pregnancy is banned, and the population lives in a non-intellectual pleasure fantasy state. But there are freethinking individuals who oppose the world-wide regime. Here is a fine summary of the similarities and contrasts between *Brave New World* and Orwell's *1984* (1949) by Neil Postman (1985):

What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one. Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egotism. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. Orwell feared we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture, preoccupied with some equivalent of the feelies, the orgy porgy, and the centrifugal bumblepuppy. As Huxley remarked in *Brave New World Revisited*, the civil libertarians and rationalists who are ever on the alert to oppose tyranny 'failed to take into

account man's almost infinite appetite for distractions.' In 1984 , Orwell added, people are controlled by inflicting pain. In *Brave New World*, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure. In short, Orwell feared that what we fear will ruin us. Huxley feared that our desire will ruin us. (pp. vii-viii)

Kafka, Franz. (1930). *The castle* (E. Muir & W. Muir, Trans.). New York, NY: A.A. Knopf. (Original work published 1926) ✓

Explores the relationship between the individual and those in power which in this case, may or may not exist (an obvious analogy to supernatural dictatorship).

King, George. (2009). *The rapture* . Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corporation.

A satire of the rapture. The “End” is always fun.

Kundera, Milan. (1984). *The unbearable lightness of being* . New York, NY: Harper & Row.

A philosophical refutation of Nietzsche’s concept of eternal recurrence (that reality and its events recur endlessly). The novel posits that we each have one unique life to live and so are not burdened or weighed down by cosmic significance, hence we are free and ‘light.’ The novel contains excellent comments on many other philosophical topics as well.

Le Guin, Ursula. (1969). *The left hand of darkness* . New York, NY: Ace Books.

How would you try and relate to an alien civilization and culture so far removed from your own?

Lem, Stanislaw. (1970). *Solaris* (J. Kilmartin & S. Cox, Trans.). New York, NY: Walker. (Original work published 1961)

Stanislaw Lem wrote that he “only wanted to create a vision of a human encounter with something that certainly exists, in a mighty manner perhaps, but cannot be reduced to human concepts, ideas or images” (Lem, 2002, ¶ 14) .

Leshner, Charles. (2012). *Shadow on the Moon* . Chandler, AZ: Writer's Cramp Publishing.

A single book containing the Republic of Luna series of *Evolution's Child: Earthman* , *Evolution's Child: Lunarian* , and *Revelation's Child* .

Lethem, Jonathan. (1995). *Amnesia moon* . New York, NY: Harcourt Brace & Co.

In a post-apocalyptic world, a man named Chaos goes in search of the truth. Lethem paints a surreal portrait as a critique of contemporary society.

Mahfouz, Naguib. (1996). *Children of the alley* (P. Theroux, Trans.). New York, NY: Anchor Books. (Original work published 1959)

A re-visioning of the history of the world's religions. God looks down upon humanity with indifference, prophets come and go, yet, the last one is Arafa, a scientist. In 1994, the Nobel Prize winning author was attacked and stabbed by Muslim extremists, because of this work, but thankfully survived.

Martin, Michael. (1996). *The big domino in the sky: & other atheistic tales*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. ●

Morrow, James. (1994). *Towing Jehovah* . New York, NY: Harcourt Brace & Co.

God's dead, now where to put the body?

Morrow, James. (2006). *The last witchfinder* . New York, NY: HarperCollins.

A young woman in England is on a mission... for reason. She travels the globe in order to stop the persecution of innocent women convicted for witchcraft.

Miller, Walter. (1960). *A canticle for Leibowitz* . New York, NY: J.B. Lippincott & Co.

This post-apocalyptic novel contrasts “brothers,” both religious and secular, who preserve and seek knowledge, with those who wish to use science as a means to power in an endless cycle of human enlightenment and fall. The primary theme is the preservation of knowledge. A great irony is that “Saint” Leibowitz was a scientist.

Niven, Larry. (1990). *N-space* . New York, NY: Tom Doherty Associates.

A collection of short stories.

Orwell, George. (1949). *1984* . London, United Kingdom: Secker & Warburg. ✎✓ **#3** ([see](#))

A nightmare vision of the future where “Big Brother” has made even thinking a crime. The hero longs for a corruption of everything, or all thoughts and actions not considered orthodox.

Pangborn, Edgar. (1964). *Davy* . New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press.

After a nuclear war, the protagonist grows-up in a post-America ruled by a church which condemns technology.

Rushdie, Salman. (1981). *Midnight’s children* . London, United Kingdom: Jonathan Cape.

The second of Salman Rushdie novels is an example of magical realism and deals with India’s independence from Britain and partition on August 15, 1947. Children born between 12 and 1 a.m. are imbued with special powers.

Rushdie, Salman. (1983). *Shame* . London, United Kingdom: Jonathan Cape.

Discusses the violence borne out of shame through the lives of the leaders of Pakistan.

Rushdie, Salman. (1988). *The satanic verses* . New York, NY: Viking Press. ✓

The famous novel which caused a fatwa to be issued denouncing and calling for his murder.

Sagan, Carl. (1985). *Contact* . New York, NY: Simon & Schuster. ✎

Sawyer, Robert. (2002-2003). *Neanderthal parallax* (series). New York, NY: Tor Books.

In a parallel universe Neanderthals have flourished in place of homo sapiens and live in a society of freethought. Humans discover this other world and the ensuing interaction is quite interesting.

Stewart, George. (1949). *Earth abides* . New York, NY: Random House. ✓

A post-apocalyptic story where a scientist tries to rebuild civilization.

Turtledove, Harry. (1998). *Between the rivers* . New York, NY: Tor Books.

Two rivers, two gods, two cities, and one populace beginning to think for themselves! A fantasy and sort-of alternative history of Mesopotamia from the most well-known alt-history writer.

Turtledove, Harry. (2002). *The case of the toxic spell dump* . Riverdale, NY: Baen Books.

What if the world actually operated through magic? Here is another alternative reality/fantasy novel packed with supernatural puns.

Twain, Mark. (1916). *The mysterious stranger: A romance* . New York, NY: Harper & Brothers.

This posthumously published satire uses the character of young Satan to highlight the hypocrisy of religion.

Vonnegut, Kurt. (1952). *Player piano* . New York, NY: Delacorte Press.

A haunting vision of a future world very much like the one we live in. Vonnegut was very insightful.

Vonnegut, Kurt. (1959). *The sirens of Titan: An original novel* . New York, NY: Dell.

A satire of religion. Douglas Adams said that the book was an inspiration for *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* .

Vonnegut, Kurt. (1966). *Mother night* . New York, NY: Delacorte Press.

Vonnegut, Kurt. (1963). *Cat's cradle* . New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston. ✓

Vonnegut, Kurt. (1968). *Welcome to the monkey house: A collection of short works* . New York, NY: Delacorte.

Vonnegut, Kurt. (1973). *Breakfast of champions: Or, goodbye blue Monday!* London, United Kingdom: Cape.

Vonnegut, Kurt. (1985). *Galapagos* . New York, NY: Delacorte Press.

Vonnegut, Kurt. (1990). *Hocus pocus* . New York, NY: Putnam.

Wales, Vincent. (2004). *One nation under God* . Sacramento, CA: DGC Press.

A coming-of-age story set in an America ruled by the religious right.

Wells, H.G. (1910). *The sleeper awakes* . London, United Kingdom: Thomas Nelson.

A man falls asleep for over 200 years and awakes to find a dystopian world in which his trust fund, through compound interest and careful management, has made him owner of the world.

H.G. Wells wrote many novels about oppression and liberation. This is one of my favorites and has much to offer freethinkers. I am a huge fan and recommend just about any of his works.

Wilson, Robert & Shea, Robert. (1975). *The Illuminatus trilogy* . New York, NY: Dell Publishing.

A world of conspiracy theories comes to life from many different perspectives. Includes *The Eye of the Pyramid* , *The Golden Apple* , and *Leviathan* .

Zelazny, Roger. (1967). *Lord of light* . New York, NY: Doubleday & Company.

On an alien planet the Hindu Gods rule, only they're real men!

Thriller/Crime/Mystery

Camus, Albert. (1946). *The stranger* (S. Gilbert, Trans.). New York, NY: A.A. Knopf. (Original work published 1942)

Protagonist refuses to give in to the false comfort of religion.

Dakron, Ron. (1987). *Infra*. Mill Creek, WA: Black Heron Press.

The author said the work is “a rage against existence” a “broadsword attack on language—a lot of poetic grunting and smashing” (Collins, January 1997).

Dexter, Colin. (1975-1999). *Inspector Morse* (series). New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.

Eco, Umberto. (1983). *The name of the rose* (W. Weaver, Trans.). San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Javanovich. (Original work published 1980) ◀ ([see](#))

This is the Sherlock Holmes of the Inquisition. It is reason vs. belief in a race to solve a string of murders at an abbey.

I dared, for the first and last time in my life, to express a theological conclusion: “But how can a necessary being exist totally polluted with the possible? What difference is there, then, between God and primigenial chaos? Isn't affirming God's absolute omnipotence and His absolute freedom with regard to His own choices tantamount to demonstrating that God does not exist?” (p. 495)

Eco, Umberto. (1989). *Foucault's pendulum* (W. Weaver, Trans.). San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. (Original work

published 1988)

A trio of skeptics concoct a conspiracy theory for a good laugh. The book emphasizes the credulity of individuals and the allure of literalizing myths which are essentially sanctioned conspiracy theories by those who created them.

Manchester, Guy. (2000). *Acts of the Apostles: A novel* .
Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corp.

A reporter attempts to thwart a group who is bent on establishing a theocracy in America.

Moore, Alan. (2008). *V for vendetta* (D. Lloyd, Illust.). New York, NY:
DC Comics. **#1** ([see](#))

Parris, S.J. (2010-2012). *Giordano Bruno series* . New York, NY:
Anchor Books.

A thriller series starring the doubting Italian friar. Includes:
Heresy (2010), *Prophecy* (2011), and *Sacrilege* (2012).

Robbins, Tom. (1971). *Another roadside attraction* . New York, NY:
Bantam Books.

A humorous thriller with missing messiahs and assassin monks.

Poetry

I was surprised to find that so many of history's greatest poets, more so than in other genres of art, were freethinkers. I hope you enjoy this section as much as I do. Note that in some cases I have only included select passages from longer poems.



"Francisco Goya, *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* (1797-1799)"
From Library of Congress Collection

Amichai, Yehuda (1924-2000), poet

When I Bang My Head on the Door

Roshi, Roshi—when I banged my head on the door / When I banged my head on the door, I screamed, / 'My head, my head,' and I screamed, 'Door, door,' / And I didn't scream 'Mama' and I didn't scream 'God.' / And I didn't prophesy a world at the End of Days / Where there will be no more heads and doors. / When you stroked my head, I whispered, / 'My head, my head,' and I whispered, 'Your hand, your hand,' / And I didn't have miraculous visions / of hands stroking heads in the heavens / as they split wide open. / Whatever I scream or say or whisper is only / To console myself: My head, my head. / Door, door. Your hand, your hand. (Amichai, 1996, pp. 118-119)

Appleman, Philip (1926-), poet, novelist

One of America's best contemporary poets, is also the recipient of a "Friend of Darwin Award" from the National Center for Science Education and a "Humanist Arts Award" from the American Humanist Association .

His poetry collections include:

Appleman, Philip. (1968). *Summer love & surf: Poems* . Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press.

Appleman, Philip. (2011). *Perfidious proverbs: A satirical look at the Bible* . Amherst, NY: Humanity Books.

I particularly liked *Eve* . With a foreward by Dan Barker.

Arnold, Matthew (1822-1888), poet

Dover Beach

The Sea of Faith / Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore / Lay like the folds of a bright girdle fur'd. / But now I only hear / Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar, / Retreating, to the breath / Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear / And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true / To one another! for the world, which seems / To lie before us like a land of dreams, / So various, so beautiful, so new, / Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light, / Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain; / And we are here as on a darkling plain / Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight, / Where ignorant armies clash by night. (Arnold, 1978, pp. 88-89)

Bailey, Philip James (1816-1902), poet

“Who never doubted never half-believed. / Where doubt there truth is —’tis her shadow” (as cited in Bradford, 2006, p. 49).

Barua, Sreeman Mishu (1971-), poet

To People - 2

“Bangladeshi poet / O people, confirm your actions / you walked a lot in this planet ‘by God's grace’ / now why don't you become responsible for yourself?”

Imagination

“How boundless is the strength of imagination! / It created Satan on one side, God on the other -- / human beings which die off easily / most unscrupulously it presented them / with the hope of immortality.”

My Religion

“I do not acknowledge religion. / The religion that kept me isolated / from your life -- / isn't mine. / Leave that religion which / is still breast feeding you.”

Betjeman, John (1906-1984), poet, writer, journalist

Let me take this other glove off / As the vox humana swells, / And the beautiful fields of Eden / Bask beneath the Abbey bells. / Here, where England's statesmen lie, / Listen to a lady's cry.

Gracious Lord, oh bomb the Germans, / Spare their women for Thy Sake, / And if that is not too easy / We will pardon Thy Mistake. / But, gracious Lord, whatever shall be, / Don't let anyone bomb me.

Keep our Empire undismembered / Guide our Forces by Thy Hand, / Gallant blacks from far Jamaica, / Honduras and Togoland; / Protect them Lord in all their fights, / And, even more, protect the whites.

Think of what our Nation stands for, / Books from Boots' and country lanes, / Free speech, free passes, class distinction, / Democracy and proper drains. / Lord, put beneath Thy special care / One-eighty-nine Cadogan Square.

Although dear Lord I am a sinner, / I have done no major crime; / Now I'll come to Evening Service / Whenever I have the time. / So, Lord, reserve for me a crown, / And do not let my shares go down.

I will labour for Thy Kingdom, / Help our lads to win the war, / Send white feathers to the cowards / Join the Women's Army Corps, /

Then wash the steps around Thy Throne / In the Eternal Safety Zone.

Now I feel a little better, / What a treat to hear Thy Word, / Where the bones of leading statesmen / Have so often been interr'd. / And now, dear Lord, I cannot wait / Because I have a luncheon date. (Betjeman, 1940)

Burns, Robert (1759-1796), poet

Epistle to the Rev. John M'Math

“Their sighin', cantin', grace-proud faces, / Their three-mile prayers, and half-mile graces” (Burns, 2010, p. 86).

Holy Willie's Prayer

O Thou that in the heavens does dwell! / Wha, as it pleases best Thysel, / Sends ane to heaven and ten to hell, / A' for Thy glory! / And no for ony gude or ill / They've done before Thee!

I bless and praise Thy matchless might, / When thousands Thou has left in night, / That I am here before Thy sight, / For gifts and grace, / A burning and a shining light / To a' this place.

What was I, or my generation, / That I should get such exaltation? / I, wha deserved most just damnation / For broken laws, / Sax thousand years ere my creation, / Thro' Adam's cause!

When from my mother's womb I fell, / Thou might hae plunged me deep in hell, / To gnash my gooms, and weep, and wail, / In burning lakes, / Where damned devils roar and yell, / Chained to their stakes.

Yet I am here, a chosen sample, / To shew Thy grace is great and ample; / I'm here, a pillar o' Thy temple, / Strong as a rock, / A guide, a buckler, and example, / To a' Thy flock.

O Lord, Thou kens what zeal I bear, / When drinkers drink, and swearers swear, / And singin' here, and dancing there, / Wi' great

an' sma'; / For I am keepst by Thy fear, / Free frae them a'.

But yet, O Lord, confess I must / At times I'm fashed wi' fleshy lust;
/ And sometimes too, in worldly trust / Vile Self gets in; / But Thou
remembers we are dust, / Defiled wi' sin.

O Lord! Yestreen, Thou kens—wi' Meg— / Thy pardon I sincerely
beg! / O may't ne'er be a living plague, / To my dishonor! / And I'll
ne'er lift a lawless leg / Again upon her.

Besides, I farther maun allow, / Wi' Leezie's lass, three time—I
trow— / But Lord, that Friday I was fou / When I cam near her; / Or
else, Thou kens, thy servant true / Wad never steer her.

Maybe Thou lets this fleshy thorn / Buffet Thy servant e'en and
morn, / Lest he o'er proud and high should turn, / That he's sae
gifted; / If sae, Thy hand maun e'en be borne / Until Thou lift it.

Lord, bless Thy Chosen in this place, / For here Thou has a
chosen race: / But God, confound their stubborn face, / And blast
their name, / Wha bring Thy rulers to disgrace / And public shame.

Lord mind Gaun Hamilton's deserts! / He drinks, and swears, and
plays at cartes, / Yet has sae mony taking arts / Wi' Great and
Sma', / Frae God's ain priest the people's hearts / He steals awa

And when we chastened him therefore, / Thou kens how he bred
sic a splore, / And set the world in a roar / O' laughing at us— /
Curse Thou his basket and his store, / Kail and potatoes.

Lord, hear my earnest cry and prayer / Against that Presbytry of
Ayr! / Thy strong right hand, Lord, make it bare / Upon their heads!
/ Lord visit them, and dinna spare, / For their misdeeds!

O Lord, my God, that glib-tongued Aiken! / My very heart and flesh
are quaking / To think how I sat, sweating and shaking. / And
pissed wi' dread, / While he wi' hingin lip and sneaking / Held up
his head!

Lord, in Thy day o' vengeance try him! / Lord, visit them that did
employ him! / And pass not in Thy mercy by them, / Nor hear their

prayer; / But for Thy people's sake destroy them, / And dinna spare!

But Lord, remember me and mine / Wi' mercies temporal and divine! / That I for grace and gear may shine, / Excelled by nane! / And a' the glory shall be Thine! / Amen! Amen! (as cited in Harmon, 1992, pp. 390-393)

Second Epistle to John Lapraik

"The social, friendly, honest man, / Whate'er he be, / 'Tis he fulfils great Nature's plan, / And none but he!" (Burns, 2010, p. 71).

Brooke, Rupert (1887-1915), poet

Heaven

...Fish say, they have their Stream and Pond; / But is there anything Beyond? / This life cannot be All, they swear, / For how unpleasant, if it were! / ...And, sure, the reverent eye must see / A Purpose in Liquidity. / ...But somewhere, beyond Space and Time, / Is wetter water, slimier slime! / And there (they trust) there swimmeth One / Who swam ere rivers were begun, / Immense, of fishy form and mind, / Squamous, omnipotent, and kind; / And in that Heaven of all their wish, / There shall be no more land, say fish. (Brooke, 1915, p. 27)

Carroll, Lewis (1832-1889), children's writer

The Walrus and the Carpenter

The sun was shining on the sea, / Shining with all his might: / He did his very best to make / The billows smooth and bright-- / And this was odd, because it was / The middle of the night.

The moon was shining sulkily, / Because she thought the sun / Had got no business to be there / After the day was done-- / 'It's very rude of him,' she said, / 'To come and spoil the fun!'

The sea was wet as wet could be, / The sands were dry as dry. /
You could not see a cloud, because / No cloud was in the sky: / No
birds were flying overhead-- / There were no birds to fly.

The Walrus and the Carpenter / Were walking close at hand; /
They wept like anything to see / Such quantities of sand: / 'If this
were only cleared away,' / They said, 'it would be grand!'

'If seven maids with seven mops / Swept it for half a year. / Do you
suppose,' the Walrus said, / 'That they could get it clear?' / 'I doubt
it,' said the Carpenter, / And shed a bitter tear.

'O Oysters, come and walk with us!' / The Walrus did beseech. / 'A
pleasant walk, a pleasant talk, / Along the briny beach: / We
cannot do with more than four, / To give a hand to each.'

The eldest Oyster looked at him, / But never a word he said: / The
eldest Oyster winked his eye, / And shook his heavy head-- /
Meaning to say he did not choose / To leave the oyster-bed.

But four young Oysters hurried up, / All eager for the treat: / Their
coats were brushed, their faces washed, / Their shoes were clean
and neat-- / And this was odd, because, you know, / They hadn't
any feet.

Four other Oysters followed them, / And yet another four; / And
thick and fast they came at last, / And more, and more, and more--
/ All hopping through the frothy waves, / And scrambling to the
shore.

The Walrus and the Carpenter / Walked on a mile or so, / And then
they rested on a rock / Conveniently low: / And all the little Oysters
stood / And waited in a row.

'The time has come,' the Walrus said, / 'To talk of many things: / Of
shoes--and ships--and sealing-wax-- / Of cabbages--and kings-- /
And why the sea is boiling hot-- / And whether pigs have wings.'

'But wait a bit,' the Oysters cried, / 'Before we have our chat; / For
some of us are out of breath, / And all of us are fat!' / 'No hurry!'

said the Carpenter. / They thanked him much for that .

'A loaf of bread,' the Walrus said, / 'Is what we chiefly need: / Pepper and vinegar besides / Are very good indeed-- / Now if you're ready, Oysters dear, / We can begin to feed.'

'But not on us!' the Oysters cried, / Turning a little blue. / 'After such kindness, that would be / A dismal thing to do!' / 'The night is fine,' the Walrus said. / 'Do you admire the view?

'It was so kind of you to come! / And you are very nice!' / The Carpenter said nothing but / 'Cut us another slice: / I wish you were not quite so deaf-- / I've had to ask you twice!'

'It seems a shame,' the Walrus said, / 'To play them such a trick, / After we've brought them out so far, / And made them trot so quick!' / The Carpenter said nothing but / 'The butter's spread too thick!'

'I weep for you,' the Walrus said: / 'I deeply sympathize.' / With sobs and tears he sorted out / Those of the largest size, / Holding his pocket-handkerchief / Before his streaming eyes.

'O Oysters,' said the Carpenter, / 'You've had a pleasant run! / Shall we be trotting home again?' / But answer came there none-- / And this was scarcely odd, because / They'd eaten every one. (Carroll, 2000)

Carvaka, System of Indian philosophy

Sarva-darsana-samgraha

The fire is hot, the water cold, refreshing cool the breeze of morn; / By who came this variety? From their own nature was it born. / And this has been also said by Brhaspati— / There is no heaven, no final liberation, nor any soul in another world / Nor do the actions of the four castes, order, ect. produce any real effect / The Agnihotra, the three Vedas, the ascetics's three staves, and smearing / Oneself with ashes / Were made by Nature as the

livelihood of those lacking knowledge and / Manliness / If a beast slain in the Jyotistoma rite will itself go to heaven, / Why then does not the sacrificer forthwith offer his own father? / While life remains let a man live happily, let him feed on ghee even though / He runs in debt; / When once the body becomes ashes, how can it ever return again? / If he who departs from the body goes to another world. / How is it that he comes not back again, restless for love of his kindred? / Hence it is only as a means of livelihood that Brahmins have established / Here all these ceremonies for the dead—there is no other fruit anywhere. (as cited in Hecht, 2004, pp. 99-100)

Clough, Arthur Hugh (1819-1861), poet

The New Sinai

Lo, here is God, and there is God! / Believe it not, O Man; / In such vain sort to this and that / The ancient heathen ran / Though old Religion shake her head, / And say in bitter grief, / The day behold, at first foretold, / Of atheist unbelief / Take better part, with manly heart, / Thine adult spirit can; / Receive it not, believe it not, / Believe it not, O Man! (Clough, 1898, p. 81)

Easter Day. Naples, 1849

The foul engendered worm / Feeds on the flesh of the life-giving form / Of our most Holy and Anointed One. / He is not risen, no, / He lies and moulders low; / Christ is not risen. / Ashes to ashes, dust to dust; / As of the unjust, also of the just— / Christ is not risen...

Is He not risen, and shall we not rise? / Oh, we unwise! / What did we dream, what wake we to discover? / Ye hills, fall on us, and ye mountains, cover! / In darkness and great gloom / Come ere we thought it is *our* day of doom, / From the cursed world which is one tomb, / Christ is not risen!

Eat, drink, and play, and think that this is bliss: / There is no heaven but this; / There is no hell, / Save earth, which serves the

purpose doubly well, / See it visits still / With equalest
apportionment of ill / Both good and bad alike, and brings to one
same dust / The unjust and the just / With Christ, who is not risen.

Eat, drink, and die, for we are men deceived, / Of all the creatures
under heaven's wide cope / We are most hopeless who had once
most hope, / We are most wretched that had most believed. /
Christ is not risen. / Eat, drink, and play, and think that this is bliss!
/ There is no Heaven but this! (Clough, 1898, pp. 100-103)

The Latest Decalogue

Thou shalt have one God only; who / Would be at the expense of
two? / No graven images may be / Worshipped, except the
currency: / Swear not at all; for, for thy curse / Thine enemy is
none the worse: / At church on Sunday to attend / Will serve to
keep the world thy friend: / Honour thy parents, that is, all / From
whom advancement may befall; / Thou shalt not kill; but need'st
not strive / Officiously to keep alive: / Do not adultery commit; /
Advantage rarely comes of it: / Thou shalt not steal; an empty feat,
/ When it's so lucrative to cheat: / Bear not false witness; let the lie
/ Have time on its own wings to fly: / Thou shalt not covet, but
tradition / Approves all forms of competition. (Clough, 1898, p.
183).

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor (1772-1834), poet, critic, philosopher

In a letter to Thomas Allsop in 1820, Coleridge wrote: "Not one man
in ten thousand has goodness of heart or strength of mind to be an
atheist" (as quoted in Robertson, 2003, p. 96).

Fears in Solitude

Forth from his dark and lonely hiding-place / (Portentous sight!) the
owlet Atheism, / Sailing on obscene wings athwart the noon, /
Drops his blue-fringed lids, and holds them close, / And hooting at
the glorious sun in Heaven, / Cries out, 'Where is it?' (Coleridge,
2009, p. 94)

Dickinson, Emily (1830-1886), poet

Johnson #185



"Emily Dickinson"
From Library of Congress Collection

"Faith' is a fine invention / When Gentlemen can see— / But
Microscopes are prudent / In an Emergency" (Dickinson, 1960, p.
87).

Johnson #413

I never felt at Home— Below— / And in the Handsome Skies / I shall
not feel at Home— I know— / I don't like Paradise—

Because it's Sunday— all the time— / And Recess— never comes—
/ And Eden'll be so lonesome / Bright Wednesday Afternoons—

If God could make a visit— / Or ever took a Nap— / So not to see us
-- but they say / Himself— a Telescope

Perennial beholds us— / Myself would run away / From Him— and
Holy Ghost— and All— / But there's the 'Judgment Day'! (Dickinson,
1960, p. 197).

Johnson #1144

"Ourselves we do inter with sweet
derision. / The channel of the dust who

once achieves / Invalidates the balm of
that religion / That doubts as fervently as
it believes” (Dickinson, 1960, p. 512).

Johnson #1545

“The Bible is an antique Volume— / Written by faded Men / At the
suggestion of Holy Spectres—“ (Dickinson, 1960, p. 644).

Johnson #1551

Those— dying the, / Knew where they went— / They went to God’s
Right Hand— / That Hand is amputated now / And God cannot be
found— / The abdication of Belief / Makes the Behavior small— /
Better an ignis fatuus / Than no illume at all— (Dickinson, 1960, p.
646)

Johnson #1741

“That it will never come again / Is what makes life so sweet. /
Believing what we don’t believe / Does not exhilarate. / That if it be, it
be at best / An ablative estate— / This instigates an appetite /
Precisely opposite” (Dickinson, 1960, p. 706).

Freneau, Philip (1752-1832), poet, polemicist, sea captain,
newspaper editor

The Wild Honey Suckle

“If nothing once, you nothing lose, / For when you die you are the
same; / The space between, is but an hour, / The frail duration of a
flower” (as cited in Stedman, 1900).

Frost, Robert (1874-1963), poet, playwright

Not All There

“I turned to speak to God / About the world's despair; / But to make bad matters worse / I found God wasn't there” (Frost, 1936).

Design

found a dimpled spider, fat and white, / On a white heal-all, holding up a moth / Like a white piece of rigid satin cloth -- / Assorted characters of death and blight / Mixed ready to begin the morning right, / Like the ingredients of a witches' broth- / A snow-drop spider, a flower like a froth, / And dead wings carried like a paper kite.

What had that flower to do with being white, / The wayside blue and innocent heal-all? / What brought the kindred spider to that height, / Then steered the white moth thither in the night? / What but design of darkness to appall? -- / If design govern in a thing so small. (as cited in Frost, 1969, p. 302)

Forgive, O Lord

“Forgive, O Lord, my little jokes on Thee / And I'll forgive Thy great big one on me” (Frost, 1969, p. 428).

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang (1749-1832), novelist, poet, biologist, theoretical physicist

Prometheus

Shroud your heaven, Zeus, / With cloudy vapours, / And do as you will, like the boy / That beheads thistles, / With oak-trees and mountain-tops; / You must my Earth / Now abandon to me, And my hut, which you did not build, / And my hearth, / Whose glow / You begrudge me.

I know of nothing poorer / Under the sun, than you, Gods! / You are barely nourished / By sacrificial offerings / And prayerful exhalations / Your Majesty / And would starve, were / Not children and beggars / Hopeful fools.

When I was a child, / And did not know the in or out, / I turned my wandering eyes toward / The sun, as if beyond it there were / An ear to hear my lament, / A heart like mine, / To take pity on the afflicted.

Who helped me / Against the Titans' mischief? / Who delivered me from Death, / From Slavery? Did you not accomplish it all yourself, — / Holy, burning Heart? / And glowed, young and good, / Deceived, your thanks for salvation / To the sleeping one above?

I should honour you? For what? / Have you softened the sufferings, / Ever, of the burdened? Have you stilled the tears, / Ever, of the anguished? / Was I not forged as a Man / By almighty Time / And the eternal Fate, / My masters and yours?

Do you somehow imagine / I should hate life, / Flee to the desert, / Because not every / Flowering dream may bloom?

Here I sit, forming people / In my image; / A race, to be like me, / To suffer, to weep, / To enjoy and delight themselves, / And to mock you – / As I do! (Goethe, 1785)

See also: Schubert's song [*Prometheus D . 674*](#) is the poem set to music.

Harburg, Yip (1896-1981), lyricist, wrote "Over the Rainbow"

Atheist

Poems are made by fools like me, / But only God can make a tree; / And only God who makes the tree / Also makes the fools like me. / But only fools like me, you see, / Can make a God, who makes a tree. (Harburg, 2010)

Repent in Pleasure

"A little secret sinning now and then, / Should not disturb the saintliest of men; / For when your life is spent, and sun has set, / It's easier to repent than to regret" (Harburg, 2010).

Hardy, Thomas (1840-1928), novelist, poet, short story writer

Hap

If but some vengeful god would call to me / From up the sky, and
laugh: 'Thou suffering thing, / Know that thy sorrow is my ecstasy, /
That thy love's loss is my hate's profiting!'

Then would I bear it, clench myself, and die, / Steeled by the
sense of ire unmerited; / Half-eased in that a Powerfuller than I /
Had willed and meted me the tears I shed.

But not so. How arrives it joy lies slain, / And why unblooms the
best hope ever sown? / -- Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and
rain, / And dicing Time for gladness casts a moan. / These
purblind Doomsters had as readily strown / Blissed about my
pilgrimage as pain. (Hardy, 1932)

God's Funeral

'O man-projected Figure, of late / Imaged as we, thy knell who
shall survive? / Whence came it we were tempted to create / One
whom we can no longer keep alive?

'Framing him jealous, fierce, at first, / We gave him justice as the
ages rolled, / Will to bless those by circumstance accurst, / And
longsuffering, and mercies manifold.

'And, tricked by our own early dream / And need of solace, we
grew self-deceived, / Our making soon our maker did we deem, /
And what we had imagined we believed,

'Till, in Time's stayless stealthy swing, / Uncompromising rude
reality / Mangled the Monarch of our fashioning, / Who quavered,
sank; and now has ceased to be.

'So, toward our myth's oblivion, / Darkling, and languid-lipped, we
creep and grope / Sadlier than those who wept in Babylon, /
Whose Zion was a still abiding hope. (Hardy, 1909)

Crane, Hart (1899-1932), poet

Crane, Hart. (1930). *The bridge* . Paris, France: Black Sun Press.

A long epic poem inspired by the Brooklyn Bridge intended to give America a new myth.

Hood, Thomas (1799-1845), humorist, poet

“But evil is wrought by want of thought, / As well as want of heart!”
(as cited in Swainson, 1999).

Housman, A.E. (1859-1936), classical scholar, poet

The Laws of God, The Laws of Man

The laws of God, the laws of man, / He may keep that will and can;
/ Not I: let God and man decree / Laws for themselves and not for
me; / And if my ways are not as theirs / Let them mind their own
affairs. / Their deeds I judge and much condemn, / Yet when did I
make laws for them? / Please yourselves, say I, and they / Need
only look the other way. / But no, they will not; they must still /
Wrest their neighbour to their will, / And make me dance as they
desire / With jail and gallows and hell-fire. / And how am I to face
the odds / Of man's bedevilment and God's? / I, a stranger and
afraid / In a world I never made. / They will be master, right or
wrong; / Though both are foolish, both are strong. / And since, my
soul, we cannot fly / To Saturn nor to Mercury, / Keep we must, if
keep we can, / These foreign laws of God and man. (Housman,
1965, p. 111)

The Carpenter's Son

Here the hangman stops his cart: / Now the best of friends must
part. / Fare you well, for ill fare I: / Live, lads, and I will die.

Oh, at home had I but stayed / 'Prenticed to my father's trade, /
Had I stuck to plane and adze, / I had not been lost, my lads.

Then I might have built perhaps / Gallows-trees for other chaps, /
Never dangled on my own, / Had I left but ill alone.

Now, you see, they hang me high, / And the people passing by /
Stop to shake their fists and curse; / So 'tis come from ill to worse .

Here hang I, and right and left / Two poor fellows hang for theft: /
All the same's the luck we prove, / Though the midmost hangs for
love.

Comrades all, that stand and gaze, / Walk henceforth in other
ways; / See my neck and save your own: / Comrades all, leave ill
alone.

Make some day a decent end, / Shrewder fellows than your friend.
/ Fare you well, for ill fare I: / Live lads, and I will die. (Housman,
1965, p. 97)

Hughes, Langston (1902-1967), poet, novelist, social activist

Christ in Alabama

Christ is a nigger, / Beaten and black: / Oh, bare your back!

Mary is His mother: / Mammy of the South, / Silence your mouth.

God is His father: / White Master above / Grant Him your love.

Most holy bastard / Of the bleeding mouth, / Nigger Christ / On the
cross / Of the South. (Hughes, 1994, p. 143)

See also: "Goodbye Christ" is a radical poem about letting go of
religion and embracing communism.

Johnson, Georgia Douglas (1880-1966), poet

The Suppliant

Long have I beat with timid hands upon life's leaden door, /
Praying the patient, futile prayer my fathers prayed before, / Yet I

remain without the close, unheeded and unheard, / And never to my listening ear is borne the waited word. / Soft o'er the threshold of the years there comes this counsel cool: / The strong demand, contend, prevail; the beggar is a fool! (as cited in Adoff, 1973, p. 23)

Keats, John (1795-1821), poet

The Fall of Hyperion

“Fanatics have their dreams, wherewith they weave / A paradise for a sect” (Keats, 2007, p. 221).

Lamia

Do not all charms fly / At the mere touch of cold philosophy? / There was an awful rainbow once in heaven: / We know her woof, her texture; she is given / In the dull catalogue of common things. / Philosophy will clip an angel's wings, / Conquer all mysteries by rule and line, / Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine - / Unweave a rainbow... (Keats, 2007, pp. 216-217)

Written in Disgust of Vulgar Superstition

The church bells toll a melancholy round, / Calling the people to some other prayers, / Some other gloominess, more dreadful cares, / More hearkening to the sermon's horrid sound. / Surely the mind of man is closely bound / In some black spell; seeing that each one tears / Himself from fireside joys, and Lydian airs, / And converse high of those with glory crowned. / Still, still they toll, and I should feel a damp - / A chill as from a tomb—did I not know / That they are dying like an outburnt lamp; / That 'tis their sighing, wailing ere they go / Into oblivion—that fresh flowers will grow, / And many glories of immortal stamp. (Keats, 1991, pp. 93-94)

Khayyám, Omar (1048-1131), philosopher, mathematician, astronomer, poet

Rubáiyát

Why, all the Saints and Sages who discuss'd / Of the Two Worlds
so wisely -- they are thrust / Like foolish Prophets forth; their
Words to Scorn / Are scattered, and their mouths are stopped with
Dust.

Oh threats of Hell and Hopes of Paradise! / One thing at least is
certain -- *This* life flies; / One thing is certain and the rest is Lies; /
The Flower that once has blown forever dies.

The Revelations of Devout and Learn'd / Who rose before us, and
as Prophets burn'd, / Are all but Stories, which, awoke from Sleep
/ They told their comrades, and to Sleep return'd.

I sent my Soul through the Invisible, / Some letter of that After-life
to spell: / And by and by my Soul return'd to me, / And answered 'I
myself am Heav'n and Hell.' (Khayyam, 1993, p. 39)

Rubáiyát

“And do you think that unto such as you / A maggot-minded, starved,
fanatic crew / God gave a secret, and denied it me? / Well, well-
what matters it? Believe that, too!” (as cited in Hitchens, 2007, p.
10).

Larkin, Philip (1922-1985), poet

Water

If I were called in / To construct a religion / I should make use of
water.

Going to church / Would entail a fording / To dry, different clothes;

My liturgy would employ / Images of sousing, / A furious devout
drench,

And I should raise in the east / A glass of water / Where any-
angled light / Would congregate endlessly. (Larkin, 1964)

See also:

Larkin, Philip. (1955). Church going. In *The less deceived* .
Australia: The Marvell Press.

Larkin, Philip. (1988). Audabe. In *Collected poems* (A. Thwaite, Ed.).
London, United Kingdom: Faber & Faber.

Lucretius (99 B.C.E. – 55 B.C.E.), poet, philosopher

The following poems are from *On the Nature of Things* (1st Century).

“Rest, brother, rest. Have you done ill or well / Rest, rest, There is no God, no gods who dwell / Crowned with avenging righteousness on high / Nor frowning ministers of their hate in hell” (as cited in Haught, 1996, p. 20).

Long time men lay oppress'd with slavish fear / Religion's tyranny did domineer ... / At length a mighty one of Greece began / To assert the natural liberty of man, / By senseless terrors and vain fancies let / To slavery. Straight the conquered phantoms fled. (as cited in Haught, 1996, p. 20)

When before our eyes man's life day groveling, prostrate, / Crushed to the dust under the burden of Religion / (Which thrust its head from heaven, its horrible fact / Glowering over mankind born to die), / One man, a Greek, was the first mortal who dared / Oppose his eyes, the first to stand firm in defense

Not the fables of gods, nor lightening, nor the menacing / Rumble of heaven could daunt him, but all the more / They whetted his keen mind with longing to be / First to smash open the tight-barred gates of Nature. / His vigor of mind prevailed, and he strode far / Beyond the fiery battlements of the world, / Raiding the fields of the unmeasured All.

Our victor returns with knowledge of what can arise, / What cannot, what law grants each thing its own / Deep-driven boundary

stone and finite scope. / Religion now lies trampled beneath our feet, / And we are made gods by the victory. (Lucretius, 1995, pp. 26-27)

al-Ma'arri, Abdallah (973-1057), philosopher, poet, writer

“By fearing whom I trust I find my way / To truth; by trusting wholly I betray / The trust of wisdom; better far is doubt / Which brings the false into the light of day” (as quoted in Hecht, 2004, p. 231).

They recite their sacred books, although the fact informs me that these are a / Fiction from first to last. / O Reason, thou (alone) speakest the truth. Then perish the fools who forged / The religious traditions or interpreted them! / O fools, awake! The rites ye sacred hold / Are but a cheat contrived by men of old / Who lusted after wealth and gained their lust / And died in baseness—and their law is dust. (as cited in Hecht, 2004, p. 232)

Marlowe, Christopher (1564-1593), playwright

The Massacre of Paris

“Religion! O Diabole! / Fie, I am asham'd, however that I seem, / To think a word of such simple sound, / Of such great matter should be made the ground” (as cited in Herrick, 1985, p. 30).

Marquis, Don (1878-1937), humorist, journalist, novelist

Transient

“Give up the dream that Love may trick the fates / To live again somewhere beyond the gleam / Of dying stars, or shatter the strong gates / Some god has builded high; give up the dream” (as cited in Haught, 1996, p. 250).

Masters, Edgar Lee (1868-1950), poet, biographer, dramatist

The Typical American?

“He is sent to school / Little or much, where he imbibes the rule / Of safety first and comfort; in his youth / He joins the church and ends the quest of truth (as cited in Seldes, 1985, p. 305).

The Village Atheist

“Listen to me, ye who live in the senses / And think through the senses only: / Immortality is not a gift, / Immortality is an achievement; / And only those who strive mightly / Shall possess it” (as cited in Seldes, 1985, p. 305).

Poem for R.G. Ingersoll

“He stripped off the armor of institutional / friendships / To dedicate his soul / To the terrible deities of Truth and Beauty” (as cited in Seldes, 1985, p. 305).

McGinley, Phyllis (1905-1978), children’s writer, poet

In Defense of Sin

Ah, snug lie those that slumber / Beneath Conviction's roof. / Their floors are sturdy lumber / Their windows weatherproof. / But I sleep cold forever / And cold sleep all my kind / For I was born to shiver / In the draft from an open mind. (as cited in Laird, 1994, p. 255).

The Degeneration of Belief

When blithe to argument I come, / Though armed with facts and merry; / May providence protect me from, / The Fool as adversary. / Whose mind to him a kingdom is, / Where reason lacks dominion; / Who calls conviction prejudice, / and prejudice opinion. (as cited in Laird, 1994, p. 298)

Pope, Alexander (1688-1744), poet

Essay on Man, Epistle IV

“Slave to no sect, who takes no private road, / But looks through Nature up to Nature’s God” (Pope, 2006, p. 307).

Shakespeare, William (1564-1616), playwright

All’s Well That Ends Well

“Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie, / Which we ascribe to heaven” (1:1).

King Lear

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe’er you are, / That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm, / How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides, / Your loop’d and window’d raggedness, defend you / From seasons such as these? O, I have ta’en / Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp; / Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel, / That thou mayest shake the superflux to them / And show the heavens more just. (3:4)

The Merchant of Venice

“In religion, / What damned error but some sober brow / Will bless it, and approve it with a text, hiding the grossness with fair ornament?” (3:2).

“Thrust your head into the public street, to gaze on Christian fools with varnish’d faces” (2:5).

Twelfth Night

“Methinks sometimes I have no more wit than a Christian” (1:3).

The Winter’s Tale

“It is a heretic that makes the fire, not she which burns in it” (2:3).

Troilus and Cressida

“Modest doubt is call’d the beacon of the wise” (2:2).

Much Ado About Nothing

“I will be flesh and blood. / For there was never yet philosopher / That could endure the tooth ache patiently, / However they have writ the style of gods / And made a pish at chance and sufferance” (5:1).

Macbeth

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow / Creeps in this petty pace from day to day / To the last syllable of recorded time; / And all our yesterdays have lighted fools / The way to dusty death. / Out, out, brief candle! / Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage / And then is heard no more; it is a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury / Signifying nothing. (5:5)

Henry the IV

Glendower: I can call spirits from the vasty deep.

Hotspur: Why, so can I, or so can any man; / But will they come when you do call for them?

Glendower: Why, I can teach you, cousin, to command the devil.

Hotspur: And I can teach thee, coz, to shame the devil— / By telling the truth. Tell the truth and shame the devil. (1:3)

Shelley, Percy Bysshe (1792-1822), poet, essayist, novelist

Queen Mab: A Philosophical Poem – Spirit

I was an infant when my mother went / To see an atheist burned. She took me there. / The dark-robed priests were met around the pile; / The multitude was gazing silently; / And as the culprit passed with dauntless mien, / Tempered disdain in his unaltering eye, / Mixed with a quiet smile, shone calmly forth; / The thirsty fire crept round his manly limbs; / His resolute eyes were scorched to blindness soon; / His death-pang rent my heart! the insensate mob / Uttered a cry of triumph, and I wept. / ‘Weep not, child!’ cried my mother, ‘for that man / Has said, ‘There is no God.’ (Shelley, 2003, p. 51)

Queen Mab: A Philosophical Poem - Fairy

There is no God! / Nature confirms the faith his death-groan sealed: / Let heaven and earth, let man's revolving race, / His ceaseless generations tell their tale; / Let every part depending on the chain / That links it to the whole, point to the hand / That grasps its term! Let every seed that falls / In silent eloquence unfold its store / Of argument: infinity within, / Infinity without, belie creation; / The exterminable spirit it contains / Is nature's only God; but human pride / Is skillful to invent most serious names / To hide its ignorance...

Earth groans beneath religion's iron age, / And priests dare babble of a God of peace, / Even whilst their hands are red with guiltless blood, / Murdering the while, uprooting every germ / Of truth, exterminating, spoiling all, / Making the earth a slaughter-house! (Shelley, 2003, pp. 51-52)

Ozymandias

I met a traveller from an antique land / Who said: 'Two vast and trunkless legs of stone / Stand in the desert. Near them on the sand, / Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown / And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command / Tell that its sculptor well those passions read / Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things, / The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed. / And on the pedestal these words appear: / 'My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings: / Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!' / Nothing beside remains. Round the decay / Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare, / The lone and level sands stretch far away.' (Shelley, 2003, p. 198)

See also: *Prometheus Unbound* (1820)

Sterling, George (1869-1926), poet

To Science

And if thou slay Him, shall the ghost not rise? / Yea! if thou
conquer Him thine enemy, / His specter from the dark shall visit
thee — / Invincible, necessitous and wise. / The tyrant and mirage
of human eyes, / Exhaled upon the spirit's darkened sea, / Shares
He thy moment of eternity, / Thy truth confronted ever with His lies.

Thy Banners gleam a little, and are furled; / Against thy turrets
surge His phantom tow'rs; / Drugged with his Opiates the nations
nod, / Refusing still the beauty of thine hours; / And fragile is thy
tenure of this world / Still haunted by the monstrous ghost of God.
(as cited in Joshi, 2000, p. 191)

Stevens, Wallace (1879-1955), poet

The Snow Man

One must have a mind of winter / To regard the frost and the
boughs / Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;

And have been cold a long time / To behold the junipers shagged
with ice, / The spruces rough in the distant glitter

Of the January sun; and not to think / Of any misery in the sound
of the wind, / In the sound of a few leaves,

Which is the sound of the land / Full of the same wind / That is
blowing in the same bare place

For the listener, who listens in the snow, / And, nothing himself,
beholds / Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.
(Stevens, 1982, pp. 9-10)

Sunday Morning

Shall our blood fail? Or shall it come to be / The blood of paradise?
And shall the earth / Seem all of paradise we shall know? / The
sky will be much friendlier then than now, / A part of labor and a
part of pain, / And next in glory to enduring love, / Not this dividing
and indifferent blue.

...

Is there no change of death in paradise? / Does ripe fruit never fail?

...

Death is the mother of beauty; hence from her, / Alone, shall come fulfillment to our dreams / And our desires. (Stevens, 1982, p. 68)

Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour

Light the first light of evening, as in a room / In which we rest and, for small reason think / The world imagined is the ultimate good.

This is, therefore, the intensest rendezvous. / It is in that thought that we collect ourselves, / Out of all the indifferences, into one thing:

Within a single thing, a single shawl / Wrapped tightly round us, since we are poor, a / warmth, / A light, a power, the miraculous influence.

Here, now, we forget each other and ourselves. / We feel the obscurity of an order, a whole, / A knowledge, that which arranged the rendezvous.

Within its vital boundary, in the mind. / We say God and the imagination are one... / How high that highest candle lights the dark.

Out of this same light, out of the central mind, / We make a dwelling in the evening air, / In which being there together is enough. (Stevens, 1982, p. 524)

Swinburne, Algernon Charles (1837-1909), poet, playwright, novelist

The Altar of Righteousness

God by god flits past in thunder, till his glories turn to shades; / God to god bears wondering witness how his gospel flames and fades. / More was each of these, while yet they were, than man

their servant seemed: / Dead are all of these, and man survives
who made them while he dreamed. (Swinburne, 1912)

Also check out “The Garden of Proserpine” (1912a), “Hertha”
(1912b), and “Before the Crucifix” (1912b) from:

Swinburne, Algernon. (1912a). *The poems of Algernon Charles
Swinburne* (Vol. 1). London, United Kingdom: Chatto & Windus.

Swinburne, Algernon. (1912b). *The poems of Algernon Charles
Swinburne* (Vol. 2). London, United Kingdom: Chatto & Windus.

Tennyson, Alfred (1809-1892), poet

He was particularly repulsed by the idea of a place like Hell.

Despair

What! I should call on that Infinite Love that / has served us so
well? / Infinite cruelty rather, that made everlasting hell, / Made us,
foreknew us, foredoom'd us, and does / what he will with his own; /
Better our dead brute mother who never has / heard us groan. (as
cited in Remsberg, 1994, p. 284)

Rizpah

Election, Election and Reprobation— it's all very well, / But I go to-
night to my boy, and I shall not find him in Hell...

And if *he* be lost— but to save *my* soul, that is all your desire; / Do
you think that I care for *my* soul if my boy be gone to the fire?

I have been with God in the dark—go, go, you may leave me alone
— / You never have borne a child—you are just as hard as stone.
(Tennyson, 2009, pp. 440-441)

Thomson, James (1700-1748), poet, playwright

The City of Dreadful Night

A poem about the melancholia which overtook Thomson after his loss of belief in God. His deep despair at the emptiness that often accompanies rejection of religion is painfully wrought.

Thomson, James. (1880). *The city of dreadful night & other poems* .
London, United Kingdom: Reeves & Turner.

Whitman, Walt (1819-1892), poet, essayist, journalist

By Blue Ontario's Shore



"Walt Whitman"
From Library of Congress Collection

O I see flashing that this America is only you and me, / Its power, weapons, testimony are you and me, / Its crimes, lies, thefts, defections, are you and me... / The war (that war so bloody and grim, the war I will / henceforth forget) was you and me... / I am for those that have never been master'd, / For men and women whose tempers have / never been master'd / For those whom laws, theories, conventions, / can never master. / I am for those who walk abreast with the whole earth, / Who inaugurate one to inaugurate all. / I will not be outfaced by irrational things, / I will penetrate what it is in them that is sarcastic upon me... (as cited in Jacoby, 2004, p. 223)

Wilcox, Ella Wheeler (1850-1919), poet

The World's Need

“So many gods, so many creeds, / So many paths that wind and wind, / While just the art of being kind, / While just the art of being kind, / Is all the sad world needs” (Wilcox, 2006, p. 8).

For more contemporary poetry check out:

Atheist Poetry

atheistempire.com/writings/poetry.html

Dandy, Christopher. (2008). *Poems for atheists* . Lulu Publishing.

And for an interesting examination of atheist poetry:

Priestman, Martin. (1999). *Romantic atheism: Poetry & freethought, 1780-1830* . New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. ✓

Additional Resources

Book Talk: Quality Books. Good People. Good Conversations .

A great freethought book forum.

booktalk.org

Magazines, Newspapers, & Journals

Many of the organizations listed in the *Organization Directory* have publications. Here I have listed some of the more prominent.

Free Inquiry: The Transnational Secular Humanist Magazine

A “hard-hitting bimonthly journal of the Council for Secular Humanism. From world-class columnists to thought-provoking cover features to commentaries from every branch of the secular humanist movement.”

secularhumanism.org

The Freethinker: The Voice of Atheism Since 1881

PO Box 234
Brighton, UK BN1 4XD

Phone: 01273680531

freethinker.co.uk

Freethought Today

A newspaper created by the Freedom From Religion Foundation. It “covers timely news related to state/church separation and includes articles of interest to freethinkers.”

ffrf.org/publications/freethought-today

The Humanist: A Magazine of Critical Inquiry & Social Concern ✓

1777 T Street, NW
Washington, DC 20009-7125

Phone: 1.202.238.9088

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thehumanist.org

New Humanist: Ideas for Godless People

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Philo

The Society of Humanist Philosophers publishes this biannual work focusing on articles on philosophy.

philoonline.org

Secular News Daily: News & Views from a Secular Perspective

secularnewsdaily.com

Skeptic: Promoting Science & Critical Thinking

skeptic.com/the_magazine

Skeptical Inquirer: The Magazine for Science & Reason ✓

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Humanist Press

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Music



"Hymns"

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In past centuries, religious institutions were the primary patrons of music. Thankfully, modern music is largely secular. We can also be grateful that there are now songs which more specifically carry the spirit of freethought. In selecting the songs below, I attempted to weigh not only the merits of the message, but also the quality of the music. There were quite a few that I eliminated because they were awful by both criteria. Not surprisingly, many of the most vitriolic and heavy-handed atheist songs are just as excruciating to listen to as Christian pop. Me-thinks fundamentalism is to blame in this regard where the music takes a back seat to the propaganda. I initially listened to over 3,000 freethought related tunes. Approximately 200 of the very best are presented below ranging between humanism, atheism, agnosticism, religious criticism, and celebrations of science. I hope I have struck a balance that is both stimulating for the mind and easy on the ears.

The reader should be aware of three things. First, with many of the tunes, I am perhaps taking some license in interpreting them as freethinking (e.g. R.E.M.'s "Losing My Religion" which, according to lead singer Michael Stipe, is about obsessive love). I have included any ambiguous songs on the basis of what the metaphors are *capable* of. Second, the selection is very Westerncentric. I want to

correct this bias in the future, but again, I need your help to do so. Lastly, most of the entries are citations of specific songs. In some cases, I have cited the album only, the title of which is always in italics.

Blues

Howlin' Wolf. (1961). I ain't superstitious. On *I ain't superstitious* [Record]. Chicago, IL: Chess.

Smither, Chris. (2006). Origin of species. On *Leave the light on* [CD]. Mississauga, ON, Canada: True North Records.

Classical

Since it is so nearly impossible to classify classical music as either secular or theistic without lyrics as a guide I have decided to list composers who were at least freethinkers in their perspective. They include (in alphabetical order): Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827), Hector Berlioz (1803-1869), Georges Bizet (1838-1875), Johannes Brahms (1833-1897), Aaron Copland (1900-1990), Claude Debussy (1862-1918), Frederick Delius (1862-1934), Edward Elgar (1857-1934), Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791), Niccolò Paganini (1782-1840), Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953), Maurice Ravel (1875-1937), Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868), Robert Schumann (1810-1856), Richard Strauss (1864-1949), Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901), and Ralph Vaughn Williams (1872-1958) (Barker, 2011, pp. 77-94). Much of the music these composers created might be described, along with secular, as deistic or pantheistic in nature.

Beethoven, Ludwig. (1824). Symphony no. 9 in D minor, Op. 125. Vienna, Austria.

Celebrates the values of the Enlightenment and the lyrics are based on Friedrich Schiller's poem "Ode to Joy" (1785), a call for human fraternity. It is also the anthem of the European Union!

Orff, Carl. (1936). *Carmina Burana: Cantiones profanæ cantoribus et choris cantandæ comitantibus instrumentis atque imaginibus*

magicis (Songs of Beuem: Secular songs for singers & choruses to be sung together with instruments & magic images). Germany.

Based on a collection of medieval poems about a number of topics including fortune, physical pleasures, and the briefness of life.

Schubert, Franz. (1819). Prometheus D. 674 .

See also: Goethe's poem "Prometheus."

Strauss, Richard. (1896). Also sprach Zarathustra, Op. 30.

Comedy

The Axis of Awesome. (2010). WWJD? On *Infinity rock explosion* [CD]. Australia: The Axis of Awesome.

Hawking, MC. (1997). F*ck the creationists. On *A brief history of rhyme: MC Hawkings' greatest hits* [CD]. Atlanta, GA: Brash Music.

Hawking, MC. (2004). What we need more of is science. On *A brief history of rhyme: MC Hawkings' greatest hits* [CD]. Atlanta, GA: Brash Music.

Lehrer, Tom. (1959). The elements. On *An evening wasted with Tom Lehrer* [Record]. Boston, MA: Lehrer Records.

Lehrer, Tom. (1965). The Vatican rag. On *That was the year that was* [Record]. Burbank, CA: Reprise.

This has been a favorite of freethinkers for decades.

Lynch, Stephen. (2000). Priest. On *A little bit special* [CD]. Chatsworth, CA: HaHa Records.

Lynch, Stephen. (2005). Craig Christ. On *The Craig machine* [CD]. Boulder, CO: What Are Records.

Martin, Steve. (2011). Atheists don't have no songs. On *Rare bird alert* [CD]. Burlington, MA: Rounder Records.

While not true, this is a funny lighthearted song. He is right that we have rock and roll!

Minchin, Tim. (2011). *Tim Minchin & the Heritage Orchestra recorded live, Manchester Area UK* [CD]. London, United Kingdom: Inertia Records. ✓ # 1

The Australian raised comedian/musician strikes a chord with “Thank You God” and “The Pope Song.”

Minchin, Tim. (2011). *Ready for this: Live at the Queen Elizabeth Hall* [CD]. Burbank, CA: Collective Sounds. ✓

In his beat poem *Storm* he challenges alternative medicine and states “Science adjusts its views based on what's observed. Faith is the denial of observation, so that belief can be preserved.” “I Love Jesus” and “The Good Book” are also worth checking out. Elsewhere, check out “If You Open Your Mind Too Much Your Brain Will Fall Out (Take My Wife).”

King Missile. (1990). Jesus was way cool. On *Mystical shit* [CD]. New York, NY: Shimmy Disc.

A deadpan satire of Jesus and his “miracles.”

Monty Python. (1983). Every sperm is sacred. On *The meaning of life* [CD]. London, United Kingdom: Virgin. ✓

Monty Python. (1989). Brian song. On *Monty Python sings* [CD]. London, United Kingdom: Virgin. ✓

Monty Python. (1991). Galaxy song. On *Galaxy song* [CD]. London, United Kingdom: Virgin. ✓

Tenacious D. (2006). Kickapoo. On *The pick of destiny* [CD]. New York, NY: Epic.

Tenacious D. (2012). Throw down. On *Rize of the fenix* [CD]. New York, NY: Columbia Records.

The epic return of the D includes this great tune about throwing religion to the trash heap of the past. “All religions of the world today / We got to leave 'em alone / We got to use our fucking brains today / Before we're gone / Before we're gooone.”

Zimmerman, Roy. (2004). Jerry Falwell's god. On *Homeland* [CD]. Kelseyville, CA: Metaphor.

Zimmerman, Roy. (2006). Creation science 101. On *Faulty intelligence* [CD]. Kelseyville, CA: Metaphor.

Country/Folk

Anonymous. (1810-1820). My thoughts are free (Die Gedanken sind frei).

A German folk song about the freedom of thought. It in part sings: "I think as I please, and this gives me pleasure, / My conscience decrees this right I must treasure; / My thoughts will not cater to duke or dictator, / No one can deny: My thoughts are free!" Pete Seeger did a good cover which can be found on his appropriately titled album *Dangerous Songs!?* (1966).

Barker, Dan. (2002). *Friendly neighborhood atheist* [CD]. Madison, WI: Freedom from Religion Foundation.

Former evangelical minister turned atheist currently has these two albums out, both of which poke fun at religion and playfully celebrates humanity.

Barker, Dan. (2004). *Beware of dogma* [CD]. Madison, WI: Freedom from Religion Foundation.

Davis, Emily. (2011). *Dark matter* [CD]. El Paso, TX: Emily Davis Music.

My favorites include "Blood Red Sea," "Diablo," and "Sagan's Song."

DeMent, Iris. (1992). Let the mystery be. On *Infamous angel* [CD]. Philo.

A stoic statement of agnosticism. Although I agree with her doubting message I don't necessarily think the questions should not be examined.

Dixie Chicks. (2006). Lubbock or leave it. On *Taking the long way* [CD]. Open Wide Records.

Carpenter, Mary. (1992). I take my chances. On *Come on come on* [CD]. New York, NY: Sony Music Distribution.

Fulks, Robbie. (1998). God isn't real. On *Let's kill Saturday night* [CD]. New York, NY: Geffen Records.

Jansch, Bert. (1969). Come sing me a happy song to prove we can all get along the lumpy, bumpy, long & dusty road. On *Birthday blues* [Record]. London, United Kingdom: Castle Music Ltd.

Near, Holly. (2000). I ain't afraid. On *Edge* [CD]. Redwood Valley, CA: Calico Tracks Music.

This song is railing against human corruption, for selfish ends, of spiritual ideas.

Snider, Todd. (2006). Happy new year. On *The devil you know* [CD]. Santa Monica, CA: New Door Records.

He's an "evangelical agnostic" who "ain't hurtin' you" and admits "that life's pretty great."

Snider, Todd. (2006). In the beginning. On *Agnostic hymns & stoner fables* [CD]. Aimless Records.

A simple (and plausible) explanation for the birth of religion. "Let that be my stuff!" And so it was done.

Williams, Dar. (2005). Empire. On *My better self* [CD]. New York, NY: Razor & Tie.

About blind faith leading to war.

Jazz

Horne, Lena. (1943). Ain't it de truth.

Originally intended to debut in the film *Cabin in the Sky* (1943). The scene in which this song was incorporated was cut because the studio didn't think American audiences could handle a black woman singing in a tub. It probably didn't help that the song is quite irreverent.

Pop/Rock

- 10,000 Maniacs. (1982). Planned obsolescence. On *Human conflict number 5* [Cassette]. London, United Kingdom: Christian Burial Music.
- Aiden. (2011). Freedom from religion. On *Some kind of hate* [CD]. Victory.
- Air. (2004). Biological. On *Talkie walkie* [CD]. London, United Kingdom: Virgin Records.
- Aereogramme. (2007). The running man. On *My heart has a wish that you would not go* [CD]. Hamilton, Ontario, Canada: Sonic Unyon.
- Alice In Chains. (1990). Man in the box. On *Facelift* [CD]. New York, NY: Columbia Records.
- Anthrax. (2003). Think about an end. On *We've come for you all* [CD]. New York, NY: Warner Music.
- A Perfect Circle. (2000). Judith. On *Judith* [CD]. London, United Kingdom: Virgin Records.
- Arcade Fire. (2006). Intervention. On *Neon Bible* [CD]. Durham, NC: Merge Records.

About the religious obsession which can grip individuals to the detriment of family, love, and other human relationships. Also check out the title track from this album about the commercialized religion of today's America.

- Armstrong, Louis. (1968). What a wonderful world. On *What a wonderful world* [CD]. New York, NY: ABC Records. ✓
- Bad Religion. (1996). Come join us. On *The gray race* [CD]. Hollywood, CA: Epitaph Records.

Proselytizing is not only absurd; its also dangerous.

- Bad Religion. (2004). Atheist peace. On *The empire strikes first* [CD]. New York, NY: Sony Music Entertainment. **#2**

An energetic assault on orthodoxy and a claim to an obvious beginning to peace. You may also want to check out another song on this album, "God's Love."

- Bauhaus. (1980). A god in an alcove. On *In the flat field* [Cassette]. London, United Kingdom: 4AD.
- The Beatles. (1965). Think for yourself. On *Rubber soul* [Record]. London, United Kingdom: Parlophone. ✓
- Beck. (2002). It's all in your mind. On *Sea changes* [CD]. Santa Monica, CA: Universal Distribution.
- Ben Folds Five. (1999). Mess. On *The unauthorized biography of Reinhold Messner* [CD]. New York, NY: 550 Music.
- Björk. (2011). *Biophilia* [CD]. London, United Kingdom: One Little Indian Records .

The 8th album from the Icelandic star is an ambitious homage to science and our relationship to the universe. She utilizes numerous metaphors to capture and make comprehensible (in the way metaphors do) aspects of reality as diverse as DNA, crystal formation, the big bang, viruses, and the planets. The album is also interactive and educational, through the use of apps.

- Black Grape. (1995). Reverend Black Grape. On *Reverend Black Grape* [CD]. London, United Kingdom: Radioactive Records.
- Blind Melon. (1996). The pusher. On *Nico* [CD]. Los Angeles, CA: Capitol Records.

An alternate rendition of the Steppenwolf original. What does more harm drugs or religion?

- Blunstone, Colin. (1972). I don't believe in miracles. On *Ennismore* [Record]. New York, NY: Sony Music Distribution.
- Boswell, John. *Symphony of science* .

This is a music project “designed to deliver scientific knowledge and philosophy in musical form. Boswell incorporates the voices of great scientists such as Carl Sagan, Richard Feynman, Neil deGrasse Tyson, Bill Nye, and Stephen Hawking.

symphonyofscience.com

- Bowie, David. (1969). Space oddity. On *Space oddity* [Record]. New York, NY: RCA.

- Bowie, David. (1970). Saviour machine. On *The man who sold the world* [CD]. Salem, MA: Rykodisc Records.
- Bragg, Billy. (1984). World turned upside down. On *Brewing up with Billy Bragg* [Cassette]. London, United Kingdom: Cooking Vinyl Records.
- Bright Eyes. (2005). When the president talks to God. On *First day of my life* [CD]. Omaha Creek, NE: Saddle Creek Records.
- Bright Eyes. (2007). Four winds. On *Four winds* [CD]. Omaha Creek, NE: Saddle Creek Records.
- Byrne, David. (1992). A walk in the dark. On *Uh-oh* [CD]. New York, NY: Warner Bros.
- Byrne, David. (1997). Dance on vaseline. On *Feelings* [CD]. New York, NY: Warner Bros.
- Byrne, David. (1997). Finite=alright. On *Feelings* [CD]. New York, NY: Warner Bros.
- Byrne, David. (1997). The gates of paradise. On *Feelings* [CD]. New York, NY: Warner Bros.
- The Cardigans. (1998). Do you believe. On *Gran turismo* [CD]. Los United Kingdom: Mercury
- The Cardigans. (2005). Godspell. On *Super extra gravity* [CD]. Santa Monica, CA: Universal Distribution.
- Carle, C. (2011). Sunday in reality. On *Songs for nonbelievers* .
- Carlisle, Belinda. (1988). Heaven is a place on earth. On *Heaven on earth* [CD]. New York, NY: MCA Records.
- The Clash. (1982). Rock the casbah. On *Combat rock* [Cassette]. New York, NY: Epic Records.
- Collins, Phil. (2002). Don't get me started. On *Testify* [CD]. New York, NY: Atlantic Records.
- Costello, Elvis. (2004). Monkey to man. On *The delivery man* [CD]. Nashville, TN: Lost Highway.
- Cowboy Junkies. (1998). Someone out there. On *Miles from our home* [CD]. New York, NY: Geffen Records.
- Crosby, Stills, & Nash. (1977). Cathedral. On *CSN* [Cassette]. New York, NY: Atlantic.
- Culture Club. (1983). Church of the poisoned mind. On *Colour by numbers* [Cassette]. London, United Kingdom: Virgin Records.

Cursive. (2006). *Happy hollow* [CD]. Omaha Creek, NE: Saddle Creek Records.

Check out “Hymns for the Heathen,” “Bad Sects,” “Big Bang,” “Retreat!,” and “Rise Up! Rise Up!”

The Dandy Warhols. (2000). Nietzsche. On *Thirteen tales from urban Bohemia* [CD]. Los Angeles, CA: Capitol Records.

The Dandy Warhols. (2003). I am a scientist. On *Welcome to the monkey house* [CD]. Los Angeles, CA: Capitol Records.

Darling, Julia. (1999). Bulletproof belief (divine intervention). On *Figure 8* [CD]. New York, NY: Wind-Up Records.

Dave Mathews Band. (2007). Eh hee. On *Live at Radio City Music Hall* [CD]. New York, NY: RCA.

Del Amitri. (2002). I’m an unbeliever. On *Just before you leave (Version two)* [CD]. London, United Kingdom: Mercury Records.

Depeche Mode. (1984). Blasphemous rumors. On *Some great reward* [CD]. Burbank, CA: Reprise Records.

Depeche Mode. (2005). John the revelator. On *Playing the angel* [CD]. Burbank, CA: Reprise Records.

DiFranco, Ani. (1992). What if no one is watching. On *Imperfectly* [CD]. Buffalo, NY: Righteous Babe Records.

Dickinson, Bruce. (1990). No lies. On *Tattooed millionaire* [CD]. Yokohama, Japan: JVC Compact Discs.

Dolby, Thomas. (1982). She blinded me with science. On *Blinded by science* [Record]. Los Angeles, CA: Capitol Records.

Duran Duran. (1993). None of the above. On *Duran Duran (the wedding album)* [CD]. Los Angeles, CA: Capitol Records.

I like to think that this is an ode to the marginalization of nonbelievers in American Society. It is most likely a song about bachelors not wanting to commit. Oh, well.

Dylan, Bob. (1964). With God on our side. On *The times they are a-changin’* [Record]. New York, NY: Columbia Records.

Dylan, Bob. (1984). Jokerman. On *Infidels* [CD]. New York, NY: Columbia Records.

Is this about Jesus? You decide.

Echo & the Bunnymen. (1987). All in your mind. On *Echo & the Bunnymen* [Cassette]. New York, NY: Sire Records.

Epica. (2006). Cry for the moon. On *The road to paradise* [CD]. Sem.

Etheridge, Melissa. (1993). Silent legacy. On *Yes I am* [CD]. London, United Kingdom: Island Records.

Everclear. (1997). Why I don't believe in God. On *So much for the afterglow* [CD]. Los Angeles, CA: Capitol Records.

Eve's Plum. (1995). Jesus loves you (not as much as I do). On *Cherry alive* [CD]. New York, NY: 550 Music.

Quit obsessing over imaginary love affairs and embrace real ones.

Farnham, John. (1988). Age of reason. On *Age of reason* [CD]. New York, NY: RCA.

Filter. (1995). Dose. On *Short bus* [CD]. New York, NY: Warner Bros.

Firewater. (1998). Knock 'em down. On *The ponzi scheme* [CD]. New York, NY: Uptown Records.

The Flaming Lips. (1999). Race for the prize. On *The soft bulletin* . [CD]. New York, NY: Warner Bros. ✓

About the great sacrifice many scientists make in their pursuit of truth.

Franz Ferdinand. (2005). Evil & a heathen. On *You could have it so much better* [CD]. New York, NY: Epic Records.

Franz Ferdinand. (2005). The fallen. On *You could have it so much better* [CD]. Domino.

Frozen Ghost. (1988). Selling salvation. On *Nice place to visit* [CD]. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Warner Music Canada.

Genesis. (1992). Jesus, he knows me. On *Jesus, he knows me* [Cassette]. New York, NY: Atlantic Records.

Gershwin, George & Gershwin, Ira. (1935). It ain't necessarily so.

This song originally was performed in the opera *Porgy and Bess* (1935) and questions certain claims of the *Bible* .

Gershwin, George. (1997). They all laughed. On *The Gershwins: The first 100 years* [CD]. BCI Music.

Gogol Bordello. (2007). Supertheory of supereverything. On *Super taranta* [CD]. Los Angeles, CA: Side One Dummy.

Green Day. (2009). Peacemaker. On *21st century breakdown* [CD]. Burbank, CA: Reprise Records.

Hammill, Peter. (1986). Four pails. On *Skin* [CD]. Torrance, CA: Enigma Records.

Harrison, Guy. (1970). All things must pass. On *All things must pass* [Record]. Los Angeles, CA: Capitol Records.

Hitchcock, Robyn. (2009). Ye sleeping knights of Jesus. On *I often dream of trains in New York* [CD]. Haw River, NC: Yep Roc Records.

The Housemartins. (1986). Sheep. On *London O hull 4* [Cassette]. Santa Monica, CA: Universal Distribution.

Hrab, George. (2010). *Trebuchet* [CD]. Geologic Records.

Incubus. (1999). Drive. On *Make yourself* [CD]. New York, NY: Epic Records. ✓

Don't let your life be controlled by others, "take the wheel and steer!"

INXS. (1985). Listen like thieves. On *Listen like thieves* [CD]. London, United Kingdom: Mercury Records.

We pray because we are greedy and lazy. If we want something we must work for it.

Iron Maiden. (1988). Can I play with madness? On *Seventh son of a seventh son* [CD]. New York, NY: Sony Music Distribution.

James. (1990). God only knows. On *Gold mother* [CD]. Divine Recordings.

James. (1992). Ring the bells. On *Seven* [CD]. London, United Kingdom: Mercury Records.

Joel, Billy. (1977). Only the good die young. On *The stranger* [Cassette]. New York, NY: Columbia Records. ✓

Joel is saying that religious dogma kills the spark of youth which carries one to adulthood.

John, Elton. (1972). Rocket man (I think it's going to be a long, long time). On *Honky chateau* [Record]. Richmond, Australia: Rocket Group Pty LTD.

John, Elton. (1976). If there's a god in heaven (what's he waiting for). On *Blue moves* [Record]. New York, NY: MCA.

Johnson, James. (2005). Never know. On *In between dreams* [CD]. Montreal, Quebec, Canada: Stomp Records.

Kaleidoscope. (1967). Keep your mind open. On *Side trips* [Record]. New York, NY: Epic Records.

The Kinks. (1968). Big sky. On *The village green preservation society* [Record]. Burbank, CA: Reprise Records.

Lennon, John. (1970). *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band* [Cassette]. Los Angeles, CA: Capitol Records. ✓ **#3**

Yoko said that "God" best represented John's thoughts on religion. "I Found Out" is a passionate expression of discovering the fraud that is literal religion. Also check out "Working Class Hero."

Lennon, John. (1971). Imagine. On *Imagine* [Cassette]. Los Angeles, CA: Capitol Records. ✓ **#1**

A personal favorite and, I think, one of the most inspiring songs ever written. Lennon's ode to humanism captures that very rare combination of incredulous sadness and earnest hope. Yoko's expression in the video perhaps captures it best.

Lewis, Jenny & The Watson Twins. (2006). *Rabbit fur coat* [CD]. New York, NY: Team Love Records.

A very agnostic album includes "Born Secular," "The Big Guns," and "The Charging Sky."

Live. (1994). Operation spirit. On *Operation spirit* [CD]. New York, NY: MCA.

Manson, Marylin. (2000). The fight song. On *Holy wood (in the shadow of the valley of death)* [CD]. Santa Monica, CA: Universal Distribution.

- Markella. (2010). Imaginary friend. On *Imaginary friend* [CD]. New Age of Reason.
- Mayer, John. (2006). Belief. On *Continuum* [CD]. Evanston, IL: Aware Records.
- Metallica. (1986). Leper messiah. On *Master of puppets* [CD]. New York, NY: Elektra Records.
- Metallica. (1991). The god that failed. On *Metallica* [CD]. New York, NY: Elektra Records.
- Mitchell, Joni. (1975). Don't interrupt the sorrow. On *The hissing of summer lawns* [Record]. New York, NY: Warner Bros.
- Mitchell, Joni. (1979). God must be a boogie man. On *Mingus* [Record]. Los Angeles, CA: Rhino Records.
- Mitchell, Joni. (1985). Tax free. On *Dog eat dog* [Cassette]. New York, NY: Geffen Records.
- Moby. (2002). We are all made of stars. On *18* [CD]. London, United Kingdom: Mute Records.
- Monkey Business. (2001). Atheism is not a crime. On *Save the robots* [CD]. New York, NY: Columbia.
- Muse. (2001). Megalomania. On *Origin of symmetry* [CD]. Melbourne, Australia: Mushroom Records.
- Muse. (2003). *Absolution* [CD]. Melbourne, Australia: Mushroom Records.

Notable songs include: "Apocalypse Please," "Sing for Absolution," "Stockholm Syndrome," "Blackout," "Butterflies and Hurricanes," "Thoughts of a Dying Atheist," and "Fury."

- Muse. (2009). Resistance. On *The resistance* [CD]. New York, NY: Warner Bros.

Lead vocalist and song writer Matthew Bellamy stated that the song is very much based on the book '1984' by George Orwell particularly the romance between Winston and Julia and the description of the act of sex and love as something political, the only place offering freedom from Big Brother. The song is also about any love which crosses boundaries such as religion or strong political beliefs and the subsequent recognition of the

unimportance and divisiveness of such beliefs. (MuseWiki, 2012, ¶ 2)

The New Amsterdams. (2006). Intelligent design. On *Story like a scar* [CD]. Santa Monica, CA: Vagrant Records.

Newman, Randy. (1972). God's song (That's why I love mankind). On *Sail away* [Record]. Burbank, CA: Reprise Records.

The idea of God, as conceived in the *Bible* , cares very little for humanity. We are but a play thing.

Newman, Randy. (1972). Old man. On *Sail away* [Record]. Burbank, CA: Reprise Records.

New York Dolls. (2006). Dance like a monkey. On *One day it will please us to remember even this* [CD]. New York, NY: Roadrunner Records.

Dance like an ape might be more appropriate. Regardless, poking fun at "intelligently designed" creationists has never been so danceable!

Nine Inch Nails. (1989). Terrible lie. On *Pretty hate machine* [CD]. New York, NY: TVT Records.

Nine Inch Nails. (1994). Heresy. On *The downward spiral* [CD]. Santa Monica, CA: Interscope Records.

NOFX. (2009). Best god in show. On *Coaster* [CD]. San Francisco, CA: Fat Wreck Chords.

Nyro, Laura. (2008). A free thinker. On *Mother's spirituality* [CD]. New York, NY: Legacy Recordings.

Oasis. (2000). Carry us all. On *Who feels love?* [CD]. New York, NY: Sony Music Distribution.

Osbourne, Ozzie. (1988). Miracle man. On *No rest for the wicked* [CD]. New York, NY: Epic Records.

Pearl Jam. (1998). Do the evolution. On *Yield* [CD]. New York, NY: Epic Records.

Criticizes religion for self-aggrandizement and fostering violence.

Pearl Jam. (1998). Faithfull. On *Yield* [CD]. New York, NY: Epic Records.

“M-Y-T-H is belief in the game controls / that keep us in a box of fear”

Pearl Jam. (2002). I am mine. On *I am mine* [CD]. New York, NY: Epic Records.

Pearl Jam. (2006). Big wave. On *Pearl Jam* [CD]. New York, NY: J Records.

Adaptation rocks!

Pearl Jam. (2006). Marker in the sand. On *Pearl Jam* [CD]. New York, NY: J Records.

About the “problem of evil” or why, if there is a diety, evil exists and is permitted.

Pet Shop Boys. (1987). It’s a sin. On *It’s a sin* [Cassette]. New York, NY: Capitol Records.

A rebellious anthem about lead singer Neil Tennant’s strict Catholic upbringing.

The Pixies. (1985) Monkey gone to heaven. On *Doolittle* [Cassette]. New York, NY: Elektra Records.

Phish. (1994). Lifeboy. On *Hoist* [CD]. New York, NY: Elektra Records.

Poi Dog Pondering. (1989). Bury me deep. On *Wishing like a mountain & thinking like the sea* [CD]. New York, NY: Columbia Records.

Poi Dog Pondering. (1989). Praise the Lord. On *Wishing like a mountain & thinking like the sea* [CD]. New York, NY: Columbia Records.

Porcupine Tree. (2005). Halo. On *Deadwing* [CD]. New York, NY: Lava Records.

Porter, Cole. (1933). Experiment. On *Nymph errant* . New York, NY.

A fun show tune about the joys and virtues of curiosity, suggesting that even Eve did a little apple experimentation.

- Propagandi. (1993). Haillie Sellasse, up your ass. On *How to clean everything* [CD]. San Francisco, CA: Fat Wreck Chords.
- Queens of the Stone Age. (2005). Burn the witch. On *Lullabies to paralyze* [CD]. Santa Monica, CA: Interscope Records.
- Quiet Company. (2011). *We are all where we belong* [CD]. Austin, TX: Quiet Company.

The former semi-Christian band refutes many of the beliefs expressed in their first two albums in this third installment which reverberates with relief at having left childish notions behind. Notable songs include “Set Your Monster Free (My New Year’s Resolution is to Cope with my Morality),” “Fear and Fallacy Sitting in a Tree (You Were Doing Well Until Everything Died),” “The Easy Confidence (What I Would Say to You Now),” and “Preaching to the Choir Invisible,” “Part II (What Do You Think Happens When We Live?).”

- Reilly, Maggie. (1996). Brought up to believe. On *Elena* [CD]. Jacksonville, IL: EMI Music Distribution.
- R.E.M. (1991). Losing my religion. On *Losing my religion* [CD]. New York, NY: Warner Bros.
- R.E.M. (1996). Undertow. On *Bittersweet me* [CD]. New York, NY: Warner Bros.
- Rush. (1981). Tom Sawyer. On *Moving pictures* [Cassette]. London, United Kingdom: Island/Mercury Records.
- Rush. (1987). Freewill. On *Permanent waves* [Cassette]. London, United Kingdom: Island/Mercury Records.
- Rush. (1989). Show don't tell. On *Presto* [CD]. New York, NY: Atlantic Records.
- Rush. (1991). Roll the bones. On *Roll the bones* [CD]. New York, NY: Atlantic Records.
- Rush. (1996). Totem. On *Test of echo* [CD]. New York, NY: Atlantic Records.
- Rush. (2007). Faithless. On *Snakes & arrows* [CD]. New York, NY: Atlantic Records.

Seal. (1998). Lost my faith. On *Human being* [CD]. New York, NY: Warner Bros.

Segal, Shelley. (2011). *An atheist album* [CD]. Australia. **#4**

Songs include "Apocalyptic Love Song," "I Don't Believe in Fairies," and "Saved."

Soundgarden. (1991). Holy water. On *Badmotorfinger* [CD]. Santa Monica, CA: A&M.

Springsteen, Bruce. (1998). Part man, part monkey. On *Tracks* [CD]. New York, NY: Columbia Records.

"The Boss" thinks the evidence is clear.

The Stone Roses. (1994). Breaking into Heaven. On *Second coming* [CD]. New York, NY: Geffen Records.

Steeksma, Brian. (2009). I am the satellite. *Residual soul* [CD]. Bryan Steeksma.

Steeksma, Brian. (2011). Listen to reason. Bryan Steeksma. **#5**

Steely Dan. (2003). Godwhacker. On *Everything must go* [CD]. Burbank, CA: Repise.

This should be the opening theme to a 70's style drama starring Hitch and Dawks as super fly cops wielding reason and logic to take down bogus beliefs.

Sting. (1987). History will teach us nothing. On *Nothing like the sun* [CD]. Santa Monica, CA: A&M.

Styx. (1977). Grand illusion. On *Grand illusion* [Record]. Santa Monica, CA: A&M.

The Sugarcubes. (1988). Deus. On *Life's too good* [CD]. New York, NY: Elektra Records.

Super Furry Animals. (2000). Run! Christian, run! On *Rings around the world* [CD]. New York, NY: Epic Records.

Tabitha's Secret. (1998). Jesus was an alien. On *Don't play with matches* [CD]. Orlando, FL: JTJ Records.

Talking Heads. (1985). Creatures of love. On *Little creatures* [CD]. New York, NY: Sire Records.

- Talking Heads. (1985). Road to nowhere. On *Little creatures* [CD]. New York, NY: Sire Records.
- Temple of the Dog. (1990). Your savior. On *Temple of the Dog* [CD]. Santa Monica, CA: A&M.
- Ten Years After. (1972). Religion. On *Rock & roll music to the world* [Record]. New York, NY: Columbia Records.
- The Thermals. (2006). Here's your future. On *The body, the blood, the machine* [CD]. Seattle, WA: Sub Pop Records.
- Thinkman. (1986). The ecstasy of free thought. On *The formula* [CD]. New York, NY: United States of Distribution.
- Thin Lizzy. (1983). Holy war. On *Life live* [CD]. New York, NY: Warner Bros.
- Thompson, Richard. (2003). Outside of the inside. On *The old kit bag* [CD]. Tokyo, Japan: P-Vine Records.
- Toad the Wet Sprocket. (1991). Pray your gods. On *Fear* [CD]. New York, NY: Columbia Records.
- Tool. (1992). Opiate. On *Opiate* [CD]. Los Angeles, CA: Zoo Entertainment.
- Tull, Jethro. (1971). My god. On *Aqualung* [Record]. London, United Kingdom: Chrysalis Records.
- Tull, Jethro. (1971). Wind-up. On *Aqualung* [Record]. London, United Kingdom: Chrysalis Records.
- XTC. (1978). Jumping in Gomorrah. On *Go 2* [Cassette]. New York, NY: Geffen Records.
- XTC. (1986). Dear God. On *Skylarking* [CD]. London, United Kingdom: Virgin Records. ✓

Surely one of the grand anthems of atheism. "Dear God" is also one of those rare songs that are simultaneously clear and great to listen to.

- XTC. (1986). Season cycle. On *Skylarking* [CD]. London, United Kingdom: Virgin Records.
- XTC. (1989). Merely a man. On *Oranges & lemons* [CD]. London, United Kingdom: Virgin Records.
- XTC. (1992). The ballad of Peter Pumpkinhead. On *Nonsuch* [CD]. London, United Kingdom: Virgin Records. ✓

- XTC. (1992). The smartest monkeys. On *Nonsuch* [CD]. London, United Kingdom: Virgin Records.
- XTC. (1992). Books are burning. On *Nonsuch* [CD]. London, United Kingdom: Virgin Records.
- U2. (1988). God part II. On *Rattle & hum* [CD]. London, United Kingdom: Island Records.
- U2. (1991). One. On *Achtung baby* [CD]. London, United Kingdom: Island Records.
- Ugly Kid Joe. (1995). God. On *Menace to sobriety* [CD]. London, United Kingdom: Mercury Records.
- U.P.O. (2000). Godless. On *No pleasantries* [CD]. New York, NY: Epic Records.
- Ure, Midge. (1988). Answers to nothing. On *Answers to nothing* [Cassette]. Chrysalis Records.
- Waits, Tom. (1999). Chocolate Jesus. On *Mule variations* [CD]. Hollywood, CA: ANTI-.
- Waits, Tom. (2002). God's away on business. On *Blood money* [CD]. Hollywood, CA: ANTI-.
- Waters, Roger. (1992). What God wants, part 1, 2, & 3. On *Amused to death* [CD]. New York, NY: Columbia Records.

Actually, three separate songs which deal with the hypocrisy, plurality, and dangers of dogmatic belief, not only within religion, but with regards to other perspectives as well.

Words Such As Burn. (2011). Flow.

A completely independently produced and recorded band who have four singles out. This song is about how differences in belief can strain relationships. Even better, all the proceeds from this song will go to the Stiefel Freethought Foundation.

Zappa, Frank. (1981). Dumb all over. On *You are what you is* [CD]. Salem, MA: Rykodisc Records.

Frank once said “The only difference between a cult and a religion is the amount of real estate they own.”

Zappa, Frank. (1981). Heavenly bank account. On *You are what you is* [CD]. Salem, MA: Rykodisc Records.

Zappa, Frank. (1981). The meek shall inherit nothing. On *You are what you is* [CD]. Salem, MA: Rykodisc Records.

Zappa, Frank. (1988). Jesus thinks you're a jerk. On *Broadway the hard way* [CD]. Salem, MA: Rykodisc Records.

Zappa, Frank. (1991). Cosmic debris. On *The best band you never heard in your life* [CD]. Salem, MA: Rykodisc Records.

Zappa, Frank. (1991). Lonesome cowboy Burt. On *The best band you never heard in your life* [CD]. Salem, MA: Rykodisc Records.

Rap

Aesop Rock. (2004). Holy smokes. On *Fast cars, danger, fire, & knives* [CD]. New York, NY: Blockhead Records.

Blackalicious. (2002). Brain washers. On *Blazing arrow* [CD]. San Francisco, CA: Quannum Projects.

Blackalicious. (2002). Chemical calisthenics. On *Blazing arrow* [CD]. San Francisco, CA: Quannum Projects.

Freethought M.C. (2009-2011).

Albums include *Diary of a Humanist* (2009), *Return of the Infidel: Modern Humanolgy* (2009), *Freethinker: Volume One* (2010), and *The Categorical Imperative* (2011)

Greydon Square. (2007-2010).

Iraq War veteran Eddie Collins brings rationality to rap. Among the topics he explores is atheism, the *Bible's* promotion of slavery, and science. His three albums *The Compton Effect* (2007), *The C.P.T. Theorem* (2008), and *The Kardashev Scale* (2010) are welcome contributions to the freethought music library.

Gripp. (2012). The future goes. On *Head in the cloud* [CD]. Glasseyeballs.

R&B

- David, Anthony. (2011). *God said. On As above so below* [CD]. New York, NY: E1 Music.
- Sly & the Family Stone. (1995). *Life. On Life* [CD]. New York, NY: Epic Records.
- The Temptations. (1970). You make your own heaven & hell right here on Earth. On *Psychedelic shack* [Record]. Detroit, MI: Motown.
- The Temptations. (1971). Smiling faces sometimes. On *Sky's the limit* [Record]. Detroit, MI: Motown.
- Wonder, Stevie. (1972). Superstition. On *Talking book* [Cassette]. Detroit, MI: Tamla Records. ✓

Reggae

- Bob Marley & the Wailers. (1973). Get up, stand up. On *Burnin'* [CD]. Kingston, Jamaica: Tuff Gong
- Bob Marley & the Wailers. (1980). Redemption song. On *Uprising* [CD]. Kingston, Jamaica: Tuff Gong.
- Marley, Ziggy. (2003). In the name of God. On *Dragonfly* [CD]. Los Angeles, CA: Private Music.
- Marley, Ziggy. (2006). Love is my religion. On *Love is my religion* [CD]. London, United Kingdom: Cooking Vinyl Records.

I have a deep suspicion that many of the songs above (e.g. the hardcore atheist ones) are only appropriate for a particular time and place. They are revolutionary wailings. Like all revolutions they will, as is my hope, come to an end. Upheavals and usurpations are often looked upon by future generations as both obvious and strangely hyperbolic, reactionary, “a little too much.” However, they are necessary where they are necessary. There is much secular music available today to give hope for a smithing of air that will address real human needs free of dogma and superstition.

Additional Resources

“Satan is Real” Atheist Music Blog

An unvetted listing of hundreds of user submitted songs.

atheistmusicblog.blogspot.com

Scopes Monkey Choir: Science, Music, Skepticism, Podcast

“We chat about music in science, music in practice, and music in myth and fact. We mull over current studies, marvel at history, and nibble on audible oddities — all with a skeptical eye. ”

scopesmonkeychoir.com

Film

“We must make an idol of our fear, and call it God” (Ekelund, 1957) .

-Antonius Block (Max von Sydow) to the Devil, *The Seventh Seal*
(Det Sjunde Inseglet 1957)

Motion pictures are arguably the most comprehensive and evocative form of education and entertainment. As long as freedom of expression is protected, film shall remain a vital tool for freethought. As with all the other resources presented in this guide, there are many more films which could rightfully be included due to their freethought content. I attempted to find a good balance between content, quality, and historical importance. The movies run the gambit from fantastical to ultra realistic, serious to lighthearted, cynical to hopeful. Many of the films are critical of and show the dangers of superstition and dogma; some highlight the contributions of freethinkers or the nuances of humanism, while others are an education in the methods and discoveries of science.

Action/Adventure

Batman Begins (2005)

The film follows the development of Bruce Wayne (Christian Bale) into Batman. Tracie Harris (2008, June Ep. 556 & 2008, July Ep. 562) of the cable-access show “The Atheist Experience” laid out a good case that the movie is a modern retelling of the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah. Instead of acquiescing to the death of some blameless individuals in order for Ra’s al Ghul (Yahweh) to purge a corrupt city, as in the original, Wayne (Abraham) vows to protect all innocents. In this modern re-visioning, it is ignorance and fear versus reason and humanism, highlighting that vengeance is not justice.

Roven, C. Thomas, E. & Franco, L. (Producers), & Nolan, C. (Director). (2005). *Batman begins* [Motion Picture]. United States: Warner Bros.

Kingdom of Heaven (2005)

Orlando Bloom, Liam Neeson, Jeremy Irons, Edward Norton, and Eva Green star in this epic about the Crusades and the consequences of its irrational and hate filled ideology. The solution offered by the film is humanism.

Scott, R. & Bradbury, C. (Producers), & Scott, R. (Director). (2005). *Kingdom of heaven* [Motion Picture]. United States: 20th Century Fox.

The Last Valley (1971)) ➡ (see: [Pick](#) [1959])

A group of soldiers finds shelter and safety in a peaceful valley during the European wars of religion. The Captain (Michael Caine) and the school teacher Vogel (Omar Sharif) are two rational, if otherwise very different, atheists who are observant of the divisiveness, underlying motives, and terrible consequences of religion. The Captain asks Vogel if he believes in witchcraft to which he responds, while lamenting the murder of his own 6 year old sister for witchcraft: "I have to believe it. Otherwise how could a man remain sane. If I can't, then 10, 20 thousand innocent men, women, and children are falsely accused, brutally tortured till they confess, then murdered each year in Germany alone. All in the name of God!"

Clavell, J. (Producer/Director). (1971). *The last valley* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom: Cinerama.

Man Friday (1975)

Robinson Crusoe brings Christian "civilization" to natives.

Buck, J. & Green, G. (Producers), & Gold, J. (Director). (1975). *Man Friday* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom: ABC Entertainment.

Moby Dick (1956) ✓ ➔ (see: [Melville](#) [1851] in the *A Short History of Freethought: Selected Bibliography: Classic Texts* section)

There are several adaptations of Melville's masterpiece but this is the highest quality and closest to the original text. Huston is a fine director and certainly a lover of the tale about a whale. Gregory Peck stars as Captain Ahab.

Huston, J. (Producer/Director). (1956). *Moby Dick* [Motion Picture]. United States: United Warner Brothers.

Avant-garde/Experimental

Begotten (1991)

Labeled a "metaphysical splatter film" this is a dark story of creation that begins with God killing himself. Power exudes throughout this exotic work.

Merhige, E. (Producer), & Merhige, E. (Director). (1991). *Begotten* [Motion Picture]. United States: World Artists.

The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie (Le charme discret de la bourgeoisie, 1972)

A superbly crafted surrealist film depicting all characters as filled with essentially human motivations and overlapping delusions. Perhaps Luis Buñuel's best film.

Silberman, S. (Producer), & Buñuel, L. (Director). (1972). *The discreet charm of the bourgeoisie* [Motion Picture]. France: 20th Century Fox.

The Exterminating Angel (El ángel exterminador, 1962) ✓

A group of wealthy friends are inexplicably trapped in a salon and are forced to survive and get along many days with no rescue in sight. Maybe, just maybe, an allegorical indictment of the over

formalization, self-aggrandizing, and imprisoning nature of wealth and religion. In other words, orthodoxy is a mental prison which confines the individual to imaginary boundaries (as the final scene may emphasize). However, the film's ambiguousness may be its most intriguing aspect.

Alatrisme, G. (Producer), & Buñuel, L. (Director). (1962). *The exterminating angel* [Motion Picture]. Mexico: Gustavo Alatrisme.

The Golden Age (L'Âge d'Or, 1930)

An expression of Luis Buñuel's belief that sexual repression by the Catholic Church and bourgeois society breeds violence.

Noailles, V. & Noailles, M. (Producers), & Buñuel, L. (Director). (1930). *The golden age* [Motion Picture]. France.

Waking Life (2001)

All kinds of radical ideas are explored in this animated dreamlike stroll through meaning and nothingness.

Pallotta, T., Smith, J., Walker-McBay, A., & West, P. (Producers), & Linklater, R. (Director). (2001). *Waking life* [Motion Picture]. United States: Thousand Words.

Comedy

Lady Claire : How do you know you're God?

14th Earl of Gurney : Simple. When I pray to him I find I'm praying to myself.

-*The Ruling Class* (1972)

Amélie (2001) ✓

A romantic humanist comedy about a shy young girl (Audrey Tautou) who discovers the fragile nature of life and sets out to

better the lives of her community in hilariously absurd but heartfelt ways.

Van Embden, A. & Ossard, C. (Producers), & Jeunet, J. (Director). (2001). *Amélie* [Motion Picture]. France: Miramax.

Catch-22 (1970) ✓ ➡ (see: [Heller](#) [1961])

Alan Arkin brilliantly portrays a sane man in a crazy situation in this surreal 2nd World War dark comedy about the absurdity of war and humanity which questions whether one should escape the weird world or join in the dance.

Calley, J. & Ransohoff, M. (Producers), & Nichols, M. (Director). (1970). *Catch-22* [Motion Picture]. United States: Paramount.

Crimes & Misdemeanors (1989)

A morality tale about the nature of good and evil, ultimately rejecting theistic claims.

Greenhut, R. (Producer), & Allen, W. (Director). (1989). *Crimes & misdemeanors* [Motion Picture]. United States: Orion.

Dark Habits (Entre tinieblas, 1983)

A satire about a woman on the lamb who hides out in a convent full of crazy nuns.

Tesauro. (Producer), & Almodovar, P. (Director). (1984). *Dark habits* [Motion Picture]. Spain: Tesauro.

Deconstructing Harry (1997)

Woody Allen plays an atheist who often clashes with his Jewish family.

Doumanian, J. (Producer), & Allen, W. (Director). (1997). *Deconstructing Harry* [Motion Picture]. United States: Buena Vista.

Dogma (1999)

This irreverent film with a big name cast (Salma Hayek, Ben Affleck, Matt Damon, Chris Rock, and the late great George Carlin), depicts the last living descendant of Jesus as a divorced woman (Linda Fiorentino) struggling with her faith and working at an abortion clinic. An angel visits her and she goes on a mission to save the world from two disgruntled angels.

Mosier, S. (Producer), & Smith, K. (Director). (1999). *Dogma* [Motion Picture]. United States: Lions Gate Films.

Dr. Strangelove: or How I Learned to Stop Worrying & Love the Bomb (1964) ✓

Stanley Kubrick's brilliant dark comedy about nuclear war caused by human delusion and paranoia. *Dr. Strangelove* highlights the perverse nature of apocalyptic fantasies indulged in by the deep recesses of the human psyche. The ending presents a particularly chilling and ironic take on the Rapture, or in this case descent, at the heart of such visions of world destruction. Peter Sellers, as three unique characters, is brilliant!

Kubrick, S. (Producer/Director). (1964). *Dr. Strangelove: or how I learned to stop worrying & love the bomb* [Motion Picture]. United States: Columbia Pictures.

Four Lions (2010)

A misfit group of young wannabe English Muslim Jihadists hilariously conspire to do Allah's work. If only Mohammed had been surrounded by such stooges the world might have been spared plight and perhaps given a few laughs.

Schlesinger, D. & Herbert, M. (Producers), & Morris, C. (Director). (2010). *Four lions* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom: Warp Films.

Greaser's Palace (1972)

Surrealistic parody of the Christ myth set in the Old West.

Rubin, C. (Producer), & Downey, R. (Director). (1972). *Greaser's palace* [Motion Picture]. United States: Greaser's Palace.

Groundhog Day (1993) ✓

A big city reporter (Bill Murray) is forced to relive the same day over and over. A major theme is the forcing of self-discovery and improvement and what it takes to move life forward in a meaningful way. Surprisingly brilliant and philosophically deep with Murray at his hysterical best.

Ramis, H. & Albert, T. (Producers), & Ramis, H. (Director). (1993). *Groundhog day* [Motion Picture]. United States: Columbia Pictures.

Hanna & Her Sisters (1986) ✓

This highly acclaimed film explores the lives and tribulations of an artistic family with Allen's character, neurotic as always, obsessed with death and experimenting with religion.

Greenhut, R. (Producer), & Allen, W. (Director). (1986). *Hanna & her sisters* [Motion Picture]. United States: Orion.

Harold & Maude (1971) ✓

A death obsessed young man meets a much older eccentric woman and prove together that love doesn't care much about social convention.

Mulvehill, C., Higgins, C., & Lewis, M. (Producers), & Ashby, H. (Director). (1971). *Harold & Maude* [Motion Picture]. United States: Paramount.

Hot Fuzz (2007)

In this action-comedy, Super cop Sergeant Nicholas Angel (Simon Pegg) is transferred to England's "Village of the Year," a place hiding dark secrets. Angel, who is ironically an agnostic, attempts to set things right in a town obsessed with conformity and utopian delusions. Near the end of the film, Angel proclaims "I may not be a man of God, Reverend, but I know right and I know wrong and I have the good grace to know which is which." From the creators of *Shaun of the Dead* (2004).

Fellner, E., Park, N., & Bevan, T. (Producers), & Wright, E. (Director). (2007). *Hot fuzz* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom: Rouge Pictures.

I Heart Huckabees (2004)

Is there nothing or something? An absurdist comedy about the two primary existential perspectives. Nothing will make one have an existential crisis like the music of Shania Twain.

Russell, D., Goodman, G., & Rudin, S. (Producers), & Russell, D. (Director). (2004). *I heart Huckabees* [Motion Picture]. United States: Fox Searchlight.

The Invention of Lying (2009)

Ricky Gervais shows why so many people tell, accept, and hold on to comforting lies.

Baden-Powell, S. (Producer), & Robinson, M. (Director). (2009). *The invention of lying* [Motion Picture]. United States: Warner Bros.

Letting Go of God (2008)

Former *Saturday Night Live* comedian Julia Sweeney explores her struggle with belief. Witty and heartfelt.

Burton, M. (Producer), & Sweeney, J. (Director). (2008). *Letting go of God* [Motion Picture]. United States.

The Life of Brian (1979) ✓

An ingenious and hilarious take on the Jesus myth.

Goldstone, J. (Producer), & Jones, T. (Director). (1979). *The life of Brian* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom: Orion.

Love & Death (1975)

A satire of Russian epic novels, particularly, Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. Woody Allen's atheist character is depicted as morally superior and less certain than everyone else.

Gallo, F., Joffe, C., & Poll, M. (Producers), Allen, W. (Director). (1975). *Love & death* [Motion Picture]. United States: United Artists.

The Man Who Sued God (2001)

A funny story which raises the question: "If God causes property damage to someone, as in the case of natural disasters, can the Church as representatives of said deity, be held liable?"

Gannon, B. (Producer), & Joffe, M. (Director). (2001). *The man who sued God* [Motion Picture]. Australia: Buena Vista.

The Milky Way (La Voie lactée, 1969)

A surrealist comedy which follows two vagabonds from Paris to Spain, through time, and one biblical story to another, all the

while heresy is a common thread.

Silberman, S. (Producer), & Buñuel, L. (Director). (1969). *The milky way* [Motion Picture]. France: Greenwich Film Productions.

Monty Python & the Holy Grail (1974) ✓

Royalty, religion, shrubberies, noble quests, and things that float are all scrutinized by the English comedy troupe. I think this is the greatest comedy of all-time.

Forstater, M. & White, M. (Producers), & Gilliam, T. (Director). (1974). *Monty Python & the Holy Grail* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom: Cinema 5.

Monty Python's The Meaning of Life! (1983) ✓

Pokes fun at all the things we take too seriously throughout our lives. Nothing is held sacred...except sperm.

Goldstone, J. (Producer), & Gilliam, T. & Jones, T. (Directors). (1983). *Monty Python's the meaning of life* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom: Universal.

My Night at Maud's (Ma nuit chez Maud, 1969)

A catholic man's faith is challenged in many ways. A dialogical examination of Pascal's Wager.

Cottrell, P. & Schroeder, P. (Producers), & Rohmer, E. (Director). (1969). *My night at Maud's* [Motion Picture]. France: Union Generale.

Paul (2011)

In this comedic homage to science fiction, two English friends travel across America on a tour of the most famous UFO sites. On the way they meet all sorts of odd creatures... and an alien.

Fellner, E., Park, N., & Bevan, T. (Producers), & Mottola, G. (Director). (2011). *Paul* [Motion Picture]. United States: Universal Pictures.

Pleasantville (1998) ✓

A purely humanistic tale about questioning convention and finding one's passion and place.

Ross, G., Kilik, J., Degus, R., & Soderbergh, S. (Producers), & Ross, G. (Director). (1998). *Pleasantville* [Motion Picture]. United States: New Line Cinema.

The Ruling Class (1972) ✓

The great Peter O'Toole stars as a schizophrenic with a messiah complex who suddenly ascends to an English Earldom after the odd death of his father. The delusions of grandeur and odd behavior of the Earl contrasts but also parallels the traditions of the English nobility. Satirizes how illegitimate power must always hide behind a masquerade of pompously absurd pageantry. Which nonsense is "real" and which is imaginary? It's frankly hard to tell.

Korda, D., Hawkins, J., & Buck, J. (Producers), & Medak, P. (Director). (1972). *The ruling class* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom: Avco Embassy Pictures.

Salome's Last Dance (1988)

Oscar Wilde is the audience member of his play of the same name which is an irreverent retelling of a biblical story.

Quigley, W. (Producer), & Russell, K. (Director). (1988). *Salome's last dance* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom & United States: Vestron.

Salvation Boulevard (2010)

An unflattering and sometimes silly tale of the lengths a group of evangelical Christians will go to protect their illusory “perfect” community.

Schulman, C., Rattray, C., & Fruchtman, P. (Producers), & Ratliff, G. (Director). (2010). *Salvation Boulevard* [Motion Picture]. United States: IFC Films.

Simon of the Desert (Simon del desierto, 1965)

This unfinished, yet meaningfully complete, film is about a delusional aesthetic who believes depravation will bring him closer to God. The devil has other plans and perhaps better advice.

Alatrisme, G. (Producer), & Buñuel, L. (Director). (1965). *Simon of the desert* [Motion Picture]. Mexico: Gustavo Aristriste.

The Truman Show (1998)

Truman : "Who are you?"

Christof : “I am the Creator... of a television show.”

Jim Carrey plays a man born and raised with no knowledge that his life is a reality program watched by millions of people. The story can be interpreted as an allegory of the nature of religious deception and the liberating value of truth.

Feldman, E., Niccol, A., Rudin, S., & Schroeder, A. (Producers), & Weir, P. (Director). (1998). *The Truman Show* [Motion Picture]. United States: Paramount.

Viridiana (1961) #1

A pious young man learns about the darker side of charity and naivety. The first in a trilogy of sorts which includes *The*

Exterminating Angel (1962) and *Simon of the Desert* (1965).

Suay, R. (Producer), & Buñuel, L. (Director). (1961). *Viridiana* [Motion Picture]. Mexico: Uninic.

Whatever Works (2009)

An existential comedy featuring *Seinfeld* co-creator and *Curb Your Enthusiasm* star Larry David who actually makes a de-conversion!

Aronson, L. & Tenenbaum, S. (Producers), & Allen, W. (Director). (2009). *Whatever works* [Motion Picture]. United States: Sony Pictures Classics.

Documentary: Biographies & History

(see also: *A Brief History of Freethought: Selected Bibliography: Autobiographies & [Biographies](#)*)

American Masters (1986-)

Has made biographies of such notable freethinkers such as Woody Allen, the band Pearl Jam, John Lennon, Albert Einstein, Arthur Miller, Edgar Allen Poe, Diego Rivera, Charles Schulz, Gore Vidal, among others.

WNET. (Producer). (1986-). *American masters* [Documentary]. United States: PBS.

The Art of Francis Bacon (2007)

The life and work of the figurative painter are vividly filmed and described. Often bleak and tortured his art is a contemplation of the human condition in a godless universe. The film focuses on descriptions of life art through Bacon's own words: "We are born and we die and that's it. There's nothing else... But in between we give this purposeless existence a meaning by our drives."

Estate of Francis Bacon & Illuminations Media. (Producers). (2007). *The art of Francis Bacon* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: Illuminations Media.

Atheism: A Rough History of Disbelief (2005) ● † ✓

Theatre director and physician Jonathan Miller narrates this first-of-its-kind documentary on the history of atheism. A must see for all! As an addendum check out *The Atheism Tapes* (2005) which is an expansion of the interviews given in the original program with Colin McGinn, Steven Weinberg, Arthur Miller, Richard Dawkins, Denys Turner, and Daniel Dennett. It is another 3 hours of thought provoking conversation.

Denton, R. (Producer/Director). (2005). *Atheism: A rough history of disbelief* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

A Brief History of Time (1992) ✓ 🍷 (see: [Hawking](#) [1988] under *Science Resources: Selected Bibliography: Astronomy & Physics*)

Cosmologist Stephen Hawking's life and work is lovingly captured. Music by the brilliant Philip Glass is captivating.

Hickman, D. (Producer), & Morris, E. (Director). (1992). *A brief history of time* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: Anglia Television Entertainment.

D.M. Bennett: The Truth Seeker (2009)

A look at the life, work, and struggles of the founder of the freethought periodical "The Truth Seeker."

Bradford, R. (Producer/Director). (2009). *D.M. Bennett: The truth seeker* [Documentary]. United States.

Empires: The Greeks: Crucible of Civilization (1999)

From the birth of democracy to expansion into empire, the history of Greek civilization is a remarkable story of contradictions. It witnessed independence and tyranny, freethought to rigid conformity, freedom and slavery.

Geffen, A. (Producer), & Harrison, C. (Director). (1999). *Empires: The Greeks: Crucible of civilization* [Documentary]. United States: PBS.

Empires: The Medici: Godfathers of the Renaissance (2003) ✓

The fascinating story of the Florentine family who helped fund many of the great works of the Renaissance is brought vividly to life in this 4-part series.

Hardy, J. (Producer/Director). (1999). *Empires: The Medici: Godfathers of the Renaissance* [Documentary]. United States: PBS.

Emma Goldman: An Exceedingly Dangerous Woman (2004)

The life of the radical anarchist. From *American Experience*, one of the finest documentary series available. Goldman wrote extensively in her Mother Earth journal. The following two short essays outline her views of Christianity and atheism respectively. See:

Goldman, Emma. (1913, February). The failure of Christianity. *Mother Earth*.

Goldman, Emma. (1916, February). The philosophy of atheism. *Mother Earth*.

Bucklin, M. (Producer/Director). (2004). *Emma Goldman: An exceedingly dangerous woman* [Documentary]. United States: PBS.

The Genius of Omar Khayyam (2009)

Although part biography, this film is primarily a look at how the Persian influenced the West.

Cameron, N. (Producer), & Saund, J. (Director). (2009). *The genius of Omar Khayyam* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

George Eliot: A Scandalous Life (2002)

Dramatically depicts the life of the brilliant novelist Mary Ann Evans, especially how difficult life could be for a woman and a nonbeliever in Victorian England attempting to live a life of her own choosing.

She wrote: “God, immortality, duty— how inconceivable the first, how unbelievable the second, how peremptory and absolute the third” (as quoted in Haught, 2000, p. 143). And that the “highest calling and election is to do without opium [comforting myths] and live through all our pain with conscious, clear-eyed endurance” (Eliot, 1968, p. 366).

Downes, M. (Producer/Director). (2002). *George Eliot: A scandalous life* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

The Great Books (1997)

Moby-Dick (1851), *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), *The Origin of Species* (1859), *The Prince* (1532), *The Dialogue* (1632), *1984* (1949), and eleven other books are included in this great collection. The series includes descriptions of the books and biographies of the authors.

Discovery Communications. (Producer). (1997). *The great books* [Documentary]. United States: Discover Channel.

Human, All Too Human (1999)

A three-part biography of existentialists Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre.

BBC. (Producer). (1999). *Human, all too human* [History documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Lewis & Clark: The Journey of the Corps of Discovery (1997)

Follows the 1803 journey, one of the greatest scientific expeditions of all time, across the American frontier to the Pacific ocean.

Burns, K. & Duncan, D. (Producers), & Burns, K. (Director). (1997). *Lewis & Clark: The journey of the Corps of Discovery* [Documentary]. United States: PBS.

The Life & Times of Frida Kahlo (2004)

About the trailblazing painter who redefined the the abilities and roles of women in Mexico through her intimate self-portraits and unique life.

Stechler, A. (Producer/Director). (2004). *The life & times of Frida Kahlo* [Documentary]. United States: PBS.

The Lost Treasure of the Alexandrian Library (1996)

Part of the *Ancient Mysteries* series which I would not recommend otherwise because of its appallingly unscholarly vague suggestions that “woo” might be true. This episode is well done and about an important historical period in freethought.

Briley, K. (Producer), & Nimoy, L. (Narrator). (1996). *The lost treasure of the Alexandrian library* [Documentary]. United States: A&E.

Mark Twain (2001) ✓

Ken Burns trains his skilled lens on America’s greatest humorist and freethinker. Twain’s story helps to illuminate how he

was able to write so accurately and profoundly about the American character.

Burns, K. (Producer/Director). (2001). *Mark Twain* [Documentary]. United States: PBS.

Not for Ourselves Alone: The Story of Elizabeth Cady Stanton & Susan B. Anthony (1999) ✓

The story of the two greatest figures of the women's rights movement which culminated in suffrage for American women. The women had very different personalities and tactics for achieving many of the same goals. Their freethought friendship helped change the world forever.

Burns, K. & Barnes, P. (Producers), & Burns, K. (Director). (1999). *Not for ourselves alone: The story of Elizabeth Cady Stanton & Susan B. Anthony* [Documentary]. United States: PBS.

Prophets of Science Fiction (2011)

A series of biographies and examinations of some of the most insightful science fiction writers. The title is ironic because most of the writers are nonbelievers including: Mary Shelley, Phillip K. Dick, H.G. Wells, Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov, and Robert Heinlein.

Chaffin, C., Peicott, J., Tavolaro, K., Cron, A., Brown, S., & Cook, C. (Producers), & Scott, R. (Host). (1996). *Prophets of science fiction* [Documentary]. United States: Science Channel.

Richard Feynman: The Pleasure of Finding Things Out (1981) ● ✓

This *Horizon* program is an excellent interview of the Nobel Prize winning physicist.

Sykes, C. (Producer). (1981). *Richard Feynman: The pleasure of finding things out* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Simon Schama's Power of Art (2006)

Eight episodes featuring the freethought artists Jacques-Louis David, Joseph M.W. Turner, and Mark Rothko.

Beavan, C. (Producer), & Beavan, C., Condie, S., & Hindmarch, C. (Directors). (2006). *Simon Schama's power of art* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

The Tillman Story (2009) ✓

The story of NFL star, veteran of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and non-theist Pat Tillman who died while serving in Afghanistan. The initial military press release stated that he had been killed while blocking the fire of Taliban insurgents. Five weeks later questions were raised when further investigation revealed that he had been killed by friendly-fire. The film shows how the family felt about Pat's memory seemingly having been used for political ends, their search for truth, and honoring him in a manner he would have wanted. Tillman's life was one of duty and courage, helping to dispel the myth that "there are no atheists in foxholes."

Battsek, J. (Producer), & Bar-Lev, A. (Director). (2009). *The Tillman story* [Documentary]. United States: Weinstein Co.

Thomas Jefferson (1996) ✓

Ken Burns has called Jefferson "the most important human being born in the last 500 years." While this may be a bit of an exaggeration, America's 3rd President was certainly instrumental in creating a future world of democracy, freedom of expression, and liberation from tyranny. Freethought is very much indebted to him.

Burns, K. & Rockwell, C. (Producers), & Burns, K. (Director). (1996). *Thomas Jefferson* [Documentary]. United States: PBS.

Thomas Paine: The Most Valuable Englishman Ever (1982) ✓

A truly impassioned biography of one of the most important freethinkers in human history.

Griffith, K. (Producer/Presenter). (1982). *Thomas Paine: The most valuable Englishman ever* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Documentary: Science & Philosophy

100 Greatest Discoveries (2007) •

Bill Nye “the science guy” narrates this great introduction to the productive legacy of science.

Fountain, M. (Producer/Director). (2007). *100 greatest discoveries* [Documentary]. United States: Discovery Channel.

The Ascent of Man (1973)

Jacob Bronowski wrote and narrated this 13 part “personal view” stroll through the history of human development from the perspective of scientific understanding.

Gilling, D. & Malone, A. (Producers), & Jackson, M., Gilling, D., & Kennard, D. (Directors). (1973). *The ascent of man* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

The Big Question (2004-2005) •

A five part series: “How Did the Universe Begin?” with Stephen Hawking, “How Did Life Begin?” by Harry Kroto, “Why Am I Me?” by Susan Greenfield, and “How Will it All End?” with Ian Stewart. I particularly liked part 3 “Why Are We Here?” with Richard Dawkins which answers the question from an evolutionary

perspective and suggests how we may transcend the strictly selfish gene, ironically, because of the same process.

Channel Five. (Producer). (2004-2005). *The big question* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

The Blind Watchmaker (1987) ➔ (See: [Dawkins](#) [1986] under *Science Resources: Selected Bibliography: Biology, Psychology, & Anthropology*)

A slightly dated but nevertheless simple introduction to how evolution can create complex structures working with simpler designs.

Taylor, J. (Producer), & Dawkins, R. (Presenter). (1987). *The blind watchmaker* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

The Brain: Our Universe Within (1994) ●

A somewhat dated yet clear introduction to brain science, brain evolution, its structure, how it works, and the implications of greater understanding.

Suzuki, D. (Presenter). (1994). *The brain: Our universe within* [Documentary]. United States: Discovery Channel.

Breaking the Science Barrier (1996) ●

An early video of Richard Dawkins promoting science and explaining how it works.

Gau, J. (Producer), & Dawkins, R. (Presenter). (1996). *Breaking the science barrier* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: The Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason & Science.

Charles Darwin & the Tree of Life (2009)

Explains the links between species and how humans came to discover the evolutionary past from understanding the fossil record to geological evidence, genetics, and so on. Shows how our knowledge of life's origins is dependent on a large variety of scientific disciplines all converging on a coherent history.

Mirzoeff, S. & Bristow, J. (Producers), & Attenborough, D. (Writer/Presenter). (2009). *Charles Darwin & the tree of life* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Chemistry: A Volatile History (2010)

From our ancestors naive conceptions of just four elements, to alchemy's search for the philosopher's stone, humans have come a long way in order to finally begin to unlock the actual building blocks of our reality. Chemistry has a very interesting story and its potential for harnessing the fabric of the universe is astounding and not yet fully achieved or comprehended.

Thomas, H. (Producer), & Al-Kalili, J. (Presenter). (2010). *Chemistry: A volatile history* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Cosmos: A Personal Voyage (1980) ● ➡ ✓ **#1** (see: [Sagan](#) [1985] under *Science Resources: Selected Bibliography: Physics & Astronomy*)

Even after more than three decades, this epic science series is still surprisingly complete and relevant. It is well worth the watch if only for Carl Sagan's visionary, soothing, and ultimately inspiring narration.

Andorfer, G. & McCain, R. (Producers), & Malone, A. (Director). (1980). *Cosmos: A personal voyage* [Documentary]. United States: Cosmos Studios & PBS.

Curiosity: Did God Create the Universe? (2011)

Stephen Hawking outlines his case that the universe did not require a creator.

Bowie, B., Smithson, J., & Winslow, S. (Producers), & Tongue, S. (Director). (2011). *Curiosity: Did God create the universe?* [Documentary]. United States: Discovery Channel.

Derren Brown

An English illusionist and skeptic exposes scams. Among his numerous television specials include *Derren Brown: Messiah* (2005) and *Derren Brown: Miracles for Sale* (2011).

Evolution: A Journey Into Where We're From & Where We're Going (2001) ● + ✓

An ambitious seven-part eight hour long overview of the major events and themes of evolutionary theory.

Mirowitz, L. (Producer), & Benyo, J. (Director). (2001). *Evolution: A journey into where we're from & where we're going* [Documentary]. United States: PBS.

Earth: The Power of the Planet (2006) ●

Known in the United States as *Earth: The Biography* (2008).

Dolling, P. (Producer), & Stewart, I. (Presenter). (2007). *Earth: The power of the planet* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

First Life (2010) ● +

David Attenborough presents what science knows and does not yet know about the origins of life on earth. Computer animation help the viewer experience life in the distant past.

Geffen, A. (Producer), & Williams, M. (Director). (2010). *First life* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Galapagos: The Islands that Changed the World (2007)

Focuses on the islands which enabled Charles Darwin to have his great insight, due to their isolation and diversity.

Gunton, M. & Morris, P. (Producers), & Swinton, T. (Presenter). (2006). *Galapagos: The islands that changed the world* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

The Genius of Charles Darwin (2008)

Richard Dawkins presents the case for evolution and gives an impassioned plea for the teaching and acceptance of the scientific method .

Barnes, R. & Hillman, D. (Producers/Directors). (2008). *The genius of Charles Darwin* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason & Science.

Great Thinkers: In Their Own Words (2011)

The views of 20th Century luminaries such as Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Bertrand Russell, Richard Dawkins, and many others on a variety of topics are personally expressed and briefly explained. What I most hope you take away from this series is an understanding of and appreciation for the wide variety of ideas about human psychology, society, and culture. It is a good introduction.

Farnham, J. (Producer/Director). (2011). *Great thinkers: In their own words* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Guns, Germs, & Steel (2005) ➡ (see: [Diamond](#) [1997] under *Science Resources: Selected Bibliography: Biology, Psychology, & Anthropology*)

A great summation of Jared Diamond's thesis for why some societies come to dominate others.

Horth, S. (Producer), & Diamond, J. (Presenter). (2005). *Guns, germs, & steel* [Documentary]. United States: National Geographic.

Here Be Dragons: An Introduction to Critical Thinking (2011) •

Anyone interested in protecting themselves against scams should watch this much needed video which is free to view online.

Dunning, B. (Producer/Director). (2011). *Here be dragons: An introduction to critical thinking* [Documentary]. United States.

Humanism: Making Bigger Circles (1986) •

The great science fiction writer and professor of biochemistry, Isaac Asimov presents the informational film breaking down the tenants of humanism and dispelling some rather unfortunate and common misconceptions about the perspective. It is not widely available but can be viewed for free at: reasoncinema.com/humanism-making-bigger-circles

American Humanist Association. (Producer), & Asimov, I. (Presenter). (1986). *Humanism: Making bigger circles* [Documentary]. United States: American Humanist Association.

Into the Universe with Stephen Hawking (2010)

The physicist gives his take on the possibility of aliens, time travel, and where the universe came from.

Darlow Smithson Productions. (Producer), & Hawking, Stephen. (Writer). (2010). *Into the universe with Stephen Hawking* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: Discovery Channel.

Life (series) (1979-2010) • ✓

There are ten documentaries in this loosely connected series by David Attenborough which is one of the most important in the history of nature filmmaking. My favorite is “Life in the Undergrowth” (2005), yet all are fantastic! Below is the citation for a 24-disc DVD box set of eight of the titles in the series.

BBC. (Producer), & Attenborough, D. (Presenter). (2005). *The life collection* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

The Nature of Existence (2009)

A man goes in search of answers to the most fundamental questions. A philosophical stroll through human understanding.

Nygaard, R. & Tarantino, P. (Producers), & Nygaard, R. (Director). (2009). *The nature of existence* [Documentary]. United States: Walking Shadows.

NOVA (1974-), and NOVA scienceNOW (2005-) • ✓ #2

Both are fantastic popular science programs. ScienceNOW is hosted by Neil deGrasse Tyson. Full episodes of each can be found at pbs.org. I highly recommend the NOVA episodes: “Origins” (2004), “The Bible’s Buried Secrets” (2008), “Becoming Human” (2009), “What Darwin Never Knew” (2009), “Finding Life Beyond Earth” (2011), & “Hunting the Elements” (2012).

Aspell, P. (Producer). (1974-). *NOVA* [Documentary series]. United States: PBS.

Aspell, P. & Fine, S. (Producers). (2005-). *NOVA scienceNOW* [Documentary series]. United States: PBS.

One Life (2011)

Beautifully captures the trials, tribulations, and triumphs of the lives of many species.

Pope, M. & Rose, M. (Producers), & Gunton, M. & Holmes, M. (Directors). (2011). *One life* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Planet Earth (2006) ● ✓

A sweeping and gorgeous view of our incredible home. There are so many David Attenborough nature programs to recommend, but this is my all-time favorite.

Fothergill, A. (Producer), & Attenborough, D. (Presenter). (2006). *Planet Earth* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC, NHK, & Discovery Channel.

The Planets (1999) ● ✓

The story of our solar system and how we discovered and explore the planets.

Jones, B. (Producer), & West, S. (Presenter). (1999). *The planets* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Science & Islam (2010)

Jim Al-Khalili once again hosts an excellent show about science, this time in the Islamic world.

Usborne, T. (Producer/Director). (1999). *Science & Islam* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Shock & Awe: The Story of Electricity (2011)

The story of the search for the reality of electricity is surprisingly fascinating. From the days when it was considered

magic to our modern understanding of its basic nature, the program is a celebration of discovery.

Crabtree, S. (Producer), & Al-Kalili, J. (Presenter). (2011). *Shock & awe: The story of electricity* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

The Story of Maths (2008)

Four programs which trace the history of the development of mathematics.

Duke, K. (Producer), & McGann, K. (Director). (2008). *The story of maths* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

The Story of Science: Power, Proof, & Passion (2010) •

A quick and quality overview of the historical progress and major achievements of science.

Walk, N. (Producer/Director), & Mosely, M. (Presenter). (2010). *The story of science: Power, proof, & passion* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Walking With...Dinosaurs (1999), Beasts (2001), and Monsters (2005) •

The *Walking With ...* series is an incredible series using state-of-the-art computer graphics and animatronics to recreate the worlds of the Mesozoic, Cenozoic, and Paleozoic Eras respectively. They are some of the most expensive and most captivating science documentaries ever made.

Haines, T. & James, J. (Producers/Directors), & Branagh, K. (Narrator). (1999). *Walking with dinosaurs* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Paterson, N. & James, J. (Producers/Directors), & Branagh, K. (Narrator). (2001). *Walking with beasts* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Leland, C. (Producer), & Haines, T. (Director), & Branagh, K. (Narrator). (2005). *Walking with monsters* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Winged Migration (2001)

Not exactly a nature science documentary, this a visually stunning birds-eye view of the migration of numerous species of birds showing nature as it is in all of its arduous glory!

Perrin, J. (Producer/Director). (2001). *Winged migration* [Documentary]. France: PBS.

Without God (2004) •

Explores the question of whether or not one can be good without God, focusing, in particular, on humanists and how they view the world and morality .

O'Brien, P. & Lowrey, G. (Producers), & Buckman, R. (Presenter). (2004). *Without God* [Documentary]. Canada: CCI.

What Happened Before the Big Bang? (2010)

Gives a clear summary of the standard Big Bang or inflationary model and how scientists are rethinking whether it is an accurate description of the beginning of our universe. Rather than a single starting point as predicted by the standard model, or singularity, some of the new hypotheses posit that it may have not been the beginning at all but merely one of many beginnings such as 1) the "Big Bounce," and 2) an idea inspired by evolutionary biology called cosmological natural selection and several other

ideas. Very interesting view of how scientists ask and attempt to answer this fundamental question.

Leonard, P. (Producer/Director). (2010). *What happened before the Big Bang?* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Documentary: Religion & Skepticism

A History of Christianity (2009) ●

This 6 hour program focuses on the history of many different denominations of Christianity rather than mythology. Very interesting.

Bancroft, G. & Salt, S. (Producers/Directors), & MacCulluch, D. (Presenter). (2009). *A history of Christianity* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

A History of God (2001) ● + ➔ (see: [Armstrong](#) [1993] under *Religion & Pseudoscience Resources: Selected Bibliography: Religion: Analysis & History*)

A good straight forward introduction to how and why most of the societies on earth moved from polytheism to monotheism.

Roos, B. (Producer), & Armstrong, K. (Writer). (2001). *A history of God* [Documentary]. United States: History Channel.

Around the World in 80 Faiths (2009) ●

Pete Owen-Jones travels the planet to explore a wide variety of religions.

Salt, S., Sheahan, T., Selway, K., Johnston, G., Cowling, R., & Jarvis, K. (Producers/Directors). (2009). *Around the world in 80 faiths* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Bondage & the Bible (2008)

Shows how the *Bible* was used to justify slavery (or not?). Also traces how Christian slavery affected the lives of African American's and the religious communities they would create after abolition. Interestingly the issue of whether or not the *Bible* supports slavery with certain passages or freedom in others makes the entire text a muddle of nonsense, to say the least.

Raitan Mult-Media Production. (Producer), & Harmond, E. (Writer/Director). (2008). *Bondage & The Bible* [Documentary]. United States: Raitan Mult-Media Production.

The Buddha (2010) ●✓

A biography of the early and influential philosopher and religious leader.

Grubin, D. (Producer/Director). (2010). *The Buddha* [Documentary]. United States: PBS.

Clash of the Gods (2009)

Depicts many of the ancient Greek and Norse Gods in their full and hideous glory .

Gaffey, J. (Producer), & Cassel, C. & Conway, J. (Directors). (2009). *Clash of the gods* [Documentary]. United States: History Channel.

Champions of the First Amendment (1988)

A film about 3 landmark state/church separation cases, including *McCullom v. Board of Education*. Also check out their earlier *A Second Look at Religion* (1980). Both are available on the Freedom From Religion Foundation's Youtube page.

Freedom From Religion Foundation. (Producer), & Barker, Dan. (Presenter). (1988). *Champions of the First Amendment* [Documentary]. United States: FFRF.

Deliver Us From Evil (2006)

Examines how and why serial child molester Father Oliver O'Grady was protected for nearly two decades.

Donner, F. & Lassalle, H. (Producers), & Berg, A. (Director). (2006). *Deliver us from evil* [Documentary]. United States: Lionsgate.

Discussions with Richard Dawkins: The Four Horseman (2007)

A casual roundtable discussion between Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett.

Dawkins, R. (Producer). (2007). *Discussions with Richard Dawkins: The four horseman* [Documentary]. United States: Richard Dawkins Foundation.

Dispatches (1987-)

Focuses on British current affairs. Has some chilling and well made episodes on the Islamic community in Britain: "What Muslims Want" (2006), "Jihad TV" (2006), "Undercover Mosque" (2007), "Unholy War" (2007), and "Lessons in Hate and Violence" (2011).

BBC. (Producer). (1987-). *Dispatches* [Documentary series]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Empires: Islam: Empire of Faith (2001) ●✓

An excellent introduction to the origins and early expansion of Islam.

Gardner, R. (Producer/Director). (2001). *Empires: Islam: Empire of faith* [Documentary]. United States: PBS.

Empires: Martin Luther (2003) ✓

Recounts the life of the revolutionary monk who challenged the corruption and dominance of the Catholic Church and sparked the Protestant Reformation.

Hunter, K. (2003). *Empires: Martin Luther* [Documentary]. United States: PBS.

Empires: Peter & Paul & the Christian Revolution (2003) ✓

Follows in the footsteps of those individuals who created the image of Jesus and were integral in articulation and spread of the new faith.

Aste, P. (Producer), & Koval, M. (Director). (2004). *Empires: Peter & Paul & the Christian revolution* [Documentary]. United States: PBS.

The End of God?: A Horizon Guide to Science & Religion (2011)

Dr. Thomas Dixon traces the modern conflicts between science and religion using the BBC documentary archives and demonstrates that ideas of God have been relegated to smaller and smaller corners of explanation .

Law, N. (Producer). (2011). *The end of God?: A Horizon guide to science & religion* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Enemies of Reason (2007)

“Professor Richard Dawkins confronts an epidemic of irrational superstitious thinking.”

IWC Media. (Producer), & Barnes, R. (2007). *Enemies of reason* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Faith School Menace? (2010)

Richard Dawkins examines the increasing role of faith schools (1/3 of total primary schools as of 2010) in educating British youth.

Barnes, R. (Producer), & Milton, M. (Director). (2010). *Faith school menace?* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Flock of Dodos: The Evolution-Intelligent Design Circus (2006)

The dodos are, of course, those who waddle on about “Intelligent Design.”

Carlisle, T. (Producer), & Olson, R. (Director). (2006). *Flock of dodos: The evolution-intelligent design circus* [Documentary]. United States: Prairie Starfish Productions.

For the Bible Tells Me So (2007)

Explores how several religious families cope with a homosexual family member and the differing biblical interpretations.

Karslake, D. (Producer/Director). (2007). *For the Bible tells me so* [Documentary]. United States: Atticus Group & VisionQuest Productions.

From Jesus to Christ: The First Christians (2004) ✓

Archeology and historical analysis are employed to try and ascertain who the historical Jesus may or may not have been.

Mellowes, M. (Producer), & Cran, W. (Director). (2004). *From Jesus to Christ: The first Christians* [Documentary]. United States: PBS.

Generation Jihad (2010)

An exploration of the radicalization of young British Muslims and what is being done about it.

BBC. (Producer), & Taylor, P. (Presenter). (2010). *Generation jihad* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

God in America (2010) ● ✓

A great film series covering the entire religious history of the U.S.

Belton, D., O'Connell, C., & Wisner, C. (Producers), & Belton, D. (Director). (2010). *God in America* [Documentary]. United States: PBS.

God on the Brain (2003)

An interesting investigation of possible neurological explanations for certain extreme religious experiences.

Tucker, L. (Producer/Director). (2003). *God on the brain* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

The God Who Wasn't There (2005)

Questions the historical existence of Jesus.

Jackson, A. (Producer), Flemming, B. (Director). (2005). *The God who wasn't there* [Documentary]. United States: Beyond Belief Media.

God's Warriors (2007)

Christiane Amanpour reports on the aggressive political movements within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam during the modern era.

Hackel, C. Timko, D. Rokus, B. Christensen, J., & O'Neill, J. (Producers), & Hackel, C. & Timko, D. (Directors). (2007). *God's warriors* [Documentary]. United States: CNN.

The Heart of the Matter: God Under the Microscope (1996)

A wide range of individuals are asked whether science and religion are compatible including: historian David Starkey, philosopher Helen Warnock, scientists Richard Dawkins and James Watson, and theologians Michael Heller and Wentzel van Huyssteen.

BBC. (Producer), & Bakewell, J. (Presenter). (1996). *The heart of the matter: God under the microscope* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Heaven (1987)

A funny series of interviews of a wide-range of individuals on their thoughts on God and heaven. Shows how subjective and varied the conceptions of heaven are. It was actor Diane Keaton's directoral debut.

Mitchell, C. (Producer), & Keaton, D. (Director). (1987). *Heaven* [Documentary]. United States: Island Pictures.

Hell House (2001)

A bizarre and oddly funny glimpse into a Christian "haunted house" intended to instill in children a deep fear of divine punishment.

Ratliff, G., Lewis, S., & Mortensen, Z. (Producers), & Ratliff, G. (Director). (2001). *Hell House* [Documentary]. United States:

Mixed Greens & Plexifilm.

Heritage: Civilization, & the Jews (1984) •

A huge nine-part series tracing the history of Judaism presented by former Israeli ambassador to the U.S. Abba Eban. Well worth the investment of time. The Jews have an interesting and tough story.

Marnier, E. (Producer/Director). (1984). *Heritage: Civilization, & the Jews* [Documentary]. United States: John G. Fox.

In God We Trust? (2011)

The primary focus of the film is the separation of church and state controversy surrounding the inclusion of a Christian flag at a public veterans memorial in King, North Carolina. The film also presents individuals' points of view on the commandments of God, religious bigotry, and revisionist history. A wide range of individuals are allowed to speak with their own voice with no narration. It is available for free per the producer at: [youtube.com/watch?v=8ucVDpmFz-E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ucVDpmFz-E)

Burdick, S. (Producer). (2011). *In God we trust?* [Documentary]. United States.

Inside Mecca (2003) •

Follows several people from different backgrounds as they make the pilgrimage to the Saudi Arabian city of Mecca known as the Hajj. The program explains the journey's significance, history, and difficulties.

Mehdi, A. (Producer/Director), & David, K. (Presenter). (2003). *Inside story of Mecca* [Documentary]. United States: National Geographic Channel.

James Randi: Psychic Investigator (1991)

A short run series which not so subtly demolishes numerous woo.

Glass, F. (Producer). (1991). *James Randi: Psychic investigator* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: ITV.

Jesus Camp (2006) ✓

Want to know how religious fanatics are created? This is a sad and chilling look at the indoctrination (abuse) of children into Christian foot soldiers. Thankfully the camp was shut down due to the criticism stemming from this film.

Loki Films & A&E Indie Films. (Producers), Ewing, H. & Grady, R. (Directors). (2006). *Jesus camp* [Documentary]. United States: Magnolia Pictures.

Join Us (2011)

Follows four South Carolinian families as they struggle to leave a cult and return to society. The confusion and stress they experience is palpable.

Timoner, O., Tobman, J., & Nunes, V. (Producers), Timoner, O. (Director). (2011). *Join us* [Documentary]. United States: Interloper Films.

Jonestown: The Life & Death of Peoples Temple (2006)

American Experience tells the story of Jim Jones and his cult which represents the epitome of what is immoral about faith and belief. Simply terrifying!

Nelson, S. (Producer). (2006). *Jonestown: The life & death of Peoples Temple* [Documentary]. United States: PBS.

Jon Safran vs. God (2004)

The comedian unleashes his wicked humor on absurd religious claims and practices throughout the world.

Yaman, S. (Producer). (2004). *Jon Safran vs God* [Documentary series]. Australia: SBS TV.

Joseph Campbell & the Power of Myth (1991) ● †

Campbell's take on mythology was founded on the work of Carl Jung. His hypothesis is that all humans everywhere and throughout history have a shared and common unconscious compulsion and need for particular story patterns which help humanity to understand life and relationships. What he called the "hero's journey" is perhaps the most pervasive and compelling of these hypothesis.

Moyers, B. (Producer/Director). (1991). *Joseph Campbell & the power of myth* [Documentary]. United States: PBS.

Judgment Day: Intelligent Design on Trail (2007)

About the landmark *Kitzmiller v. Dover* case which was only the latest blow to creationism.

McMaster, J., Johnstone, G., & Tovell, V. (Producers), & Johnstone, G. & McMaster, J. (Directors). (2007). *Judgment day: Intelligent design on trail* [Documentary]. United States: PBS.

Kumaré: The True Story of a False Prophet (2010)

Vikram Gandhi, interested in whether religious teachers are genuine or genuinely frauds, poses as an Indian guru and suckers many into following his practices which he makes up along the way. Explores America's fascination with Eastern spiritualism and the often honest gullibility of individuals.

Colthurst, B., Carmel, B., & Feder, S. (Producers), Gandhi, V. (Director). (2010). *Kumaré: The true story of a false prophet* [Documentary]. United States: Future Bliss Films.

Lake of Fire (2007)

A piercing and nuanced look at the abortion debate.

Kaye, T. (Producer/Director). (2007). *Lake of fire* [Documentary]. United States: THINKFilms.

The Life of Muhammad (2011) •

About the life and philosophy of the founder of Islam.

Kermani, F. (Producer/Director), & Omaar, R. (Presentor). (2011). *The life of Muhammad* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Living with the Ayatollah (2011)

An eye-opening look at the brutal crack down on Iranians calling for greater freedom from the Iranian regime headed by the religious leader “Grand Ayatollah” Seyed Ali Khamenei.

Corbin, J. (Producer/Presentor). (2011). *Living with the Ayatollah* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

The Lord is Not on Trial Here Today: The Real Story of How Separation of Church & State in Public Schools Became Part of American Law & the Courageous Woman Who Made it Happen (2010)

In 1945 Vashti McCollum courageously stood up to theists in Illinois who had instituted a voluntary religion class at her son’s school. After her son was treated poorly for not attending the class, McCollum sued the school and finally, after 3 years, helped establish the separation of church and public education.

Check out McCollum's memoir of the events:

McCollum, Vashti. (1993). *One woman's fight* . Madison, WI: Freedom from Religion Foundation.

Rosenstein, J. (Producer/Director). (2010). *The lord is not on trial here today: The real story of how separation of church & state in public schools became part of American law & the courageous woman who made it happen* [Documentary]. United States: Independent Television Service.

Marjoe (1972) ✓

B-movie actor Marjoe Gortner recreates the tactics he was taught and employed as a child to swindle believers out of their money. Won the 1972 Academy award for Best Documentary Feature.

Kernochan, S. Palevsky, M. & Smith, H. (Producers), Kernochan, S. & Smith, H. (Directors). (1972). *Marjoe* [Documentary]. United States: Docurama.

The Mormons (2007) ● ✓

Learn the history and beliefs of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church). Study of Mormonism is essential to understanding the birth and development of major religions because they are so new to history.

Whitney, H. (Producer/Director). (2007). *The Mormons* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Mythbusters (2003-) **#1**

With the aid of science, attempts to demonstrate whether or not commonly held myths, urban legends, beliefs are founded in fact or fiction.

Rees, P. (Creator). (2005-). *Mythbusters* [Documentary series]. Discovery Channel.

None of the Above: The Rise of the Religiously Unaffiliated (2012)

An interesting 3-part look at the now 20% of American's who do not identify with any specific religious organization.

Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly. (Producer). (2012). *None of the above: The rise of the religiously unaffiliated* [Documentary]. United States: PBS.

The Occult History of the Third Reich (1991)

I don't know how many times I have heard the nonsensical argument that the Nazis and Soviet regimes were atheistic. Even a cursory understanding of history dispels this myth completely.

McWhinnie, D. (Producer), & Flitton, D. (Director). (1991). *The occult history of the Third Reich* [Documentary]. United States: History Channel.

Oh My God (2009)

Humans from many walks of life are asked what they think God is.

Rodger, P. (Producer/Director). (2009). *Oh my god* [Documentary]. United States: Mitropoulos Films.

Pagans (2004)•

Richard Rudgley presents this interesting four-part series which attempts to understand the beliefs, practices, and cultural influence of paganism .

Salt, C. (Producer), & Malone, C. (Director). (2004). *Pagans* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Penn & Teller: Bullshit! (2003) ✓ **#2**

The comedic/magician duo expose, in their own unique and profane way, numerous scams, delusions, and otherwise nonsensical beliefs of the human species.

Hotchkiss, J. (Producer), & Jillett, P. & Teller (Writers/Directors). (2003). *Penn & Teller: Bullshit!* [Documentary series]. United States: Showtime.

Phil Plait's Bad Universe (2011) **#4** (see also: [Plait](#) [2002] *Religion & Pseudoscience Resources: Selected Bibliography: Skepticism & Counter-Apologetics*)

Former President of the James Randi Educational Foundation and Bad Astronomy blogger takes his skepticism to the small screen.

Rees, P. (Creator), & Bluemke, J. (Director). (2005-). *Phil Plait's bad universe* [Documentary]. United States: Discovery Channel.

The Question of God (2004)

A number of prominent thinkers hold a soft debate about this big question using the lives and thoughts of psychologist Sigmund Freud and writer C.S. Lewis to structure opposing views.

Tatge, C. & Lasseur, D. (Producers), & Tatge, C. (2004). *The question of God* [Documentary]. United States: PBS.

Religulous (2008) ✓ **#3**

Comedian Bill Maher goes on a journey to try and understand why people believe in so many ridiculous religious things.

Maher, B., Smith, J., & West, P. (Producers), & Charles, L. (Director). (2008). *Religulous* [Documentary]. United States: Lionsgate.

The Revisionaries (2012)

Follows the political debate surrounding the Texas State Board of Education and a handful of its members to insert creationism into Texas's curriculum. A startling look at how fundamentalism and non-intellectualism influences our public education.

Thurman, S., Wood, O., & Silver, P. (Producers), & Thurman, S. (Director). (2012). *The revisionaries* [Documentary]. United States: Kino Lorber Films.

The Root of All Evil? (2006)

A BBC documentary by Richard Dawkins about the harmful effects of religion. Dawkins didn't like the title because he does not think that religion is necessarily the *root* of all evil.

Dawkins, Richard. (Producer/Director). (2006). *The root of all evil?* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Scientology & Me (2007), and The Secrets of Scientology (2010)

In these two programs, John Sweeney investigates the secretive world of this modern secretive religion.

Hesse, U. (Producer), & Sweeney, J. (2007). *Scientology & me* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Stead, K. & Mole, S. (Producers), & Sweeney, J. (Presenter). (2010). *The Mormons* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Secret Files of the Inquisition (2007)

A series based on the 1998 release of the Catholic Church's "Archive of the Holy Office of the Inquisition." 600 years of persecution is revealed.

Inquisition Productions. (Producer), & Rabinovitch, D. (Director). (2007). *Secret files of the Inquisition* [Documentary]. United States: PBS.

Sex in a Cold Climate (1998) (see also: [The Magdalene Sisters](#) (2003) above under *Drama* which is a fictionalized film account of the Magdalene Asylums).

The very personal accounts of former inmates of the infamous asylums where prostitutes and other "fallen women" were, from the 18th to 20th centuries, subjected to abuse and kept from their children.

Humphries, S. (Producer/Director). (1998). *Sex in a cold climate* [Documentary]. United Kingdom.

Sons of Perdition (2010)

About three boys who courageously left the polygamous Mormon community in Utah headed by Warren Jeffs. Co-director and co-producer of the film Tyler Measom has described himself thus: "I'm a searcher, I'm a wanderer, I'm a filmmaker, and I'm happy to be an ex-Mormon."

Measom, T., Merten, J., & Goldman, J. (Producers), & Measom, T. & Merten, J. (Directors). (2010). *Sons of perdition* [Documentary]. United States.

Talmud (2006)

Explains the content, meaning, and historical origins of the text that is essentially a companion to the *Torah (Old Testament)*.

Saadoun, P. (Producer), & Salfati, P. (Director). (2006). *Talmud* [Documentary]. France: 13 Productions & ARTE France Cinema.

The Vatican: The Hidden World (2012) ● ✓

A penetrating view of the tiny nation's inner sanctums, daily routine, and historical and contemporary controversies.

Kwak, J. & Sasse, S. (Producers), & Ladkani, R. (Director). (2012). *The Vatican: The hidden world* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Waiting for Armageddon (2008)

Shows the close and strange relationship between Christian Zionists and Jews. It seems those Christians support Israel largely because they believe it will help fulfill biblical prophesy, namely the end of the world.

Heilbroner, D. & Sacchi, F. (Producers), & Heilbroner, D., Sacchi, F., & Davis, K. (Directors). (2008). *Waiting for Armageddon* [Documentary]. United States: Q-Ball Productions & Eureka Film Productions.

A War on Science (2006)

Bill Paterson narrates a recent attempt and failure by a US school board to introduce religious "intelligent design" into their school's curriculum.

Van Der Pool, J. (Producer). (2006). *A war on science* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Welcome to North Korea (Noord-Korea, 2001) ● +

The contemporary nation which most exemplifies the horrors of a religious state is certainly North Korea. The traits it shares with most religions are a dogmatic and authoritarian ideology in the form of a personality cult around a supposedly transcendent figurehead, utopian delusions of grandeur, brainwashing propaganda, unproven truth claims, the elevation of blind faith and belief as virtues, the suppression of alternative possibilities, and an emphasis on apostasy as the highest crime.

There are numerous films about the totalitarian nation. This Dutch documentary is among the clearest and most informative.

de Heus, M. & Stok, L. (Producers), & Feddema, R. & Tetteroo, P. (Directors). (2001). *Welcome to North Korea* [Documentary]. Netherlands.

Why Democracy?: Bloody Cartoons (2007)

A look at the childish and violent outrage which erupted in the Muslim world after a Danish newspaper printed a satirical cartoon of the prophet Mohammed and the consequences for freedom of expression.

Hayling, A. (Producer). (2007), & Kjaer, K. (Director). *Why democracy?: Bloody cartoons* [Documentary]. Denmark: Freeport Media & STEPS International.

Drama/Romance

12 Angry Men (1957)

On the surface this is a story about the deliberation of a jury in the trial of a young man accused of killing his father. Thanks to a skeptic (Henry Fonda) the jurors are forced to confront their prejudices and the facts or lack thereof. Powerful underlying themes include the link between personal emotional life-histories and certainty, and the redemptive value of doubt.

Fonda, H. & Rose, R. (Producers), & Lumet, S. (Director). (1957). *12 angry men* [Motion Picture]. United States: United Artists.

Agora (2010) ✓

An historical drama about Hypatia (Rachel Weisz) who was a Neoplatonist philosopher and perhaps the last librarian of the great Library at Alexandria. The film depicts the clash of cultures occurring during the early 5th century between, Greeks, Jews, and Christians. Note that the movie depicts one of several possible historical fates of the Library.

Augustin, A. & Bovaira, F. (Producers), & Amenabar, A. (Director). (2010). *Agora* [Motion Picture]. United States: Newmarket Films.

Amadeus (1984) ✓

Based on an urban legend surrounding the death of Mozart, a devout Christian composer, Salieri (F. Murray Abraham), becomes angry with God after he recognizes the genius in the vulgar and non-believing fellow composer which was denied to him. Salieri attempts to thwart “God’s plan” by destroying Mozart. Won eight Academy Awards.

Forman, M., Ohlsson, B., Hausman, M., & Zaentz, S. (Producers), & Forman, M. (Director). (1984). *Amadeus* [Motion Picture]. United States: Orion.

American Beauty (1999) ✓

A depressed suburban dad (Kevin Spacey) attempts to take control of his life and in the process liberates those around him. The film suggests we stop trying to control other people’s lives, let go of idols, and self-actualize. The viewer also learns about the destructive tendencies of those who are unable to embrace such

freedom. May also be viewed as an allegory for Buddhist philosophy.

Cohen, B. & Jinks, D. (Producers), & Mendes, S. (Director). (1999). *American beauty* [Motion Picture]. United States: DreamWorks.

Amen (2003)

About the Catholic Church hierarchies' collaboration with the Nazi's and silence on the Holocaust. Individuals of conscience, a priest and an SS officer struggle to inform the world.

Berri, C. (Producer), & Costa-Gavras. (Director). (2003). *Amen* [Motion Picture]. France: Kino International.

Angels & Insects (1995)

An erotic drama about the love affair between a gentle entomologist and the widowed daughter of his wealthy benefactor.

Haas, B., Herlihy, J., & Orent, K. (Producers). Hass, P.. (Director). (1995). *Angels & insects* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom: Samuel Goldwyn Company.

Antonia's Line (Antonia, 1995)

Celebrates life, love, tragedy, and humanist values. Described by the director as a "feminist fairy tale."

Weers, H. (Producer), & Gorris, M. (Director). (1995). *Antonia's line* [Motion Picture]. Netherlands: Asmik Ace Entertainment.

At Play in the Fields of the Lord (1991)

Missionaries attempt to convert Native South Americans to Christianity and eventually succumb to their own barbarity. Stars Kathy Bates, Daryl Hannah, John Lithgow, Aidan Quinn, and musician Tom Waits.

Nichols, D., Ramalho, F., & Zaentz, S. (Producers), & Babenco, H. (Director). (1991). *At play in the fields of the Lord* [Motion Picture]. United States: Universal.

Bad Boy Bubby (1993)

Initially, this is a very disturbing story. If you can get through the first thirty minutes or so you'll find a touching tale of man-child Bubby, who was imprisoned by his cruel mother in single room since birth. He eventually escapes and experiences the outside world for the first time.

Draskovic, G. & Procacci, D. (Producers), & Heer, R. (Director). (1993). *Bad boy Bubby* [Motion Picture]. Australia: Blue Underground.

The Bicycle Thief (Ladri di biciclette, 1948)

One of the first neorealist films, for its use of nonprofessional actors and depicting the lives of the poor and working class, this is the intimate story of a poor father who gets his bike stolen which is his only means for income and survival. He and his son fight to reclaim the bike and in doing so highlight many societal ills. A triumph in humanist film story-telling. Given the honorary award Most Outstanding Foreign Language Film.

de Sica, V. (Producer/Director). (1948). *The bicycle thief* [Motion Picture]. Italy: Enic.

Black Robe (1991)

Demonstrates that Christianity is just as primitive as other religions.

Lantos, R., Milliken, S., & Reichel, S. (Producers), & Beresford, B. (Director). (1991). *Black Robe* [Motion Picture]. United States: Samuel Goldwyn Company.

The Boys of St. Vincent (1991)

An startling account of the pedophilia among Catholic clergy.

Luca, C. (Producer), & Smith, J. (Director). (1991). *The boys of St. Vincent* [Motion Picture]. Canada: Alliance Atlantis Communications.

Breaking the Waves (Mifunes Sidste Sang, 1996)

A uncompromising story about a naïve young woman (Emily Watson) who will do anything to please those she loves and God with desperate and dramatic results. A fine cinematic achievement as well.

Jensen, P. & Windelov, V. (Producers), & Trier, L. (Director). (1996). *Breaking the waves* [Motion Picture]. Denmark: Guild.

Chocolat (1999)

A pious mayor tries to drive an unwed atheist woman from a small French town for arousing the spirits of the citizens.

Brown, D., Golden, K., & Holleran, L. (Producers), & Hallstrom, L. (Director). (2000). *Chocolat* [Motion Picture]. United States: Miramax.

The Contender (2000)

Atheist (Joan Allen) is nominated vice-president after the vice-president dies and Republicans try to destroy her reputation.

Baer, W., Frydman, M., Spies, J., & Urbanski, D. (Producers), & Lurie, R. (Director). (2000). *The contender* [Motion Picture]. United States: DreamWorks.

Clarence Darrow (1978)

Henry Fonda stars in this one-man play based on the writings of famous defense attorney. It covers numerous cases, including the Scopes “Monkey” trial, and his freethinking views on life and liberty.

Today Home Entertainment. (Producer), & Rich, J. (Director). (1978). *Clarence Darrow* [Motion Picture]. United States: PBS.

Creation (2010) 🐘 (see: based on the book by [Keynes](#) [2001] located under *A Brief History of Freethought: Selected Bibliography: Autobiographies & Biographies*)

Tells the story of how Charles Darwin struggled with his religious views after the death of his daughter.

Thomas, J. (Producer), & Amiel, J. (Director). (2010). *Creation* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom: HanWay Films.

The Crucible (1996) ✓

Ostensibly about the Salem witch trials, but used as a metaphor for McCarthyism. Adapted from Arthur Miller’s play of the same name.

Hytner, N., Miller, B., & Picker, D. (Producers), & Hytner, N. (Director). (1996). *The crucible* [Motion Picture]. United States: Twentieth Century Fox.

Darwin’s Darkest Hour (2009)

Explores many of the same issues as the above film *Creation* (2010) while focusing as well on the publication of *The Origin of Species* (1859) and the similar findings of Alfred Wallace.

Mahoney, M. (Producer), & Bradshaw, J. (Director). (2009). *Darwin’s darkest hour* [Motion Picture]. United States: National

Geographic.

The Devils (1971) → (see: [Huxley](#) [1952] under *Religion & Pseudoscience Resources: Religion: Analysis & History*)

Mass hysteria and superstition are on full display in this version of the John Whiting play of the same name and Aldous Huxley's novel.

Solo, R. (Producer), & Russell, K. (Director). (1971). *The devils* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom: Warner Brothers.

Elmer Gantry (1960) → (see: [Lewis](#) [1927])

Burt Lancaster portrays a dishonest tent-show minister during the 1920's .

Smith, B. (Producer), & Brooks, R. (Director). (1960). *Elmer Gantry* [Motion Picture]. United States: United Artists.

Earth (1998) (see also: 2nd film in the "Elements Trilogy" along with *Fire* [1996] and *Water* [2005])

A romantic drama set amidst the tumultuous period before partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. The main theme centers around the terrible divisions and violence amongst Hindus, Sikhs, Parsees, and Muslims within the city of Lahore, communities which had formerly lived in relative peace and acceptance.

Mehta, D., Masson, A., & Mehta, D. (Producers), & Mehta, D. (Director). (1998). *Earth* [Motion Picture]. India/Canada: MGM.

Fanny & Alexander (1982)

A young boy and his sister suffer the death of their father and the subsequent marriage of their mother to an extremely domineering bishop. The family struggles under the bishop's

thumb and attempt to escape. Won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film in 1983.

Donner, J. (Producer), & Bergman, I. (Director). (1982). *Fanny & Alexander* [Motion Picture]. Sweden: Persona Films.

Fearless (1993)

In one of Jeff Bridges' best performances, an atheist becomes a contemplative hero after he survives and rescues others from a plane crash. A philosophical look at trauma, loss, and the value of life.

Rosenberg, M. & Weinstein, P. (Producers), & Weir, P. (Director). (1993). *Fearless* [Motion Picture]. United States: Warner Bros.

Fire (1996) (see also: the beginning of the "Elements Trilogy" followed by *Earth* [1998] and *Water* [2005])

A series of humanist films, each dealing with a different system of oppression. This one highlights arranged marriage and bigotry against homosexuals.

Bedi, B. & Mehta, D. (Producers), & Mehta, D. (Director). (1996). *Fire* [Motion Picture]. India/Canada: Zeitgeist Films.

The French Lieutenant's Woman (1981) ➔ (see: [Fowles](#) [1969])

Interpretes the sexual and social oppression of Victorian England through the lense of late 60's liberation. Reisz cleverly adapts the novel through parrallel narratives of a modern actor couple playing the roles of Fowles' original characters in a movie. Reminds us that while our views may evolve, some aspects of life remain the same.

Clore, L. (Producer), & Reisz, K. (Director). (1981). *The French Lieutenant's woman* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom: United Artists.

Frida (2002)

A straightforward telling of the life of Frida Kahlo (Salma Hayek) the iconoclastic artist, communist, and progressive thinker.

Polstein, J., Flickinger, L., Speed, L., Hardin, N., Sneider, R., & Hayek, S. (Producers), & Taymor, J. (Director). (2002). *Frida* [Motion Picture]. United States: Miramax.

Galileo (1975)

About the famous astronomer's heresy trial.

Landau, E. & Weinstein, H. (Producers), & Losey, J. (Director). (1975). *Galileo* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom: American Film Theatre.

God on Trial (2008)

A thought provoking true story about holocaust victims at Auschwitz who put God on trial for breaking The Covenant. A very interesting concept highlighting a wide variety of views.

Rodgers, J. (Producer), & DeEmmony, A. (Director). (2008). *God on trial* [Motion Picture]. United States: PBS.

Grand Illusion (La Grande Illusion, 1937) ✓

A group of French soldiers are captured by the Germans and attempt to escape (many times). This is first and foremost an anti-war film (the title alludes to the folly of thinking that the First World War was the "war to end all wars"). Yet, it also is critical of nationalism, anti-Semitism, and class distinction making it one of the earliest and finest humanistic films. Made just before WWII, it was an answer to the rise of Fascism.

Pinkovitch, A. & Rollmer, F. (Producers), & Renoir, J. (Director). (1937). *Grand illusion* [Motion Picture]. France/Italy: Warner Brothers.

Howards End (1992) ➔ (see: [Forster](#) [1910])

A wonderful rendition of the humanist novel about the human desire to connect. The brilliant cast includes Emma Thompson, Anthony Hopkins, Vanessa Redgrave, and Helena Bonham Carter. Winner of three Academy Awards.

Merchant, I. (Producer), & Ivory, J. (Director). (1992). *Howards end* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom: Orion Classics.

Hadewijch (2009)

A young French woman, deeply committed to her Christian faith, leaves the convent where she has been studying and enters the wider more secular community. Believing that the world is morally deficient, she befriends an equally devout Muslim man who takes her on a journey to a war-torn Middle Eastern country. Themes include the lost human experiences and violence often wrought by single-minded belief. Essentially, the characters are naive victims of systems that, on the one hand, teach utter devotion coupled with deep guilt and, on the other, cringe from those who fully embody such psychological torture.

Merlin, M. (Producer), & Dumont, B. (Director). (2010). *Hadewijch* [Motion Picture]. France: IFC Films.

Heart of the Beholder (2007)

A small town video store owner is harangued by Christians who want him to remove certain titles. A First Amendment story.

Manor, A. & Volturno, J. (Producers), & Tipton, K. (Director). (2005). *Heart of the beholder* [Motion Picture]. United States: Vanguard

Cinema.

Ikiru (1952) ✓

Ikiru or “to live” is the heartbreaking, yet triumphant, story of a government worker who realizes, after he is diagnosed with a terminal illness, his mundane replaceable life has meant very little to the world and those around him. His existential crisis leads him on a journey of reflection, naïve and often self-destructive attempts at exuberance, and ultimately a powerful niche of meaning through personal and collective action. It must be remembered that we all have the terminal condition of being human. Whether our time is merely months or decades the urgency for life should remain constant. One of the great humanist films of all-time and perhaps Akira Kurosawa’s best.

Motoki, S. (Producer), & Kurosawa, A. (Director). (1952). *Ikiru* [Motion Picture]. Japan: Toho.

Inherit the Wind (1960) ✓ #1 ([see](#))

Spencer Tracy stars in this parable of the 1925 Scopes “Monkey” Trial that highlights the dangers of McCarthyism and creationism .

Kramer, S. (Producer/Director). (2011). *Inherit the wind* [Motion Picture]. United States: United Artists.

Jude (1996) (see: [Hardy](#) [1895] under *A Brief History of Freethought: Selected Bibliography: Classic Texts*)

Kate Winslet and Christopher Eccleston star in this adaptation about the difficulties experienced by non-“traditional” families in Victorian England.

Eaton, A. (Producer), & Winterbottom, M. (Director). (1996). *Jude* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom: Universal Pictures.

The Ledge (2011)

Are you an *Old Testament*, *New Testament*, or humanist person? What does family and marriage signify? Should one deal with loss with integrity or abandonment? What would you do for love? These questions and more are explored in *The Ledge*, an interesting, if not so subtle, exploration of the integrity it takes to be an atheist. This is the most recent film to explore whether humans can be “good without God.”

Damon, M. & Mailer, M. (Producers), & Chapman, M. (Director). (2011). *The ledge* [Motion Picture]. United States: Foresight Unlimited & IFC Films.

The Life of Emile Zola (1937)

The French author fought for truth, for illuminating the plight of the oppressed, and for depicting the reality of life, blemishes and all. This story focuses largely on his involvement in the Dreyfus Affair in which he helped exonerate an innocent Jewish soldier from a conviction of treason fueled by anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and investigative blunders. Won the 1937 Academy Award for Best Picture.

Blanke, H. (Producer), & Rapper, I. (Director). (1937). *The life of Emile Zola* [Motion Picture]. United States: Warner Bros.

Lord of the Flies (1963) ✓ ➡ (see: [Golding](#) [1954])

An excellent adaptation! I also lightly recommend the Americanized 1990 version, if only for comparison.

Allen, L. (Producer), & Brook, P. (Director). (1963). *Lord of the flies* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom: Continental.

Lourdes (2009)

A disabled woman travels to the famous holy site to be cured. After bathing in the water she gains nearly full mobility. Is it a miracle? Questions are raised, not only about the source of her recovery, but also about the seemingly arbitrary “selection” process. The viewer is challenged to contemplate financial and other motivations for the Church and other individuals to either support or dismiss the occurrence.

Bober, P., Gschlacht, M., & Marian, S., (Producers), & Hausner, J. (Director). (2009). *Lourdes* [Motion Picture]. France: Arte France Cinema.

Madame Curie (1943)

A biopic of the famed scientist based on her daughter Eve’s biography. In the end, Marie Curie gives an impassioned speech about the virtues of science in helping to make a better world.

Franklin, S. (Producer), & LeRoy, M. (Director). (1943). *Madame Curie* [Motion Picture]. United States: MGM.

The Magdalene Sisters (2003) (see also: [Sex in a Cold Climate](#) [1998] which is the documentary of the same story under *Documentary: Religio & Skepticism*)

Tragic and heartbreaking, this is a “holier-than-thou” cautionary true story.

Higson, F. (Producer), & Mullan, P. (Director). (2003). *The Magdalene sisters* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom: Irish Film Board.

The Magician (Ansiktet, 1958) (see also: can be considered the 2nd in a loose trilogy along with *The Seventh Seal* [*Det Sjunde Inseplet* , 1957] and *The Virgin Spring* [*Jungfrukallan* , 1959]) ✓

Magicians claiming supernatural powers in 1840's Sweden try to mesmerize an audience of skeptics and believers. It is creepy, deep, and at times one of Bergman's most hilarious works. This film is also an allegory of the Christ myth and reality behind seemingly miraculous tricks and grand persona's.

Ekelund, A. (Producer), & Bergman, I. (Director). (1957). *The magician* [Motion Picture]. Sweden: Swedish Film Production.

Middlemarch (1994) 🏠 (see: [Eliot](#) [1874] is located in the *A Brief History of Freethought: Selected Bibliography: Classic Texts*)

My favorite adaptation of Eliot's masterpiece.

BBC. (Producer), & Page, A. (Director). (1994). *Middlemarch* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Moolaadé (2004)

A central theme is the slowly changing attitudes in an African village towards the horrific traditional practice of female genital mutilation. Modernity and tradition clash. I particularly liked the pitting of woo against woo.

Sud, C. (Producer), & Sembene, O. (Director). (2004). *Moolaadé* [Motion Picture]. Senegal: Centre Cinematographique.

My Brilliant Career (1979)

Sybylla (Judy Davis) is a confident young woman who follows her own path to becoming a writer, despite the objections of her friends and family who are steeped in the rigid patriarchal conventions of Australian 19th century high-society.

Fink, M. (Producer), & Armstrong, G. (Director). (1979). *My brilliant career* [Motion Picture]. Australia: New South Wales Film Corporation.

Nazarin (1958)

A priest leaves his order and while traveling the country-side gathers a group of disciples. Clearly a literal reality based take on the Christ myth emphasizing that if taken as a real figure Jesus would have been regarded as insane.

Ponce, M. (Producer), & Buñuel, L. (Director). (1958). *Nazarin* [Motion Picture]. Mexico: Producciones Barbachano Ponce.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (1975) ✓ ➡ (see: [Kesey](#) [1962])

May be summed up by the line "You're not a loony, you're a fisherman!" The film earned five Academy Awards.

Douglas, M. & Zaentz, S. (Producers), & Forman, M. (Director). (1975). *One flew over the cuckoo's nest* [Motion Picture]. United States: United Artists.

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit (1990) ➡ (see: [Winterson](#) [1985])

A young lesbian struggles to grow up in a bigoted Pentecostal community. The TV version excludes a few important elements found in the book like the allegorical fairytales.

BBC. (Producer), & Kidron, B. (Director). (1989). *Oranges are not the only fruit* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Parrot (2012)

A short film (24 min.) about two brothers who are closeted atheists. When one of the brothers dies we see how each member of the family copes.

McKenna, E. (Producer), & Foster, C. (Director). (2012). *Parrot* [Motion Picture]. Australia: Myrtle Street Pictures.

A Passage to India (1984) ➡ (see: [Forster](#) [1924])

A fair translation of this “clash of cultures” story with its call for harmony between the rational and emotional sides of humanity.

Lean, D., Heyman, J., Brabourne, L., & Goodwin, R. (Producers), & Lean, D. (Director). (1984). *A passage to India* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom: Columbia Pictures.

The People vs. Larry Flynt (1996)

Hustler magazine founder Larry Flynt stood up for the First Amendment and won! A central theme is the idea that our right to free speech is dependent on everyone else’s ability to speak freely even if we may not feel comfortable with what is being said.

Stone, O., Yang, J., & Hausman, M. (Producers), & Forman, M. (Director). (1996). *The people v. Larry Flynt* [Motion Picture]. United States: Columbia Pictures.

Persepolis (2007) ✓

This animated, though deep, heavy, and undoubtedly adult story is a coming-of-age autobiography of Iranian Marjane Satrapi just before and during the takeover of Ayatollah Khomeini. Political and religious oppression clash with Iranian desire for Western culture. Satrapi is an expressive young girl struggling to find her place despite the tumult. The film is also a stunning achievement in animated story telling.

Paronnaud, V. & Robert, M. (Producers), & Satrapi, M. (Director). (2007). *Persepolis* [Motion Picture]. France: Diaphana.

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1979) ➡ (see: [Joyce](#) [1916])

Though only an adequate adaptation, Joyce is so difficult that it is best to come at his work from as many different angles as possible.

Botley, B. & Hallinan, R. (Producers), & Strick, J. (Director). (1979). *Portrait of the artists as a young man* [Motion Picture]. United States: Ulysses Film Company Ltd.

Priest (1995)

Celibacy, homosexuality, abuse, and cover-up are some of the themes of this tough story.

Shivas, M. (Producer), & Bird, A. (Director). (1994). *Priest* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom: BBC.

October Sky (1999)

The autobiography of the formative years of NASA engineer Homer H. Hickam, Jr. After the Soviet Union launches Sputnik, Homer is inspired to build his own rockets but meets resistance from his father and community. However, he is encouraged by his friends and teacher to follow his dreams. Tradition and progress mildly clash during the birth of the space age.

Gordon, C. & Franco, L. (Producers), & Johnston, J. (Director). (1999). *October sky* [Motion Picture]. United States: Universal Pictures.

Osama (2003)

After the death of all immediate male relatives a Afghani girl living under the Taliban is forced to assume a male identity in order to support her family because women are not allowed to work. Highlights the struggles of living under an intensely repressive regime.

Fraser, J. & LeBrocqy, J. (Producers), & Barmak, S. (Director). (2004). *Osama* [Motion Picture]. Afghanistan: United Artists.

Queen Margot (La Reine Margot, 1994) ➔ (see: [Dumas](#) [1845] under *A Brief History of Freethought: Selected Bibliography: Classic Texts*)

Depicts the court intrigue and events leading up to the infamous St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in which 5,000-30,000 Protestants were murdered by Catholics in 1572. The viewer will need some background in order to fully comprehend the web of social and political relationships.

Berri, C. (Producer), & Chereau, P. (Director). (1971). *Queen Margot* [Motion Picture]. France: AMLF.

Quills (2000)

A highly fictionalized account of the last days of French artist and libertine Marquis de Sade exploring the issues of censorship and religion, among others.

Chasman, J., Kaufman, P., & Wechsler, N. (Producers), & Kaufman, P. (Director). (2000). *Quills* [Motion Picture]. United States: 20th Century Fox.

I Remember (Amarcord, 1973) ✓

Master director Federico Fellini spins this sort of autobiographical coming-of-age tale about 1930's Italy under Mussolini's fascists. The totalitarian state and the Catholic Church are portrayed as keeping the population in "perpetual adolescence." It is also sweet and funny. Earned the Best Foreign Language Film Oscar .

Cristaldi, F. (Producer), & Fellini, F. (Director). (1973). *I remember* [Motion Picture]. France/Italy: Warner Brothers.

A Room with a View (1986) ✓ ➔ (see: [Forster](#) [1908])

An excellent screen version, which opens in beautiful Florence, Italy, one of the primary centers of Renaissance humanism, to which Forster must have related. Cast includes a young Helena Bonham Carter, Judi Dench, and Daniel Day-Lewis. Won three Academy awards.

Merchant, I. (Producer), & Ivory, J. (Director). (1986). *A room with a view* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom: Cinecom International Films.

Schindler's List (1993) ✓

A Nazi industrialist whose slave labor force is exclusively Jewish finds his conscience and eventually attempts to save as many people as possible from the horrors of the holocaust. A heart-wrenching, yet ultimately humanist, story of perseverance and redemption in the face of overwhelming tyranny.

Spielberg, S., Lustig, B., Molen, G., & Molen, J. (Producers), & Spielberg, S. (Director). (1993). *Schindler's list*. [Motion Picture]. United States: Universal Pictures.

The Second Coming (2003)

About time! This movie tackles my favorite reason for deposing the Almighty. Written by atheist Russell T. Davies who later became head writer for the BBC science fiction series *Doctor Who* (2005-).

Harrison-Baxter, A. (Producer), & Shergold, A. (Director). (2003). *The second coming* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom: Red Production Company.

Secrets & Lies (1996)

A middle-aged woman with a deadend job and a emotionally distant family is contacted by the daughter she secretly gave up for

adoption. A gritty realist drama about the redemptive value of truth and opening up to those we love. In the pivotal scene which sums up the central message of the film Maurice proclaims “We’re all in pain! Why can’t we share our pain?!” An excellent tale of humanism.

Channing-Williams, S. (Producer), & Leigh, M. (Director). (1996). *Secrets & lies* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom: Thin Man Films.

The Shawshank Redemption (1994) ✓

A story of the redemptive value of human perseverance and integrity in the face of imprisonment and manipulation; it is essentially a humanist myth.

Marvin, N. (Producer), & Darabont, F. (Director). (1997). *The Shawshank redemption* [Motion Picture]. United States: Columbia Pictures.

The Silence (Tystnaden, 1963) (see also: this is the 3rd in the “Silence of God” or “Trilogy of Faith” series preceded by *Through a Glass Darkly* [*Såsom i en spegel* , 1961] and *Winter Light* [*Nattvardsgästerna* , 1962])

Two sisters, representing contrasting personalities, are traveling home through a fictional Eastern European country on the verge of war. Again, Bergman explores the deep human desire to communicate and empathize with others. This striving for personal understanding is always an extremely difficult but not entirely futile act within the trilogy. The film is also significant within this guide for helping to break down censorship in its depiction of nudity and other “vulgar” acts.

Ekelund, A. (Producer), & Bergman, I. (Director). (1963). *The Silence* [Motion Picture]. Sweden: Swedish Film Production.

Sirens (1994)

An English priest (Hugh Grant) travels to the home of libertarian artist Norman Lindsay (Sam Neill) to try to persuade him from displaying a blasphemous art piece in an Australian gallery. In a Garden of Eden like setting libertine openness and religious morality clash and intertwine like two serpents helping to expel psychological repression.

Milliken, S. (Producer), & Duigan, J. (Director). (1994). *Sirens* [Motion Picture]. Australia: Miramax.

Song of the Little Road (Pathar Panchali, 1955) (see also: the first in “Apu Trilogy” followed by *The Unvanquished* [*Aparajito* , 1956] and *The World of Apu* [*Apur Sansar* , 1959])

The “Apu Trilogy” tells the story of the coming-of-age of a Bengali boy. The first film delves into his life as a poor son in a high caste family. Some of the greatest humanist films ever made. To top it off the soundtrack comes from Ravi Shankar.

Ray, S. (Producer/Director). (1955). *Song of the little road* [Motion Picture]. India: Government of West Bengal.

The Stoning of Soraya M. (2008)

A stark reminder of the dangerous coupling of ignorance, cruelty, misogyny, and power in the hands of religious fanatics.

McEveety, S. & Shepherd, J. (Producers), & Nowrasteh, C. (Director). (2008). *The stoning of Soraya M.* [Motion Picture]. United States: Roadside Attractions.

Submission (2004)

Theo van Gogh was assassinated by Muslim extremists for this 11 minute film highlighting the sadistic misogyny sanctioned by the *Koran* which gives men ultimate power over women.

van Gogh, T. (Producer/Director). (2004). *Submission* [Motion Picture]. Netherlands.

There Will Be Blood (2007)

Although only loosely based on Upton Sinclair's novel *Oil!* (1927), the film does treat its characters in a similar manner. Both the evangelical theist and the completely self-centered Ayn Rand style atheist are depicted as being driven by the same human motivations, namely greed, so as to demonstrate that selfish faith in both religion and capitalism can make dangerous bedfellows. The film may be seen as an allegory for a very particular kind of American religiosity which has become a kind of might makes right chimera of egoism and a belief in divine righteousness, a grotesque justification for exploitation of people and the environment. Watch out or they'll drink up your milk shake!

Lupi, D. & Sellar, J. (Producers), & Anderson, P. (Director). (2007). *There will be blood* [Motion Picture]. United States: Miramax.

Through a Glass Darkly (Såsom i en spegel, 1961) ✓ (see also: this is the 1st in the "Silence of God" or "Trilogy of Faith" series followed by *Winter Light* [*Nattvardsgästerna* , 1962] and *The Silence* [*Tystnaden* , 1963])

A family struggles to help their beloved daughter cope with mental illness. The purpose of faith and concepts of God, real and imagined, are wrestled with. The film was the Academy's Best Foreign Film winner for 1961.

"These three films," Bergman explained, "deal with reduction. *Through a Glass Darkly* - conquered certainty. *Winter Light* - penetrated certainty. *The Silence* - God's silence - the negative imprint. Therefore, they constitute a trilogy." What should also be kept in mind throughout the series is Bergman's belief that person to God relationships are the result of deficiencies in purely human relationships.

Ekelund, A. (Producer), & Bergman, I. (Director). (1961). *Through a glass darkly* [Motion Picture]. Sweden: Swedish Film Production.

A Tree Without Roots (Lalsalu, 2002)

A hypocritical and dishonest self-proclaimed holy man takes advantage of the credulity of the citizens of a small remote village. By doing so he is able to cheat the people out of their money and their daughters.

Mokammel, T. (Producer/Director). (2002). *A tree without roots* [Motion Picture]. Bangladesh.

The Unvanquished (Aparajito, 1956) (see also: number 2 in the “Apu Trilogy” preceded by *Song of the Little Road* [*Pather Panchali* , 1955] and followed by *The World of Apu* [*Apur Sansar* , 1959])

Continues to show Apu’s struggles with poverty and education.

Ray, S. (Producer/Director). (1956). *The unvanquished* [Motion Picture]. India: Satyajit Ray Productions.

The Virgin Spring (Jungfrukallan, 1959) (see also: can be considered the 3rd in a loose trilogy along with *The Seventh Seal* [*Det Sjunde Inseplet* , 1957] and *The Magician* [*Ansiktet* , 1958])

A revenge story, with the subtext of examining the “problem of evil” and the supposed justice of God which never materializes. It won the 1960 Academy Award for Best Foreign Film, one of only three Bergman films to do so.

Ekelund, A. & Bergman, I. (Producers), & Bergman, I. (Director). (1958). *The virgin spring* [Motion Picture]. Sweden: Swedish Film Production.

Water (2005) (see also: here is the last of the “Elements Trilogy” preceded by *Fire* [1996] and *Earth* [1998])

A group of widows is forced into poverty and live in a temple in India. One of the young women struggles to escape her plight with the aid of a man from the highest caste and follower of Gandhi .

Hamilton, D. (Producer), & Mehta, D. (Director). (2005). *Water* [Motion Picture]. India/Canada: Fox Searchlight.

Winter Light (Nattvardsgästerna, 1962) ✓ (see also: this is the 2nd film in the “Silence of God” or “Trilogy of Faith” series along with *Through a Glass Darkly* [*Såsom i en spegel* , 1961] and *The Silence* [*Tystnaden* , 1963])

A small town pastor is in the midst of an existential crisis as he struggles to understand his dwindling faith. Apparently, this is the most autobiographical of the director’s films. Fans might be interested in the documentary *Ingmar Bergman Makes a Movie* (1962) which tells the story of the making of the movie.

Ekelund, A. (Producer), & Bergman, I. (Director). (1962). *Winter light* [Motion Picture]. Sweden: Swedish Film Production.

The World of Apu (Apur Sansar, 1959) (see also: 3rd in the “Apu Trilogy” preceded by *Song of the Little Road* [*Pather Panchali* , 1955] and *The Unvanquished* [*Aparajito* , 1956])

Apu tries to become a writer and gets married.

Ray, S. (Producer/Director). (1959). *The world of Apu* [Motion Picture]. India: Satyajit Ray Productions.

You Don’t Know Jack (2010)

Tells the story of atheist Dr. Jack Kevorkian and his struggle against religious fundamentalists and the law to help those

suffering terminal illness end their lives with dignity and on their own terms.

Ferguson, S. (Producer), & Levinson, B. (Director). (2010). *You don't know Jack* [Motion Picture]. United States: HBO Films.

Horror

Black Death (2010)

This grim story takes place in 14th century England during an outbreak of the plague. The film highlights the horror that can be unleashed because of superstition and conflict between religions.

Bernstein, R., Meurer, J., Rae, D., & Smith, C. (Producers), & Smith, C. (Director). (2011). *Black death* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom: Egoli Tossell Film.

Carrie (1976)

A young woman (Sissy Spacek) is raised by her fanatical and domineering Christian mother and is unable to fit in at school. Despite the supernatural elements, like some other films on this list, I think we can see Carrie's ability to move things with her mind as a metaphor for the feelings she has toward her uncontrollable situation.

Monash, P. (Producer), & de Palma, B. (Director). (1976). *Carrie* [Motion Picture]. United States: United Artists.

Frailty (2002)

A father believes God is telling him to do things, with horrific consequences. About the all too real dangers of belief, faith, and the religious abuse of children. Bolsters the argument that morality is and should be independent of any command.

Siemega, C., Blocker, D., & Kirschner, D. (Producers), & Paxton, B. (Director). (2002). *Frailty* [Motion Picture]. United States: Lions Gate Films.

Martin (1978)

A young man believes he is a vampire. The truth behind his obsession appears to be completely psychological with the supernatural claims kept ambiguous. Absurd beliefs collide with strange and horrific results.

Rubenstein, R. (Producer), & Romero, G. (Director). (1978). *Martin* [Motion Picture]. United States: Libra Films International & Laurel Group.

Stephen King's *The Mist* (2007)

Shows how irrational many humans can become in times of crisis, and how fear and anger can play into the hands of those who seek power. One part Salem Witch trials, one part *The War of the Worlds* (1898), and a whole lot of *Lord of the Flies* (1954). It is ultimately all about how we cope with the unknown and the inevitable.

Glotzer, L. & Shafer, M. (Producers), & Darabont, F. (Director). (2007). *Stephen King's the mist* [Motion Picture]. United States: Dimension Films.

Science Fiction/Fantasy

1984 (1984) → (see: [Orwell](#) [1949])

Hauntingly brings to life George Orwell's cautionary tale of Oceania a big-brother nation set in the near future (when it was written) and the central character who commits the "thought crime" of falling in love.

Perry, S. (Producer), & Radford, M. (Director). (1984). *1984* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom: Atlantic Releasing Corporation.

2001: A Space Odyssey (1968) ✓ ➡ (see: [Clarke](#) [1968])

An epic, sometimes eerie, adaptation of the evolution of humanity from our primitive roots to the distant future of 2001! Just pretend the title is *Homo Sapiens: A Space Odyssey*. This is a masterpiece of science fiction and philosophical film making.

In an interview director Stanley Kubrick said :

The whole idea of god is absurd. If anything, *2001* shows that what some people call 'god' is simply an acceptable term for their ignorance. What they don't understand, they call 'god'... I chose to do Dr. Clarke's story as a film because it highlights a critical factor necessary for human evolution; that is, beyond our present condition. This film is a rejection of the notion that there is a god; isn't that obvious? (as cited in Barker, 2011, p. 128)

Lyndon, V. (Producer), & Kubrick, S. (Director). (1968). *2001: A space odyssey* [Motion Picture]. United States: MGM.

Blade Runner (1982) ✓ ➡ (see: [Dick](#) [1968])

Harrison Ford stars as a hunter of near human androids. The story is a deep exploration of what constitutes life, its value and the relationship between the creators and the created. One of the greatest science fiction films of all-time.

Deeley, M. (Producer), & Scott, R. (Director). (1982). *Blade runner* [Motion Picture]. United States: Warner Brothers.

Brave New World (1980) ➡ (see: [Huxley](#) [1932])

A decent 3-hour television adaptation.

Babbin, J. (Producer), & Brinckerhoff, B. (Director). (1980). *Brave new world* [Motion Picture]. United States: Universal TV.

Contact (1997) ➡ (see: [Sagan](#) [1985])

This film of Carl Sagan's novel of the same name is a watered-down and "balanced" adaptation. Jodie Foster assumes the role of an atheist scientist who longs to make contact with those beyond, in more than one sense. I recommend this movie with some reservation. Read the novel, watch the movie, and decide for yourself.

Zemeckis, R. (Producer/Director). (1997). *Contact* [Motion Picture]. United States: Warner Borthers & South Side Amusement Co.

Defending Your Life (1991)

A humorous look at purgatory, reincarnation, and the fear which holds humans back from fulfilling their true potential.

Grillo, M. (Producer), & Brooks, A. (Director). (1991). *Defending your life* [Motion Picture]. United States: Warner Brothers.

Fahrenheit 451 (1966) ➡ (see: [Bradbury](#) [1953])

A story about censorship and the distortion and dumbing down of knowledge by mass-media. Novelist Ray Bradbury celebrates deep thought and the dissemination of ideas.

Allen, L. (Producer), & Truffaut, F. (Director). (1966). *Fahrenheit 451* [Motion Picture]. United Kingdom: Universal.

Gattaca (1997)

Set in a future world where one's life is determined by genetics. The film is a celebration of human potential and rails

against the ideas of castes, eugenics, and determinism. A fantastic humanist story!

DeVito, D., Shamberg, M., & Sher, S. (Producers). Niccol, A. (Director). (1997). *Gattaca* [Motion Picture]. United States: Columbia Pictures.

Ghost in the Shell (1996)

The nature of humanity is explored in this animated psychological action thriller.

Iyadomi, K. Matsumoto, K. Kodansha, Ishikawa, M. & Mizuo, Y. (Producers). Oshii, M. (Director). (1996). *Ghost in the shell* [Motion Picture]. Japan: Manga Entertainment.

The Handmaid's Tale (1990) ➔ (see: [Atwood](#) [1985])

A good adaptation of the book which is a rare feat.

Glattes, W. & Wilson, D. (Producers), & Schlondorff, V. (Director). (1990). *The handmaid's tale* [Motion Picture]. United States: Cinecom Pictures.

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy (2005) ➔ (see: [Adams](#) [2005])

A hilarious romp through cosmic absurdity and human questioning.

Adams, D. (Producer), & Jennings, G. (Director). (2005). *The hitchhiker's guide to the galaxy* [Motion Picture]. United States: Buena Vista.

The Man from Earth (2007)

A professor confesses to his colleagues that he is a 14,000 year old caveman who studied under the Buddha and then

founded Christianity. The film is a very interesting thought experiment.

Wilkinson, E. (Producer), & Schenkman, R. (Director). (2007). *The man from Earth* [Motion Picture]. United States: Falling Sky Entertainment.

Planet of the Apes (1968) ✓

Dogma and the prejudices which it invariably induces are chillingly on display in this reversal of roles sci-fi classic.

Abrahams, M. & Jacobs, A. (Producers), & Schaffner, F. (Director). (1968). *Planet of the apes* [Motion Picture]. United States: 20th Century Fox.

The Seventh Seal (Det Sjunde Inseglet, 1957) (see also: the 1st in a loose trilogy along with *The Magician* [Ansiktet, 1958] and *The Virgin Spring* [Jungfrukallan, 1959]) **#1**

A Swedish knight during the middle ages returns from the Crusades to find the bubonic plague ravaging the populace. He quickly encounters the figure of Death and challenges him to a game of chess in order to delay his demise. A dark, powerful, and ingenious philosophical drama. Major themes include the burden of faith, the silence of God towards evil and suffering, and the temporal fragility of life.

Ekelund, A. (Producer), & Bergman, I. (Director). (1957). *The seventh seal* [Motion Picture]. Sweden: Swedish Film Production.

Trollhunter (Trolljegeren, 2010)

A humorous and sometimes scary fantasy flick. A group of students trek to the forests of Norway to make a documentary

about a suspected bear poacher. That is not exactly what they find. Beware! They can smell the blood of Christians!

Golimo, S. (Producer), & Ovredal, A. (Director). (2010). *Trollhunter* [Motion Picture]. Norway: Magnet Releasing.

Wings of Desire (1987)

Two angels watch the citizens of Berlin and begin to long for human experience as opposed to heaven and an indifferent God. Karl J. Skutski (2004) astutely observes that the “Angels prefer the lived gospel of existing man, versus the dead words of past gods” (p. 16).

Windisch, I. (Producer), & Wenders, W. (Director). (1987). *Wings of desire* [Motion Picture]. Germany: Argos Films.

Television

There are numerous television series and other programs which feature freethought characters or themes. Below is a list of a few of the most recent and notable.

All in the Family (1968-1979) ✓

A bigoted old man is the catalyst for the questioning of previously taboo issues including: racism, feminism, abortion, war, religion, and homosexuality, among others. The series helped break down old stereotypes and dogmas by highlighting their absurdity. A humanist sitcom about changing moral attitudes.

Lear, N. & Yorkin, B. (Producers). (1968). *All in the family* [Television series]. United States: CBS.

Bones (2005-)

A forensic anthropology and archaeology show featuring title character and atheist FBI agent Temperance “Bones” Brennan

(Emily Deschanel).

Reichs, K., Deschanel, E., & Boreanaz, D. (Producers). (2005-). *Bones* [Television series]. United States: Fox.

Doctor Who (1963-1989, 2005-) **#5**

I love the episode “The God Complex” (2011) in which the doctor and his companions encounter a minotaur like creature that feeds off of individual’s faith. An interesting allegory within an allegory. The series itself is from a secular humanist perspective..

Newman, S., Webber, C., & Wilson, D. (Creators). (1963-1989, 2005-). *Doctor Who* [Television series]. United Kingdom: BBC.

Family Guy (1999-2002, 2005-) ✓

Atheist Seth MacFarlane has created a brilliant successor to *The Simpsons*. No topic is off limits for this hypocrisy and dogma balm of satire. Watch the episodes “Holy Crap” (1999), “Not All Dogs Go to Heaven” (2009), “Road to the Multiverse” (2009), “Livin’ on a Prayer” (2012).

MacFarlane, S. (Creator). (1999-2002, 2005-). [Television series]. *Family guy* . United States: Fox.

Firefly (2002)

This short lived science fiction series by atheist and “Buffy the Vampire Slayer” creator has a protagonist who is also a non-believer.

Edlund, B. (Producer), & Whedon, J. (Creator). (2002). *Firefly* [Television series]. United States: Fox.

House M.D. (2004-) **#4**

Atheist Hugh Laurie plays a gruff and very rational freethinking doctor in this medical drama.

Attanasio, P., Jacobes, K., Shore, D., Singer, B., Moran, T., Friend, R., & Lerner, G. (Producers). (2004-). *House* [Television series]. United States: Fox.

The Mentalist (2008-)

A former conman (psychic medium) uses his observational skills to foil charlatans and help solve crimes. An interesting police procedural and psychology series. Reason and science in the service of justice!

Goldstein, C. (Producer). (2008-). *The mentalist* [Television series]. United States: CBS.

Moral Orel (2005-2008)

A young boy hears lessons in church, attempts to understand and apply them, and chaotic hilarity ensues .

Stamatopoulos, D. (Producer). (2005). *Moral Orel* [Television series]. United States: Adult Swim.

Neon Genesis Evangelion (1995-1996)

A paramilitary group called NERV attempts to fight beings called Angels which recruit teenagers to fight in humanoids called Evangelions. Described as apocalyptic mecha, this anime series has some deep themes and symbolism. References to existentialism and meaning abound. There are also two films associated with the franchise.

Gainax. (Producer). (1995-1996). *Neon genesis evangelion* [Television series]. Japan: TV Tokyo.

Outnumbered (2007-)

This sitcom about an English family uses children as a vehicle for raising all sorts of funny questions.

Hamilton, A. & Jenkin, G. (Producers). (2007-). *Outnumbered* [Television series]. United Kingdom: BBC One.

Real Time with Bill Maher (2003-) ✓ **#3**

A comedy talk show hosted by one of my favorite political satirists. He doesn't let fundamentalist get away with anything.

Maher, B. (Producer/Creator). (2003). *Real time with Bill Maher* [Television series]. United States: HBO.

The Simpsons (1989-) ✓

The longest running series in television history (and still going strong) is also one of the most intelligent. I recommend viewing the following episodes "The Monkey Suit" (2006), "Lisa the Skeptic" (1997), and "The Joy of Sect" (1998).

Groening, M. (Creator). (1989-). [Television series]. *The Simpsons* . United States: Fox.

South Park (1997-)

Some notable episodes are "Jewbilee" (1999), "Do the Handicapped Go to Hell?" (2000), "All About Mormons" (2003), "The Passion of the Jew" (2004), and "200" (2010).

Parker, T. & Stone, M. (Creators). (1997-). *South Park* . [Television series]. United States: Comedy Central.

Star Trek: The Original Series (1966-1969) **#2**

Secular humanism pervades all of Gene Roddenberry's Star Trek creations. He had a great optimism for the future of the human species and this is reflected in his vision for the future. Particularly freethought episodes include "The Return of the Archons" (1967), "This Side of Paradise" (1967), "Who Mourns for Adonais?" (1967), "The Apple" (1967), "Patterns of Force" (1968), "For the World is Hollow and I have Touched the Sky" (1968), "The Mark of Gideon" (1969), and "The Way to Eden" (1969).

Coon, G., Lucas, J., & Freiberger, F. (Producers). Roddenberry, G. (Creator). (1966-1969). *Star trek: The original series* [Television series]. United States: NBC.

Star Trek: The Next Generation (1987-1994) #1

A science fiction show celebrating the progress and relations of sentient beings of all stripes. Religion is dealt with very rarely which is why the episode "Who Watches the Watchers" (1989) is so intriguing.

Roddenberry, G. (Creator). (1987-1994). [Television series]. *Star trek: The next generation*. United States: CBS

Thriller/Crime/Mystery

Alphaville: A Strange Adventure of Lemmy Caution (Alphaville: Une étrange aventure de Lemmy Caution, 1965)

This intriguing combination of noir and science fiction pits a secret agent against a totally logic based dictatorship guided by a seemingly omnipresent supercomputer with a haunting voice. It is a truly dystopian totalitarian state where the individual has been swallowed into a collective; where free thoughts, emotions are punishable by execution. "Bibles," or dictionaries which eliminate words if they are deemed emotionally evocative, are placed everywhere. There is also plenty of absurd dark humor to make this gem even more bizarre.

Michelin, A. (Producer), & Godard, J. (Director). (1965). *Alphaville: A strange adventure of Lemmy Caution* [Motion Picture]. France: Athos Films.

The Grey (2012)

A group of oil rig workers survive a plane crash in the Alaskan wilderness and must fight to survive. The film is purposely ambiguous, meant to challenge the viewer to examine the nature of the universe and what role we have in our ultimate destination. One of my only criticisms of the film is that it may breed an irrational fear and/or hatred of wolves amongst some viewers.

Carnahan, J., Daly, J., Liddell, M., & Scott, R. (Producers), & Carnahan, J. (Director). (2012). *The grey* [Motion Picture]. United States: Open Road Films.

Martha Marcy May Marlene (2011)

A young woman (Elizabeth Olsen) escapes a cult and later suffers from PTSD due to the manipulation, exploitation, and abuse she experienced at the hands of a charismatic leader. Demonstrates one of the primary reasons cult leaders create groups centered around them and the often subtle methods they employ to keep their victims under control. Also, shows how a family can struggle to help readjust such a victim when they fail to recognize warning signs of cult trauma.

Campos, A., Maybach, C., & Mond, J. (Producers), & Durkin, T. (Director). (2011). *Martha Marcy May Marlene* [Motion Picture]. United States: Filmhaven Entertainment, Fox Searchlight Pictures, Maybach Cunningham.

The Name of the Rose (1986) ➡ (see: [Eco](#) [1983])

Sean Connery plays a rational “Sherlock Holmes” type Franciscan friar in this faithful adaptation.

Eichinger, B. (Producer), & Annaud, J. (Director). (1986). *The name of the rose* [Motion Picture]. France: 20th Century Fox.

The Night of the Hunter (1955)

Serial killer Reverend Harry Powell (Robert Mitchum in an unforgettable performance) seduces an ex-cellmate's widow in order to locate a stolen stash of money.

Gregory, P. (Producer), & Laughton, C. (Director). (1955). *The night of the hunter* [Motion Picture]. United States: United Artists.

Sherlock Holmes (2009)

Reason and logic are pitted against dark "magic." Where the former may free humanity, the latter plays on fear and superstition. A fun and well made detective adventure.

Silver, J., Wigram, L., Downey, S., & Lin, D. (Producers), & Ritchie, G. (Director). (2009). *Sherlock Holmes* [Motion Picture]. United States: Warner Bros.

V for Vendetta (2005) 🐞 (see: [Moore](#) [2008])

A masked man takes on a Christian dictatorship.

Hill, G., Silver, J., Wachowski, A., & Wachowski, L. (Producers), & McTeigue, J. (Director). (2006). *V for vendetta* [Motion Picture]. United States: Warner Bros.

Additional Resources

Atheist Movies: Movies Documentaries, Books, Texts, Video & Sound Clips Related to Atheism, Freethinking & Science

This is a large selection of downloadable resources. The picture collection is particularly large and useful for website design.

atheistmovies.blogspot.com

The Atheist Film Festival

It was “created in 2009, is world’s first film festival dedicated to showcasing feature films, documentaries, shorts and animated cinema created especially for the secular community.” Hosted by San Francisco Atheists.

sfatheistfilmfestival.org

The Film Atheist

Good reviews of many atheist themed films.

filmatheist.com

Freethought Film Festival Foundation: Promoting Reason Through Film

The first annual Freethought Film Festival was held in Tampa, FL. Check out the site for information on season one films and the 2012 festival.

freethoughtfilmfest.org

Reason Cinema: Bringing Humanism & Film Together

“A film series project sponsored by the American Humanist Association.”

reasoncinema.com

Theatre

Book of Mormon (2011) #1

A musical about two young Mormon Missionaries sent to Uganda.

Parker, T. & Stone, M. (2011). *The Book of Mormon* [Musical]. United States.

The Crucible (1952) ⚡

Ostensibly about witches of Salem, but used as a metaphor for McCarthyism. Either way we are dealing with tyranny.

Miller, A. (1953). *The crucible* [Play]. United States.

The Devils (1960) ⚡

Whiting, J. (1960). *The devils* [Play]. United Kingdom.

Emperor & Galilean (1896)

Ibsen, H. (1896). *Emperor & Galilean* [Play]. Germany.

An Enemy of the People (1882)

About the irrationality of people.

Ibsen, H. (1882). *An enemy of the people* [Play]. Norway.

Factwino Meets the Moral Majority (1981)

In comic book style here is how the creators, Mime Troupe (2012), describe the musical:

As Factwino, our hero pursues his mission with single-hearted devotion. Mindful of the Spirit's warning, 'If you booze it, you

lose it', abandoning his faithful sidekick Buddy, Factwino transforms anti-abortion crusaders, book-burners and homosexual-haters into thinking citizens---and arouses the ire of the main enemy, Armageddonman.

Holden, J., Picciotto, H., Solomon, P., & Matthews, T. (1981). *Factwino meets the moral majority* [Musical]. United States.

Inherit the Wind (1955) ✦ ([see](#) : *Arts & Entertainment: Film: Drama/Romance*)

Fictionalizes the Scopes "Monkey" Trial of the 1920s.

Lawrence, J. & Lee, R. (1955). *Inherit the wind* [Play]. United States.

The Marriage of Bette & Boo (1985)

Does Catholicism cause mental illness? A satire.

Durang, C. (1985). *The marriage of Bette & Boo* [Play]. United States.

Saint Joan (1923)

George Bernard Shaw's play about the life, trial, and execution of Joan of Arc. Shaw, when describing his play in the prologue, also said a lot about the tragedy of religion when he wrote:

There are no villains in the piece. Crime, like disease, is not interesting: it is something to be done away with by general consent, and that is all [there is] about it. It is what men do at their best, with good intentions, and what normal men and women find that they must and will do in spite of their intentions, that really concern us.

Shaw, George. (1923). *Saint Joan* [Play]. United States.

Saturday's Voyeur (1978)

A parody of life in Utah and Mormon culture.

Borgenicht, N. & Nevins, A. (1978). *Saturday's voyeur* [Musical].
United States.

Tartuffe, or the Imposter (1664)

A French comedy play about a fraud who pretends to be a
pious prophet.

Molière. (1664). *Tartuffe, or the imposter* [Play]. France.

A Very Merry Unauthorized Children's Scientology Pageant (2003)

Makes fun of L. Ron Hubbard and Scientology.

Jarrow, K. (2003). *A very merry unauthorized children's Scientology
pageant* [Musical]. United States.

Waiting for Godot: A Tragicomedy in Two Acts (1952-1953)

Becket, S. (1952-1953). *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two
acts* [Play]. United States.

See also:

Tribe, David.(1964). *Freethought & humanism in Shakespeare* .
Pioneer Press.

Comedy

“No man of any humor ever founded a religion— never. Humor sees both sides; while reason is the holy light, humor carries the lantern; and a man with a keen sense of humor is preserved from the solemn stupidities of superstition” (Ingersoll, 2009, p. 30).

-Robert G. Ingersoll (1833-1899), orator

“I think it's the duty of the comedian to find out where the line is drawn and cross it deliberately” (as cited in A&E, 2000).

-George Carlin (1937-2008), comedian

Humor is one of the most irreverent art forms. As Ingersoll pointed out above, comedy allows an expansion of perspective and the shattering of the closed mind. F. Scott Fitzgerald once said “The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time and, still retain the ability to function” (as cited in Knowles, 2009, p. 332). Humor often relies on the flipping of ideas, the contortion of multiple views, and the holding of the tension between opposed perspectives. Furthermore, as novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky (2011) lamented, “Irony... [is] the last refuge of modest and chaste-souled people when the privacy of their soul is coarsely and intrusively invaded” (p. 83). Dissenters seek this refuge because “The literal mind does not understand the ironic mind,” as Christopher Hitchens put it.

The comedian is a trickster, who reveals truths and cracks in the foundation of literalism. To laugh is to accept the contradictions and absurdities of the world. Out of chaos, the comedian is a preacher who helps to relieve tension and transcend the contradictions and uncertainties around us. In essence, the comedian, in this case *Peanuts* creator, Charles Schulz (2011), says, “Don't worry about the world coming to an end today. It is already tomorrow in Australia” (as cited in Positive Atheism, 2011).

One reason individuals do not identify as atheists or speak out is because they don't understand or misunderstand the term. Here is one example of the problem:

A journalist, researching for an article on the complex political situation in Northern Ireland, was in a pub in a war-torn area of Belfast. One of his potential informants leaned over his pint of Guinness and suspiciously cross-examined the journalist: 'Are you a Catholic or Protestant?' the Irishman asked. 'Neither,' replied the journalist, 'I'm an atheist,' The Irishman, not content with this answer, put a further question: 'Ah, but are you a Catholic atheist or a Protestant atheist?' (Fulbrook, 2009, pp. 26-27)

The genius that was George Carlin perfectly summarized atheism when he said that it is a: "non-*prophet* organization." And lest anyone still thinks that atheism is just another form of belief, Don Hirschberg wants to set the record straight: "Calling Atheism a religion is like calling bald a hair color" (as cited in Positive Atheism, 2011).

Often freethinking comics will indirectly point out the absurdity of faith. For instance, perhaps the primary reason atheists don't believe in the supernatural is the complete lack of evidence. Director Woody Allen (1973) knows what would convince him: "If only God would give me some clear sign! Like making a large deposit in my name at a Swiss Bank" (p. 48).

If theists think freethinkers simply lack faith we think religiously minded folks are at the very least gullible and at worst deceptive (e.g. "Faith is believing what you know ain't true" [Twain, 2001, p. 94]).

During the Reign of Terror of the French Revolution, one morning's executions began with three men: a rabbi, a Catholic priest, and a freethinker.

The rabbi was marched up onto the platform first. There, facing the guillotine, he was asked if he had any last words. And the rabbi cried out, 'I believe in the one and only true God, and He shall save me.' The executioner then positioned the rabbi below the blade, set the block above his neck, and pulled the cord to set the terrible instrument in motion. The heavy cleaver plunged downward, searing the air. But then, abruptly with a crack, it stopped only inches above the would-be victim's neck. To which the rabbi said, 'I told you so.'

'It's a miracle!' gasped the crowd. And the executioner had to agree, letting the rabbi go.

Next in line was the priest. Asked for his final words, he declared, 'I believe in Jesus Christ--the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost--who will rescue me in my hour of need.' The executioner then positioned this man's head on the block. And he pulled the cord. Again the blade flew downward--thump! creak!--stopping just short of its mark once more.

'Halelujia,' shouted the priest. 'Another miracle,' sighed the disappointed crowd. And the executioner for the second time had no choice but to let the condemned go free.

Now it was the freethinker's turn. 'What final words have you to say?' he was asked. But the freethinker didn't hear. Staring raptly at the ominous engine of death, he seemed lost. The executioner had to poke him in the ribs and ask the question again before he would reply. But at length, the freethinker cried out, 'You gullible, superstitious fools. Those weren't miracles! You've got a blockage in the gear assembly, right there.' (Edwards, 2006, para. 1)

Novelist and poet George Meredith sums up the credulousness of believers: "The man who has no mind of his own lends it to the priests" (as cited in Positive Atheism, 2011). And what about an after-life: "I have little confidence in any enterprise or business or investment that promises dividends only after the death of the stockholders" (Ingersoll, 1890). Ok, I'll bite. If there is a heaven and hell, Mark Twain (2001) has some advice: "Go to Heaven for the climate, Hell for the company" (p. 125). Better safe than sorry? This is how Woody Allen is hedging his bet: "I do not believe in an afterlife, although I am bringing a change of underwear."

As someone who has studied comparative mythology, I often wonder what believers think of the plurality of religions. Twain (2001) was puzzled as well: "What God lacks is convictions—stability of character. He ought to be a Presbyterian or a Catholic or *something*, — not try to be everything" (p. 113, emphasis in original). Furthermore, as Homer from *The Simpsons* points out to his wife Marge: "And what if we picked the wrong religion? Every week, we're

just making God madder and madder!” (Groening, 1992). I suppose the only solution is to fight over it!

A common objection, not necessarily to the existence of God, but to his conception in *The Bible* is what is known as the “problem of evil.” If real, why does God cause suffering? George Carlin (1999) exposed the absurdity of believing in an all-loving God, in the first place, that not only allows evil but is apparently the harbinger of it as well:

Religion has actually convinced people that there's an *invisible man* — *living in the sky* — who watches everything you do, every minute of every day. And the invisible man has a special list of ten things he does not want you to do. And if you do any of these ten things, he has a special place, full of fire and smoke and burning and torture and anguish, where he will send you to live and suffer and burn and choke and scream and cry forever and ever 'til the end of time!

But He loves you.

We atheists are often perturbed and more than a little confused when theists reject evolution, oppose stem-cell research, or generally denounce something scientific as “just a theory” when they are more than willing to partake in all the benefits of scientific discovery when it suits their needs. Not only is this stance hypocritical, it is downright detrimental to much needed progress. Intelligent design? Woody Allen isn't blind to the absurdity of this notion: “If it turns out that there is a God, I don't think that he's evil. But the worst that you can say about him is that basically he's an underachiever” (Gallo, Joffe, & Poll, 1975).

Yet, perhaps whether one sees harmony or dysfunction, divine purpose or cause and effect depends on an insoluble mindset. The question of whether or not one believes in God lies in how he or she views the world. In this regard, atheists and theists just can't seem to agree on anything:

A little old Christian lady comes out onto her front porch every morning and shouts, ‘Praise the Lord!’

And every morning the atheist next door yells back, 'There is no God!'

This goes on for weeks. 'Praise the Lord!' yells the lady. 'There is no God!' responds the neighbor.

As time goes by, the lady runs into financial difficulties and has trouble buying food. She goes out onto the porch and asks God for help with groceries, then says, 'Praise the Lord!'

The next morning when she goes out onto the porch, there are the groceries she asked for. Of course, she shouts, 'Praise the Lord!'

The atheist jumps out from behind a bush and says, 'Ha! I bought those groceries. There is no God!'

The lady looks at him and smiles. She shouts, 'Praise the Lord! Not only did you provide for me, Lord, you made Satan pay for the groceries!' (Cathcart & Klein, 2007, p. 99)

What about the separation of church and state? Freethinkers have been protecting everyone's right to worship or not worship as he or she pleases for hundreds of years. An important way to do so is to keep religion out of government. We also understand that our freedoms (perhaps our very lives) are at stake in keeping the wall high and thick. But is the tax-free status of religion a necessary check to this separation or should they pay their fair share for government services they inevitably enjoy? HBO's Bill Maher has come up with a *New Rule* :

If churches don't have to pay taxes, they also can't call the fire department when they catch fire. Sorry reverend, that's one of those services that goes along with paying in. I'll use the fire department I pay for. You can pray for rain. (Brad Grey Television, 2006)

In the end, theists shouldn't be so hard on freethinkers, after all, as Woody Allen points out: "To you, I'm an atheist. To God, I'm the loyal opposition" (Rollins & Allen, 1980).

More Laughs...

Anonymous

The Dog Delusion

Did you hear about the dyslexic, agnostic insomniac who stays up all night wondering if there really is a Dog?

Q: How does a female Rationalist have her hair done?

A: In big bangs

Q: Why did the Rationalist cross the road?

A: In order to see both sides.

A rabbi, a priest, and a bishop walk into a bar.

The bartender says, "What is this, some kind of joke?"

Jesus Walked into a disco and had trouble dancing, he said:

"Help me, I have risen, and I can't get down! "

Religion is humanity's attempt to communicate with the weather.

Could you imagine if God turns out to be a woman?

Not only am I going to hell, but I will never know why.

How do you get holy water?

Boil the hell out of it.

A Short Guide to Comparative Perspectives

Taoism: Shit happens.

Buddhism: If shit happens, it's not really shit.

Islam: If shit happens, it's the will of Allah.

Nihilism: Shit doesn't matter.

Protestantism: Shit happens because you don't work hard enough.

Judaism: Why does this shit always happen to us?

Hinduism: This shit happened before.

Catholicism: Shit happens because you're bad.

Hare Krishna: Shit happens rama rama.

Mormonism: Our shit doesn't stink.

Zen: What is the sound of shit happening?

Epicureanism: Enjoy the shit.

Confusianism: Confucius says, "Shit happens."

Relativism: All shit's the same.

T.V. Evangelism: Send more shit.

Atheism: We don't believe your shit.

Jehova's Witness: Knock knock, we have some good news about shit.

Deism: Shit started, now it's our problem.

Hedonism: There's nothing like a good shit happening.

Freethought: We'll find our own shit.

Christian Science: We have unproven shit that will cure you.

Agnosticism: Maybe shit happens, maybe it doesn't.

Rastafarianism: Let's smoke this shit.

Pastafarianism: Shit with meatballs.

Existentialism: What is shit anyway?

Stoicism: This shit doesn't bother us.

Science: Let's figure this shit out.

Why God Never Got a PhD.

1. He had only one major publication.
2. It was in Hebrew.
3. It had no references.
4. It wasn't published in a peer reviewed journal.
5. There are serious doubts he wrote it himself.
6. He claims to have created the world, but what has he done since?
7. His cooperative efforts have been quite limited.
8. The scientific community has had a hard time replicating his results.
9. He never applied to the ethics board for permission to use human subjects.
10. When one experiment went awry he tried to cover it by drowning his subjects.
11. When subjects didn't behave as predicted, he deleted them from the sample.
12. He rarely came to class, just told his students to read the book.
13. Some say he had his son teach the class.
14. He expelled his first two students for learning.

15. Although there were only 10 requirements, most of his students failed his tests.

16. His office hours were infrequent and usually held on a mountain top.

17. No record of working well with colleagues.

The Farmer & God

A farmer purchased an old, run-down, abandoned farm with plans to turn it into a thriving enterprise. The fields were grown over with weeds, the farmhouse was falling apart, and the fences were broken down. During his first day of work, the town preacher stops by to bless the man's work, saying, "May you and God work together to make this the farm of your dreams!" A few months later, the preacher stops by again to call on the farmer. Lo and behold, it's a completely different place. The farm house is completely rebuilt and in excellent condition, there are plenty of cattle and other livestock happily munching on feed in well-fenced pens, and the fields are filled with crops planted in neat rows. "Amazing!" the preacher says. "Look what God and you have accomplished together!" "Yes, reverend," says the farmer, "but remember what the farm was like when God was working it alone!"

Holy Diver

It's the second resurrection of Christ. Before the world ends he wants to take in some fishing. So he gets his friend Moses and they head up to Minnesota to fish. They are about to rent a canoe when Moses says: "Jesus, can't you still walk on water? Why not just walk out there?" So Jesus takes his reel and tackle and steps onto the lake....and falls knee deep in water.

Moses says, "Well....maybe you need a head start or something, why not go to the end of the dock and try."

So Jesus takes his reel and tackle and steps off the end of the dock and falls up to his waist.

Moses says, "Well why not rent the boat, go out to the center of the lake and try there."

So they rent the boat and go to the middle of the lake, Jesus is about to step off and try again when...

Moses says, "Wait. Just to be safe, why not get yourself into the state of mind you were in the first time you did it."

So Jesus sets down, meditates for a few minutes, and finally he's all psyched up, and steps out of the canoe.... ..and precedes to drown. So Moses does the water parting thing, and pulls Jesus up into the boat.

Jesus is just beating himself up over this. He just doesn't see what's going wrong here. Moses just stares down at the bottom of the boat. Suddenly, Moses says, "I got it! I know what's wrong! Did you have those holes in your feet last time?!?! "

Flock of Mammals

Three Pastors from the south were having lunch in a diner. One said, "Ya know, since summer started I've been having trouble with bats in my loft and attic at church. I've tried everything-noise, spray, cats-nothing seems to scare them away. Another said, "Yea, me too. I've got hundreds living in my belfry and in the attic. I've even had the place fumigated, and they won't go away." The third said, "I baptized all mine, and made them members of the church... Haven't seen one back since!"

The Good News and the Bad News

One day God called the Pope, and he said "I have good news and bad news. First the good news. I am tired of all the squabbling between the religions. I have decided there will be only the one true religion". The Pope was overjoyed and told God how wise his decision was, then asked "What's the bad news?" God said, "The bad news is that I am calling from Salt Lake City."

Our Little Secret

A man arrives at the gates of heaven. St. Peter asks, "Religion?"

The man says, "Methodist."

St. Peter looks down his list, and says, "Go to room 24, but be very quiet as you pass room 8."

Another man arrives at the gates of heaven. "Religion?"

"Baptist."

"Go to room 18, but be very quiet as you pass room 8."

A third man arrives at the gates. "Religion?"

"Jewish."

"Go to room 11, but be very quiet as you pass room 8."

The man says, "I can understand there being different rooms for different religions, but why must I be quiet when I pass room 8?"

St. Peter tells him, "Well the Jehovah's Witnesses are in room 8, and they think they're the only ones here."

The Drunken Pew

A drunk staggered down the main street of the town. Somehow he managed to make it up the stairs to a cathedral and into the entrance, where he crashed from pew to pew, finally making his way to a side aisle and into a confessional.

A priest had observed all this, and figured the fellow needed some help, so he entered his side of the confessional. After the priest sat there in deathly silence, he finally asked, "May I help you, my son?"

"I dunno," came the drunk's voice from behind the partition. "You got any paper on your side?"

Bible Class

In Sunday school, Sister Mary asked the class: "What part of the body goes to heaven first?"

In the back of the class, nasty Billy waved his hand frantically, but Sister Mary, suspecting a wrong answer, turned to another child. "Yes, Susan?"

"The heart goes to heaven first because that's where God's love lives."

"Excellent," said Sister Mary, "and you, Charlotte?"

"The soul, Sister Mary, because that's the part that lives beyond death. "

"Very good, Charlotte," said the Sister, as she noticed Billy's hand still waving in desperation."

"Ok, Billy, what do you think?"

"It's the feet that go first, Sister, the feet."

"That's a strange answer Billy. Why the feet?"

Billy answered, "Because I saw my mom with her feet up in the air, shouting, 'God, I'm coming, I'm coming!'"

Dadeo

Jesus made his usual rounds in heaven when he noticed a wizened, white-haired old man sitting in a corner looking very disconsolate. The next week he was disturbed to come across him again, looking equally miserable, and a week later he stopped to talk to him.

"See here, old fellow," said Jesus kindly, "this is heaven. The sun is shining, you've got all you could want to eat, all the instruments you might want to play-- you're supposed to be blissfully happy! What's wrong?"

“Well,” said the old man, “you see, I was a carpenter on earth, and lost my only, dearly beloved son at an early age. And here in heaven I was hoping more than anything to find him.”

Tears sprang from Jesus' eyes. “Father!” he cried.

The old man jumped to his feet, bursting into tears, and sobbed, “Pinocchio!”

How Beer is Better Than Christianity

10. No one will kill you for not drinking beer.
9. Beer doesn't tell you how to have sex.
8. Beer has never caused a major war.
7. They don't force beer on minors who can't think for themselves.
6. When you have beer, you don't knock on people's doors trying to give it away.
5. Nobody's ever been burned at the stake, hanged, or tortured to death over his brand of beer.
4. You don't have to wait 2,000+ years for a second beer.
3. There are laws saying that beer labels can't lie to you.
2. You can prove you have a beer.
1. If you have devoted your life to beer, there are groups to help you stop.

Bierce, Ambrose (1842-1913), journalist, short story writer, satirist

“ Clairvoyant, *n.* A person, commonly a woman, who has the power of seeing that which is invisible to her patron— namely, that he is a blockhead” (Bierce, 2003).

“Clergyman, *n.* A man who undertakes the management of our spiritual affairs as a method of bettering his temporal ones” (Bierce, 2003).

“Faith, *n.* Belief without evidence in what is told by one who speaks without knowledge, of things without parallel” (Bierce, 2003).

“Heathen, *n* . A benighted creature who has the folly to worship that he can see and feel” (Bierce, 2003).

“Infidel, *n* . In New York, one who does not believe in the Christian religion; in Constantinople, one who does” (Bierce, 2003).

“Pray, *v*. To ask that the laws of the universe be annulled in behalf of a single petitioner, confessedly unworthy” (Bierce, 2003).

“Religion, *n* . A daughter of Hope and Fear, explaining to Ignorance the nature of the Unknowable” (Bierce, 2003).

“Saint, *n* . A dead sinner revised and edited” (Bierce, 2003).

“Scriptures, *n*. The sacred books of our holy religion, as distinguished from the false and profane writings on which all other faiths are based” (Bierce, 2003).

Franklin, Benjamin (1706-1790), American Founding Father, polymath

“Many a long dispute among divines may be thus abridged: It is so; it is not so. It is so; it is not so” (Franklin, 1743).

Lec, Stanislaw (1909-1966), poet, aphorist

“Puritans should wear fig leaves on their eyes” (Lec, 1967).

Philips, Emo (1956-), comedian

The Guy on a Bridge

Once I saw this guy on a bridge about to jump. I said, “Don't do it!” He said, “Nobody loves me.” I said, “God loves you. Do you believe in God?”

He said, “Yes.” I said, “Are you a Christian or a Jew?” He said, “A Christian.” I said, “Me, too! Protestant or Catholic?” He said,

“Protestant.” I said, “Me, too! What franchise?” He said, “Baptist.” I said, “Me, too! Northern Baptist or Southern Baptist?” He said, “Northern Baptist.” I said, “Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist or Northern Liberal Baptist?”

He said, “Northern Conservative Baptist.” I said, “Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region, or Northern Conservative Baptist Eastern Region?” He said, “Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region.” I said, “Me, too!”

Northern Conservative†Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1879, or Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912?” He said, “Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912.” I said, “Die, heretic!” And I pushed him over. (Philips, 1985)

When I was a kid, I used to pray every night for a new bike. Then I realised, the Lord doesn't work that way. So I just stole one and asked Him to forgive me... and I got it! (Philips, 2005).

So I'm at the wailing wall, standing there like a moron, with my harpoon (Philips, 2005).

A Mormon told me that they don't drink coffee. I said, “A cup of coffee every day gives you wonderful benefits.” He said, “Like what?” I said, “Well, it keeps you from being Mormon...” (Philips, 2005).

I'm not Catholic, but I gave up picking my belly button for lint (Philips, 2005).

When I was a kid my dad would say, “Emo, do you believe in the Lord?” I'd say, “Yes!” He'd say, “Then stand up and shout Hallelujah!” So I would... and I'd fall out of the roller coaster (Philips, 2005).

Renard, Jules (1864-1910), novelist, playwright

“I don't know if God exists, but it would be better for His reputation if He didn't” (as cited in Positive Atheism, 2011).

The Simpsons (1989-), animated comedy television program

Superintendent Chalmers : “Thank the Lor... thank the Lord? That sounds like a prayer. A prayer. A prayer in public school! God has no place within these walls, just like facts have no place in religion” (Groening, 1994).

Ned Flanders : “Science is like a blabbermouth who ruins a movie by telling you how it ends. There are some things we don't want to know. Important things” (Groening, 1997).

Szasz, Thomas (1920-), psychiatrist

“If you talk to God, you are praying; if God talks to you, you have schizophrenia” (as cited in Positive Atheism, 2011).

Voltaire (1694-1778), writer, historian

“Metaphysics consists of two parts: first, that which all men of sense already know, and second, that which they can never know” (as cited in Haught, 1996).

“Among theologians, heretics are those who are not backed with a sufficient array of battalions to render them orthodox” (as cited in Haught, 1996).

“The first divine was the first rogue who met the first fool” (as cited in Haught, 1996).

“I have never made but one prayer to God, a very short one: ‘O Lord, make my enemies ridiculous.’ And God granted it” (as cited in Haught, 1996).

“On religion, many are destined to reason wrongly; others not to reason at all; and others to persecute those who do reason” (as cited in Haught, 1996).

Honorable Mention

Lewis Black, Lenny Bruce, Adam Carolla, Billy Connolly, David Cross, Larry David, Stephen Fry, Janeane Garofalo, Ricky Gervais, Eddie Izzard, Bill Hicks, Seth Macfarlane, and Jamie Kilstein

Not a Joke, but Funny: Hilarious Tales of Religious Persecution

Spirit of the Law

During the First World War, movie producer Robert Goldstein was sentenced to ten years in prison for making a short film about the American Revolution which depicted atrocities committed by British soldiers against Americans. The judge in the case said that Goldstein had violated the Espionage Act of 1917 because the film might lead Americans “to question the good faith of our ally, Great Britain” (Jacoby, 2004, p. 239). The case was United States v. Spirit of '76!

Bonfire of the Idol

Historian J. M. Robertson (1936) relates the story of Diagoras of Melos who was charged with impiety, for divulging the Eleusinian mysteries, and:

with making firewood of an image of Herakles, telling the god thus to perform his thirteenth labour by cooking turnips... [Diagoras] became thenceforth one of the proverbial atheists of the ancient world, and a reward of a silver talent was offered for killing him, and of two talents for his capture alive; despite which he seems to have escaped. (pp. 173-174)

Church Signs (apparently real)

Don't let worry kill you— let the church help.

Thursday night - Potluck supper. Prayer and medication to follow.

Remember in prayer the many who are sick of our church and community.

For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs.

The rosebud on the alter this morning is to announce the birth of David Alan Belzer, the son of Rev. and Mrs. Julius Belzer.

This afternoon there will be a meeting in the South and North ends of the church. Children will be baptized at both ends.

Tuesday at 4:00 PM there will be an ice cream social. All ladies giving milk will please come early.

Wednesday, the ladies Liturgy Society will meet. Mrs. Jones will sing, "Put me in My Little Bed" accompanied by the pastor.

Thursday at 5:00 P.M. there will be a meeting of the Little Mothers Club. All wishing to become little mothers, please see the minister in his study.

This being Easter Sunday, we will ask Mrs. Lewis to come forward and lay an egg on the alter.

The ladies of the church have cast off clothing of every kind and they may be seen in the church basement Friday.

A bean supper will be held on Tuesday evening in the church hall. Music will follow.

At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be "What is Hell?" Come early and listen to our choir practice.

The preacher will preach his farewell message, after which the choir will sing, "Break Forth With Joy."

During the absence of our pastor, we enjoyed the rare privilege of hearing a good sermon when A. B. Doe supplied our pulpit.

The Rev. Adams spoke briefly, much to the delight of his audience.

The church is glad to have with us today as our guest minister the Rev. Shirley Green who has Mrs. Green with him. After the service

we request that all remain in the sanctuary for the Hanging of the Greens.

Selected Bibliography



"Mark Twain"
From Library of Congress Collection

"It ain't the parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand" (Twain, 1987, p. 24) .

-Mark Twain (1835-1910), novelist, humorist

Bierce, Ambrose. (1906). *The cynic's word book* . New York, NY: Doubleday, Page, & Company. ✓ **#2**

More popularly known as *The Devil's Dictionary* (1911), this is a satirical "reference" work with dictionary-like definitions of all kinds of terms.

Carlin, George. (2006). *Three times Carlin: An orgy of George* . New York, NY: Hyperion.

George Carlin wrote four books and I recommend the above title because it is a collection of his last three.

Farr-Wharton, Jake. (2011). *Letters to Christian leaders – Hallow be thy claims* . London, United Kingdom: Dangerous Little Books.

Gerard, Jim. (2007). *Beam me up, Jesus: A heathen's guide to the Rapture* . New York, NY: Nation Books.

Heston, Watson. (1892). *The Bible: Comically illustrated* . The Truth Seeker Company.

Hopper, William. (2011). *The heathen's guide to world religions: A secular history of the one true faiths* . Eris Publications.

Hump, Dromedary. (Bart Centre). (2009). *The atheist camel chronicles: Debate themes & arguments for the non-believer (and those who think they might be)* . Charleston, SC: BookSurge Publishing.

Jillette, Penn. (2011). *God, no!: Signs you may already be an atheist & other magical tales* . New York, NY: Simon & Schuster. **#1**

The talkative half of the magic duo Penn & Teller lays out an atheist/libertarian case for alternatives to the biblical Ten Commandments using personal stories, wit, and unapologetic candor.

Provenza, Paul & Dion, Dan. (2010). *Sataristas: Comedians, contrarians, raconteurs, vulgarians* . New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Twain, Mark. (1968). *The war prayer* . New York, NY: Harper & Row. (Originally published in 1905)

This very short work shows the absurdity of competing groups invoking God as their advocate.

Twain, Mark. (1995). *The Bible according to Mark Twain: Irreverent writings on Eden, Heaven, & the Flood*. (Baeitzhold, H. & McCullough, J. Eds.). New York, NY: Touchstone. **#3**

Contains such posthumously published witty gems such as *Letters From the Earth* (1962) and *The Private Life of Adam & Eve; Being Extracts From Their Diaries* (1931).

Warren, Sidney. (2005). *The priest, the pastor, & the rabbi: An intellectual study of irreverent politically incorrect, downright blasphemous religious humor* . Warren Communications.

Additional Resources

Comic Strips & Humor Sites

Atheist Cartoons: Cartoons by an Atheist

atheistcartoons.com

Atheist Eve #3

A cartoon strip created by Tracie Harris. Many of the cartoons are featured in this book. Check out more of her great work!

atheist-community.org/atheisteve

Mrs. Betty Bowers: America's Best Christian

"Since I was created in God's image, I have more than returned the favor!" A humorous take on Christian fundamentalists.

bettybowers.com

Bizarro ✓

A syndicated cartoon panel by Dan Piraro appearing in 250 papers since 2006. He has many great comics about religion and atheism.

bizarro.com

The Boondocks

boondockstv.com

Calvin & Hobbes

gocomics.com/calvinandhobbes

Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster #1

A legend in irreverent comedy. Began as a protest against teaching creationism in public schools.

venganza.org

Mr. Deity #2

“A webshow/podcast which looks at the every-day life of the creator and everything he must endure as he attempts to manage his creation.”

mrdeity.com

Eternal Earth-Bound Pets, USA: The Next Best Thing to Pet Salvation in a Post Rapture World

Perhaps this should have gone in the business section? Hilarious! Reminds me of UFO abduction insurance which is a real thing by-the-way .

eternal-earthbound-pets.com

Freethunk

freethunk.net

God Checker

godchecker.com

Godless Comedy: Pat Condell #5

No holds barred skewering of religion and other nonsense. He is a funny blowhard.

patcondell.net

Jesus & Mo

Depicts Jesus and Mohammed (gasp!) commenting on the world.

jesusandmo.net

Landover Baptist Church #4

A hilarious parody of fundamentalist church news in the spirit of *The Onion*, in that it is dry and ridiculous.

landoverbaptist.org

The Onion

A satirical news site where no topic is sacred.

theonion.com

Ship of Fools: The Magazine of Christian Unrest +

A satirical and thought provoking site run by Christians who are dedicated to “help[ing] Christians be self-critical and honest about the failings of Christianity, as we believe honesty can only strengthen faith.”

I had to include it. Good stuff here folks.

ship-of-fools.com

ORGANIZATION DIRECTORY

International (alphabetical order)

Note that most of the international organizations have many national and local affiliate and member organizations. Visit the sites under the "Affiliates:" heading at the end of each entry.

Atheist Alliance International: For a Secular World

1777 T Street NW
Washington, DC 20009-7125

Phone: 1.866.437.3842
Email: info@atheistalliance.org

atheistalliance.org

Affiliates:

There are links to organizations on the right-hand side of the homepage.

The Brights' Net: Illuminating & Elevating the Naturalistic Worldview

P.O. Box 163418
Sacramento, CA 95816

Email: the-brights@the-brights.net

the-brights.net

Affiliates:

the-brights.net/community/bnc/list.html

Center for Inquiry

PO Box 741

Amherst, NY 14226

Phone: 1.716.636.4869

Email: info@centerforinquiry.net

centerforinquiry.net

Affiliates:

centerforinquiry.net/outreach/branches

Center for Naturalism: Connection, Compassion, Control

PO Box 441705

Somerville, MA 02144

Phone: 1.617.480.8846

Email: info@naturalism.org

centerfornaturalism.org

European Humanist Federation

Campus de la Plaine ULB, Accès 2,

Avenue Arnaud Fraiteur, CP237

Buxxelles 1050 Belgium

Phone: 32.2.627.68.90

Fax: 32.2.627.68.01

Email: admin@humanistfederation.eu

humanistfederation.eu

Affiliates:

humanistfederation.eu/about-ehf/member-organisations

*Institute for Science & Human Values: Inspired by Empathy,
Creativity, & Guided by Reason*

5201 W. Kennedy Blvd. Ste. 708
Tampa, FL 33609

Phone: 1.813.282.1350

Fax: 1.813.319.5804

instituteforscienceandhumanvalues.net

Affiliates:

instituteforscienceandhumanvalues.net/Global%20affiliates.htm

*International Humanist & Ethical Union: The World Union of
Humanist Organizations*

1 Gower Street,
London, WC1E 6HD UK

Phone: 44.207.636.4797

Fax: 44.870.288.7631

Email: office-iheu@iheu.org

iheu.org

Affiliates:

iheu.org/contacts

International League of Humanists

Ulica Mehmeda Spahe 18
71000 Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina

Phone: 00.387.33.66.08.25

FAX: 00.387.33.27.72.85

Email: info@intlh.com

Appears to be a fairly exclusive organization admitting only a select few from various counties.

intlh.com

Rationalist International

PO Box 9110
779/5, Mayur Vihar Phase 1
New Delhi 110091 India

Phone: 91.11.22.75.32.55
Fax: 91.11.22.75.53.79
Email: info_desk@rationalistinternational.net

rationalistinternational.net

The Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason & Science #1

PO Box 866
Oxford, OX1 9NQ UK

richarddawkins.net

The Skeptic Society: Promoting Science & Critical Thinking

P.O. Box 338
Altadena, CA 91001

Phone: 1.626.794.3119
Fax: 1.626.794.1301
Email: skepticssociety@skeptic.com

skeptic.com

Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregation s

25 Beacon St.
Boston, MA 02108

Phone: 1.617.742.2100

Email: info@uua.org

uua.org

National

(alphabetical by country)

The vast majority of national organizations are affiliated with one or more of the international groups listed above. To find one near you visit the “Affiliates:” links at the bottom of International Organizations entries. Another good starting point for finding local groups is through:

Meetup.com

Hundreds of freethought groups are represented on this site designed to help people find organizations of interest. You can start your own group or search for a particular group or check out:

meetup.com

The following are unaffiliated groups.

Afghanistan

Afghan Atheists

Arnhem, Netherlands

Email: Afghan_Atheists@hotmail.com

facebook.com/pages/Afghan-Atheists/247734328587044

Australia

Rationalist Society of Australia

PO Box 1312
Hawksburn VIC 3142

Email: secretary@rationalist.com.au

rationalist.com.au

Austria

Alliance for Humanism & Atheism

atheisten.at

Freethinker Association of Austria

Postfach 54
1153 Wien

Email: info@freidenker.at

freidenker.at

Canada

Canadian Secular Alliance

Email: research@secularalliance.ca

secularalliance.ca

Croatia

Protagora: Croatian Irreligious Association

protagora.hr

Cuba

Cuban Evolutionary Humanist Movement

mhec.humanists.net

Denmark

Humanistisk Debat

humanistiskdebat.dk

Finland

Union of Freethinkers

Siltasaarencatu 15 C 65,
00530 Helsinki

Phone: 0440.715.601

Email: val@vapaa-ajattelijat.fi

vapaa-ajattelijat.fi

The Union of the Atheistic Ones

Maison des Associations du 18^e Boite n° 64
15 passage Ramey 75018 Paris

Phone: 00.33.0.1.64.49.09.55

atunion.free.fr

Germany

Brandenburgischer Freidenker-Verband e. V.

brandenburger-freidenker.de/cms

Humanistischer Verband Deutschlands

humanismus.de

Iceland

Sidmennt:
Icelandic Ethical Humanist Association

Æsufelli 4 - 111
Reykjavík

Email: sidmennt@sidmennt.is

sidmennt.is

India

Atheist Centre

Benz Circle,
Vijayawada 520 010
Andhra Pradesh

Phone: 91.866.2472330
Fax: 91.866.2484850
Email: atheistcentre@yahoo.com

atheistcentre.in

Science & Rationalist Association of India

P-2, Block B
Lake Town, Kolkata 700 089

Phone: 0091.93301.23900
Email: editor@srai.org

srai.org

Buddhiwadi Foundation

“Non-profit, educational trust for promoting rationalism & humanism.”

216-A, S. K. Puri
Patna, Bihar-800001

Email: ramendra@sancharnet.in

facebook.com/pages/Buddhiwadi-Foundation/180107345339986

Nirmukta: Promoting Science, Freethought, & Secular Humanism in India

I love this organization’s name which is a Sanskrit word meaning “Freed,” “Liberated.”

nirmukta.com

Affiliates:

nirmukta.com/freethought-media-network

Indonesia/South-East Asia

SEA-Atheists.org: A Community of South-East Asian Non-Believers

Email: groups@sea-atheists.org

sea-atheists.org

Ireland

The Humanist Association of Ireland

Rose Cottage,

Coach Road, Balrothery,
Balbriggan, Co. Dublin

Phone: 353.0.1.841.3116

Phone: 353.0.87.9817861

Email: info@humanism.ie

humanism.ie

UCC Atheists

Email: atheist@uccsocieties.ie

uccatheists.com

Italy

Italian Union of Rationalist Atheists & Agnostics

Via Ostiense 89 00154 Rome

Phone: 39.06.5757611

Fax: 39.06.57103987

Email: info@uaar.it

uaar.it

Luxembourg

Liberty & Conscience

libco.lu

Malawi

Secular Humanism Malawi

mwhumanism.blogspot.com

Netherlands

Humanistische Alliantie

human.nl

Young Humanists

Postbus 75490
1070 AL Amsterdam

Phone: 020.521.90.00
Email: jonghv@humanistischverbond.nl

jonghv.nl

New Zealand

Humanist Society of New Zealand

PO Box 3372
Wellington

Email: jeffhunt90@gmail.com

humanist.org.nz

New Zealand Association of Rationalists & Humanists: Home to New Zealand's Non-Religious Community Since 1927

Rationalist House
64 Symonds Street
Auckland 1010

Phone: 09.373.5131
Fax: 09.379.8233
Email: admin@nzarh.org.nz

nzarh.org.nz

Norway

Norwegian Humanist Association

PO Box 6744
St. Olavs plass
0130 Oslo

Phone: 02.315.6000
Email: human@human.no

human.no

Philippines

Filipino Freethinkers

filipinofreethinkers.org

Poland

Atheist Community

ateista.pl

Portugal

Humanismo Secular Portugal

humanismosecular.org

Russia

Russian Atheists

Email: info@atheism.ru

atheism.ru

Slovakia

Prometheus Society of Slovakia

Pod Bánošom 14
974 11 Banská Bystrica

Email: kancelariasp@mail.t-com.sk

slovakia.humanists.net

Sweden

Humanisterna: Swedish Humanist Association

Box 162 41
103 24 Stockholm

Phone: 46.8.508.622.90

Email: kansli@humanisterna.se

humanisterna.se

Turkey

Ataturk Thought Association

add.org.tr

United Kingdom

British Humanist Association: For the One Life We Have

1 Gower Street
London, WC1E 6HD

Phone: 020.7079.3588

Fax: 020.7079.3588

humanism.org.uk

Humanist Society of Scotland

272 Bath St
Glasgow, G2 4JR

Phone: 0870.874.9002

humanism-scotland.org.uk

National Secular Society: Join the Campaign for a Secular Society

25 Red Lion Square
London, WC1R 4RL

Phone: 020.7404.3126

Fax: 0870.762.8971

Email: enquiries@secularism.org.uk

secularism.org.uk

United States

American Atheists

PO Box 5733
Parisippany, NJ 07054

Phone: 1.908.276.7300
Email: info@atheists.org

atheists.org

Affiliates:

atheists.org/content/local-and-affiliates

American Humanist Association: Advocating Progressive Values & Equality for Humanists, Atheists, & Freethinkers

1777 T. Street NW
Washington, DC 20009-7125

Phone: 1.202.238.9088
Toll Free: 1.800.837.3792
Fax: 1.202.238.9003

americanhumanist.org

Affiliates:

americanhumanist.org/What_We_Do/Local_Groups/AHA_Groups

The American Ethical Union: Deed Before Creed

2 West 64th St
New York, NY 10023

Phone: 1.212.873.6500

aeu.org

Affiliates:

aeu.org/index.php?case=members

Americans for Religious Liberty

PO Box 6656
Silver Spring, MD 20916

Phone: 1.301.260.2988

Fax: 1.301.260.2989

Email: arlinc@Verizon.net

arlinc.org

Americans United for Separation of Church & State

518 C St. NE
Washington, DC 20002

Phone: 1.202.466.3234

Fax: 1.202.466.2587

Email: americansunited@au.org

au.org

Atheist Alliance of America

1777 T Street NW
Washington, DC 20009-7125

Phone: 1.866.437.3842

Email: info@atheistallianceamerica.org

atheistallianceamerica.org

Affiliates:

atheistallianceamerica.org/programs/alliance/affiliates.html

The Committee for Skeptical Inquiry

An important affiliate of the Center for Inquiry whose mission is “to promote scientific inquiry, critical investigation, and the use of reason in examining controversial and extraordinary claims.”

PO Box 703
Amherst, NY 14226

Phone: 1.716.636.1425
Email: info@csicop.org

csicop.org

The Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations

320 Claymore Blvd
Cleveland, OH 44143

Phone: 1.866.874.8608
Fax: 1.216.373.3260

csjo.org

Affiliates:

csjo.org/about-us/find-a-local-group/

Council for Secular Humanism

PO Box 664
Amherst, NY 14226-0664

Phone: 1.716.636.7571
Fax: 1.716.636.1733

Email: info@secularhumanism.org

secularhumanism.org

Freedom from Religion Foundation: Protecting the Constitutional Principle of the Separation of State & Church #1

PO Box 750
Madison, WI 53701

Phone: 1.608.256.8900

Fax: 1.608.256.1116

Email: info@ffrf.org

ffrf.org

Affiliates:

ffrf.org/about/ffrf-chapters

Military Association of Atheists & Freethinkers: Providing Community for Atheists, Humanists, & Other Nontheists in the Military

1380 Monroe St NW PMB 505
Washington, DC 20010

Phone: 1.202.656.MAAF

Email: community@militaryatheists.org

militaryatheists.org

Military Religious Freedom Foundation:

13170-B Central Avenue, SE Suite 255
Albuquerque, NM 87123

Phone: 1.800.736.5109

Email: info@militaryreligiousfreedom.org

militaryreligiousfreedom.org

Secular Coalition for America: Representing Secular Americans in Our Nation's Capital

PO Box 66096

Washington, DC 20035-6096

Phone: 1.202.299.1091

Fax: 1.202.293.0922

secular.org

Affiliates:

secular.org/states

Society for Humanistic Judaism: Building Humanistic Jewish Congregations Today Creating Continuity for Our Children for the Future

Email: info@shj.org

shj.org

United Coalition of Reason: Shine the Light of Reason!

1777 T Street, NW

Washington, DC 20009

Email: Info@UnitedCoR.org

unitedcor.org

Affiliates:

unitedcor.org/national/page/map

Independent Local (United States)

(alphabetical by state)

Arkansas

Arkansas Society of Freethinkers

PO Box 4135

Little Rock AR 72214

arkansasfreethinkers.com

California

Atheists of Silicon Valley

Email: mwthomas33@gmail.com

godlessgeeks.com

Atheists United: Atheists United is a Positive Atheist Community for Southern California

4773 Hollywood Blvd

Hollywood, CA 90027

Phone: 1.866.GOD.LESS

Phone: 1.323.666.4258

atheistsunited.org

CA only Affiliates:

atheistsunited.org/affiliated-organizations

Fellowship of Humanity: The World is My Country. To Do Good is My Religion.

411 28th St
Oakland, CA 94609-3602

Phone: 1.510.681.8699

humanisthall.net

Freethinkers of Ventura County

788 Calle Clavel
Thousand Oaks, CA 91360

Email: FrThVC@yahoo.com

ftvc.org

Colorado

Boulder Atheists: Moral, Ethical, Logical

P.O. Box 21365
Boulder, CO 80308

Email: info@boulderatheists.org

boulderatheists.org

Freethinkers of Colorado Springs

freethinkerscs.com

District of Columbia

Washington Area Secular Humanists

P. O. Box 15319
Washington, DC 20003

Phone: 1.202.657.6346
Email: inquire@wash.org

wash.org

Affiliates:

home.wash.org/chapters

Florida

Humanists of Florida Association: Reason & Compassion in Action

Email: info@floridahumanist.org

floridahumanist.org

Georgia

Atlanta Freethought Society

4775 N. Church Lane SE
Smyrna, GA 30080

atlantafreethought.org

Fellowship of Reason: Promoting Personal Flourishing Through Reason

P.O. Box 28891
Atlanta, GA 30358

fellowshipofreason.com

Idaho

Idaho Atheists, Inc.: Community, Education, Ethics, Tradition

P.O. Box 204
Boise, ID 83701

Email: MailBag@IdahoAtheists.org

idahoatheists.org

Iowa

Iowa Atheists & Freethinkers

PO Box 672
Des Moines, IA 50303-0672

Email: info@iowaatheists.org

iowaatheists.org

Minnesota

The Cannon Falls Freethinkers

cannonfallsfreethinkers.org

Central Minnesota Freethinkers: A Community of Reason & Rationality

Email: info@freeoftheism.org

cmfreethinkers.org

La Crosse Area Freethought Society

lcafs.org

Minnesota Skeptics

minnesotaskeptics.com

Missouri

Community of Reason KC: A Center for Free Thought

5019 State Line Road
Kansas City, MO 54112-1156

Phone: 1.816.561.1866

communityofreasonkc.org

Joplin Freethinkers

Phone: 1.417.434.0443

Email: info@joplinfreethinkers.org

joplinfreethinkers.friendhood.net

Montana

Atheists of Butte County

PO Box 157
Forest Ranch, CA

Email: butte.atheist@gmail.com

atheistsofbuttecounty.com

Nebraska

Rationalists, Empiricists, & Skeptics of Nebraska

reason.ws

New Mexico

New Mexicans for Science & Reason

nmsr.org

New York

CNY Skeptics: Promoting Science & Reason in Central New York

Email: info@cnyskeptics.org

cnyskeptics.org

Freethinkers of Upstate New York

Box 22

Blossvale, NY 13308

Phone: 1.315.245.3596

funygroup.org

New York Society for Ethical Culture

2 West 64th Street (at Central Park West)

New York, NY 10023

Phone: 1.212.874.5210
Fax: 1.212.595.7258

nysec.org

Ohio

Cincinnati Skeptics: The Association for Rational Thought

P.O. Box 24104
Cincinnati, OH 45224-0104

Email: artcincy@gmail.com

cincinnati-skeptic.org

Oregon

Corvallis Secular Society: A Humanist & Freethought Society for All Non-theists of Good Will.

John S. Dearing
126 NW 21st St
Corvallis, OR 97330

Phone: 1.541.754.2557
Email: Pres@CorvallisSecular.org

corvallissecular.org

The Jefferson Center: Promoting Critical Thinking & a Secular, Humanistic World

208 Oak Street Suite 101
Ashland, OR 97520

Phone: 1.541.488.9450

Fax: 1.541.488.9450

thejeffcenter.org

Oregonians for Science & Reason

o4sr.org

United States Atheists

Phone: 1.503.ATHEIST

Email: usa@unitedstatesatheists.com

unitedstatesatheists.com

Pennsylvania

Humanist Community Services of Northeast PA

Email: nepaatheist@yahoo.com

nepahcs.tripod.com

Philadelphia Association for Critical Thinking

653 Garden Rd
Glenside, PA 19038

Email: erickrieg@verizon.net

phact.org

Rhode Island

Rhode Island Atheist Society

Phone: (401) 484-7094

Email: info@riatheist.com

riatheist.com

Tennessee

Rationalists of East Tennessee

PO Box 51634

Knoxville, TN 37950

Email: info@rationalists.org

rationalists.org

Atheist Society of Knoxville

asknoxville.wix.com/ask

Texas

Ethical Society of Austin

5555 N. Lamar

Suite L137

Austin, TX 78751

Email: board@esoa.org

esoa.org

Freethinkers Association of Central Texas

P.O. Box 160881
San Antonio, TX 78280-3081

freethinkersact.org

Houston Church of Freethought

P.O. Box 7357
Houston, TX 77248-7357

Email: welcome@hcof.org

hcof.org

Humanist Association of San Antonio

[meetup.com/Humanists-of-San-Antonio](https://www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-San-Antonio)

Metroplex Atheists

1332 Martin Court
Grapevine, TX 76051

Phone: 1.817.382.5948

Email: director@metroplexatheists.org

metroplexatheists.org

North Texas Church of Freethought

P.O. Box 202447
Arlington, TX 76006

Phone: 1.214.702.2050

churchoffreethought.org

North Texas Skeptics

P.O. Box 111794
Carrollton, TX 75011-1794

Phone: (214) 335-9248
Email: contact@ntskeptics.co.cc

ntskeptics.org

Texas Citizens for Science

texscience.org

Texas Freedom Network #1

P.O. Box 1624
Austin, TX 78767

Phone: 1.512.322.0545
Fax: 1.512.322.0550
Email: ifn@inf.org

tfn.org

Washington

Humanists of Washington

P.O. Box 17201
Seattle, Washington 98127

Phone: 1.206.527.8518
Email: humanists@comcast.net

humanistsofwashington.org

Washington, D C

National Capital Area Skeptics: Promoting Critical Thinking & Scientific Understanding

P.O. Box 8428
Silver Spring, MD 20907

Phone: 1.301.587.3827
Email: ncas@ncas.org

ncas.org

Wisconsin

Freethought Society of Wisconsin

P.O. Box 14501
Milwaukee, WI 53214-0501
Phone: 1.414.727.2106

Email: info@FreeThoughtSocietyofWisconsin.org

freethoughtsocietyofwisconsin.org

Women & Minorities

African Americans for Humanism

P.O. Box 664
Amherst, NY 14226

Phone: 1.716.636.7571 ext. 421
Email: aah@centerforinquiry.net

aahumanism.net

Black Non-Believers, Inc.:
Walking by sight, NOT faith!

blacknonbelievers.wordpress.com

Equal Rights Now: Organization Against Women's Discrimination in Iran

equalrightsnow-iran.com

Gay & Lesbian Humanist Association

1 Gower Street
London, WC1E 6HD

galha.org

Hispanic American Freethinkers: Advancing Reason, Science, & Evidenced-Based Knowledge

hafree.org

LGBT Humanist Council

1777 T Street NW
Washington, DC 20009-7125

Phone: 1.800.837.3792

Email: lgbt@americanhumanist.org

lgbthumanists.org

Secular Woman: Breaking Through #1

“The mission of Secular Woman is to amplify the voice, presence, and influence of non-religious women” and the group “envisions a future in which women without supernatural beliefs have the opportunities and resources they need to participate openly and confidently as respected voices of leadership in the secular community and every aspect of American society.”

secularwoman.org

Women Against Fundamentalism

womenagainstofundamentalism.org.uk

INTERNET DIRECTORY

The internet is now the most powerful and pervasive organizing and information tool available. It is especially important for the freethought community which is often spread-out, isolated, and marginalized in the public sphere and often given a limited voice in private media for fear of consumer backlash. The following is a listing of great websites and other electronic tools from and for freethinkers.

Introductions to Freethought

About Atheism & Agnosticism

A very informative site run by Austin Cline.

atheism.about.com

Atheist Empire

atheistempire.com

Atheism: Man Standing on His Own Two Feet

A French site explaining various forms of freethought.

atheisme.free.fr

Atheism Resource: Big Questions Deserve Big Answers

atheismresource.com

BBC: Religions – Atheism

bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/atheism/index.shtml

Freethoughtpedia

freethoughtpedia.com

Naturalism.org

“A resource for those interested in worldview naturalism and its personal and social implications.”

naturalism.org

Positive Atheism

An excellent resource a huge collection of quotes and a forum.

positiveatheism.org

The Really Simple Guide to Humanism

simpleguidetohumanism.org.uk

The Secular Web: A Drop of Reason in a Pool of Confusion ✓

A great resource site run by the Internet Infidels a “nonprofit educational organization dedicated to promoting and defending a naturalistic worldview on the internet.”

infidels.org

News Sites & Webzines

Arts & Letters Daily: From the Chronicle of Higher Education

aldaily.com

Atheist Media Blog: Your Daily Source of News & Videos on Science & Religion

atheistmedia.com

PhilosophyNews

“Get the latest in news and events about philosophy from around the world as well as original essays.”

philosophynews.com

Secular News Daily: News & Views from a Secular Perspective

secularnewsdaily.com

Social Networks, Forums, & Discussion Boards

Atheism Plus: More Than Disbelief #2

“Atheism+ is a safe space for people to discuss how religion affects everyone and to apply skepticism and critical thinking to everything, including social issues like sexism, racism, GLBT issues, politics, poverty, and crime.”

atheismplus.com

Atheistic Forum

debate.atheist.net

Atheist Match Maker: Dating Service Exclusively for Atheists & Agnostics Seeking a Match

Has over 16,000 members.

freethinkermatch.com

Atheist Nexus #1

Nearly 28,000 members.

atheistnexus.org

Atheist Passions: 100% Free Atheist Dating & Social Network, Atheist Personals & Chat

700 members.

atheistpassions.com

Atheist_Singles: Atheist, Agnostic, Humanist Singles

groups.yahoo.com/group/Atheist_Singles

Atheist-Talk: One of the Oldest & Most Respected Atheist Lists on the Web

groups.yahoo.com/group/atheist-talk

Atheist Universe

atheistuniverse.net

Freethinker Finder: Find Freethinkers in Your Area

Over 670 members.

freethinkerfinder.com

Freethought Forum: Think What You Like, & Say What You Think...

freethought-forum.com

Freethought & Rationalism Discussion Board

freeratio.org

Heathen Hangout/Heathen Hub

The first forum is intended for heathens only while the second is open to everyone.

heathen-hangout.com

heathen-hub.com

Reddit @ Atheism #3

A social news site that ranks links according user votes.

reddit.com/r/atheism

Think Atheist

A community social networking and news site focused on bringing freethinkers together and breaking the misconceptions about

atheism.

thinkatheist.com

Think Humanism

This forum “is a humanist forum based in the UK that welcomes anyone from anywhere in the world who is interested in humanism, secularism and freethought, regardless of their personal world view.”

thinkhumanism.com

Young Atheist & Freethinkers Discussion List

Nearly 2,000 members.

groups.yahoo.com/group/Young_Atheists_Freethinkers

Blog Aggregates

The Atheists Blogroll

Lists over 1400 atheist blogs.

atheistblogroll.blogspot.com

Freethought Blogs ✓ **#1**

A central location for 32 quality freethought blogs. They include (followed by who maintains them):

The Ace of Clades: Science Doesn't Know Everything, Religion Doesn't Know Anything

Aron Ra.

The Atheist Experience Blog

Various contributors including the shows hosts Matt Dillahunty, Martin Wagner, Jen Peeples, and more.

Butterflies & Wheels

Ophelia Benson.

Mostly about questioning and examining various pseudoscience .

Christina Rad

Christina Rad.

Greta Christina's Blog: Atheism, Sex, Politics, Dreams & Whatever.

Greta Christina.

Pharyngula: Evolution, Development, & Random Biological Ejaculations from a Godless Liberal

PZ Myers.

Reasonable Doubts: Your Skeptical Guide to Religion

Richard Carrier Blogs

Richard Carrier.

Token Skeptic: Bending Misconceptions with Her Mind

Kylie Sturgess.

freethoughtblogs.com

Patheos Atheist: Hosting the Conversation on Faith ✓ #2

Includes the popular:

Brother Richard's Life Without Faith

Friendly Atheist

By Hemant Mehta

Unreasonable Faith: Reasonable Thoughts on Religion, Science, and Skepticism

Daniel Florien.

What Would JT Do?: Fighting Religion Tooth & Claw

Written by JT Eberhard.

patheos.com/Atheist

Planet Atheism: Aggregating Blogs by Non-Believers & Freethinkers

planetatheism.com

Blogs

40 Year Old Atheist

40yearoldatheist.com

Atheist Ethicist

atheistethicist.blogspot.com

Atheism: Proving the Negative

atheismblog.blogspot.com

Atheist Revolution

atheistrev.com

Bad Astronomy ✓

Phil Plait's blog debunking pseudoscience.

slate.com/blogs/bad_astronomy.html

Cobourg Atheist

cobourgatheist.com

Common Sense Atheism #1

commonsenseatheism.com

Dangerous Talk

“An atheist/progressive daily blog discussing the three most dangerous topics of polite conversation: Religion, Politics, and Sex. Our goal is to fight back against the Religious Right and push for a more free and rational society.”

dangeroustalk.net

Debunking Christianity

debunkingchristianity.blogspot.com

Freethinking Blog

centerforinquiry.net/blogs

Friendly Humanist

friendlyhumanist.net

Godless Girl

godlessgirl.com

The Good Atheist

Funny and informative. Also has a podcast.

thegoodatheist.net

Happiness Through Humanism: Short Posts About the Humanist Philosophy Designed to Encourage People to Live Ethical Lives of Personal Fulfillment that Aspire to the Greater Good of Humanity †

An especially good intro for theists because of its soft tone. Written by Jen Hancock.

humanishappiness.blogspot.com

LessWrong: A Community Blog Devoted to Refining the Art of Human Rationality

lesswrong.com

Michael Nugent

michaelnugent.com

Martin S. Pribble: Attempting to Make Sense

martinspribble.com

New Humanist

rationalist.org.uk/articles

Rant & Reason: Humanist Perspectives on Breaking News & Politics

blog.thehumanist.com

Reason Works: The Website of Michael Scott Earl

reasonworks.com

Science-Based Medicine: Exploring Issues & Controversies in the Relationship Between Science & Medicine

sciencebasedmedicine.org

Skepticblog ✓

Contributors include Brian Dunning, Donald Prothero, Steven Nevella, Daniel Loxtton, Michael Shermer, and Mark Edward.

skepticblog.org

Podcasts, Radio, & Video

American Freethought: Question. Think. Decide

americanfreethought.com/wordpress

American Heathen: The Evolution of a Godless Revolution

“American Heathen® is a weekly 3 hour assault on ignorance, complacency, bigotry, hatred, and racism. It's an intense, unforgiving, take-no-prisoners radio show that cuts through the rhetoric and din of political, religious, and social injustices that are destroying American freedom and liberty! Hosted by America's Angriest Atheist, R.J. Evans, the show openly and unabashedly provokes and challenges anyone who attempts to trample upon the Constitutionally guaranteed freedoms of ALL Americans. ”

americanheathen.net

Ask an Atheist: A Call-In Radio Show Featuring Atheists from the Tacoma/Seattle Area

askanatheist.tv

Atheism TV

A good collection of video's with some original content.

atheismtv.com

The Atheist Experience ● + © ☒ ✨ ✓ **#1**

An Austin, TX based live call-in cable access television show promoting positive atheism and the separation of church and state. The hosts answer questions from the public and discuss a wide range of religion related issues. They prefer theist callers.

atheist-experience.com

Atheist Viewpoint: TV Show Hosted by David Silverman & Dennis Horvitz

Produced by American Atheists.

atheists.org/video

Big Think ✓

Important individuals of all stripes are asked to express themselves through blogs and video blogs. A diversity of perspectives are stressed. Very cool.

bigthink.com

Cognitive Dissonance: An Atheist & Skeptical News Podcast

dissonancepod.com

The David Pakman Show ✓

davidpakman.com

For Good Reason with D.J. Grothe

An interview show “promoting critical thinking and skepticism about the central beliefs of society. Interviews often focus on the paranormal, pseudoscience and the supernatural.” Produced in association with the James Randi Educational Foundation.

forgoodreason.org

Freethought Multimedia

A good site with a lot of videos.

reitstoen.com/multimedia.php

Freethought Radio: Irreverant Views, News, Music, & Interviews • ✓
#3

A program with hosts Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor co-presidents of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. "Radio from the secular point of view."

ffrf.org/news/radio

Freethought Radio: Audio Energy for Freethinking ✓

An entire radio station dedicated to freethought! Many of the shows listed in this section are re-played here.

freethoughtradio.com

The Geologic Podcast

Hosted by musician and skeptic George Hrab.

geologicpodcast.com

Godless Bitches: Feminism From a Secular Perspective ✓ **#2**

godlessbitches.podbean.com

The Good Atheist

thegoodatheist.net/category/podcast

The Hellbound Allee Show: Listen & Burn

hellboundalleee.com

The Humanist Hour

“A monthly one-hour talk show produced by the American Humanist Association.”

podcast.thehumanist.org

I Am an Ex Mormon: A New Weekly Video Series

“Our new weekly video series is dedicated to sharing the stories of those who have courageously followed their own path out of Mormonism. We hope that their struggles and accomplishments will help others to have compassion and respect for those who have made this journey. ”

iamanexmormon.com

The Imaginary Friends Show: Comedic Atheistic Cannablistic Podcast: Where Nothing is Sacred

imaginaryfriendsshow.com

The Infidel Guy Radio

infidelguy.com

Inspirational Humanist Radio Hour

radiohive.org/category/shows/ihrh

Irreligiosophy: The One True Podcast

irreligiosophy.com

Living After Faith

livingafterfaith.blogspot.com

The Magic Sandwich Show

“The Magic Sandwich Show is a bi-weekly live call in show, broadcast every other Sunday on BlogTV and uStream. During the show a panel of 3 or 4 discuss topical issues relating to religion and science. People are invited to call into the show through Skype.”

magicsandwichshow.com

The Non-Prophets ✓

Has great guests, discusses a wide range of woo, and is broadcast from Austin, TX

nonprophetsradio.com

Open Culture: The Best Free Cultural & Educational Media on the Web

openculture.com

The Pod Delusion ✓

The best secular podcast from across the pond, at least that I know of!

“The Pod Delusion is an award-winning weekly news magazine radio programme and podcast about interesting things. From politics, to science to culture and philosophy, it's commentary from a secular, rationalist, skeptical, somewhat lefty-liberal, sort of perspective. A bit like From Our Own Correspondent but with more jokes.”

poddelusion.co.uk/blog

Point of Inquiry with Chris Mooney & Indre Viskontas

pointofinquiry.org

Public Reality Radio: Rational Patriotism

publicrealityradio.org

SkepChick #5

“A group of women (and one deserving guy) who write about science, skepticism, feminism, atheism, secularism, and pseudoscience. With intelligence, curiosity, and occasional snark, the group tackles diverse topics from astronomy to astrology, psychics to psychology.” Includes 18 contributors including Rebecca Watson.

skepchick.org

Skeptically Speaking: Call In. Question Everything ✓

Host Desiree Schell is great and interviews a wide range of scientists and others.

skepticallyspeaking.com

The Skeptics' Guide to the Universe ✓

A podcast put on by The New England Skeptical Society.

theskepticsguide.org

The Skeptics's Testament

podcastlaboratory.libsyn.com

Skeptoid: Critical Analysis of Pop Phenomena

Brian Dunning, creator of documentary *Here Be Dragons* (2011), hosts.

skeptoid.com

Technology, Entertainment & Design (TED): Ideas Worth Spreading

✓

A large collection of talks from some of the world's most distinguished scholars. Truly, a forum for freethought.

ted.com

TERRA: The Nature of Our World ✓

A really good original documentary site examining science, art, nature, politics, and a whole lot more. I particularly appreciate the episode 702 "Why Is Science Important?"

lifeonterra.com

The Thinking Atheist #4

The kind and witty Seth Andrews hosts this great podcast in which he takes calls and offers opinions.

thethinkingatheist.com

Thought for the World

“Offers a secular alternative to the BBC Today programme’s Thought for the Day.”

No new podcasts since 2009, however, the contributors are excellent. Check it out!

thoughtfortheworld.org

Token Skeptic ✓

“Kylie Sturgess covers the latest ideas and issues, from psychology to philosophy and ethics, science, critical thinking, literacy and education. Interviews featured include famous international figures from pop-culture, science fiction, science communication, philosophy and more. With an Australian emphasis and overseas appeal – there’s even the occasional awesome vodcast episode.”

tokenskeptic.org

Truth-Driven Thinking

“Building a social learning community that encourages skeptical examination of—and intellectually honest dialogue surrounding—virtually all claims about how the world works, and how it ought to work, in conscious effort to make it a better place for sentient beings.”

truthdriventhinking.com

The Web's Best Videos on Evolution, Creationism, Atheism, & More

introducedrate.com/evolution.htm

Youtube

The Web's Best Videos on Evolution, Creationism, Atheism & More ✓

I was going to include an exhaustive list of good freethought youtube channels here, but with the link below there was no need. You'll find on the site over 1,000 videos from over 100 contributors for all your rational video needs.

introducedrat.com/evolution.htm

Cell Phone Applications

Atheist Pocket Debater

ifreethinker.com

Ex-Christian

The Clergy Project: Moving Beyond Faith ✓

“The Clergy Project is a confidential online community for active and former clergy who do not hold supernatural beliefs.”

clergyproject.org

ExChristian.net: Encouraging De-Converting & Former Christians

exchristian.net

Ex-Christian.net

ex-christian.net

Ex-Jehovah's Witness Forum & Recovery Site

exjehovahswitnessforum.yuku.com

FreeMinds: Reinvent Yourself

Ex-Mormon support.

freeminds.org

Losing My Religion: Helping Good Folks Just Like You Break Free of Religion Since 1999

losingmyreligion.com

PostMormon.org

postmormon.org

Recovering from Religion: Thousands of organizations will help you get INTO religion, but we're the only one helping you OUT ✓

Founded by Dr. Darrel Ray. Also includes a resource for finding secular therapists.

recoveringfromreligion.org

Recovery from Mormonism: A Site for Those Who Are Questioning Their Faith in the Mormon Church & for Those Who Need Support as They Transition Their Lives to a Normal Life

exmormon.org

Take Heart Project

The site “has a two-fold purpose: to provide support to women and children who are escaping abusive religious movements, and to provide the public with accurate, compassionate information on the unique challenges faced by the spiritually abused.”

takeheartproject.org

Ex-Muslim

Apostates of Islam

Helps ex-Muslims recover from dogma.

apostatesofislam.com

Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain

ex-muslim.org.uk

Institution for the Secularization of Islamic Society

centerforinquiry.net/isis

Miscellaneous

Christopher Hitchens: An Online Directory

A good site for all things related to the work of Hitch.

buildupthatwall.com

Daniel C. Dennett's Home Page

ase.tufts.edu/cogstud/incbios/dennettd/dennettd.htm

Sam Harris' Official Website

samharris.org

Business & Shopping

Atheist List: Job Board, Classified Advertising, Link Exchange & Business Directory for Non-Believers

atheistlist.com

EvolveFISH

Sells a wide variety of heathen related items including the famous EvolveFISH car emblem.

Phone: 1.800.386.5846

evolvefish.com

Reasonist Products

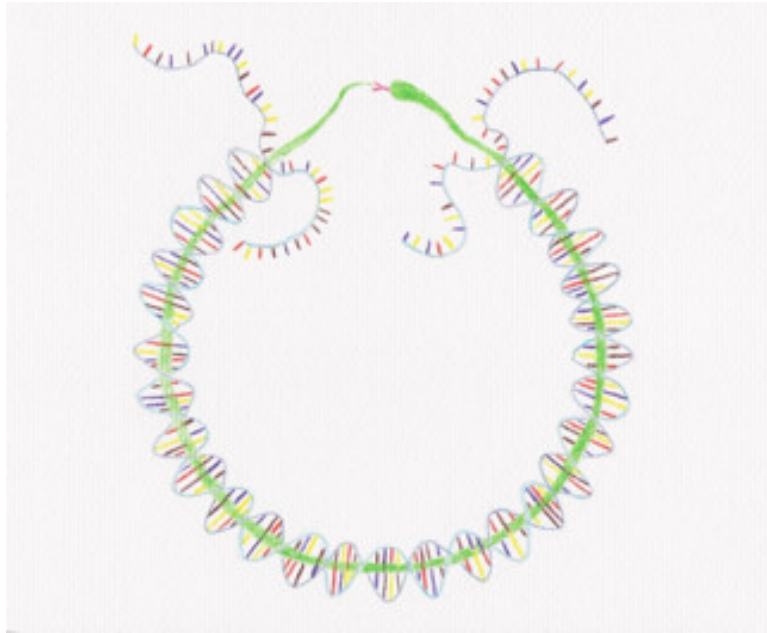
“Helps you support the social movement of reason with funny and intelligent science and atheist t-shirts.”

reasonistproducts.com

*Ring of Fire Enterprises: Unique & Expressive Gifts for the
Independently-Minded Individual*

rof.com

CONCLUSION: BEYOND NON-BELIEF



“DNA *Ouroboros* ”
(by author)

In the preface to the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* , poet Walt Whitman envisioned that:

There will soon be no more priests. Their work is done. They may wait awhile... perhaps a generation or two... dropping off by degrees... a new order shall arise and they shall be the priests of man, and every man shall be his own priest. The churches built under their umbrage shall be the churches of men and women. Through the divinity of themselves shall the kosmos and the new breed of poets be interpreters of men and women and of all events and things. They shall find their inspiration in real objects today, symptoms of the past and future... They shall not deign to defend immortality or God or the perfection of things or liberty or the exquisite beauty and reality of the soul. They shall arise in America and be responded to from the remainder of the earth. (as cited in Jacoby, 2004, pp. 214-215)

“By the year 2000 we will, I hope, raise our children to believe in human potential, not God” (Steinem, 1973).

-Gloria Steinem (1934-), feminist, journalist

Whitman and Steinem echo sentiments repeated by freethinkers for thousands of years. They are optimistic yet fundamentally naïve predictions. Perhaps one day such a world will come to pass, but better to pour the vision into our deeds and action than utopian delusions of grandeur. And what more, we should not even wish to do away with religion completely. Broadly speaking, religion as poetic metaphor for things mysterious, communal identification, rites of passage, and moral guide, should always remain a vital, if not inescapable, part of the individual and collective life of humanity. Religion is in essence the adolescence of our species. Many of the mythic traditions of the world teach humans how to grow beyond the gods. When we become mature, however, it will be time to leave childish things behind. But we need religion for those who have not yet grown up. Our problem seems to be that we have far too many old children telling young children to never grow up.

I am not claiming that religion is innate or that we are *homo religulous* . Rather, the appeal of religion lies in the fact that it addresses and provokes deep human curiosity and desires. Religion touches faculties of human psychology that are indeed innate and seemingly unique to our species. So, in this sense, I think the only way freethought will attract humanity is through some kind of marriage between the practical reliability of the scientific method and the siren song of mythological poetry, no matter how uncomfortable that may make freethinkers feel. Carl Sagan (1994) wrote that:

A religion old or new, that stressed the magnificence of the universe as revealed by modern science, might be able to draw forth reserves of reverence and awe hardly tapped by the conventional faiths. Sooner or later, such a religion will emerge. (p. 50)

The awesome beauty of the reality, as revealed by science, is far more compelling than any religious vision to date, precisely because they are adolescent in nature. “We have lost religion, but we have gained humanism. The ideal now is to liberate and to help emancipate mankind, with the result that man becomes really an

absolute for man” (Sartre as cited in Haught, 1996, p. 275). What freethought somewhat lacks is the artistic touch to make the scientific and life centered perspective compelling and readily understandable.

One important avenue is flexibility of imagination and growth of perspective. We must move beyond and above, for atheism is essentially a negation. I agree with August Comte (1798-1857) when he said that atheism “even from the intellectual point of view, is a very imperfect form of emancipation; for its tendency is to prolong the metaphysical stage indefinitely” and is “generally connected with the visionary but mischievous tendencies of ambitious thinkers to uphold what they call the empire of Reason... Politically, its tendency is to unlimited prolongation of the revolutionary position” (as quoted by Hecht, 2003, p. 409). Atheism, therefore, is not a state one can remain in for very long. For,

As yet another human string, atheism draws me out of the herd of theism. Atheism is in this sense a necessary point of arrival. It is how and where I *stop* my inherited cultural inertia. While as an individual, atheism is my point of departure. It too is a herd I leave behind, for this is not a God/anti-God reality. (Berry, 2009, p. 11)

Atheism represents the end of irrationality and the start of a largely reason based perspective. But it is just that, a “point of departure.”

Going beyond atheism and extending freethought may also have practical benefits. The terms, especially atheism, are so stigmatized that they may actually be harmful to our cause. I agree with Hecht (2003) that:

politics drives a lot of clinging to the three terms [believer, agnostic, atheist], but I also think it is easier to force yourself to be clear if you avoid using, *believer*, *agnostic*, and *atheist* [emphasis in original] and just try to say what you think about what we are and what’s out there. (p. 485)

The “Brights” movement is a response to this challenge, though, I think it is condescending in a way that will ultimately prove counter-productive as well. However, the Brights do highlight an important step forward because they demonstrate that the freethought

community is learning from other progressive civil rights movements (e.g. the term “Gay” was adopted by homosexual’s in order to put a positive spin on their controversial orientation). We need to keep learning and experimenting with different techniques and strategies. Still, in the name game, freethought or humanism are the most progressive and positive options.

Certainly, if there remain individuals or institutions wedded to literal religious sentiment, atheism is an indefinitely tenable position to hold, yet, personally one must struggle to remain affirmative, articulating benefits of a dogma free life. We must communicate why honesty matters, why authenticity and integrity are morally incumbent; why humanity without gods enriches rather than diminishes the lived experience. We do not, and should not, offer easy unjustified answers; literalized religions will always dominate that market. But what we can offer are tools for discovering provisional truths, practical and open dialogue in the here and now, and a chance for individual, collective freedom. We can also gather in communities, perform rituals, tell stories, express an artistic wonder for the world while still being grounded in reality. A skeptical humanistic world-view is a belief to be proud of, a gift to be cherished and protected; for there is indeed “a grandeur to this view of life” (Darwin, 1979, p. 459).

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Affirmations of Humanist Perspectives

Below are two statements by humanist organizations of some of the core perspectives and vision of their community:

In 1952, at the first World Humanist Congress, the founding fathers of IHEU agreed on a statement of the fundamental principles of modern Humanism. They called it 'The Amsterdam Declaration.' That declaration was a product of its time: set in the world of great power politics and the Cold War.

The 50th anniversary World Humanist Congress in 2002, again meeting in the Netherlands, unanimously passed a resolution updating that declaration: 'The Amsterdam Declaration 2002.' Following the Congress, this updated declaration was adopted unanimously by the IHEU General Assembly, and thus became the official defining statement of World Humanism.

Amsterdam Declaration 2002

Humanism is the outcome of a long tradition of free thought that has inspired many of the world's great thinkers and creative artists and gave rise to science itself.

The fundamentals of modern Humanism are as follows:

1. *Humanism is ethical* . It affirms the worth, dignity and autonomy of the individual and the right of every human being to the greatest possible freedom compatible with the rights of others. Humanists have a duty of care to all of humanity including future generations. Humanists believe that morality is an intrinsic part of human nature based on understanding and a concern for others, needing no external sanction.

2. *Humanism is rational* . It seeks to use science creatively, not destructively. Humanists believe that the solutions to the world's problems lie in human thought and action rather than divine intervention. Humanism advocates the application of the methods

of science and free inquiry to the problems of human welfare. But Humanists also believe that the application of science and technology must be tempered by human values. Science gives us the means but human values must propose the ends.

3. *Humanism supports democracy and human rights* . Humanism aims at the fullest possible development of every human being. It holds that democracy and human development are matters of right. The principles of democracy and human rights can be applied to many human relationships and are not restricted to methods of government.

4. *Humanism insists that personal liberty must be combined with social responsibility*. Humanism ventures to build a world on the idea of the free person responsible to society, and recognises our dependence on and responsibility for the natural world. Humanism is undogmatic, imposing no creed upon its adherents. It is thus committed to education free from indoctrination.

5. *Humanism is a response to the widespread demand for an alternative to dogmatic religion*. The world's major religions claim to be based on revelations fixed for all time, and many seek to impose their world-views on all of humanity. Humanism recognises that reliable knowledge of the world and ourselves arises through a continuing process of observation, evaluation and revision.

6. *Humanism values artistic creativity and imagination* and recognises the transforming power of art. Humanism affirms the importance of literature, music, and the visual and performing arts for personal development and fulfilment.

7. *Humanism is a lifeway aiming at the maximum possible fulfilment through the cultivation of ethical and creative living* and offers an ethical and rational means of addressing the challenges of our times. Humanism can be a way of life for everyone everywhere.

Our primary task is to make human beings aware in the simplest terms of what Humanism can mean to them and what it commits

them to. By utilising free inquiry, the power of science and creative imagination for the furtherance of peace and in the service of compassion, we have confidence that we have the means to solve the problems that confront us all. We call upon all who share this conviction to associate themselves with us in this endeavour. (IHEU Congress 2002, 2008, emphasis in original)

There have been several humanist manifestos issued by various groups over the years. The first was created in 1933, signed by John Dewey and 33 American Unitarian ministers, the second was signed by 261 prominent thinkers in 1973, and a third created in 2003 by the American Humanist Association (Cooke, 2006, pp. 262-263). Each has attempted to make clear the perspective of the general humanist community. Below is the perhaps the clearest and most powerful statement of goals and values of global humanism:

Humanist Manifesto 2000: A Call for a New Planetary Humanism drafted by Professor Paul Kurtz, International Academy of Humanism, USA

I. Preamble

Humanism is an ethical, scientific, and philosophical outlook that has changed the world. Its heritage traces back to the philosophers and poets of ancient Greece and Rome, Confucian China, and the Charvaka movement in classical India. Humanist artists, writers, scientists, and thinkers have been shaping the modern era for over half a millennium. Indeed, humanism and modernism have often seemed synonymous for humanist ideas and values express a renewed confidence in the power of human beings to solve their own problems and conquer uncharted frontiers.

II. Prospects for a Better Future

For the first time in human history we possess the means provided by science and technology to ameliorate the human condition, advance happiness and freedom, and enhance human life for all people on this planet.

III. Scientific Naturalism

The unique message of humanism on the current world scene is its commitment to scientific naturalism. Most world views accepted today are spiritual, mystical, or theological in character. They have their origins in ancient pre-urban, nomadic, and agricultural societies of the past, not in the modern industrial or postindustrial global information culture that is emerging. Scientific naturalism enables human beings to construct a coherent world view disentangled from metaphysics or theology and based on the sciences.

IV. The Benefits of Technology

Humanists have consistently defended the beneficent values of scientific technology for human welfare. Philosophers from Francis Bacon to John Dewey have emphasized the increased power over nature that scientific knowledge affords and how it can contribute immeasurably to human advancement and happiness.

V. Ethics and Reason

The realization of the highest ethical values is essential to the humanist outlook. We believe that growth of scientific knowledge will enable humans to make wiser choices. In this way there is no impenetrable wall between fact and value, is and ought. Using reason and cognition will better enable us to appraise our values in the light of evidence and by their consequences.

VI. A Universal Commitment to Humanity as a Whole

The overriding need of the world community today is to develop a new Planetary Humanism—one that seeks to preserve human rights and enhance human freedom and dignity, but also emphasizes our commitment to humanity as a whole. The underlying ethical principle of Planetary Humanism is the need to respect the dignity and worth of all persons in the world community.

VII. A Planetary Bill of Rights and Responsibilities

To fulfill our commitment to Planetary Humanism, we offer a *Planetary Bill of Rights and Responsibilities*, which embodies our planetary commitment to the well-being of humanity as a whole. It incorporates the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, but goes beyond it by offering some new provisions. Many independent countries have sought to implement these provisions within their own national borders. But there is a growing need for an explicit *Planetary Bill of Rights and Responsibilities* that applies to all members of the human species.

VIII. A New Global Agenda

Many of the high ideals that emerged following the Second World War, and that found expression in such instruments as the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, have waned through the world. If we are to influence the future of humankind, we will need to work increasingly with and through the new centers of power and influence to improve equity and stability, alleviate poverty, reduce conflict, and safeguard the environment.

IX. The Need for New Planetary Institutions

The urgent question in the twenty-first century is whether humankind can develop global institutions to address these problems. Many of the best remedies are those adopted on the local, national, and regional level by voluntary, private, and public efforts. One strategy is to seek solutions through free-market initiatives; another is to use international voluntary foundations and organizations for educational and social development. We believe, however, that there remains a need to develop new global institutions that will deal with the problems directly and will focus on the needs of humanity as a whole. These include the call for a bicameral legislature in the United Nations, with a World Parliament elected by the people, an income tax to help the underdeveloped countries, the end of the

veto in the Security Council, an environmental agency, and a world court with powers of enforcement.

X. Optimism about the Human Prospect

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, as members of the human community on this planet we need to nurture a sense of optimism about the human prospect. Although many problems may seem intractable, we have good reasons to believe that we can marshal our talent to solve them, and that by goodwill and dedication a better life will be attainable by more and more members of the human community. Planetary humanism holds forth great promises for humankind. We wish to cultivate a sense of wonder and excitement about the potential opportunities for realizing enriched lives for ourselves and for generations yet to be born. (Kurtz, 2000, emphasis in original)

Appendix B: Top 25 Most Common Logical Fallacies

The following is an excerpt from Bo Bennett's fantastically concise introductory work *Logically... Fallacious: The Ultimate Collection of Over 300 Logical Fallacies* .

See also: *Religion & Pseudoscience Resources: Selected Bibliography: Skepticism & [Counter-Apologetics](#)* and *Religion & Pseudoscience Resources: Additional Resources: Skepticism & [Counter-Apologetics](#)* and [Appendix C](#) .

1. Ad Hominem
2. Appeal to Common Belief
3. Appeal to Faith
4. Ambiguity Fallacy
5. Anonymous Authority
6. Argument by Emotive Language
7. Argument from Ignorance
8. Begging the Question
9. Biased Sample Fallacy
10. Equivocation
11. Failure to Elucidate
12. False Dilemma
13. Hasty Generalization
14. Magical Thinking
15. Moving the Goal Posts
16. Poisoning the Well
17. Prejudicial Language
18. Questionable Cause
19. Red Herring
20. Reductio ad Hitlerum
21. Slippery Slope
22. Special Pleading
23. Strawman Fallacy
24. Weak Analogy
25. Wishful Thinking

1. Ad Hominem (Abusive)

argumentum ad hominem

(also known as: *personal abuse, personal attacks, abusive fallacy, damning the source, name calling, needling [form of], refutation by character*)

Description: Attacking the person making the argument, rather than the argument itself, when the attack on the person is completely irrelevant to the argument the person is making.

Logical Form:

Person 1 is claiming Y.

Person 1 is a moron.

Therefore Y is not true.

Example #1: My opponent suggests that lowering taxes will be a good idea -- this is coming from a woman who eats a pint of Ben and Jerry's each night!

Explanation: The fact that the woman loves her ice cream, has nothing to do with the lowering of taxes, and therefore is irrelevant to the argument. Ad hominem attacks are usually made out of desperation when one cannot find a decent counter argument.

Example #2: Tony wants us to believe that the origin of life was an "accident". Tony is a godless SOB who has spent more time in jail than in church, so the only information we should consider from him is the best way to make license plates.

Explanation: Tony may be a godless SOB. Perhaps he did spend more time in the joint than in church. But all this is irrelevant to his argument or truth of his claim as to the origin of life.

Exception: When the attack on the person is relevant to the argument, it is not a fallacy. In our first example, if the issue being debated was the elimination of taxes only on Ben and Jerry's ice cream, then pointing out her eating habits would be strong evidence of a conflict of interest.

Tip: When others verbally attack you, take it as a compliment to the quality of your argument. It is usually a sign of desperation on their part .

Variation: Needling is attempting to make the other person angry, taking attention off of the argument and perhaps even making the other person look foolish.

2. Appeal to Common Belief

argumentum ad populum

(also known as: *appeal to accepted belief, groupthink, appeal to widespread belief, appeal to the masses, appeal to belief, appeal to the majority, argument by consensus, consensus fallacy, authority of the many, bandwagon fallacy, argumentum ad numerum, appeal to the number, argumentum consensus gentium, appeal to the mob, appeal to the gallery, mob appeal, social conformance, value of community*)

Description: When the claim that most or many people in general or of a particular group accept a belief as true is presented as evidence for the claim. Accepting another person's belief, or many people's beliefs, without demanding evidence as to why that person accepts the belief, is lazy thinking and a dangerous way to accept information.

Logical Form:

*A lot of people believe X.
Therefore, X must be true.*

Example #1: Up until the late 16th century, most people believed that the earth was the center of the universe. This, of course, is not true.

Explanation: The geocentric model was observation (limited) and faith based, but most who accepted the model did so based on the common and accepted belief of the time, not on their own observations, calculations, and or reasoning. It was people like

Copernicus, Galileo and Kepler, who refused to appeal to common belief and uncovered a truth not obvious to the rest of humanity.

Example #2: How could you not believe in virgin births? Roughly two billion people believe in them, don't you think you should reconsider your position?

Explanation: Anyone who believes in virgin births does not have empirical evidence for his or her belief. This is a claim accepted on faith, which is an individual and subjective form of accepting information, that should not have any effect on your beliefs. Don't forget that there was a time that the common beliefs included a flat earth, earth-centered universe, and demon-possession as the root cause of most illness.

Exception: Sometimes there is good reason to think that the common belief is held by people who do have good evidence for believing. For example, if 99.7% of all earth scientists believe that the universe is approximately 13.7 billion years old, it is wise to believe them, because they will be able to present objective and empirical evidence as to why they believe.

Tip: History has shown that those who break away from the common beliefs are the ones who change the course of history. Be a leader, not a follower.

3. Appeal to Faith

Description: This is an abandonment of reason in an argument and a call to faith, usually when reason clearly leads to disproving the conclusion of an argument. It is the assertion that one must have (the right kind of) faith in order to understand the argument.

Even arguments which heavily rely on reason that ultimately require faith, abandon reason.

Logical Form:

X is true.

If you have faith, you will see that.

Example #1: Jimmie: How can you possibly associate gentle Jesus with the same God who says, “I will make my arrows drunk with blood, while my sword devours flesh: the blood of the slain and the captives, the heads of the enemy leaders.”? (Deuteronomy 32:42)

Hollie: You are trying to interpret those words through your carnal mind. You need to read those words through the eyes of faith.

Jimmie: What does that even mean?

Hollie: If you had faith, you would understand.

Explanation: There are some things, some believe, that are beyond reason and logic. Fair enough, but the moment we accept this, absent of any objective method of telling what is beyond reason and why, anything goes. Anything can be explained away without having to explain anything.

Example #2: Tina: So please explain how Jesus can also be God, yet two separate persons who talk to each other.

St. Bingo: My child, you will only see that answer clearly through the eyes of faith.

Explanation: It should be obvious that reason and logic are not being used, but rather “faith”. While St. Bingo may be right, there is still no valid reason offered. The problem also arises in the vagueness of the appeal to faith. St. Bingo’s answer can be used to answer virtually any question imaginable, yet the answer is really a deflection.

St. Bingo: You need to massage my feet.

Tina: Why?

St. Bingo: My child, you will only see that answer clearly through the eyes of faith.

Exception: No exceptions -- the appeal to faith is always a fallacy when used to justify a conclusion in absence of reason.

4. Ambiguity Fallacy

(also known as: *amphiboly, semantical ambiguity, type-token ambiguity [form of], vagueness*)

Description: When an unclear phrase with multiple definitions are used within the argument, therefore don't support the conclusion. Some will say single words count for the ambiguity fallacy, which is really a specific form of a fallacy known as equivocation .

Logical Form:

Claim X is made.

Y is concluded based on an ambiguous understanding of X.

Example #1: It is said that we have a good understanding of our universe. Therefore, we know exactly how it began and exactly when.

Explanation: The ambiguity here is what exactly "good understanding" means. The conclusion assumes a much better understanding than is suggested in the premise, therefore we have the ambiguity fallacy.

Example #2: All living beings come from other living beings. Therefore, the first forms of life must have come from a living being. That living being is God.

Explanation: This argument is guilty of two cases of ambiguity. First, the first use of the phrase, "come from", refers to reproduction, whereas the second use refers to origin. The fact that we know quite a bit about reproduction is irrelevant when considering origin. Second, the first use of, "living being", refers to an empirically verifiable, biological, living organism. The second use of, "living being", refers to a belief of an immaterial god. As you can see, when a term such as, "living being", describes a do-do bird as well as the

all-powerful master of the universe, it has very little meaning and certainly is not specific enough to draw logical or reasonable conclusions.

Exception: Ambiguous phrases are extremely common in the English language and a necessary part of informal logic and reasoning. As long as these ambiguous phrases mean exactly the same thing in all uses of phrase in the argument, this fallacy is not committed.

Variation: The type-token fallacy is committed when a word can refer to either a type (cars) or token (Prius, RAV4, Camry) is used in a way that makes it unclear which it refers to, the statement is ambiguous.

Toyota manufactures dozens of cars.

This obviously refers to the different types of cars, not how many instances (or tokens) of each car was manufactured.

5. Anonymous Authority

(also known as: *appeal to anonymous authority*)

Description: When an unspecified source is used as evidence for the claim. This is commonly indicated by phrases such as “They say that...”, “It has been said...”, “I heard that...”, “Studies show...”, or generalized groups such as, “scientists say...” When we fail to specify a source of the authority, we can’t verify the source, thus the credibility of the argument. Appeals to anonymous sources are more often than not, either a way to fabricate, exaggerate, or misrepresent “facts” in order to deceive others into accepting your claim. At times, this deception is done subconsciously -- it might not always be deliberate.

Logical Form:

Person 1 once heard that X was true.

Therefore X is true.

Example #1: You know, they say that if you swallow gum it takes 7 years to digest. So whatever you do, don't swallow the gum!

Explanation: "They" are wrong as "they" usually are. Gum passes through the system relatively unchanged, but does not hang around for 7 years like a college student terrified to get a job. "They" is a common form of appeal to anonymous authority.

Example #2: The 13.7 billion year-old universe is a big conspiracy. I read this article once where these notable scientists found strong evidence that the universe was created 6000 years ago, but because of losing their jobs, they were forced to keep quiet!

Explanation: Without knowing who these scientists are, or the credibility of the source of the article, we cannot verify the evidence therefore we should not accept the evidence.

Exception: At times an accepted fact uses the same indicating phrases as the ones used for the fallacy, therefore, if the anonymous authority is actually just a statement of an accepted fact, it should be accepted as evidence.

Climate change is happening -- and always has been. Scientists say the earth is certainly in a warming phase, but there is some debate on the exact causes and certainly more debate on what should be done about it politically.

Tip: Be very weary of "they".

6. Argument by Emotive Language

(also known as: *loaded words, loaded language, euphemisms*)

Description: Substituting facts and evidence with words that stir up emotion, with the attempt to manipulate others into accepting the truth of the argument.

Logical Form:

Person A claims that X is true.

*Person A uses very powerful and emotive language in the claim.
Therefore, X is true.*

Example #1: By rejecting God, you are rejecting goodness, kindness, and love itself.

Explanation: Instead of just “not believing” in God, we are “rejecting” God, which is a much stronger term -- especially when God is associated with “goodness”.

Example #2: I don't see what's wrong with engaging the services of a professional escort.

Explanation: That's just a nice way of saying, “soliciting a hooker”. No matter what you call it, unless you live in certain parts of Nevada (or other parts of the world), it is still illegal.

Exception: Language is powerful and should be used to draw in emotions, but never at the expense of valid reasoning and evidence .

7. Argument from Ignorance

Ad Ignorantium

(also known as: *appeal to ignorance, absence of evidence, argument from personal astonishment, argument from Incredulity*)

Description: The assumption of a conclusion or fact based primarily on lack of evidence to the contrary. Usually best described by, “absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.”

Logical Form:

X is true, because you cannot prove that X is false.

X is false, because you cannot prove that X is true.

Example #1: Although we have proven that the moon is not made of spare ribs, we have not proven that its core cannot be filled with them. Therefore, the moon's core is filled with spare ribs.

Explanation: There is an infinity of things we cannot prove -- the moon being filled with spare ribs is one of them. Now you might expect that any “reasonable” person would know that the moon can’t be filled with spare ribs, but you would be expecting too much. People make wild claims, and get away with them, simply on the fact that the converse cannot otherwise be proven.

Example #2: To this very day (at the time of this writing), science has been unable to create life from all inorganic substances, therefore life must be a result of divine intervention.

Explanation: Ignoring the false dilemma, the fact that we have not found a way to create life from all inorganic substances is not evidence that there is no way to create life from all inorganic substances.

Exception: The assumption of a conclusion or fact deduced from evidence of absence, is not considered a fallacy, but valid reasoning.

Jimbo: Dude, did you spit your gum out in my drink?

Dick: No comment.

Jimbo: (after carefully pouring his drink down the sink looking for gum but finding none...) Jackass!

Tip: Look at all your existing major beliefs and see if they are based more on the lack of evidence than evidence. You might be surprised as to how many actually are.

8. Begging the Question

petitio principii

(also known as: *assuming the initial point, assuming the answer, chicken and the egg argument, circulus in probando, circular reasoning [form of], vicious circle*)

Description: Any form of argument where the conclusion is assumed in one of the premises. Many people use the phrase “begging the question” incorrectly when they use it to mean,

“prompts one to ask the question”. That is NOT the correct usage. Begging the question is a form of circular reasoning.

Logical Forms:

Claim X assumes X is true.

Claim X is therefore true.

Example #1: Paranormal activity is real because I have experienced what can only be described as paranormal activity.

Explanation: The claim, “paranormal activity is real” is supported by the premise, “I have experienced what can only be described as paranormal activity.” The premise presupposes, or assumes, that the claim, “paranormal activity is real” is already true.

Example #2: God exists because we exist. The only way we could exist is if God created us.

Explanation: The claim, “God exists” has two supporting premises: 1) “we exist”, which everyone should agree to, and 2) “the only way we could exist is if God created us”, which assumes the conclusion, “God exists”, therefore begs the question.

Exception: Some assumptions that are universally accepted could pass as not being fallacious.

People like to eat because we are biologically influenced to eat.

9. Biased Sample Fallacy

(also known as: *biased statistics, loaded sample, prejudiced statistics, prejudiced sample, loaded statistics, biased induction, biased generalization, unrepresentative sample, unrepresentative generalization*)

Description: Drawing a conclusion about a population based on a sample that is biased, or chosen in order to make it appear the population on average is different than it actually is.

This differs from the hasty generalization fallacy, where the biased sample is specifically chosen from a select group, and the small sample is just a random sample, but too small to get any accurate information.

Logical Form:

*Sample S, which is biased, is taken from population P.
Conclusion C is drawn about population P based on S.*

Example #1: Based on a survey of 1000 American homeowners, 99% of those surveyed have two or more automobiles worth on average \$100,000 each. Therefore, Americans are very wealthy.

Explanation: Where did these homeowners live? Beverly Hills, CA. If the same exact survey was taken in Detroit, the results would be quite different. It is fallacious to accept the conclusion about the American population in general based on not just the geographical sample, but also the fact that homeowners were only surveyed.

Example #2: Pastor Pete: People are turning to God everywhere! 9 out of 10 people I interviewed said that they had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ .

Fred: Where did you find these people you interviewed?

Pastor Pete: In my church.

Explanation: Pastor Pete has drawn a conclusion about religious beliefs from people “everywhere” based on people he has interviewed in his church. That’s like concluding that the world likes to dance naked in front of strangers after interviewing a group of strippers.

Exception: What exactly is “biased” is subjective, but some biases are very clear.

Tip: Be very weary of statistics. Look at the source and details of the studies which produced the statistics. Very often you will find

some kind of bias.

10. Equivocation

(also known as: *doublespeak*)

Description: Using an ambiguous term in more than one sense, thus making an argument misleading.

Example #1: I wanted to have myself a merry little Christmas, so I did as the song suggested and made the yuletide gay by watching the movie, “Funnygirl”, in Provincetown, MA.

Explanation: The word, “gay” is meant to be in light spirits, joyful, and merry, not in the homosexual sense. Besides, watching a Barbara Streisand movie in a city where gay people like to congregate, will not make you gay.

Example #2: The priest told me I should have faith.

I have faith that my son will do good in school this year.

Therefore, the priest should be happy with me.

Explanation: The term “faith” used by the priest, was in the religious sense of believing in God without evidence, which is different from having “faith” in your son in which years of good past performance leads to the “faith” you might have in your son.

Exception: Equivocation works great when deliberate attempts at humor are being made.

Tip: When you suspect equivocation, substitute the word with the exact same definition for all uses and see if it makes sense.

11. Failure to Elucidate

Obscurum per Obscurius

Description: When the definition is made more difficult to understand than the word or concept being defined.

Logical Form:

Person 1 makes a claim.

Person 2 asks for clarification of the claim, or a term being used.

Person 1 restates the claim or term in a more confusing way.

Example #1: Tracy: I don't like him because of his aura.

TJ: What do you mean by that?

Tracy: I mean that he is projecting a field of subtle, luminous radiation that is negative.

Explanation: This is such a common fallacy, yet rarely detected as one. Usually, out of fear of embarrassment, we accept confusing definitions as legitimate elucidations, that is, we pretend the term that was defined is now clear to us. What exactly is the field? How is it detected? Are there negative and positive ones? How do we know?

Example #2: Linda: We live in a spirit filled world; I am certain of that.

Rob: What is a "spirit"?

Linda: A non-corporeal substance.

Explanation: Many times, we fool ourselves into thinking that because we know other words for the term, we better understand what the term actually represents. The above example is an illustration of this. We can redefine, "spirit" as many times as we like, but our understanding of what a spirit actually is will still be lacking.

Assuming we did not really understand what was meant by "spirit", the definition, "non-corporeal substance" might or might not shed any light on what is meant by the term. In this case, it might be more clear now that Linda is not referring to alcoholic beverages, but conceptually, what is a non-physical substance? Especially when "substance" is defined as being physical matter or material.

We fallaciously reason that we now understand what the term represents when in fact we don't.

Exception: Some may actually just lack the vocabulary needed -- this is not your fault, but you should do your best to attempt to elucidate using words understandable to your audience.

Tip: Are there any concepts that you feel you understand, when really you can just define the concept with words?

12. False Dilemma

(also known as: *false dichotomy, the either-or fallacy, either-or reasoning, fallacy of false choice, fallacy of false alternatives, black-and-white thinking, the fallacy of exhaustive hypotheses, bifurcation, excluded middle, no middle ground, polarization*)

Description: When only two choices are presented yet more exist, or a spectrum of possible choices exist between two extremes. False dilemmas are usually characterized by "either this or that" language, but can also be characterized by omissions of choices. Another variety is the false trilemma, which is when three choices are presented when more exist.

Logical Form:

Either X or Y is true.

Either X, Y or Z is true.

Example (two choices):

You are either with God, or against him.

Explanation: As Obi Wan Kenobi so eloquently puts it in Star Wars episode III, "Only a Sith deals in absolutes!" There are also those who simply don't believe there is a God to either be for or against.

Example (omission):

I thought you were a good person, but you weren't at church today.

Explanation: The assumption here is that bad people don't go to church. Of course, good people exist who don't go to church, and good church-going people could have had a really good reason not to be in church -- like a hangover from the swingers gathering the night before.

Example (trilemma):

Don't give me that, "Jesus was just a good teacher" crap. As C.S. Lewis says, Jesus was either Lord, lunatic, or liar.

Explanation: C.S. Lewis left off a very crucial option: legend.

Exception: It is not a fallacy if other options exist but you are not offering other options as a possibility. For example:

Mom: Billy, it's time for bed.

Billy: Can I stay up and watch a movie?

Mom: You can either go to bed or stay up for another 30 minutes and read.

Billy: That is a false dilemma!

Mom: No, it's not. Here, read Bo's book and you will see why.

Billy: This is freaky, our exact conversation is used as an example in this book!

Tip: Be conscious of how many times you are presented with false dilemmas, and how many times you present yourself with false dilemmas.

13. Hasty Generalization

(also known as: *argument from small numbers, statistics of small numbers, insufficient statistics, unrepresentative sample [form of], argument by generalization, faulty generalization, hasty conclusion [form of], inductive generalization, insufficient sample, lonely fact fallacy, over generality, over generalization*)

Description: Drawing a conclusion based on a small sample size, rather than looking at statistics that are much more in line with the typical or average situation.

Logical Form:

Sample S is taken from population P.

Sample S is a very small part of population P.

Conclusion C is drawn from sample S.

Example #1: My father smoked four packs of cigarettes a day since age fourteen, and lived until age sixty-nine. Therefore, smoking really can't be that bad for you.

Explanation: It is extremely unreasonable (and dangerous) to draw a universal conclusion about the health risks of smoking by the case study of one man.

Example #2: Four out of five dentists recommend Happy Glossy Smiley toothpaste brand. Therefore, it must be great.

Explanation: It turns out, that only five dentists were actually asked. When a random sampling of 1000 dentists were polled, only 20% actually recommended the brand. The four out of five result was not necessarily a biased sample or a dishonest survey, it just happened to be a statistical anomaly common among small samples

Exception: When statistics of a larger population are not available, and a decision must be made or opinion formed, if the small sample size is all you have to work with, then it is better than nothing. For example, if you are strolling in the desert with a friend, and he goes to pet a cute snake, gets bitten, then dies instantly, it would not be fallacious to assume the snake is poisonous.

Tip: Don't base decisions on small sample sizes when much more reliable data exists.

Variation: The hasty conclusion is leaping to a conclusion without carefully considering the alternatives -- a tad different than drawing a conclusion from too small of a sample.

14. Magical Thinking

(also known as: *post hoc fallacy [form of], superstitious thinking*)

Description: Making causal connections or correlations between two events not based on logic or evidence, but primarily based on superstition. Magical thinking often causes one to experience irrational fear of performing certain acts or having certain thoughts because they assume a correlation with their acts and threatening calamities.

Example #1: Mr. Governor issues a proclamation for the people of his state to pray for rain. Several months later, it rains. Praise God!

Explanation: Suggesting that appealing to the gods for rain via prayer or dance is just the kind of thing crazy enough to get you elected President of the United States, but there is absolutely no logical reason or evidence to support the claim that appealing to the gods will make it rain.

Example #2: I refuse to stay on the 13th floor of any hotel because it is bad luck. However, I don't mind staying on the same floor as long as we call it the 14th floor.

Explanation: This demonstrates the kind of magical thinking that so many people in this country engage in, that, according to Dilip Rangnekar of Otis Elevators, an estimated 85% of buildings with elevators did not have a floor numbered "13". There is zero evidence that the number 13 has any property that causes bad luck -- of course, it is the superstitious mind that connects that number with bad luck.

Example #3: I knew I should have helped that old lady across the road. Because I didn't, I have been having bad Karma all day.

Explanation: This describes how one who believes that they deserve bad fortune, will most likely experience it due to the confirmation bias and other self-fulfilling prophecy-like behavior. Yet there is no logical or rational basis behind the concept of Karma.

Exception: If you can empirically prove your magic, then you can use your magic to reason.

Tip: Magical thinking may be comforting at times, but reality is always what's true.

15. Moving the Goal Posts

(also known as: *gravity game, raising the bar, argument by demanding impossible perfection [form of]*)

Description: Demanding from an opponent that he or she address more and more points, after the initial counter-argument has been satisfied, refusing to concede or accept the opponent's argument.

Logical Form:

Issue A has been raised, and adequately answered.

Issue B is then raised, and adequately answered.

.....

Issue Z is then raised, and adequately answered.

(despite all issues adequately answered, the opponent refuses to concede or accept the argument.

Example #1: Ken: There has to be an objective morality, because otherwise terms like "right" and "wrong" would be meaningless, since they have no foundation for comparison .

Rob: The terms "right" and "wrong" are based on cultural norms, which do have a subjective foundation -- one that changes as the moral sphere of the culture changes. The term "heavy" does not have an objective standard, yet we have no problem using that term in a meaningful way. In fact, very few relational terms have any kind of objective foundation.

Ken: But without an objective morality, we would all be lost morally as a race.

Rob: Many would say that we are.

Ken: But how can you say that torturing children for fun is morally acceptable in any situation?

Rob: Personally, I wouldn't. But you are implying that anything that is not objective must necessarily be seen in all possible ways. A feather may not be seen as "heavy" to anyone, but that doesn't mean its "lightness" is still not relative to other objects.

Ken: But God is the standard of objective morality. Prove that wrong!

Explanation: Ken starts with a statement explaining why he thinks there has to be an objective morality -- a statement based on a reasonable argument that can be pursued with reason and logic. Rob adequately answers that objection, as indicated by Ken's move away from that objection to a new objection. This pattern continues until we arrive at an impossible request: to essentially prove that God does not exist. Despite all the objections being adequately answered, at no time does Ken concede any points or abandon the argument.

Example #2: Perhaps the most classic example of this fallacy is the argument for the existence of God. Due to understanding of nature through science, many of the arguments that used to be used for God (or gods) were abandoned, only to be replaced with new ones, usually involving questions to which science has not definitively answered yet. The move from creationism to intelligent design, is a prime example. Currently the origin of life is a popular argument for God (although a classic argument from ignorance), and an area where we very well may have a scientific answer for in the next decade, at which time, that "origin of life" argument will fade away and be replaced by another, thus moving the figurative goal posts farther back.

Exception: This fallacy should not be confused with an argument or set of arguments, with multiple propositions inherent in the argument. The reason for the difference between this kind of argument and the moving the goal posts fallacy, is a subtle one, but indicated by a strong initial claim (“has to be”, “must”, “required for”, etc.) that gets answered and/or what appears to be ad hoc objections that follow eventually leading to an impossible request for proof.

16. Poisoning the Well

(also known as: *discrediting, smear tactics*)

Description: To commit a pre-emptive ad hominem attack against an opponent. That is, to prime the audience with adverse information about the opponent from the start, in an attempt to make your claim more acceptable, or discount the credibility of your opponent’s claim.

Logical Form:

*Adverse information (be it true or false) about person 1 is presented.
Therefore, the claim(s) of person 1 will be false.*

Example #1: Tim: Boss, you heard my side of the story why I think Bill should be fired and not me. Now, I am sure Bill is going to come to you with some pathetic attempt to weasel out of this lie that he has created.

Explanation: Tim is poisoning the well by priming his boss by attacking Bill’s character, and setting up any defense Bill might present as “pathetic”. Tim is committing the fallacy here, but if the boss were to accept Tim’s advice about Bill, she, too, would be committing the fallacy.

Example #2: I hope I presented my argument clearly. Now, my opponent will attempt to refute my argument by his own fallacious, incoherent, illogical version of history.

Explanation: Not a very nice setup for the opponent. As an audience member, if you allow any of this “poison” to affect how you evaluate the opponent’s argument, you are guilty of fallacious reasoning.

Exception: Remember that if a person states facts relevant to the argument, it is not an ad hominem attack. In the first example, if the other “poison” were left out, no fallacy would be committed.

Tim: Boss, you heard my side of the story why I think Bill should be fired and not me. Now, I am sure Bill is going to come to you with his side of the story, but please keep in mind that we have two witnesses to the event who both agree that Bill was the one who told the client that she had ugly children.

17. Prejudicial Language

(also known as: *variant imagization*)

Description: Loaded or emotive terms used to attach value or moral goodness to believing the proposition.

Logical Form:

*Claim A is made using loaded or emotive terms.
Therefore, claim A is true.*

Example #1: All good Catholics know that impure thoughts are the work of the devil, and should be resisted at all costs.

Explanation: The phrase “all good Catholics” is the loaded or prejudicial language being used. The implication is that Catholics who don’t resist impure thoughts are “bad Catholics”, which is not fair -- they may just not be as strong willed, or perhaps they don’t buy into the mind-control portion of the religion.

Example #2: Students who want to succeed in life will do their homework each and every night.

Explanation: The assertion is that students who don't do their homework every night don't want to succeed in life, which is bad reasoning. Perhaps the student is sick one night, tired, doesn't understand the work, or was busy making out with his father's secretary in the office supply closet, next to the memo pads. The point is, dad, you cannot assume that just because I skipped homework a few nights that it means I didn't want to succeed in life!

Exception: This is often used for motivation, even if the intent is honorable, it is still fallacious.

18. Questionable Cause

cum hoc ergo propter hoc

(also known as: *ignoring a common cause, neglecting a common cause, confusing correlation and causation, confusing cause and effect, false cause, third cause, juxtaposition [form of], reversing causality/wrong direction [form of]*)

Description: Concluding that one thing caused another, simply because they are regularly associated.

Logical Form:

A is regularly associated with B, therefore A causes B.

Example #1: Every time I go to sleep, the sun goes down. Therefore, my going to sleep causes the sun to set.

Explanation: I hope the fallacious reasoning here is very clear and needs no explanation.

Example #2: Many homosexuals have AIDS, therefore, homosexuality causes AIDS.

Explanation: While AIDS is found in a much larger percentage of the homosexual population than in the heterosexual population, we cannot conclude that homosexuality is the cause of AIDS, any more than we can conclude that heterosexuality is the cause of pregnancy.

Exception: When strong evidence is provided for causation, it is not a fallacy.

Variation: The juxtaposition fallacy is putting two items/ideas together, implying a causal connection, but never actually stating that one exists.

It's funny how whenever you are around, the room smells bad.

Reversing causality or wrong direction is just what it sounds like -- it is still a false cause, but the specific case where one claims something like the sun sets because night time is coming.

19. Red Herring

Ignoratio elenchi

(also known as: *beside the point, misdirection [form of], changing the subject, false emphasis, the Chewbacca defense, irrelevant conclusion, irrelevant thesis, smokescreen, clouding the issue, ignorance of refutation, judgmental language [form of]*)

Description: Attempting to redirect the argument to another issue to which the person doing the redirecting can better respond. While it is similar to the avoiding the issue fallacy, the red herring is a deliberate diversion of attention with the intention of trying to abandon the original argument.

Logical Form:

Argument A is presented by person 1.

Person 2 introduces argument B.

Argument A is abandoned.

Example #1: Mike: It is morally wrong to cheat on your spouse, why on earth would you have done that?

Ken: But what is morality exactly?

Mike: It's a code of conduct shared by cultures.

Ken: But who creates this code?...

Explanation: Ken has successfully derailed this conversation off of his sexual digressions to the deep, existential, discussion on morality.

Example #2: Billy: How could the universe be 6000 years old when we know the speed of light, the distance of astronomical objects (13+ billion light years away), and the fact that the light has reached us[1]?

Marty: 6000 years is not a firm number. The universe can be as old as about 10,000 years.

Billy: How do you figure that?...

Explanation: Marty has succeeded in avoiding the devastating question by introducing a new topic for debate... shifting the young-earth creation timeline where it does not necessarily coincide with the Bible.

Exception: Using a red herring to divert attention away from your opponent's red herring, might work. But do two wrongs make a right?

Tip: Impress your friends by telling them that there is no such fish species as a "red herring"; rather it refers to a particularly pungent fish—typically a herring but not always—that has been strongly cured in brine and/or heavily smoked.

Variation: Using judgmental language is using insulting, compromising or pejorative language to influence the recipient's judgment, and take the attention off the real argument.

[1] The most distant object yet confirmed in the universe is a self-destructing star that exploded 13.1 billion light years from Earth. The object is a gamma-ray burst (GRB) – the brightest type of stellar explosion. The burst is dubbed GRB 090423 for the date of its discovery.

20. Reductio ad Hitlerum

reductio ad hitlerum

(also known as: *argumentum ad Hitlerum*, *playing the Nazi card*,
Hitler Card)

Description: The attempt to make an argument analogous with Hitler or the Nazi party. Hitler is probably the most universally despised figure in history, so any connection to Hitler, or his beliefs, can (erroneously) cause others to view the argument in a similar light. However, this fallacy is becoming more well known, as is the fact that it is most often a desperate attempt to render the truth claim of the argument invalid out of lack of a good counter argument.

Logical Form:

Person 1 suggests that Y is true.

Hitler liked Y.

Therefore, Y is false.

Person 1 suggests that Y is true.

Person 1's rhetoric sounds a bit like Hitler's.

Therefore, Y is false.

Example #1: Peter Gibbons: It's NOT wrong. INITECH is wrong. INITECH is an evil corporation, all right? Chockies is wrong. Doesn't it bother you that you have to get up in the morning and you have to put on a bunch of pieces of flair?

Joanna: Yeah, but I'm not about to go in and start taking money from the register.

Peter Gibbons: Well, maybe you should. You know, the Nazis had pieces of flair that they made the Jews wear.

Joanna: What?

Explanation: The above was from the classic masterpiece film, "Office Space". Out of desperation, Peter plays the Nazi card in order to make the idea of being made to wear flair more appalling. This somewhat jarring statement misdirects the argument and the focus is taken off Joanna's last response, which was quite good.

Example #2: The God of the *Old Testament* was big into religious cleansing. Hitler was big into ethnic cleansing. Therefore, God is like Hitler.

Explanation: There are far too many good arguments against the God of the Old Testament character to have to resort to playing the Hitler card.

Exception: When the Hitler reference cannot reasonably be avoided.

Mr. President, I can appreciate your desire to make some changes in the White House, but that new hand gesture you are proposing we use to show our allegiance to you, is way too much like the one Hitler used. On a similar note, that Charlie Chaplin mustache doesn't work on you.

21. Slippery Slope

(also known as: *absurd extrapolation, thin edge of the wedge, camel's nose, domino fallacy*)

Definition: When a relatively insignificant first event is suggested to lead to a more significant event, which in turn leads to a more significant event, and so on, until some ultimate, significant event is reached, where the connection of each event is not only unwarranted, but with each step it becomes more and more improbable. Many events are usually present in this fallacy, but only two are actually required -- usually connected by "the next thing you know..."

Logical Form:

If A, then B, then C, ... then ultimately Z!

Example #1: We cannot unlock our child from the closet because if we do, she will want to then roam the house. If we let her roam the house, she will want to roam the neighborhood. If she roams the neighborhood, she will get picked up by a stranger in a van, who will

sell her in a sex slavery ring in some other country. Therefore, we should keep her locked up in the closet.

Explanation: In this example, it starts out with reasonable effects to the causes. For example, yes, if the child is allowed to go free in her room, she would most likely want to roam the house -- 95% probability estimate[1]. Sure, if she roams the house, she will probably want the freedom of going outside, but not necessarily "roaming the neighborhood", but let's give that a probability of say 10%. Now we start to get very improbable. The chances of her getting picked up by a stranger (.05%) in a van (35%) to sell her into sex slavery (.07%) in another country (40%) is next to nothing when you do all the math:

$.95 \times .10 \times .0005 \times .35 \times .0007 \times .4 =$ about 1 in 25,000,000.

Morality and legality aside, is it really worth it to keep a child locked in a closet based on those odds?

Example #2: If you accept that the story of Adam and Eve was figurative, then you will do the same for most of the *Old Testament* stories of similar literary styles. Once you are there, the *New Testament* and the story of Jesus does not make sense, which will lead you to believe that the resurrection of Jesus was a "spiritual" one. Once you accept that, you won't be a Christian anymore, you will be a dirty atheist, then you will have no morals and start having sex with animals of a barnyard nature. So you better take the story of Adam and Eve literally, before the phrase, "that chicken looks delicious", takes on a whole new meaning.

Explanation: Accepting the story of Adam and Eve as figurative rarely (it is sad that I cannot confidently say "never") leads to bestiality.

Exception: When a chain of events has an inevitable cause and effect relationship, as in a mathematical, logical, or physical certainty, it is not a fallacy.

Tip: The concept of a “bad day” is part of this fallacy. You wake up in the morning and you discover that you are out of coffee. From there, you fallaciously reason that this means you will be grumpy, late for work, therefore behind all day in work, therefore have to stay late, therefore miss dinner with the family, therefore cause more friction at home, etc. This is only true if you act it out as if it is true. And of course, with an already bad attitude, you look back on the day, block out the good and wallow in the bad, just so you can tell yourself, that you were right all along about having a “bad day”.

Don't let that happen.

[1] I am basing these estimates on my best guess... this is not meant to be an accurate study on child abduction, just an illustration of how odds work in the fallacy.

22. Special Pleading

Description: Applying standards, principles, and/or rules to other people or circumstances, while making oneself or certain circumstances exempt from the same critical criteria, without providing adequate justification. Special pleading is often a result of strong emotional beliefs that interfere with reason.

Example #1: Yes, I do think that all drunk drivers should go to prison, but your honor, he is my son! He is a good boy who just made a mistake!

Explanation: The mother in this example has applied the rule that all drunk drivers should go to prison. However, due to her emotional attachment to her son, she is fallaciously reasoning that he should be exempt from this rule, because, “he is a good boy who just made a mistake”, which would hardly be considered adequate justification for exclusion from the rule.

Example #2: Superstition is a belief or practice resulting from ignorance, fear of the unknown, trust in magic or chance, or a false

conception of causation -- unless it is written in the *Bible* , then it is reasonable faith.

Explanation: It has been said that one's superstition is another's faith. The standard of superstition has been defined by the person, and violated by the Bible (attributing God and demons as the cause of natural phenomenon). But while the person in the example rejects all other holy books and sources of superstition using certain criteria, the book of their choice, the Bible, is exempt from these criteria.

Many non-Catholic Christians take offense in the superstitions of the Catholics, like priests thinking they can turn wine into the literal blood of Jesus Christ, yet have no problem with believing that pouring water over the head, while making a few cantations, "washes away" original sin. This is special pleading.

Exception: "Adequate justification" is subjective, and can be argued.

Tip: If you are accused of special pleading, take time to honestly consider if the accusation is warranted. This is a fallacy that is easy to spot when others make it, yet difficult to spot when we make it .

23. Strawman Fallacy

Description: Substituting a person's actual position or argument with a distorted, exaggerated, or misrepresented version of the position of the argument.

Logical Form:

Person 1 makes claim Y.

Person 2 restates person 1's claim (in a distorted way).

Person 2 attacks the distorted version of the claim.

Therefore, claim Y is false.

Example #1: Ted: Biological evolution is both a theory and a fact.

Edwin: That is ridiculous! How can you possibly be absolutely certain that we evolved from pond scum!

Ted: Actually that is a gross misrepresentation of my assertion. I never claimed we evolved from pond scum. And, unlike math and logic, science is based on empirical evidence and therefore a scientific fact is something that is confirmed to such a degree that it would be perverse to withhold provisional consent. The empirical evidence for the fact that biological evolution does occur, falls into this category.

Explanation: Edwin has ignorantly mischaracterized the argument by a) assuming we evolved from pond scum (whatever that is exactly), and b) assuming “fact” means “certainty”.

Example #2: Zebedee: What is your view on the Christian God?

Mike: I don't believe in any gods, including the Christian one.

Zebedee: So you think that we are here by accident, and all this design in nature is pure chance, and the universe just created itself?

Mike: You got all that from me stating that I just don't believe in any gods?

Explanation: Mike made one claim: that he does not believe in any gods. From that, we can deduce a few things, like he is not a theist, he is not a practicing Christian, Catholic, Jew, or a member of any other religion that requires the belief in a god. But we cannot deduce that he believes we are all here by accident, nature is chance, and the universe created itself. Mike might have no beliefs about these things whatsoever. Perhaps he distinguishes between “accident” and natural selection, perhaps he thinks the concept of design is something we model after the universe, and perhaps he has some detailed explanation based on known physics as to how the universe might have first appeared. Regardless, this was a gross mischaracterization of Mike's argument.

Exception: At times, an opponent might not want to expand on the implications of his or her position, so making assumptions might be the only way to get the opponent to point out that your interpretation is not accurate, then they will be forced to clarify.

24. Weak Analogy

(also known as: *bad analogy, false analogy, faulty analogy, questionable analogy, argument from spurious similarity, false metaphor*)

Description: When an analogy is used to prove or disprove an argument, but the analogy is too dissimilar to be effective, that is, it is unlike the argument more than it is like the argument.

Logical Form:

X is like Y.

Y has property P.

Therefore, X has property P.

(but X really is not too much like Y)

Example #1: Not believing in the literal resurrection of Jesus because the *Bible* has errors and contradictions, is like denying that the Titanic sunk because eye-witnesses did not agree if the ship broke in half before or after it sunk.

Explanation: This is an actual analogy used by, I am sorry to say, one of my favorite Christian debaters (one who usually seems to value reason and logic). There are several problems with this analogy, including:

- The Titanic sunk in recent history
- We know for a fact that the testimonies we have are of eye-witnesses
- We have physical evidence of the sunken Titanic

Example #2: How can you possibly look at something so elegant as a rose, and not see that it must have been designed by an

intelligent designer? That is like walking on the beach, finding a watch, and not recognizing that it had an intelligent designer!

Explanation: A rose is like a watch as in they both look as if they were designed. A rose is unlike a watch in thousands of ways including:

- a rose is living, a watch is not
- a rose is guided by evolution, a watch is not
- a rose makes copies of itself with variations in the DNA, a watch does not, etc.

Exception: It is important to note that analogies cannot be “faulty” or “correct”, and even calling them “good” or “bad” is not as accurate as referring to them as either “weak” or “strong”. The use of an analogy is an argument in itself, the strength of which is very subjective. What is weak to one person, is strong to another.

Tip: Analogies are very useful, powerful, and persuasive ways to communicate ideas. Use them -- just make them strong.

25. Wishful Thinking

(also known as: *appeal to consequences [form of]*)

Description: When the desire for something to be true is used in place of/or as evidence for the truthfulness of the claim. Wishful thinking, more as a cognitive bias than a logical fallacy, can also cause one to evaluate evidence very differently based on the desired outcome.

Logical Form:

*I wish X were true.
Therefore, it is true.*

Example #1: I know in my heart of hearts that our home team will win the World Series.

Explanation: No, you don't know that. And what the heck is, “heart of hearts” anyway? This is classic wishful thinking -- wanting the

home team to win so pretending that it is/has to be true.

Example #2: I believe that when we die, we are all given new, young, perfect bodies, and we spend eternity with those whom we love. I can't imagine the point of life if it all just ends when we die!

Explanation: The fact that one doesn't like the idea of simply not existing is not evidence for the belief. Besides, nobody seemed to mind the eternity they didn't exist before they were born.

Exception: When wishful thinking is expressed as a hope, wish, or prayer, and no belief is formed as a result, then it is not a fallacy because no direct or indirect argument is being made.

I really hope that I don't have to spend my eternity with my aunt Edna, who really loved me, but she drove me nuts with her constant jabbering.

Tip: Wishing for something to be true is a powerful technique when and only when, a) you have influence on what it is you want to be true and b) you take action to make it come true -- not just wish for it to be true.

Appendix C: 36 Arguments for the Existence of God:
Appendix to 36 Arguments for the Existence of God: A Work of
Fiction by Rebecca Newberger Goldstein.

See also: *Religion & Pseudoscience Resources: Selected Bibliography: Skepticism & [Counter-Apologetics](#)* and *Religion & Pseudoscience Resources: Additional Resources: Skepticism & [Counter-Apologetics](#)* and [Appendix B](#) .

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31. The Argument from Decision Theory (Pascal's Wager)
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34. The Argument from Sublimity
35. The Argument from the Intelligibility of the Universe (Spinoza's God)
36. The Argument from the Abundance of Arguments

1. The Cosmological Argument

1. Everything that exists must have a cause.
2. The universe must have a cause (from 1).
3. Nothing can be the cause of itself.
4. The universe cannot be the cause of itself (from 3).
5. Something outside the universe must have caused the universe (from 2 and 4).
6. God is the only thing that is outside of the universe.
7. God caused the universe (from 5 and 6).
8. God exists.

FLAW 1 CAN BE CRUELY PUT: Who caused God? The Cosmological Argument is a prime example of the Fallacy of Passing the Buck: invoking God to solve some problem, but then leaving unanswered that very same problem about God himself. The proponent of The Cosmological Argument must admit a contradiction to either his first premise—and say that, though God exists, he doesn't have a cause—or else a contradiction to his third premise—and say that God is self-caused. Either way, the theist is saying that his premises have at least one exception, but is not explaining why *God* must be the unique exception, otherwise than asserting his unique mystery (the Fallacy of Using One Mystery to Explain Another). Once you admit of exceptions, you can ask why the universe itself, which is also unique, can't be the exception. The universe itself can either exist without a cause, or else can be self-caused. Since the buck has to stop somewhere, why not with the universe?

FLAW 2: The notion of “cause” is by no means clear, but our best definition is a relation that holds between events that are connected by physical laws. Knocking the vase off the table caused it to crash to the floor; smoking three packs a day caused his lung cancer. To apply this concept to the universe itself is to misuse the concept of cause, extending it into a realm in which we have no idea how to use it. This line of reasoning, based on the unjustified demands we make on the concept of cause, was developed by David Hume.

COMMENT: The Cosmological Argument, like The Argument from the Big Bang and The Argument from the Intelligibility of the Universe, is an expression of our cosmic befuddlement at the question, why is there something rather than nothing? The late philosopher Sidney Morgenbesser had a classic response to this question: “And if there were nothing? You’d still be complaining!”

2. The Ontological Argument

1. Nothing greater than God can be conceived (this is stipulated as part of the definition of “God”).
2. It is greater to exist than not to exist.
3. If we conceive of God as not existing, then we can conceive of something greater than God (from 2).
4. To conceive of God as not existing is not to conceive of God (from 1 and 3).
5. It is inconceivable that God not exist (from 4).
6. God exists.

This argument, first articulated by Saint Anselm (1033–1109), the Archbishop of Canterbury, is unlike any other, proceeding purely on the conceptual level. Everyone agrees that the mere existence of a concept does not entail that there are examples of that concept; after all, we can know what a unicorn is and at the same time say, “Unicorns don’t exist.” The claim of The Ontological Argument is that the concept of God is the one exception to this generalization. The very concept of God, when defined correctly, entails that there is something that satisfies that concept. Although most people suspect that there is something wrong with this argument, it’s not so easy to figure out what it is.

FLAW: It was Immanuel Kant who pinpointed the fallacy in The Ontological Argument—it is to treat “existence” as a property, like “being fat” or “having ten fingers.” The Ontological Argument relies on a bit of wordplay, assuming that “existence” is just another property, but logically it is completely different. If you really could treat “existence” as just part of the definition of the concept of God, then you could just as easily build it into the definition of any other concept. We could, with the wave of our verbal magic wand, define a *trunicorn* as “a horse that (a) has a single horn on its head, and (b) exists.” So, if you think about a trunicorn, you’re thinking about something that must, by definition, exist; therefore, trunicorns exist. This is clearly absurd: we could use this line of reasoning to prove that any figment of our imagination exists.

COMMENT: Once again, Sidney Morgenbesser offered a pertinent remark, in the form of The Ontological Argument for God’s Non-Existence: Existence is such a lousy thing, how could God go and do it?

3. The Argument from Design

A. The Classical Teleological Argument

1. Whenever there are things that cohere only because of a purpose or function (for example, all the complicated parts of a watch that allow it to keep time), we know that they had a designer who designed them with the function in mind; they are too improbable to have arisen by random physical processes. (A hurricane blowing through a hardware store could not assemble a watch.)
2. Organs of living things, such as the eye and the heart, cohere only because they have a function (for example, the eye has a cornea, lens, retina, iris, eyelids, and so on, which are found in the same organ only because together they make it possible for the animal to see).
3. These organs must have a designer who designed them with their function in mind: just as a watch implies a watchmaker, an eye implies an eye-maker (from 1 and 2).
4. These things have not had a human designer.

5. Therefore, these things must have had a non-human designer (from 3 and 4).
6. God is the non-human designer (from 5).
7. God exists.

FLAW: Darwin showed how the process of replication could give rise to the *illusion* of design without the foresight of an actual designer. Replicators make copies of themselves, which make copies of themselves, and so on, giving rise to an exponential number of descendants. In any finite environment, the replicators must compete for the energy and materials necessary for replication. Since no copying process is perfect, errors will eventually crop up, and any error that causes a replicator to reproduce more efficiently than its competitors will result in the predominance of that line of replicators in the population. After many generations, the dominant replicators will *appear* to have been designed for effective replication, whereas all they have done is accumulate the copying errors, which in the past *did* lead to effective replication. The fallacy in the argument, then, is Premise 1 (and, as a consequence, Premise 3, which depends on it): parts of a complex object serving a complex function do not, in fact, require a designer. In the twenty-first century, creationists have tried to revive the Teleological Argument in three forms:

B. The Argument from Irreducible Complexity

1. Evolution has no foresight, and every incremental step must be an improvement over the preceding one, allowing the organism to survive and reproduce better than its competitors.
2. In many complex organs, the removal or modification of any part would destroy the functional whole. Examples are the lens and retina of the eye, the molecular components of blood clotting, and the molecular motor powering the cell's flagellum. Call these organs "irreducibly complex."
3. These organs could not have been useful to the organisms that possessed them in any simpler forms (from 2).
4. The theory of natural selection cannot explain these irreducibly complex systems (from 1 and 3).
5. Natural selection is the only way out of the conclusions of The Classical Teleological Argument.

6. God exists (from 4 and 5 and The Classical Teleological Argument).

This argument has been around since the time of Charles Darwin, and his replies to it still hold.

FLAW 1: For many organs, Premise 2 is false. An eye without a lens can still see, just not as well as an eye with a lens.

FLAW 2: For many other organs, removal of a part, or other alterations, may render it useless for its current function, but the organ could have been useful to the organism for some other function. Insect wings, before they were large enough to be effective for flight, were used as heatexchange panels. This is also true for most of the molecular mechanisms, such as the flagellum motor, invoked in The New Argument from Irreducible Complexity.

FLAW 3 (the Fallacy of Arguing from Ignorance): There may be biological systems for which we don't yet know how they may have been useful in simpler versions. But there are obviously many things we don't yet understand in molecular biology, and, given the huge success that biologists have achieved in explaining so many examples of incremental evolution in other biological systems, it is more reasonable to infer that these gaps will eventually be filled by the day-to-day progress of biology than to invoke a supernatural designer just to explain these temporary puzzles.

COMMENT: This last flaw can be seen as one particular instance of the more general, fallacious Argument from Ignorance:

1. There are things that we cannot explain yet.
2. Those things must be attributed to God.

FLAW: Premise 1 is obviously true. If there weren't things that we could not explain yet, then science would be complete, laboratories and observatories would unplug their computers and convert to condominiums, and all departments of science would be converted to departments of the history of science. Science is only in business because there are things we have not explained yet. So we cannot

infer from the existence of genuine, ongoing science that there must be a God. In other words, Premise 2 does not follow from Premise 1.

C. The Argument from the Paucity of Benign Mutations

1. Evolution is powered by random mutations and natural selection.
2. Organisms are complex, improbable systems, and by the laws of probability any change is astronomically more likely to be for the worse than for the better.
3. The majority of mutations would be deadly for the organism (from 2).
4. The amount of time it would take for all the benign mutations needed for the assembly of an organ to appear by chance is preposterously long (from 3).
5. In order for evolution to work, something outside of evolution had to bias the process of mutation, increasing the number of benign ones (from 4).
6. Something outside of the mechanism of biological change—the Prime Mutator—must bias the process of mutations for evolution to work (from 5).
7. The only entity that is both powerful enough and purposeful enough to be the Prime Mutator is God.
8. God exists.

FLAW: Evolution does not require infinitesimally improbable mutations, such as a fully formed eye appearing out of the blue in a single generation, because (a) mutations can have small effects (tissue that is slightly more transparent, or cells that are slightly more sensitive to light), and mutations contributing to these effects can accumulate over time; (b) for any sexually reproducing organism, the necessary mutations do not have to have occurred one after another in a single line of descendants, but could have appeared independently in thousands of separate organisms, each mutating at random, and the necessary combinations could come together as the organisms have mated and exchanged genes; (c) life on Earth has had a vast amount of time to accumulate the necessary mutations (almost four billion years).

D. The Argument from the Original Replicator

1. Evolution is the process by which an organism evolves from simpler ancestors.
2. Evolution by itself cannot explain how the original ancestor—the first living thing—came into existence (from 1).
3. The theory of natural selection can deal with this problem only by saying that the first living thing evolved out of non-living matter (from 2).
4. That original non-living matter (call it the Original Replicator) must be capable of (a) self-replication, (b) generating a functioning mechanism out of surrounding matter to protect itself against falling apart, and (c) surviving slight mutations to itself that will then result in slightly different replicators.
5. The Original Replicator is complex (from 4).
6. The Original Replicator is too complex to have arisen from purely physical processes (from 5 and The Classical Teleological Argument). For example, DNA, which currently carries the replicated design of organisms, cannot be the Original Replicator, because DNA molecules require a complex system of proteins to remain stable and to replicate, and could not have arisen from natural processes before complex life existed.
7. Natural selection cannot explain the complexity of the Original Replicator (from 3 and 6).
8. The Original Replicator must have been created rather than have evolved (from 7 and The Classical Teleological Argument).
9. Anything that was created requires a Creator.
10. God exists.

FLAW 1: Premise 6 states that a replicator, because of its complexity, cannot have arisen from natural processes, i.e. by way of natural selection. But the mathematician John von Neumann proved in the 1950s that it is theoretically possible for a simple physical system to make exact copies of itself from surrounding materials. Since then, biologists and chemists have identified a number of naturally occurring molecules and crystals that can replicate in ways that could lead to natural selection (in particular, that allow random variations to be preserved in the copies). Once a molecule replicates, the process of natural selection can kick in, and the replicator can accumulate matter and become more complex, eventually leading to precursors of the replication system used by living organisms today.

FLAW 2: Even without von Neumann's work (which not everyone accepts as conclusive), to conclude the existence of God from our not yet knowing how to explain the Original Replicator is to rely on The Argument from Ignorance.

4. The Argument from the Big Bang

1. The Big Bang, according to the best scientific opinion of our day, was the beginning of the physical universe, including not only matter and energy, but space and time and the laws of physics.
2. The universe came to be ex nihilo (from 1).
3. Something outside the universe, including outside its physical laws, must have brought the universe into existence (from 2).
4. Only God could exist outside the universe.
5. God must have caused the universe to exist (from 3 and 4).
6. God exists.

The Big Bang is based on the observed expansion of the universe, with galaxies rushing away from one another. The implication is that, if we run the film of the universe backward from the present, the universe must continuously contract, all the way back to a single point. The theory of the Big Bang is that the universe exploded into existence about fourteen billion years ago.

FLAW 1: Cosmologists themselves do not all agree that the Big Bang is a "singularity"—the sudden appearance of space, time, and physical laws from inexplicable nothingness. The Big Bang may represent the lawful emergence of a new universe from a previously existing one. In that case, it would be superfluous to invoke God to explain the emergence of something from nothing.

FLAW 2: The Argument from the Big Bang has all the flaws of The Cosmological Argument—it passes the buck from the mystery of the origin of the universe to the mystery of the origin of God, and it extends the notion of "cause" outside the domain of events covered by natural laws (also known as "the universe"), where it no longer makes sense.

5. The Argument from the Fine-Tuning of Physical Constants

1. There are a vast number of physically possible universes.
2. A universe that would be hospitable to the appearance of life must conform to some very strict conditions. Everything from the mass ratios of atomic particles and the number of dimensions of space to the cosmological parameters that rule the expansion of the universe must be just right for stable galaxies, solar systems, planets, and complex life to evolve.
3. The percentage of possible universes that would support life is infinitesimally small (from 2).
4. Our universe is one of those infinitesimally improbable universes.
5. Our universe has been fine-tuned to support life (from 3 and 4).
6. There is a Fine-Tuner (from 5).
7. Only God could have the power and the purpose to be the Fine-Tuner.
8. God exists.

Philosophers and physicists often speak of “the Anthropic Principle,” which comes in several versions, labeled “weak,” “strong,” and “very strong.” They all argue that any explanation of the universe must account for the fact that we humans (or any complex organism that could observe its condition) exist in it. The Argument from the Fine-Tuning of Physical Constants corresponds to the Very Strong Anthropic Principle. Its upshot is that the upshot of the universe is . . . us. The universe must have been designed with us in mind.

FLAW 1: The first premise may be false. Many physicists and cosmologists, following Einstein, hope for a unified “theory of everything,” which would deduce from as-yet unknown physical laws that the physical constants of our universe had to be what they are. In that case, ours would be the only possible universe. (See also The Argument from the Intelligibility of the Universe, #35 below.)

FLAW 2: Even were we to accept the first premise, the transition from 4 to 5 is invalid. Perhaps we are living in a “multiverse” (a term coined by William James), a vast plurality (perhaps infinite) of parallel universes with different physical constants, all of them composing one reality. We find ourselves, unsurprisingly (since we are here doing the observing), in one of the rare universes that does support the appearance of stable matter and complex life, but nothing had to have

been fine-tuned. Or perhaps we are living in an “oscillatory universe,” a succession of universes with differing physical constants, each one collapsing into a point and then exploding with a new big bang into a new universe with different physical constants, one succeeding another over an infinite time span. Again, we find ourselves, not surprisingly, in one of those time slices in which the universe does have physical constants that support stable matter and complex life. These hypotheses, which are receiving much attention from contemporary cosmologists, are sufficient to invalidate the leap from 4 to 5.

6. The Argument from the Beauty of Physical Laws

1. Scientists use aesthetic principles (simplicity, symmetry, elegance) to discover the laws of nature.
2. Scientists could only use aesthetic principles successfully if the laws of nature were intrinsically and objectively beautiful.
3. The laws of nature are intrinsically and objectively beautiful (from 1 and 2).
4. Only a mindful being with an appreciation of beauty could have designed the laws of nature.
5. God is the only being with the power and purpose to design beautiful laws of nature.
6. God exists.

FLAW 1: Do we decide an explanation is good because it’s beautiful, or do we find an explanation beautiful because it provides a good explanation? When we say that the laws of nature are beautiful, what we are really saying is that the laws of nature are the laws of nature, and thus unify into elegant explanation a vast host of seemingly unrelated and random phenomena. We would find the laws of nature of any lawful universe beautiful. So what this argument boils down to is the observation that we live in a lawful universe. And of course any universe that could support the likes of us would *have* to be lawful. So this argument is another version of the Anthropic Principle—we live in the kind of universe that is the only kind of universe in which observers like us could live—and thus is subject to the flaws of Argument #5.

FLAW 2: If the laws of the universe are intrinsically beautiful, then positing a God who loves beauty, and who is mysteriously capable of

creating an elegant universe (and presumably a messy one as well, though his aesthetic tastes led him not to), makes the universe complex and incomprehensible all over again. This negates the intuition behind Premise 3, that the universe is *intrinsically* elegant and intelligible. (See The Argument from the Intelligibility of the Universe, #35 below.)

7. The Argument from Cosmic Coincidences

1. The universe contains many uncanny coincidences, such as that the diameter of the moon as seen from the earth is the same as the diameter of the sun as seen from the earth, which is why we can have spectacular eclipses when the corona of the sun is revealed.
2. Coincidences are, by definition, overwhelmingly improbable.
3. The overwhelmingly improbable defies all statistical explanation.
4. These coincidences are such as to enhance our awed appreciation for the beauty of the natural world.
5. These coincidences must have been designed in order to enhance our awed appreciation of the beauty of the natural world (from 3 and 4).
6. Only a being with the power to effect such uncanny coincidences and the purpose of enhancing our awed appreciation of the beauty of the natural world could have arranged these uncanny cosmic coincidences.
7. Only God could be the being with such power and such purpose.
8. God exists.

FLAW 1: Premise 3 does not follow from Premise 2. The occurrence of the highly improbable can be statistically explained in two ways. One is when we have a very large sample: a one-in-a-million event is not improbable at all if there are a million opportunities for it to occur. The other is that there are a huge number of occurrences that could be counted as coincidences, if we don't specify them beforehand but just notice them after the fact. (There could have been a constellation that forms a square around the moon; there could have been a comet that appeared on January 1, 2000; there could have been a constellation in the shape of a Star of David, etc. etc. etc.) When you consider how many coincidences are possible, the fact that we observe any one coincidence (which we notice after the fact) is not improbable but likely.

And let's not forget the statistically improbable coincidences that cause havoc and suffering, rather than awe and wonder, in humans: the perfect storm, the perfect tsunami, the perfect plague, et cetera.

FLAW 2: The derivation of Premise 5 from 3 and 4 is invalid: an example of the Projection Fallacy, in which we project the workings of our mind onto the world, and assume that our own subjective reaction is the result of some cosmic plan to cause that reaction. The human brain sees patterns in all kinds of random configurations: cloud formations, constellations, tea leaves, inkblots. That is why we are so good at finding supposed coincidences. It is getting things backward to say that, in every case in which we see a pattern, someone deliberately put that pattern in the universe for us to see.

Aside: Prominent among the uncanny coincidences that figure into this argument are those having to do with numbers. Numbers are mysterious to us because they are not material objects like rocks and tables, but at the same time they seem to be real entities, ones that we can't conjure up with any properties we fancy but that have their own necessary properties and relations, and hence must somehow exist outside us (see *The Argument from Human Knowledge of Infinity*, #29, and *The Argument from Mathematical Reality*, #30, below). We are therefore likely to attribute magical powers to them. And, given the infinity of numbers and the countless possible ways to apply them to the world, "uncanny coincidences" are bound to occur (see Flaw 1). In Hebrew, the letters are also numbers, which has given rise to the mystical art of gematria, often used to elucidate, speculate, and prophecy about the unknowable.

8. The Argument from Personal Coincidences

1. People experience uncanny coincidences in their lives (for example, an old friend calling out of the blue just when you're thinking of him, or a dream about some event that turns out to have just happened, or missing a flight that then crashes).
2. Uncanny coincidences cannot be explained by the laws of probability (which is why we call them uncanny).
3. These uncanny coincidences, inexplicable by the laws of probability, reveal a significance to our lives.

4. Only a being who deems our lives significant and who has the power to effect these coincidences could arrange for them to happen.
5. Only God both deems our lives significant and has the power to effect these coincidences.
6. God exists.

FLAW 1: The second premise suffers from the major flaw of The Argument from Cosmic Coincidences: a large number of experiences, together with the large number of patterns that we would call “coincidences” after the fact, make uncanny coincidences probable, not improbable.

FLAW 2: Psychologists have shown that people are subject to an illusion called Confirmation Bias. When they have a hypothesis (such as that day-dreams predict the future), they vividly notice all the instances that confirm it (the times when they think of a friend and he calls), and forget all the instances that don’t (the times when they think of a friend and he doesn’t call). Likewise, who among us remembers all the times when we miss a plane and it *doesn’t* crash? The vast number of non-events we live through don’t make an impression on us; the few coincidences do.

FLAW 3: There is an additional strong psychological bias at work here. Every one of us treats his or her own life with utmost seriousness. For all of us, there can be nothing more significant than the lives we are living. As David Hume pointed out, the self has an inclination to “spread itself on the world,” projecting onto objective reality the psychological assumptions and attitudes that are too constant to be noticed, that play in the background like a noise you don’t realize you are hearing until it stops. This form of the Projection Fallacy is especially powerful when it comes to the emotionally fraught questions about our own significance.

9. The Argument from Answered Prayers

1. Sometimes people pray to God for good fortune, and, against enormous odds, their calls are answered. (For example, a parent prays for the life of her dying child, and the child recovers.)

2. The odds that the beneficial event will happen are enormously slim (from 1).
3. The odds that the prayer would have been followed by recovery out of sheer chance are extremely small (from 2).
4. The prayer could only have been followed by the recovery if God listened to it and made it come true.
5. God exists.

This argument is similar to The Argument from Miracles, #11 below, except that, instead of the official miracles claimed by established religion, it refers to intimate and personal miracles.

FLAW 1: Premise 3 is indeed true. However, to use it to infer that a miracle has taken place (and an answered prayer is certainly a miracle) is to subvert it. There is nothing that is *less* probable than a miracle, since it constitutes a violation of a law of nature (see The Argument from Miracles). Therefore, it is more reasonable to conclude that the conjunction of the prayer and the recovery is a coincidence than that it is a miracle.

FLAW 2: The coincidence of a person's praying for the unlikely to happen and its then happening is, of course, improbable. But the flaws in The Argument from Cosmic Coincidences and The Argument from Personal Coincidences apply here: Given a large enough sample of prayers (the number of times people call out to God to help them and those they love is tragically large), the improbable is bound to happen occasionally. And, given the existence of Confirmation Bias, we will notice these coincidences, yet fail to notice and count up the vastly larger number of unanswered prayers.

FLAW 3: There is an inconsistency in the moral reasoning behind this argument. It asks us to believe in a compassionate God who would be moved to pity by the desperate pleas of some among us—but not by the equally desperate pleas of others among us. Together with The Argument from a Wonderful Life, The Argument from Perfect Justice, and The Argument from Suffering, it appears to be supported by a few cherry-picked examples, but in fact is refuted by the much larger number of counterexamples it ignores: the prayers that go unanswered, the people who do not live wonderful lives. When the life is our own, or

that of someone we love, we are especially liable to the Projection Fallacy, and spread our personal sense of significance onto the world at large.

FLAW 4: Reliable cases of answered prayers always involve medical conditions that we know can spontaneously resolve themselves through the healing powers and immune system of the body, such as recovery from cancer, or a coma, or lameness. Prayers that a person can grow back a limb, or that a child can be resurrected from the dead, always go unanswered. This affirms that supposedly answered prayers are actually just the rarer cases of natural recovery.

10. The Argument from a Wonderful Life

1. Sometimes people who are lost in life find their way.
2. These people could not have known the right way on their own.
3. These people were shown the right way by something or someone other than themselves (from 2).
4. There was no person showing them the way.
5. God alone is a being who is not a person and who cares about each of us enough to show us the way.
6. Only God could have helped these lost souls (from 4 and 5).
7. God exists.

FLAW 1: Premise 2 ignores the psychological complexity of people. People have inner resources on which they draw, often without knowing *how* they are doing it or even *that* they are doing it. Psychologists have shown that events in our conscious lives—from linguistic intuitions of which sentences sound grammatical, to moral intuitions of what would be the right thing to do in a moral dilemma—are the end products of complicated mental manipulations of which we are unaware. So, too, decisions and resolutions can bubble into awareness without our being conscious of the processes that led to them. These epiphanies seem to *announce themselves* to us, as if they came from an external guide: another example of the Projection Fallacy.

FLAW 2: The same as Flaw 3 in The Argument from Answered Prayers #9 above.

11. The Argument from Miracles

1. Miracles are events that violate the laws of nature.
2. Miracles can be explained only by a force that has the power of suspending the laws of nature for the purpose of making its presence known or changing the course of human history (from 1).
3. Only God has the power and the purpose to carry out miracles (from 2).
4. We have a multitude of written and oral reports of miracles. (Indeed, every major religion is founded on a list of miracles.)
5. Human testimony would be useless if it were not, in the majority of cases, veridical.
6. The best explanation for why there are so many reports testifying to the same thing is that the reports are true (from 5).
7. The best explanation for the multitudinous reports of miracles is that miracles have indeed occurred (from 6).
8. God exists (from 3 and 7).

FLAW 1: It is certainly true, as Premise 4 asserts, that we have a multitude of reports of miracles, with each religion insisting on those that establish it alone as the true religion. But the reports are not testifying to the *same* events; each miracle list justifies one religion at the expense of the others. See Flaw 2 in The Argument from Holy Books, #23, below.

FLAW 2: The fatal flaw in The Argument from Miracles was masterfully exposed by David Hume in *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, chapter 10, "On Miracles." Human testimony may often be accurate, but it is very far from infallible. People are sometimes mistaken; people are sometimes dishonest; people are sometimes gullible—indeed, more than sometimes. Since, in order to believe that a miracle has occurred, we must believe a law of nature has been violated (something for which we otherwise have the maximum of empirical evidence), and we can only believe it on the basis of the truthfulness of human testimony (which we already know is often inaccurate), then even if we knew nothing else about the event, and had no particular reason to distrust the witness, we would have to conclude that it is more likely that the miracle has not occurred, and

that there is an error in the testimony, than that the miracle has occurred. (Hume strengthens his argument, already strong, by observing that religion creates situations in which there *are* particular reasons to distrust the reports of witnesses. “But if the spirit of religion join itself to the love of wonder, there is an end of common sense.”)

COMMENT: The Argument from Miracles covers more specific arguments, such as The Argument from Prophets, The Arguments from Messiahs, and The Argument from Individuals with Miraculous Powers.

12. The Argument from the Hard Problem of Consciousness

1. The Hard Problem of Consciousness consists in our difficulty in explaining why it subjectively *feels* like something to be a functioning brain. (This is to be distinguished from the so-called Easy Problem of Consciousness, which is to explain why some brain processes are unconscious and others are conscious.)
2. Consciousness (in the Hard-Problem sense) is not a complex phenomenon built out of simpler ones; it can consist of irreducible “raw feels” like seeing red or tasting salt.
3. Science explains complex phenomena by reducing them to simpler ones, and reducing them to still simpler ones, until the simplest ones are explained by the basic laws of physics.
4. The basic laws of physics describe the properties of the elementary constituents of matter and energy, like quarks and quanta, which are not conscious.
5. Science cannot derive consciousness by reducing it to basic physical laws about the elementary constituents of matter and energy (from 2, 3, and 4).
6. Science will never solve the Hard Problem of Consciousness (from 3 and 5).
7. The explanation for consciousness must lie beyond physical laws (from 6).
8. Consciousness, lying outside physical laws, must itself be immaterial (from 7).
9. God is immaterial.
10. Consciousness and God both consist of the same immaterial kind of being (from 8 and 9).

11. God has not only the means to impart consciousness to us, but also the motive—namely, to allow us to enjoy a good life, and to make it possible for our choices to cause or prevent suffering in others, thereby allowing for morality and meaning.
12. Consciousness can only be explained by positing that God inserted a spark of the divine into us (from 7, 10, and 11).
13. God exists.

FLAW 1: Premise 3 is dubious. Science often shows that properties can be *emergent*: they arise from complex interactions of simpler elements, even if they cannot be found in any of the elements themselves. (Water is wet, but that does not mean that every H₂O molecule it is made of is also wet.) Granted, we do not have a theory of neuroscience that explains how consciousness emerges from patterns of neural activity, but to draw theological conclusions from the currently incomplete state of scientific knowledge is to commit the Fallacy of Arguing from Ignorance.

FLAW 2: Alternatively, the theory of panpsychism posits that consciousness in a low-grade form, what is often called “proto-consciousness,” is inherent in matter. Our physical theories, with their mathematical methodology, have not yet been able to capture this aspect of matter, but that may just be a limitation on our mathematical physical theories. Some physicists have hypothesized that contemporary malaise about the foundations of quantum mechanics arises because physics is here confronting the intrinsic consciousness of matter, which has not yet been adequately formalized within physical theories.

FLAW 3: It has become clear that every measurable manifestation of consciousness, like our ability to describe what we feel, or let our feelings guide our behavior (the “Easy Problem” of consciousness), has been, or will be, explained in terms of neural activity (that is, every thought, feeling, and intention has a neural correlate). Only the existence of consciousness itself (the “Hard Problem”) remains mysterious. But perhaps the hardness of the Hard Problem says more about what *we* find hard—the limitations of the brains of *Homo sapiens* when it tries to think scientifically—than about the hardness of the problem itself. Just as our brains do not allow us to visualize four-

dimensional objects, perhaps our brains do not allow us to understand how subjective experience arises from complex neural activity.

FLAW 4: Premise 12 is entirely unclear. How does invoking the spark of the divine explain the existence of consciousness? It is the Fallacy of Using One Mystery to Explain Another.

COMMENT: Premise 11 is also dubious, because our capacity to suffer is far in excess of what it would take to make moral choices possible. This will be discussed in connection with The Argument from Suffering, #25, below.

13. The Argument from the Improbable Self

1. I exist in all my particularity and contingency: not as a generic example of personhood, not as any old member of *Homo sapiens*, but as that unique conscious entity that I know as *me*.
2. I can step outside myself and view my own contingent particularity with astonishment.
3. This astonishment reveals that there must be something that accounts for why, of all the particular things that I could have been, I am *just this*— namely, me (from 1 and 2).
4. Nothing within the world can account for why I am *just this*, since the laws of the world are generic: they can explain why certain *kinds* of things come to be, even (let's assume) why human beings with conscious brains come to be. But nothing in the world can explain why one of those human beings should be *me*.
5. Only something outside the world, who cares about me, can therefore account for why I am *just this* (from 4).
6. God is the only thing outside the world who cares about each and every one of us.
7. God exists.

FLAW: Premise 5 is a blatant example of the Fallacy of Using One Mystery to Explain Another. Granted that the problem boggles the mind, but waving one's hands in the direction of God is no solution. It gives us no sense of *how* God can account for why I am *this* thing and not another.

COMMENT: In one way, this argument is reminiscent of the Anthropic Principle. There are a vast number of people who could have been born. One's own parents alone could have given birth to a vast number of alternatives to oneself. Granted, one gropes for a reason for why it was, against these terrific odds, that oneself came to be born. But there may be no reason; it just happened. By the time you ask this question, you already are existing in a world in which you were born. Another analogy: The odds that the phone company would have given you your exact number (if you could have wished for exactly that number beforehand) are minuscule. But it had to give you *some* number, so asking after the fact why it should be *that* number is silly. Likewise, the child your parents conceived had to be *someone*. Now that you're born, it's no mystery why it should be you; you're the one asking the question.

14. The Argument from Survival After Death

1. There is empirical evidence that people survive after death: patients who flat-line during medical emergencies report an experience of floating over their bodies and seeing glimpses of a passage to another world, and can accurately report what happened around their bodies while they were dead to the world.
2. A person's consciousness can survive after the death of his or her body (from 1).
3. Survival after death entails the existence of an immaterial soul.
4. The immaterial soul exists (from 2 and 3).
5. If an immaterial soul exists, then God must exist (from Premise 12 in The Argument from the Hard Problem of Consciousness).
6. God exists.

FLAW: Premise 5 is vulnerable to the same criticisms that were leveled against Premise 12 in The Argument from the Hard Problem of Consciousness. Existence after death no more implies God's existence than our existence before death does.

COMMENT: Many, of course, would dispute Premise 1. The experiences of people near death, such as auras and out-of-body experiences, could be hallucinations resulting from oxygen deprivation in the brain. In addition, miraculous resurrections after total brain death,

and accurate reports of conversations and events that took place while the brain was not functioning, have never been scientifically documented, and are informal, secondhand examples of testimony of miracles. They are thus vulnerable to the same flaws pointed out in The Argument from Miracles. But the argument is fatally flawed even if Premise 1 is granted.

15. The Argument from the Inconceivability of Personal Annihilation

1. I cannot conceive of my own annihilation: as soon as I start to think about what it would be like not to exist, I am thinking, which implies that I would exist (as in Descartes's *Cogito ergo sum*), which implies that I would not be thinking about what it is like not to exist.
2. My annihilation is inconceivable (from 1).
3. What cannot be conceived, cannot be.
4. I cannot be annihilated (from 2 and 3).
5. I survive after my death (from 4). The argument now proceeds as in The Argument from Survival After Death, only substituting "I" for "people," until we get to:
6. God exists.

FLAW 1: Premise 2 confuses *psychological* inconceivability with *logical* inconceivability. The sense in which I can't conceive of my own annihilation is like the sense in which I can't conceive that those whom I love may betray me—a failure of the imagination, not an impossible state of affairs. Thus Premise 2 ought to read "My annihilation is inconceivable *to me*, " which is a fact about what my brain can conceive, not a fact about what exists.

FLAW 2: Same as Flaw 3 from The Argument from the Survival of Death.

COMMENT: Though logically unsound, this is among the most powerful *psychological* impulses to believe in a soul, and an afterlife, and God. It genuinely is difficult—not to speak of disheartening—to conceive of oneself not existing!

16. The Argument from Moral Truth

1. There exist objective moral truths. (Slavery and torture and genocide are not just distasteful to us, but are actually wrong.)
2. These objective moral truths are not grounded in the way the world *is* but, rather, in the way the world *ought to be*. (Consider: should white supremacists succeed, taking over the world and eliminating all who don't meet their criteria for being existence-worthy, their ideology still would be morally wrong. It would be true, in this hideous counterfactual, that the world ought not to be the way that they have made it.)
3. The world itself—the way it is, the laws of science that explain why it is that way—cannot account for the way the world ought to be.
4. The only way to account for morality is that God established morality (from 2 and 3).
5. God exists.

FLAW 1: The major flaw of this argument is revealed in a powerful argument that Plato made famous in the *Euthyphro*. Reference to God does not help in the least to ground the objective truth of morality. The question is, why did God choose the moral rules he did? Did he have a reason justifying his choice that, say, giving alms to the poor is good, whereas genocide is wrong? Either he had a good reason or he didn't. If he did, then *his* reasons, whatever they are, can provide the grounding for moral truths for *us*, and God himself is redundant. And if he didn't have a good reason, then his choices are arbitrary—he could just as easily have gone the other way, making charity bad and genocide good—and we would have no reason to take his choices seriously. According to the *Euthyphro* argument, then, The Argument from Moral Truth is another example of the Fallacy of Passing the Buck. The hard work of moral philosophy consists in grounding morality in some version of the Golden Rule: that I cannot be committed to my own interests' mattering in a way that yours do not just because I am me and you are not.

FLAW 2: Premise 4 is belied by the history of religion, which shows that the God from which people draw their morality (for example, the God of the Bible and the Koran) did not establish what we now

recognize to be morality at all. The God of the Old Testament commanded people to keep slaves, slay their enemies, execute blasphemers and homosexuals, and commit many other heinous acts. Of course, our interpretation of which aspects of biblical morality to take seriously has grown more sophisticated over time, and we read the Bible selectively and often metaphorically. But that is just the point: we must be consulting some standards of morality that do *not* come from God in order to judge which aspects of God's word to take literally and which aspects to ignore.

COMMENT: Some would question the first premise, and regard its assertion as a flaw of this argument. Slavery and torture and genocide are wrong by *our* lights, they would argue, and conflict with certain values we hold dear, such as freedom and happiness. But those are just subjective values, and it is obscure to say that statements that are consistent with those values are objectively true in the same way that mathematical or scientific statements can be true. But the argument is fatally flawed even if Premise 1 is granted.

17. The Argument from Altruism

1. People often act altruistically—namely, against their interests. They help others, at a cost to themselves, out of empathy, fairness, decency, and integrity.
2. Natural selection can never favor true altruism, because genes for selfishness will always out-compete genes for altruism (recall that altruism, by definition, exacts a cost to the actor).
3. Only a force acting outside of natural selection and intending for us to be moral could account for our ability to act altruistically (from 2).
4. God is the only force outside of natural selection that could intend us to be moral.
5. God must have implanted the moral instinct within us (from 3 and 4).
6. God exists.

FLAW 1: Theories of the evolution of altruism by natural selection have been around for decades and are now widely supported by many kinds of evidence. A gene for being kind to one's kin, even if it hurts the

person doing the favor, can be favored by evolution, because that gene would be helping a copy of *itself* that is shared by the kin. And a gene for conferring a large benefit to a non-relative at a cost to oneself can evolve if the favor doer is the beneficiary of a return favor at a later time. Both parties are better off, in the long run, from the exchange of favors. Some defenders of religion do not consider these theories to be legitimate explanations of altruism, because a tendency to favor one's kin, or to trade favors, is ultimately just a form of selfishness for one's genes, rather than true altruism. But this is a confusion of the original phenomenon. We are trying to explain why people are sometimes altruistic, not why genes are altruistic. (We have no reason to believe that genes are ever altruistic in the first place!) Also, in a species with language—namely, humans—committed altruists develop a reputation for being altruistic, and thereby win more friends, allies, and trading partners. This can give rise to selection for true, committed, altruism, not just the tit-for-tat exchange of favors.

FLAW 2: We have evolved higher mental faculties, such as self-reflection and logic, that allow us to reason about the world, to persuade other people to form alliances with us, to learn from our mistakes, and to achieve other feats of reason. Those same faculties, when they are honed through debate, reason, and knowledge, can allow us to step outside ourselves, learn about other people's points of view, and act in a way that we can justify as maximizing everyone's well-being. We are capable of moral reasoning because we are capable of reasoning in general.

FLAW 3: In some versions of The Argument from Altruism, God succeeds in getting people to act altruistically because he promises them a divine reward and threatens them with divine retribution. People behave altruistically to gain a reward or avoid a punishment in the life to come. This argument is self-contradictory. It aims to explain how people act without regard to their self-interest, but then assumes that there could be no motive for acting altruistically other than self-interest.

18. The Argument from Free Will

1. Having *free will* means having the freedom to choose our actions, rather than having them determined by some prior cause.

2. If we don't have free will, then we are not agents, for then we are not really *acting*, but, rather, we're being acted *upon*. (That's why we don't punish people for involuntary actions—such as a teller who hands money to a bank robber at gunpoint, or a driver who injures a pedestrian after a defective tire blows out.)
3. To be a moral agent means to be held morally responsible for what one does.
4. If we can't be held morally responsible for anything we do, then the very idea of morality is meaningless.
5. Morality is not meaningless.
6. We have free will (from 2–5).
7. We, as moral agents, are not subject to the laws of nature—in particular, the neural events in a genetically and environmentally determined brain (from 1 and 6).
8. Only a being who is apart from the laws of nature and partakes of the moral sphere could explain our being moral agents (from 7).
9. Only God is a being who is apart from the laws of nature and partakes of the moral sphere.
10. Only God can explain our moral agency (from 8 and 9).
11. God exists.

FLAW 1: This argument, in order to lead to God, must ignore the paradoxical Fork of Free Will. Either my actions are predictable (from my genes, my upbringing, my brain state, my current situation, and so on), or they are not. If they are predictable, then there is no reason to deny that they are caused, and we would not have free will. So, if we are to be free, our actions must be unpredictable—in other words, random. But if our behavior is random, then in what sense can it be attributable to us at all? If it really is a random event when I give the infirm man my seat in the subway, then in what sense is it *me* to whom this good deed should be attributed? If the action isn't caused by my psychological states, which are themselves caused by other states, then in what way is it really *my* action? And what good would it do to insist on moral responsibility if our choices are random, and cannot be predicted from prior events (such as growing up in a society that holds people responsible)? This leads us back to the conclusion that we, as moral agents, *must* be parts of the natural world—the very negation of Premise 7.

FLAW 2: Premise 10 is an example of the Fallacy of Using One Mystery to Explain Another. It expresses, rather than dispels, the confusion we feel when faced with the Fork of Free Will. The paradox has not been clarified in the least by introducing God into the analysis

COMMENT: Free will is yet another quandary that takes us to the edge of our human capacity for understanding. The concept is baffling, because our moral agency seems to demand both that our actions be determined, and also that they not be determined.

19. The Argument from Personal Purpose

1. If there is no purpose to a person's life, then that person's life is pointless.
2. Human life cannot be pointless.
3. Each human life has a purpose (from 1 and 2).
4. The purpose of each individual person's life must derive from the overall purpose of existence.
5. There is an overall purpose of existence (from 3 and 4).
6. Only a being who understands the overall purpose of existence could create each person according to the purpose that person is meant to fulfill.
7. Only God could understand the overall purpose of creation.
8. There can be a point to human existence only if God exists (from 6 and 7).
9. God exists.

FLAW 1: The first premise rests on a confusion between the purpose of an action and the purpose of a life. It is human activities that have purposes—or don't. We study for the purpose of educating and supporting ourselves. We eat right and exercise for the purpose of being healthy. We warn children not to accept rides with strangers for the purpose of keeping them safe. We donate to charity for the purpose of helping the poor (just as we would want someone to help us if we were poor). The notion of a person's entire *life* serving a purpose, above and beyond the purpose of all the person's choices, is obscure. Might it mean the purpose for which the person was born? That implies that some goalseeking agent decided to bring our lives into being to serve some purpose. Then who is that goal-seeking agent? Parents

often purposively have children, but we wouldn't want to see a parent's wishes as the purpose of the child's life. If the goal-seeking agent is God, the argument becomes circular: we make sense of the notion of "the purpose of a life" by stipulating that the purpose is whatever God had in mind when he created us, but then argue for the existence of God because he is the only one who could have designed us with a purpose in mind.

FLAW 2: Premise 2 states that human life cannot be pointless. But of course it could be pointless in the sense meant by this argument: lacking a purpose in the grand scheme of things. It could very well be that there is no grand scheme of things because there is no Grand Schemer. By assuming that there is a grand scheme of things, it assumes that there is a schemer whose scheme it is, which circularly assumes the conclusion.

COMMENT: It's important not to confuse the notion of "pointless" in Premise 2 with notions like "not worth living" or "expendable." Confusions of this sort probably give Premise 2 its appeal. But we can very well maintain that each human life is precious—is worth living, is not expendable—*without* maintaining that each human life has a purpose in the overall scheme of things.

20. The Argument from the Intolerability of Insignificance

1. In a million years, nothing that happens now will matter.
2. By the same token, anything that happens at any point in time will not matter from the point of view of a time a million years distant from it in the future.
3. No point in time can confer mattering on any other point, for each suffers from the same problem of not mattering itself (from 2).
4. It is intolerable (or inconceivable, or unacceptable) that in a million years nothing that happens now will matter.
5. What happens now will matter in a million years (from 4).
6. It is only from the point of view of eternity that what happens now will matter even in a million years (from 3).
7. Only God can inhabit the point of view of eternity.
8. God exists.

FLAW: Premise 4 is illicit: it is of the form “This argument must be correct because it is intolerable that this argument is not correct.” The argument is either circular, or an example of the Fallacy of Wishful Thinking. Maybe we *won't* matter in a million years, and there's just nothing we can do about it. If that is the case, we shouldn't declare that it is intolerable—we just have to live with it. Another way of putting it is: we should take ourselves seriously (being mindful of what we do, and the world we leave our children and grandchildren), but we shouldn't take ourselves *that* seriously, arrogantly demanding that we must matter in a million years.

21. The Argument from the Consensus of Humanity

1. Every culture in every epoch has had theistic beliefs.
2. When peoples, widely separated by both space and time, hold similar beliefs, the best explanation is that those beliefs are true.
3. The best explanation for why every culture has had theistic beliefs is that those beliefs are true.
4. God exists.

FLAW: Premise 2 is false. Widely separated people could very well come up with the same *false* beliefs. Human nature is universal, and thus prone to universal illusions and shortcomings of perception, memory, reasoning, and objectivity. Also, many of the needs and terrors and dependencies of the human condition (such as the knowledge of our own mortality, and the attendant desire not to die) are universal. Our beliefs arise not only from well-evaluated reasoning, but from wishful thinking, self-deception, self-aggrandizement, gullibility, false memories, visual illusions, and other mental glitches. Well-grounded beliefs may be the exception rather than the rule when it comes to psychologically fraught beliefs, which tend to bypass rational grounding and spring instead from unexamined emotions. The fallacy of arguing that if an idea is universally held then it must be true was labeled by the ancient logicians *consensus gentium*.

22. The Argument from the Consensus of Mystics

1. Mystics go into a special state in which they seem to see aspects of reality that elude everyday experience.

2. We cannot evaluate the truth of their experiences from the viewpoint of everyday experience (from 1).
3. There is a unanimity among mystics as to what they experience.
4. When there is unanimity among observers as to what they experience, then, unless they are all deluded in the same way, the best explanation for their unanimity is that their experiences are true.
5. There is no reason to think that mystics are all deluded in the same way.
6. The best explanation for the unanimity of mystical experience is that what mystics perceive is true (from 4 and 5).
7. Mystical experiences unanimously testify to the transcendent presence of God.
8. God exists.

FLAW 1: Premise 5 is disputable. There is indeed reason to think mystics might be deluded in similar ways. The universal human nature that refuted The Argument from the Consensus of Humanity entails that the human brain can be stimulated in unusual ways that give rise to widespread (but not objectively correct) experiences. The fact that we can stimulate the temporal lobes of non-mystics and induce mystical experiences in them is evidence that mystics might be deluded in similar ways. Certain drugs can also induce feelings of transcendence, such as an enlargement of perception beyond the bounds of effability, a melting of the boundaries of the self, a joyful expansion out into an existence that seems to be all One, with all that Oneness pronouncing Yes upon us. Such experiences, which, as William James points out, are most easily attained by getting drunk, are of the same kind as the mystical: “The drunken consciousness is one bit of the mystic consciousness.” Of course, we do not exalt the stupor and delusions of drunkenness, because we *know* what caused them. The fact that the same effects can overcome a person when we know what caused them (and hence don’t call the experience “mystical”) is reason to suspect that the causes of mystical experiences also lie within the brain.

FLAW 2: The struggle to put the ineffable contents of abnormal experiences into language inclines the struggler toward pre-existing religious language, which is the only language that most of us have been exposed to that overlaps with the unusual content of an altered

state of consciousness. This observation casts doubt on Premise 7. See also The Argument from Sublimity, #34, below.

23. The Argument from Holy Books

1. There are holy books that reveal the word of God.
2. The word of God is necessarily true.
3. The word of God reveals the existence of God.
4. God exists.

FLAW 1: This is a circular argument if ever there was one. The first three premises cannot be maintained unless one independently knows the very conclusion to be proved—namely, that God exists.

FLAW 2: A glance at the world's religions shows that there are numerous books and scrolls and doctrines and revelations that all claim to reveal the word of God. But they are mutually incompatible. Should I believe that Jesus is my personal saviour? Or should I believe that God made a covenant with the Jews requiring every Jew to keep the commandments of the Torah? Should I believe that Muhammad was Allah's last prophet and that Ali, the prophet's cousin and husband of his daughter Fatima, ought to have been the first caliph, or that Muhammad was Allah's last prophet and that Ali was the fourth and last caliph? Should I believe that the resurrected prophet Moroni dictated the Book of Mormon to Joseph Smith? Or that Ahura Mazda, the benevolent Creator, is at cosmic war with the malevolent Angra Mainyu? And on and on it goes. Only the most arrogant provincialism could allow someone to believe that the holy documents that happen to be held sacred by the clan he was born into are true, whereas all the documents held sacred by the clans he wasn't born into are false.

24. The Argument from Perfect Justice

1. This world provides numerous instances of imperfect justice—bad things happening to good people, and good things happening to bad people.
2. It violates our sense of justice that imperfect justice may prevail.
3. There must be a transcendent realm in which perfect justice prevails (from 1 and 2).

4. A transcendent realm in which perfect justice prevails requires the Perfect Judge.
5. The Perfect Judge is God.
6. God exists.

FLAW: This is a good example of the Fallacy of Wishful Thinking. Our wishes for how the universe should be need not be true; just because we want there to be some realm in which perfect justice applies does not mean that there is such a realm. In other words, there is no way to pass from Premise 2 to Premise 3 without the Fallacy of Wishful Thinking.

25. The Argument from Suffering

1. There is much suffering in this world.
2. Suffering must have some purpose, or existence would be intolerable.
3. Some suffering (or at least its possibility) is demanded by human moral agency: if people could not choose evil acts that cause suffering, moral choice would not exist.
4. Whatever suffering cannot be explained as the result of human moral agency must also have some purpose (from 2 and 3).
5. There are virtues— forbearance, courage, compassion, and so on —that can only develop in the presence of suffering. We may call them “the virtues of suffering.”
6. Some suffering has the purpose of inducing the virtues of suffering (from 5).
7. Even taking premises 3 and 6 into account, the amount of suffering in the world is still enormous—far more than what is required for us to benefit from suffering.
8. Moreover, some who suffer can never develop the virtues of suffering—children, animals, those who perish in their agony.
9. There is more suffering than we can explain by reference to the purposes that we can discern (from 7 and 8).
10. There are purposes for suffering that we cannot discern (from 2 and 9).
11. Only a being who has a sense of purpose beyond ours could provide the purpose of all suffering (from 10).
12. Only God could have a sense of purpose beyond ours.

13. God exists.

FLAW: This argument is a sorrowful one, since it highlights the most intolerable feature of our world, the excess of suffering. The suffering in this world is excessive in both its intensity and its prevalence, often undergone by those who can never gain anything from it. This is a powerful argument *against* the existence of a compassionate and powerful deity. It is only the Fallacy of Wishful Thinking, embodied in Premise 2, that could make us presume that what is psychologically intolerable cannot be the case.

26. The Argument from the Survival of the Jews

1. The Jews introduced the world to the idea of the one God, with his universal moral code.
2. The survival of the Jews, living for millennia without a country of their own, and facing a multitude of enemies that sought to destroy not only their religion but all remnants of the race, is a historical unlikelihood.
3. The Jews have survived against vast odds (from 2).
4. There is no natural explanation for so unlikely an event as the survival of the Jews (from 3).
5. The best explanation is that they have some transcendent purpose to play in human destiny (from 1 and 4).
6. Only God could have assigned a transcendent destiny to the Jews.
7. God exists.

FLAW: The fact that Jews, after the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans, had no country of their own, made it *more* likely, rather than less likely, that they would survive as a people. If they had been concentrated in one country, they would surely have been conquered by one of history's great empires, as happened to other vanished tribes. But a people dispersed across a vast diaspora is more resilient, which is why other stateless peoples, like the Parsis and Roma (Gypsies), have also survived for millennia, often against harrowing odds. Moreover, the Jews encouraged cultural traits—such as literacy, urban living, specialization in middleman occupations, and an extensive legal code to govern their internal affairs—that gave them further

resilience against the vicissitudes of historical change. The survival of the Jews, therefore, is not a miraculous improbability.

COMMENT: The persecution of the Jews need not be seen as part of a cosmic moral drama. The unique role that Judaism played in disseminating monotheism, mostly through the organs of its two far more popular monotheistic offshoots, Christianity and Islam, has bequeathed to its adherents an unusual amount of attention, mostly negative, from adherents of those other monotheistic religions.

27. The Argument from the Upward Curve of History

1. There is an upward moral curve to human history (tyrannies fall; the evil side loses in major wars; democracy, freedom, and civil rights spread).
2. Natural selection's favoring of those who are fittest to compete for resources and mates has bequeathed humankind selfish and aggressive traits.
3. Left to their own devices, a selfish and aggressive species could not have ascended up a moral curve over the course of history (from 2).
4. Only God has the power and the concern for us to curve history upward.
5. God exists .

FLAW: Though our species has inherited traits of selfishness and aggression, we have inherited capacities for empathy, reasoning, and learning from experience as well. We have also developed language, and with it a means to pass on the lessons we have learned from history. And so humankind has slowly reasoned its way toward a broader and more sophisticated understanding of morality, and more effective institutions for keeping peace. We make moral progress as we do scientific progress, through reasoning, experimentation, and the rejection of failed alternatives.

28. The Argument from Prodigious Genius

1. Genius is the highest level of creative capacity, the level that, by definition, defies explanation.

2. Genius does not happen by way of natural psychological processes (from 1).
3. The cause of genius must lie outside of natural psychological processes (from 2).
4. The insights of genius have helped in the cumulative progress of humankind—scientific, technological, philosophical, moral, artistic, societal, political, spiritual.
5. The cause of genius must both lie outside of natural psychological processes and be such as to care about the progress of humankind (from 3 and 4).
6. Only God could work outside of natural psychological processes and create geniuses to light the path of humankind.
7. God exists.

FLAW 1: The psychological traits that go into human accomplishment, such as intelligence and perseverance, are heritable. By the laws of probability, rare individuals will inherit a concentrated dose of those genes. Given a nurturing cultural context, these individuals will, some of the time, exercise their powers to accomplish great feats. Those are the individuals we call geniuses. We may not know enough about genetics, neuroscience, and cognition to explain exactly what makes for a Mozart or an Einstein, but exploiting this gap to argue for supernatural provenance is an example of the Fallacy of Arguing from Ignorance.

FLAW 2: Human genius is not consistently applied to human betterment. Consider weapons of mass destruction, computer viruses, Hitler’s brilliantly effective rhetoric, or those criminal geniuses (for example, electronic thieves) who are so cunning that they elude detection.

29. The Argument from Human Knowledge of Infinity

1. We are finite, and everything with which we come into physical contact is finite.
2. We have a knowledge of the infinite, demonstrably so in mathematics.
3. We could not have derived this knowledge of the infinite from the finite, from anything that we are and come in contact with (from 1).

4. Only something itself infinite could have implanted knowledge of the infinite in us (from 2 and 3).
5. God would want us to have a knowledge of the infinite, both for the cognitive pleasure it affords us and because it allows us to come to know him, who is himself infinite.
6. God is the only entity that both is infinite and could have an intention of implanting the knowledge of the infinite within us (from 4 and 5).
7. God exists.

FLAW: There are certain computational procedures governed by what logicians call recursive rules. A recursive rule is one that refers to itself, and hence it can be applied to its own output ad infinitum. For example, we can define a natural number recursively: 1 is a natural number, and if you add 1 to a natural number, the result is a natural number. We can apply this rule an indefinite number of times and thereby generate an infinite series of natural numbers. Recursive rules allow a finite system (a set of rules, a computer, a brain) to reason about an infinity of objects, refuting Premise 3.

COMMENT: In 1931 the young logician Kurt Gödel published a paper proving The Incompleteness Theorem (actually there are two). Basically, what Gödel demonstrated is that recursive rules cannot capture all of mathematics. For any mathematical system rich enough to express arithmetic, we can produce a true proposition that is expressible in that system but not provable within it. So even though the flaw discussed above is sufficient to invalidate Premise 3, it should not be understood as suggesting that all of our mathematical knowledge is reducible to recursive rules.

30. The Argument from Mathematical Reality

1. Mathematical truths are necessarily true (there is no possible world in which 2 plus 2 does not equal 4).
2. The truths that describe our physical world are empirical, requiring observational evidence.
3. Truths that require empirical evidence are not necessary truths. (We require empirical evidence because there are possible worlds

in which these are not truths, and we have to test that ours is not such a world.)

4. The truths of our physical world are not necessary truths (from 2 and 3).
5. The truths of our physical world cannot explain mathematical truths (from 1 and 3).
6. Mathematical truths exist on a different plane of existence from physical truths (from 5).
7. Only something which itself exists on a different plane of existence from the physical can explain mathematical truths (from 6).
8. Only God can explain the necessary truths of mathematics (from 7).
9. God exists.

Mathematics is derived through pure reason—what the philosophers call a priori reason—which means that it cannot be refuted by any empirical observations. The fundamental question in the philosophy of mathematics is, how can mathematics be true but not empirical? Is it because mathematics describes some trans-empirical reality—as mathematical realists believe—or is it because mathematics has no content at all and is a purely formal game consisting of stipulated rules and their consequences? The Argument from Mathematical Reality assumes, in its third premise, the position of mathematical realism, which isn't a fallacy in itself; many mathematicians believe it, some of them arguing that it follows from Gödel's incompleteness theorems (see the Comment in The Argument from Human Knowledge of Infinity, #29, above). This argument, however, goes further and tries to deduce God's existence from the trans-empirical existence of mathematical reality.

FLAW 1: Premise 5 presumes that something outside of mathematical reality must explain the existence of mathematical reality, but this presumption is non-obvious. Lurking within Premise 5 is the hidden premise: mathematics must be explained by reference to non-mathematical truths. But this hidden premise, when exposed, appears murky. If God can be self-explanatory, why, then, can't mathematical reality be self-explanatory—especially since the truths of mathematics are, as this argument asserts, necessarily true?

FLAW 2: Mathematical reality—if indeed it exists—is, admittedly, mysterious. Many people have trouble conceiving of where mathematical truths live, or exactly what they pertain to. But invoking God does not dispel this puzzlement; it is an instance of the Fallacy of Using One Mystery to Explain Another.

31. The Argument from Decision Theory (Pascal’s Wager)

1. Either God exists or God doesn’t exist.
2. A person can either believe that God exists or believe that God doesn’t exist (from 1).
3. If God exists and you believe, you receive eternal salvation.
4. If God exists and you don’t believe, you receive eternal damnation.
5. If God doesn’t exist and you believe, you’ve been duped, have wasted time in religious observance, and have missed out on decadent enjoyments.
6. If God doesn’t exist and you don’t believe, then you have avoided a false belief.
7. You have much more to gain by believing in God than by not believing in him, and much more to lose by not believing in God than by believing in him (from, 3, 4, 5, and 6).
8. It is more rational to believe that God exists than to believe that he doesn’t exist (from 7).

| | | |
|---------------|-------------------|--|
| | God Exists | God doesn’t exist |
| Believe | Eternal salvation | You’ve been duped, missed out on some sins |
| Don’t believe | Eternal damnation | You got it right |

This unusual argument does not justify the conclusion that “God exists.” Rather, it argues that it is rational to believe that God exists, given that we don’t know whether he exists .

FLAW 1: The “believe” option in Pascal’s Wager can be interpreted in two ways.

One is that the wagerer genuinely has to believe, deep down, that God exists; in other words, it is not enough to mouth a creed, or merely act as *if* God exists. According to this interpretation, God, if he exists, can peer into a person's soul and discern the person's actual convictions. If so, the kind of "belief" that Pascal's Wager advises—a purely pragmatic strategy, chosen because the expected benefits exceed the expected costs—would not be enough. Indeed, it's not even clear that this option is coherent: if one *chooses* to believe something because of the consequences of holding that belief, rather than being genuinely convinced of it, is it really a belief, or just an empty vow?

The other interpretation is that it is enough to *act* in the way that traditional believers act: say prayers, go to services, recite the appropriate creed, and go through the other motions of religion.

The problem is that Pascal's Wager offers no guidance as to *which* prayers, *which* services, *which* creed to live by. Say I chose to believe in the Zoroastrian cosmic war between Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu to avoid the wrath of the former, but the real fact of the matter is that God gave the Torah to the Jews, and I am thereby inviting the wrath of Yahweh (or vice versa). Given all the things I could "believe" in, I am in constant danger of incurring the negative consequences of disbelief even though I choose the "belief" option. The fact that Blaise Pascal stated his wager as two stark choices, putting the outcomes in blatantly Christian terms—eternal salvation and eternal damnation—reveals more about his own upbringing than it does about the logic of belief. The wager simply codifies his particular "live options," to use William James's term for the only choices that seem possible to a given believer.

FLAW 2: Pascal's Wager assumes a petty, egotistical, and vindictive God who punishes anyone who does not believe in him. But the great monotheistic religions all declare that "mercy" is one of God's essential traits. A merciful God would surely have some understanding of why a person may not believe in him (if the evidence for God were obvious, the fancy reasoning of Pascal's Wager would not be necessary), and so would extend compassion to a non-believer. (Bertrand Russell, when asked what he would have to say to God, if, despite his reasoned atheism, he were to die and face his Creator, responded, "O Lord, why

did you not provide more evidence?") The non-believer therefore should have nothing to worry about—falsifying the negative payoff in the lower-left-hand cell of the matrix.

FLAW 3: The calculations of expected value in Pascal's Wager omit a crucial part of the mathematics: the probabilities of each of the two columns, which have to be multiplied with the payoff in each cell to determine the expected value of each cell. If the probability of God's existence (ascertained by other means) is infinitesimal, then even if the cost of not believing in him is high, the overall expectation may not make it worthwhile to choose the "believe" row (after all, we take many other risks in life with severe possible costs but low probabilities, such as boarding an airplane). One can see how this invalidates Pascal's Wager by considering similar wagers. Say I told you that a fire-breathing dragon has moved into the next apartment, and that unless you set out a bowl of marshmallows for him every night he will force his way into your apartment and roast you to a crisp. According to Pascal's Wager, you should leave out the marshmallows. Of course you don't, even though you are taking a terrible risk in choosing not to believe in the dragon, because you don't assign a high enough probability to the dragon's existence to justify even the small inconvenience.

32. The Argument from Pragmatism (William James's Leap of Faith)

1. The consequences for the believer's life of believing should be considered as part of the evidence for the truth of the belief (just as the effectiveness of a scientific theory in its practical applications is considered evidence for the truth of the theory). Call this the pragmatic evidence for the belief.
2. Certain beliefs effect a change for the better in the believer's life—the necessary condition being that they are believed.
3. The belief in God is a belief that effects a change for the better in a person's life.
4. If one tries to decide whether or not to believe in God based on the evidence available, one will never get the chance to evaluate the pragmatic evidence for the beneficial consequences of believing in God (from 2 and 3).

5. One ought to make “the leap of faith” (the term is James’s) and believe in God, and only *then* evaluate the evidence (from 1 and 4). This argument can be read out of William James’s classic essay “The Will to Believe.” The first premise, as presented here, is a little less radical than James’s pragmatic definition of truth according to which a proposition is true if believing that it is true has a cumulative beneficial effect on the believer’s life. The pragmatic definition of truth has severe problems, including possible incoherence: in evaluating the effects of the belief on the believer, we have to know the truth about what those effects are, which forces us to fall back on the old-fashioned notion of truth. To make the best case for The Argument from Pragmatism, therefore, the first premise is to be interpreted as claiming only that the pragmatic consequences of belief are a relevant *source of evidence* in ascertaining the truth, not that they can actually be *equated* with the truth.

FLAW 1: What exactly does effecting “a change for the better in the believer’s life” mean? For an antebellum Southerner, there was more to be gained in believing that slavery was morally permissible than in believing it heinous. It often doesn’t pay to be an iconoclast or a revolutionary thinker, no matter how much truer your ideas are than the ideas opposing you. It didn’t improve Galileo’s life to believe that the earth moved around the sun rather than that the sun and the heavens revolve around the earth. (Of course, you could say that it’s always intrinsically better to believe something true rather than something false, but then you’re just using the language of pragmatism to mask a non-pragmatic notion of truth.

FLAW 2: The Argument from Pragmatism implies an extreme relativism regarding the truth, because the effects of belief differ for different believers. A profligate, impulsive drunkard may have to believe in a primitive retributive God who will send him to hell if he doesn’t stay out of barroom fights, whereas a contemplative mensch may be better off with an abstract deistic presence who completes his deepest existential worldview. But either there is a vengeful God who sends sinners to hell or there isn’t. If one allows pragmatic consequences to determine truth, then truth becomes relative to the believer, which is incoherent.

FLAW 3: Why should we only consider the pragmatic effects on the *believer's* life? What about the effects on everyone else? The history of religious intolerance, such as inquisitions, fatwas, and suicide bombers, suggests that the effects on one person's life of another person's believing in God can be pretty grim.

FLAW 4: The Argument from Pragmatism suffers from the first flaw of The Argument from Decision Theory (#31, above)—namely, the assumption that the belief in God is like a faucet that one can turn on and off as the need arises. If I make the leap of faith in order to evaluate the pragmatic consequences of belief, then, if those consequences are not so good, can I leap back to disbelief? Isn't a leap of faith a one-way maneuver? "The will to believe" is an oxymoron: beliefs are forced on a person (ideally, by logic and evidence); they are not chosen for their consequences.

33. The Argument from the Unreasonableness of Reason

1. Our belief in reason cannot be justified by reason, since that would be circular.
2. Our belief in reason must be accepted on faith (from 1).
3. Every time we exercise reason, we are exercising faith (from 2).
4. Faith provides good rational grounds for beliefs (since it is, in the final analysis, necessary even for the belief in reason—from 3).
5. We are justified in using faith for any belief that is so important to our lives that not believing it would render us incoherent (from 4).
6. We cannot avoid faith in God if we are to live coherent moral and purposeful lives.
7. We are justified in believing that God exists (from 5 and 6).
8. God exists.

Reason is a faculty of thinking, the very faculty of giving grounds for our beliefs. To justify reason would be to try to give grounds for the belief: "We ought to accept the conclusions of sound arguments." Let's say we produce a sound argument for the conclusion that "we ought to accept the conclusions of sound arguments." How could we legitimately accept the conclusion of that sound argument without independently knowing the conclusion? Any attempt to justify the very propositions that we must use in order to justify propositions is going to land us in circularity.

FLAW 1: This argument tries to generalize the inability of reason to justify itself to an abdication of reason when it comes to justifying God's existence. But the inability of reason to justify reason is a unique case in epistemology, not an illustration of a flaw of reason that can be generalized to some other kind of belief—and certainly not a belief in the existence of some entity with specific properties such as creating the world or defining morality. Indeed, one could argue that the attempt to justify reason with reason is not circular, but, rather, unnecessary. One already is, and always will be, committed to reason by the very process one is already engaged in—namely, reasoning. Reason is non-negotiable; all sides concede it. It needs no justification, because it *is* justification. A belief in God is not like that at all.

FLAW 2: If one really took the unreasonability of reason as a license to believe things on faith, then which things should one believe in? If it is a license to believe in a single God who gave his son for our sins, why isn't it just as much a license to believe in Zeus and all the other Greek gods, or the three major gods of Hinduism, or the Angel Moroni? For that matter, why not Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy? If one says that there are good reasons to accept some entities on faith, while rejecting others, then one is saying that it is ultimately reason, not faith, that must be invoked to justify a belief.

FLAW 3: Premise 6, which claims that a belief in God is necessary in order to have a purpose in one's life, or to be moral, has already been challenged in the discussions of The Argument from Moral Truth (#16, above) and The Argument from Personal Purpose (#19, above).

34. The Argument from Sublimity

1. There are experiences that are windows into the wholeness of existence—its grandeur, beauty, symmetry, harmony, unity, even its goodness.
2. We glimpse a benign transcendence in these moments.
3. Only God could provide us with a glimpse of benign transcendence.
4. God exists.

FLAW: An experience of sublimity is an aesthetic experience. Aesthetic experience can indeed be intense and blissful, absorbing our attention so completely, while exciting our pleasure, as to seem to lift us right out of our surroundings. Aesthetic experiences vary in their strength, and when they are overwhelming, we grope for terms like “transcendence” to describe the overwhelmingness. Yet, for all that, aesthetic experiences are still responses of the brain, as we see from the fact that ingesting recreational drugs can bring on even more intense experiences of transcendence. And the particular triggers for natural aesthetic experiences are readily explicable from the evolutionary pressures that have shaped the perceptual systems of human beings. An eye for sweeping vistas, dramatic skies, bodies of water, large animals, flowering and fruiting plants, and strong geometric patterns with repetition and symmetry was necessary to orient attention to aspects of the environment that were matters of life and death to the species as it evolved in its natural environment. The identification of a blissfully aesthetic experience with a glimpse into benign transcendence is an example of the Projection Fallacy, dramatic demonstrations of our spreading ourselves onto the world. This is most obvious when the experience gets fleshed out into the religious terms that come most naturally to the particular believer, such as a frozen waterfall being seen by a Christian as evidence for the Christian Trinity.

35. The Argument from the Intelligibility of the Universe (Spinoza’s God)

1. All facts must have explanations.
2. The fact that there is a universe at all—and that it is *this* universe, with just these laws of nature—has an explanation (from 1).
3. There must, in principle, be a Theory of Everything that explains why just this universe, with these laws of nature, exists. (From 2. Note that this should not be interpreted as requiring that we have the capacity to come up with a Theory of Everything; it may elude the cognitive abilities we have.)
4. If the Theory of Everything explains everything, it explains why it is the Theory of Everything.
5. The only way that the Theory of Everything could explain why it is the Theory of Everything is if it is itself necessarily true (i.e. true in all possible worlds).

6. The Theory of Everything is necessarily true (from 4 and 5).
7. The universe, understood in terms of the Theory of Everything, exists necessarily and explains itself (from 6).
8. That which exists necessarily and explains itself is God (a definition of “God”).
9. The universe is God (from 7 and 8).
10. God exists.

Whenever Einstein was asked whether he believed in God, he responded that he believed in “Spinoza’s God.” This argument presents Spinoza’s God. It is one of the most elegant and subtle arguments for God’s existence, demonstrating where one ends up if one rigorously eschews the Fallacy of Invoking One Mystery to Explain Another: one ends up with the universe and nothing but the universe, which itself provides all the answers to all the questions one can pose about it. A major problem with the argument, however, in addition to the flaws discussed below, is that it is not at all clear that it is *God* whose existence is being proved. Spinoza’s conclusion is that the universe that itself provides all the answers about itself simply *is* God. Perhaps the conclusion should, rather, be that the universe is different from what it appears to be—no matter how arbitrary and chaotic it may appear, it is in fact perfectly lawful and necessary, and therefore worthy of our awe. But is its awe-inspiring lawfulness reason enough to regard it as God? Spinoza’s God is sharply at variance with all other divine conceptions. The argument has only one substantive premise, its first one, which, though unprovable, is not unreasonable; it is, in fact, the claim that the universe itself is thoroughly reasonable. Though this first premise can’t be proved, it is the guiding faith of many physicists (including Einstein). It is the claim that everything must have an explanation; even the laws of nature, in terms of which processes are explained, must have an explanation. In other words, there has to be an explanation for why it is *these* laws of nature rather than some other, which is another way of asking for why it is *this* world rather than some other.

FLAW: The first premise cannot be proved. Our world could conceivably be one in which randomness and contingency have free reign, no matter what the intuitions of some scientists are. Maybe some things just *are* (“stuff happens”), including the fundamental laws of

nature. Philosophers sometimes call this just-is-ness “contingency,” and if the fundamental laws of nature are contingent, then, even if everything that happens in the world is explainable by those laws, the laws themselves couldn’t be explained. There is a sense in which this argument recalls The Argument from the Improbable Self. Both demand explanations for *just this* -ness, whether of *just this* universe or *just this* me.

The Argument from the Intelligibility of the Universe fleshes out the consequences of the powerful first premise, but some might regard the argument as a *reductio ad absurdum* of that premise.

COMMENTS: Spinoza’s argument, if sound, invalidates all the other arguments, the ones that try to establish the existence of a more traditional God—that is, a God who stands *distinct* from the world described by the laws of nature, as well as distinct from the world of human meaning, purpose, and morality. Spinoza’s argument claims that any transcendent God, standing *outside* of that for which he is invoked as explanation, is invalidated by the first powerful premise, that all things are part of the same explanatory fabric. The mere coherence of The Argument from the Intelligibility of the Universe, therefore, is sufficient to reveal the invalidity of the other theistic arguments. This is why Spinoza, although he offered a proof of what he called “God,” is often regarded as the most effective of all atheists.

36. The Argument from the Abundance of Arguments

1. The more arguments there are for a proposition, the more confidence we should have in it, even if every argument is imperfect. (Science itself proceeds by accumulating evidence, each piece by itself being inconclusive.)
2. There is not just one argument for the existence of God, but many—thirty-five (with additional variations) so far, in this list alone.
3. The arguments, though not flawless, are persuasive enough that they have convinced billions of people, and for millennia have been taken seriously by history’s greatest minds.
4. The probability that each one is true must be significantly greater than zero (from 3).

5. For God *not* to exist, every one of the arguments for his existence must be false, which is extremely unlikely (from 4). Imagine, for the sake of argument, that each argument has an average probability of only .2 of being true. Then the probability that all thirty-five are false is $(1 - 0.2)^{35} = .004$, an extremely low probability.
6. It is extremely probable that God exists (from 5).

FLAW 1: Premise 3 is vulnerable to the same criticisms as The Argument from the Consensus of Humanity. The flaws that accompany each argument may be extremely damaging, even fatal, notwithstanding the fact that they have been taken seriously by many people throughout history. In other words, the average probability of any of the arguments' being true may be far less than .2, in which case the probability that all of them are false could be high.

FLAW 2: This argument treats all the other arguments as being on an equal footing, distributing equal probabilities to them all, and rewarding all of them, too, with the commendation of being taken seriously by history's greatest minds. Many of the arguments on this list have been completely demolished by such minds as David Hume and Baruch Spinoza: their probability is zero.

COMMENT: The Argument from the Abundance of Arguments may be the most psychologically important of the thirty-six. Few people rest their belief in God on a single, decisive logical argument. Instead, people are swept away by the sheer number of reasons that make God's existence seem plausible—holding out an explanation as to why the universe went to the bother of existing, and why it is this particular universe, with its sublime improbabilities, including us humans; and, even more particularly, explaining the existence of each one of us who know ourselves as unique conscious individuals, who make free and moral choices that grant meaning and purpose to our lives; and, even more personally, giving hope that desperate prayers may not go unheard and unanswered, and that the terrors of death can be subdued in immortality. Religions, too, do not justify themselves with a single logical argument, but minister to all of these spiritual needs and provide a space in our lives where the largest questions with which we grapple all come together, which is a space that can become among the most

expansive and loving of which we are capable, or the most constricted and hating of which we are capable—in other words, a space as contradictory as human nature itself.

Appendix D: Questionnaire: Thinker's Choice: What are your Favorite Freethought Resources?

You are invited to participate in the following questionnaire. In an endeavor to make this guide as informative as possible, I am interested to know what you, my dear reader and fellow freethinker, think should be included in the next edition of the guide.

This questionnaire is anonymous and any identifying information will be kept strictly confidential. The information gathered will be presented as a statistical aggregate of all responses returned. By filling out and returning this questionnaire it will be assumed that you have agreed to freely participate.

I am interested in learning about those resources freethinkers themselves feel are important to an understanding of freethought, secular humanism, skepticism, agnosticism, and atheism. Think of the questions in this way: If a friend came to you desiring to learn about these perspectives which resources would you recommend?

For this project to succeed in educating and empowering freethinkers, I need your help! To participate in the questionnaire please visit: www.freethoughtguide.com

The questionnaire can be reviewed below.

If you would like more information or have questions please contact the author by email at: freethoughtguide@yahoo.com

1. Please list a few of your favorite **fiction & nonfiction books (all genres)** about freethought.
2. Do you know of any **activist resources** including **celebrations** and **holidays** you participate in which may be helpful in empowering and educating freethinkers?
3. Do you know of freethought materials which may be helpful to **parents, teachers, students, or children** ?
4. List **science resources** (books, websites, etc.) you feel other freethinkers should know about.
5. Please include items which have helped you learn about **religion** (books, websites, etc.).
6. Are there any other freethought **artworks (music, film, painting, sculpture, theatre, humor, etc.)** that you enjoy or think are important? (please indicate which format)
7. What are your favorite **websites, blogs, video shows, or podcasts** about freethought?
8. List freethought resources that you think would be appropriate for **theist friends or family** .
9. Do you know of any freethought groups or sites which focus on **women's or minority issues** ?
10. Below please include **any other resources** you think should be included in the next edition of the *Freethought Resource Guide* and/or **questions or comments** you may have.

I hope that you'll help out!

Appendix E: The Beast of Belief, or: A Flowery Expression of Angst & Hope Upon Completion of the Above Work



“Nitpicky Negative Things”

Reprinted with kind permission from Tracie Harris.

People may say that the world is imbued with spirit, that there are ghosts, gods, or gremlins. They say that this honors the mystery of reality and connects its true nature. But the literalization of fanciful ideas, with merit in their own symbolic right, is nothing but an insult to the terrible and awesome world in which we have been thrown. Endowing anything with attributes beyond its capacity is a bar to high. Disappointment swells with each passing day when this “spiritual” life comes to naught. “Why, why?” we scream in our sleep. “Why have you forsaken me?”

We have challenged existence with childish demands. When it does not deliver we lash out in a tantrum of guilt. Is not the infinity of the universe enough to satisfy our lusty search for awe? With our imaginations we have the power to discover or inflate, to accept or deny. The spiritualization of the world is blight upon the grandeur of existence, the beauty of the experience of life, the wondrous satisfaction of knowing. We build our towers of faith not to welcome the world as it is but to mask our horror and perceived powerlessness before it. We may create paper dragons and hollow gods which we admit somewhere within, often chained to our

unconscious floor by fear, that these machinations of the mind are the products of our own vanity. Our chants are simply “la, la, la’s” to the bully world. All the while time moves inextricably forward. Where we place a cross we throw off the burden of responsibility towards one another, in prayer we become free of the shame of idle hands, and when we submit to dictatorial commands we lose conscience and freedom.

The mental demons which lurk in the minds of men exist as shadows seeking to be tossed out into the world, where their power can be tangible. The person who allows such an escape is not warning us or saving us but is merely a blind man crying wolf at the zoo. They can smell the beast but are oblivious from whence it came. “Over there, under there, behind you!” the poor soul cries. Turn and turn they might, scramble and flee the terrible stench and snapping jaws. How much can a man stand before his eyes open to find no stalking beast but themselves with razor teeth and a taste for blood? Whole societies become blind hunters telling us to beware of the fellow to his left while licking their lips in eager anticipation.

Spiritual conceptions, however well intentioned or deeply felt, are accomplices in the gravest of mental failings: remaining unconscious. As if this were not enough to rob beliefs of their supposed purpose, delusions suck the reliability out of knowledge, the substance out of truth, and the authenticity out of life leaving nothing but an obtuse and hollow reminder of humanity’s arrogance and fear.

When we lay back witnessing before us, what our senses can plainly capture, what experience instills, it seems part of our condition to think it otherwise. Why with such untapped wellsprings of discovery do we insist on denying that yawning chasm its true nature and reflect upon it our own boring and self-centered insecurities. While all reality may be one there are divisions which exist that neither will, nor fate, nor sleight of hand can bridge. While many wish the world to be what it is not, reality beckons to join in the dance of the true. So it stands before us. The years pass. And until we wake up to the here and now, as it is, we continue to still the inquisitive mind with each cumulative delusion. Why dwell beyond when we have yet to grasp what is so very near?

Thank you so very much for reading this guide. I hope you enjoyed it as much as I had compiling it! Hopefully I have done some justice to the grand history of freethought. I look forward to a bright and productive future, yet am cognizant we freethinkers have much work to do in helping our fellow human beings live more honest, productive, compassionate, and liberating lives. I urge you to use the insights and tools above to facilitate a more enlightened planet.

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From Ryan Vandebroke

Mark Vandebroke earned a B.A in history from Southwest Minnesota State University (2006), an M.A. in the humanities from Pacifica Graduate Institute (2008), and an M.A. in psychology from Saybrook University (2012). He lives in Austin, TX.

Contact the author at: freethoughtguide@yahoo.com

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