

The
BIBLE
of the
Good and Moral
Atheist

The Bible of the Good and Moral Atheist

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The Testament of Philosophy

The Books of the Testament of Philosophy

Welcome

Morality

Virtues & Ethics

Tenets

Atheists

Arguments

Quotes

Books

Welcome

Think for yourself! Do not be afraid to question all the statements in this book. This book contains the thoughts and opinions and interpretations of regular people, just like every other book you have ever read, without exception. Accepting the teachings of others without questioning them is a recipe for narrow-mindedness and ignorance.

Use this book as a guide to a life based upon reality. The start of the trail has been marked for you. We will show you where to find out more information on every aspect of Atheism, and how to live life as an Atheist. But, you alone will choose how to complete your journey to understand the nature of the world, to put aside the false supernatural, and to live as a good and moral person.

This book is not intended to be an authoritative guide to the study of morality, nor a set of rigorous philosophical or logical arguments for or against god. It is not meant as a scholarly treatise on the science of the Big Bang or evolution, nor an exact timeline of the events involved. It is merely an introduction to such concepts in common terms, in addition to being an outline for life as an Atheist. More detailed and accurate papers and books exist on all of these topics (the Book of Books offers a good selection of such material), and the interested are encouraged to seek out such information, and to read it all using the sharp lens of reason.

Many other books on Atheism concentrate on the “whys” of Atheism. They either ask why we should believe in the concept of Atheism, or tell us why we should not believe in god. Although this book covers such questions in a basic way, answering the “whys” is not the primary purpose of this book. The Bible of the Good and Moral Atheist is about the “hows” of Atheism. How should an Atheist approach the world? How should we seek purpose? How should we deal with death? How do Atheists approach morality? How do Atheists pray? How should we celebrate life?

The goal of this book is to make Atheism accessible and comfortable. We are used to reading religious tomes such as the Bible, the Torah and Talmud, or the Quran. We are comfortable with learning moral lessons in this manner, and modifying them to apply to our own lives. Those books give us structure and guidelines, even though the miracles and supernatural events that supposedly occurred are obviously fictional. Religious words comfort us in times of distress, and help us to comfort others. What The Bible of the Good and Moral Atheist does is give us the same moral lessons, explanations of existence, and comfort, but without the fables.

If you are not an Atheist, please feel welcome to read about our philosophy! Atheists are not evil, scary, devil-worshipping monsters. We are good, wholesome, moral members of society. We go to school with you and work with you, we have friends and raise families, we coach soccer and donate blood and give to charity. We are conservatives and liberals and moderates. Whether you are a Theist, a Deist, an Agnostic, or still searching for a way, we're sure you'll find our Bible enlightening.

The Bible of the Good and Moral Atheist is divided into three testaments. The first section, the Testament of Philosophy, describes the philosophy behind Atheism, covers the basic arguments for Atheism, and gives the reader a guide to quotes and books concerning Atheism and freethinking in general. Next is the Testament of History, which tells the history of the universe, the world, life, humanity, and human understanding. In this section there are also basic descriptions of the scientific theories and discoveries behind this history, and the evidence supporting these explanations. Finally, the books of the Testament of Life serve as a guide to living life as a Good and Moral Atheist. Much like religious tomes have in the past attempted to do, these books educate the Atheist on questions of life and death, answer questions, and offer sources of inspiration and reflection. Included in the Testament of Life is the Book of Resources, where we categorize and give short reviews of websites of interest to Atheists.

If you choose to embrace Atheism and reject the supernatural, you will receive the key to true morality, true understanding, and true purpose in the world. Take what you wish from this guide, and go out and live your life to the fullest. Find the purpose that motivates you, and strive to make a difference. We only get this one life; we each must make the most out of what chance has brought to us.

Good luck on your journey!

Morality

¹All morality begins and ends with sympathy.

We have evolved the ability to empathize, to share the motivations and feelings of those around us. From this, we have gained the ability to sympathize with the plight of others, to understand what may be causing them distress or pain, and to wish, for their sake, that their suffering would stop. Armed with this sympathy, we act in a moral way to prevent the distress and suffering of others. Our opinions on what constitutes a moral course of action may differ, but the underlying sympathy is the same.

With sympathy for others and recognition of the similarities between people, we each build an internal code of the morality of our actions. We seek to protect innocent children, for we were once children ourselves and needed protection. We seek a society that does not foster immoral actions, in order to protect the members of society like ourselves. We feel and internalize various plights and pains of others in this process, and develop a true morality. American revolutionary and President Thomas Jefferson put it well when he wrote in an 1814 letter, "Nature [has] implanted in our breasts a love of others, a sense of duty to them, a moral instinct, in short, which prompts us irresistibly to feel and to succor their distresses."

In our daily lives, we occasionally encounter challenges to this morality, where we are faced with actions that may cause some distress to others, and we must decide whether our own actions are moral or not. Our code of morality may allow for small transgressions or small injuries to others, but not large ones. We might perhaps take an inexpensive item like a pen from our workplace, but we do not take an expensive one. We might ignore a man caught in a downpour, but we do not ignore a drowning man. We might argue politics with people on the street, but we do not assault them. We recognize the harm to others in theft, in neglecting someone who is drowning, in committing assault.

Theistic religions, on the other hand, offer a false morality based upon threats and rewards, usually combined with a scripted set of moral and immoral actions. Adherents who fail to follow the scripted moral actions are threatened with divine punishment, while adherents who follow them closely are promised supernatural rewards of bliss or pleasure from god. However, these religions often do include references to the true morality of sympathy. In the Christian bible, Matthew 7:12 (KJV) states, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." This is known as the Golden Rule, and the common form of this is often quoted, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." This is the true embodiment of sympathy.

Although much of the rest of the scripted morality is false, the morality put into practice by most theists and by most people throughout the world is true, and is based on sympathy. Most theists adjust the scripted requirements as needed to follow their own understanding of what is moral and what is not. Although the bible allows for slavery but bans the wearing of clothing consisting of mixed fibers woven together (Leviticus 19:19, KJV), most people today recognize that slavery is bad and mixed-fiber clothing is harmless. The scripture has been adjusted to meet more reasonable moral standards. The Indian independence and peace activist Mahatma Gandhi (a Hindu) himself explicitly admitted that his morality was not based on that of scripture when he stated, "My belief in the Hindu scriptures does not require me to accept every word and every verse as divinely inspired, I decline to be bound by any interpretation, however learned it may be, if it is repugnant to reason or moral sense." In all religions, scripture is usually subordinate to the natural "moral sense" of sympathy.

Many of the political arguments we have today are a matter of choice of interpretation of the more moral action between the two. Is it more moral to allow a drug user to go free and possibly clean up his life, or to jail him and help prevent the flow of drugs into society? Is it more moral to spare the life of a murderer, or to execute him to ensure he never kills again and deter other would-be killers, so sparing the lives of their future victims? Is it more moral to go to war to bring down a brutal dictator and protect the people he has oppressed and killed, or to avoid the war and protect the people that would be the casualties of war? There is no absolute answer to any of these questions; the answers are a matter of personal preferences of which choice is more moral, in the eyes of the beholder.

However, the fact that we can see both sides of the above issues shows that there is a consistent moral underpinning to us all. Our common moral goals in all of the above examples are to minimize injustice and suffering and death, and to foster a positive society. We would not support the jailing or execution of an innocent person. We

would not support war against a peaceful country that treats its citizens fairly and has not attacked or threatened us. There are obviously absolute bounds to morality.

⁹What is the nature of good and evil? Does evil exist? In the traditional supernatural sense of demons and devils, no. However, people can commit evil actions, actions which people agree are immoral in such an extreme way as to be evil. The actions of Hitler or of Pol Pot are of course evil, to the point where the person himself can only be considered evil and completely immoral. Any good acts by that person must necessarily be cast in the light of their evil actions.

Is there such a thing as “sin”? Traditionally, we think of sins as transgressions against god. But an Atheist can understand them term, for certain acts are surely “sinful,” although the transgression is not against god, it is against another. Sometimes sins are classified as being in thought rather than in deed. For the Atheist, the sins in deed are the ones that matter the most. Sins in thought may be thought of as transgressions against one’s self, but as long as there is no action taken, no harm has been committed to others. Catholics further divide sins into “mortal” sins, which cannot be rectified, and “venial” sins, which can. Mortal sins require knowledge of the sin, free will in commission of the sin, and the sin itself must be a grave matter, not merely a minor transgression. Atheists will recognize mortal sins as being those which are outside the absolute bounds of morality. Unlike theists, we recognize no supernatural punishment for commission of a mortal sin. Instead, an Atheist who does so will suffer the pains of their own conscience and guilt, as a result of their underlying sympathy for their victim. Again, sympathy is the basis for all morality.

Does good exist? Again, there are no angels or gods. But people can choose good actions over evil ones. A good action is defined by a person’s set of morals, which depend on sympathy. But just as there are absolutes in the moral basis upon which we all build our particular moral codes, there are actions that would qualify as good by all moral standards. Helping the injured after a natural disaster is certainly good in the eyes of all societies, as is protecting a child or offering shelter to a guest. Judaism calls such acts “mitzvahs,” and Atheists certainly understand such acts. But instead of earning a supernatural reward for such mitzvahs, the Atheist will benefit from their sympathy for those they assisted. Plus, Atheists recognize that there is no afterlife, and see mitzvahs as a way to personally leave a lasting positive impression on the world, and to help shape society in a way that such good deeds are commonplace.

So are all sets of morals that give rise to personal judgements of good and evil equally valid? Should each person’s actions be only judged by that of their small peer group? The answer is no. As we have matured as a thinking and moral species, our global set of morals has also matured. We have cast out actions from our history that are now deemed objectionable. Genocide and slavery, even of those who fight against you, has been recognized as immoral under all circumstances, even though our history is rife with instances of genocidal actions by groups that have since changed to be moral. Denial of the basic rights of innocent people is considered immoral, such as the rights of free speech, freedom of movement (with an allowance for order and security), freedom of action (as long as it doesn’t infringe on the rights of others), and a vote for your leaders. One of the strongest embodiments of such principles was in the American Declaration of Independence, which stated, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Although the “Creator” of man is merely the complex process of evolution, the statement that all innocent people have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness rings true.

Since morality must be based upon sympathy, does that mean that all we learned from the Bible or the Quran is wrong? Of course not. Although much of what was written in those books were based upon the sensibilities of people who lived thousands of years ago, some of what was written was grounded in the concept of basic human interaction and sympathy, and still applies today. Here are a few of the good teachings from the Bible and the Quran:

Do not kill or steal:

“Thou shalt not kill.” Exodus 20:13, KJV (King James Version of the Bible)

“Thou shalt not steal.” Exodus 20:15, KJV

Be kind to strangers:

“Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

Exodus 22:21, KJV

“And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him.” Leviticus, 19:33, KJV

¹⁶Do not commit perjury:

“Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.” Exodus 20:16, KJV

Deal fairly with one another:

“And if thou sell aught unto thy neighbor, or buyest aught of thy neighbor's hand, ye shall not oppress one another.” Leviticus 25:14, KJV

“Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbor, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning.” Leviticus 19:13, KJV

Care for orphans and treat them fairly:

“And test the orphans until they attain puberty; then if you find in them maturity of intellect, make over to them their property, and do not consume it extravagantly and hastily, lest they attain to full age; and whoever is rich, let him abstain altogether, and whoever is poor, let him eat reasonably; then when you make over to them their property, call witnesses in their presence; ...” Chapter 4 (An-Nisa), verse 7 (Shakir version of Quran)

Surely such teachings still apply today. Whether you follow such teachings out of reverence for scripture or out of common sense and sympathy for a fellow human being, you are still committing good acts. These passages fall within the bounds of morality. That was much of the intent of the authors of the Torah, the Bible, the Quran, and other such religious tomes: to explicitly codify which actions are moral, and which actions are not. And these books did serve a great purpose, to help teach children the difference between good and evil, and to give the adult a written, standard document to fall back upon when confronted with a morally gray area.

But other passages in the Bible and Quran give commandments that are either contradictory to other passages in the same book, pointless (the Bible is clear that mixing wool and linen is forbidden!), and in some cases, in direct opposition to the ultimate arbiter of morality, our sympathy for others. If such scripted morality is used as the only basis for beliefs, you can see how some might end up committing acts that are immoral, but that follow the letter of their chosen scripture. A written law can have loopholes, but human sympathy is much harder to circumvent.

We have in our midst people who have perverted their own moral system to one that the rest of us recognize as immoral, based upon the written laws of their religion, and their faith in one god or another. In the conflict between Israel and Palestine, we have seen actions such as those of Israeli settler Baruch Goldberg, who fired an automatic weapon at the backs of unarmed Palestinian civilians in a mosque killing dozens, or that of the Palestinian sniper who shot and killed Shalhevet Pas, an infant in her mother's arms. Both committed heinous acts against the innocent because they thought their religion made what they did morally acceptable. They were blinded to true morality by their faith and their scripture. Although they might have thought their acts were acceptable, the world acknowledges them as actions of evil. Even their own people, locked in a battle where morals are constantly pushed to the boundaries, have categorically condemned such horrific acts.

Throughout history, many other innocents have died at the hand of those claiming to be doing good in the name of religion. During the Spanish Inquisition, thousands upon thousands of innocents died and many more were horribly tortured in the name of Christianity. Hysteria over supposed anti-Christian witches was responsible for many more deaths in Europe and America. And even in modern times, people are tortured and killed in the name of religion. In 1998, Iran executed a member of the Baha'i faith for heresy, one of hundreds to die and many more tortured for heresy against Islam in the decades since the revolution in Iran in 1979. Even in 2005, three Christian men were convicted in London, England for torturing an eight-year-old girl they believed was a witch. Clearly, evil acts are committed by people following the false morality of scripted religious teachings, usually ones which call non-believers “evil” or destined for their supposed hell. Such acts continue to this day.

The definition of actions that are good and/or evil has a range of interpretation, but there are definite bounds to that interpretation that society has agreed upon. If you follow supposedly infallible religious teachings, you might commit an evil, immoral act in the name of religion, in the expectation of a supernatural reward. To quote Nobel Laureate Steven Weinberg: “... With or without it, you'd have good people doing good things and evil people doing evil things. But for good people to do evil things, it takes religion.” However, with the understanding of the true nature of the world and morality that Atheism brings, a higher set of morals is achieved. People can rightly evaluate whether their actions are good or evil, using their own internal scale, instead of the ancient writings of the uninformed.

²⁴Note that this is not a claim that all Atheists are moral people. Atheists are people, just as are Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and followers of all other religions. Within any population there are good people and bad people, and the bad often use their belief system to oppress others. Stalin, an avowed Atheist, killed millions. He was clearly immoral and evil, without the regard for his fellow man that a Good and Moral Atheist has. He used Atheism as a tool, much as other evil people throughout history have used religion. Hitler and Torquemada professed Christianity, but their actions in no way followed the teachings of Jesus. They used religion as a way to control others and as a justification for their horrendous acts.

The Good and Moral Atheist will base his or her morality upon sympathy for other people and for other living beings. While that morality will have a subjective element due to individual perceptions of what is harmful or helpful, and what priorities are placed on different actions, it will nevertheless be bounded by what we now consider absolutes. We must do what is in our power to protect innocents, especially children. We must help those who are in need. We must strive for a fair and just society, where basic freedoms are protected. We must seek a betterment of mankind, and a nullification of the agents of injustice, prejudice, oppression, intolerance, and evil in the world. We must continue scientific efforts to understand the nature of the world and of ourselves, for such knowledge is the only truth.

We must recognize that sympathy for our fellow man is the noblest of the emotions.

Virtues & Ethics

Virtues

¹Virtues—as we define them here—are personality traits that may be considered “good,” in that we respect those with those traits, and seek such traits in our children. They are not morals, per se, in that one can be completely moral yet lack these virtues (although some of the virtues are enhancements of basic morals). But to retain the common definition of the “virtuous man,” we should recognize that a virtuous person is one whom not only has personal virtues, but is moral as well. Adolf Hitler was known for some of the virtues we mention below, at least in his actions towards those of German descent, but he was in no way a “virtuous man.”

The Good and Moral Atheist should recognize virtues, and strive to achieve them. Virtues should be seen as goals for personal improvement. These should contrast against morals, which although flexible to some extent, reside in certain absolute bounds and define lines which we should not cross. However, we should also recognize that mere failing of a particular virtue does not make a person immoral.

The virtues may be grouped into several categories. First and most important would be the Virtues of Kindness: benevolence, compassion, generosity, charity. These virtues define a positive outlook to society as a whole. A person holding these virtues shows that they care and sympathize with all people throughout the world.

A second level of virtue recognizes those we directly interact with, the Virtues of Civility. These include friendliness, tact, courteousness, cooperativeness, thoughtfulness, tolerance, patience, humility, and reasonableness. Such virtues are the mark of a person who gives basic respect to all people with whom they encounter.

Going deeper, there is a third level of virtue that reflects upon our contribution to the world and to ourselves through our efforts, the Virtues of Productivity. The productive person is conscientious, industrious, and dependable. Those who hold such virtues are easy to work and live with, and always are willing to pull their share of the load.

The final level of virtue is an inward reflection of our strengths and worth, the Virtue of Self-Worth. We strive to be confident, self-reliant, courageous, and disciplined. We seek to understand where moderation and self-control are appropriate, yet we also recognize when to reward ourselves. We maintain self-respect, and we seek enjoyment out of life.

These four types of virtues, Kindness, Civility, Productivity, and Self-Worth, are goals we must set for ourselves. We must search for kindness in our hearts toward people. We should endeavor to remain civil in our dealings with others. Each of us must find a way to be productive, positive members of society. And, we should all recognize our own strengths, the value inherent in our own being. We should respect such virtues in others, and work toward their attainment in our own lives. In addition to being a Good and Moral Atheist, we should aspire to being a virtuous Atheist as well. These virtues apply to all humanity, Atheist and theist alike.

Ethics

We can use “ethics” to describe a stricter societal code than morality. Also, unlike the vagueness of virtues, ethics are well-defined rules to live by. Ethics help to allow societies to function by prescribing basic rules which smooth interactions between people. These rules are more than moral actions, and in some cases they even fall afoul of morality, giving us the classical “ethical dilemma.”

A person who is ethical is honest, fair, just, and law-abiding. Ethics defined this way comprise a strict code, much like morals, but less binding. One might be unethical and tell a lie or break a minor law, yet still be a moral person. Due to this less-binding nature, we should strive to be ethical, much as we strive to be virtuous, while recognizing that following these rules perfectly may not be possible. These same ethics allow us to function as a society. We expect others to be honest (while allowing for minor social fibs), fair, just, and to abide by the laws of the land.

Virtues & Ethics 10-13

¹⁰Note that law-abiding does not mean that we should obey laws that are patently unjust, unfair, or dishonest to the point that they harm others. Also note that we may be able to find people who are moral and “virtuous,” but who are not ethical. The mythical “Robin Hood” (as written in storybooks, not necessarily in real life) who stole from the rich and gave to the poor was certainly not law-abiding or honest, but he was courteous to those he stole from, and compassionate to the poor and starving.

And on the other side, there are those who are nominally ethical, but not virtuous or moral. An example might be a legislator proposing a three-strikes-you’re-out law that applies even to misdemeanors, where a third minor offense lands a person in jail for life with no chance of parole. The law might be fairly applied to everyone, but it certainly has no compassion for those who are caught for the least of such offenses, such as the theft of an item worth a few dollars.

Ethics, virtues, and morals overlap a great deal. In many texts, you will not find the separation of the three we have here, or you may find subtly different definitions. But the above split serves us well, and helps us to understand the relative importance of the three personal goals. Morals, although they may vary a bit, have a firm outer boundary which must not ever be crossed. Virtues are personal attributes which we respect in others and work towards in ourselves. Ethics are strict societal codes that allow us to interact peacefully.

As Atheists, we respect and sympathize with the feelings of others. With such a base, it becomes logically imperative upon us to be good and moral, and to strive to be virtuous and ethical whenever possible. Without virtues and ethics, we become difficult to live with, and fall afoul of the key underpinnings of society. But without morality, more is lost, for we have lost what it is to be human, that key sympathy for the plight of those around us.

Tenets

¹The Five Tenets of the Good and Moral Atheist are the Atheist's equivalent of the Ten Commandments. However, unlike the Ten Commandments, the Five Tenets place trust in the true morality of sympathy to handle the gray areas. Even with such firm commandments such as "Thou shall not murder" and "Thou shall not steal," gray areas may arise. Can we kill someone in self-defense? Is it immoral for a starving man to steal bread for his family if there are no other ways to get them food? For the Atheist, such gray situations are weighed carefully against the true morality of sympathy.

The Five Tenets of the Good and Moral Atheist are the tenets of Morality, Purpose, Life, Freedom, and Reason. These tenets are as follows:

I. Morality

We commit to be Good and Moral, strive to be Virtuous and Ethical, and trust in the Goodness of Humanity.

II. Purpose

We each strive to better the world in the time we have.

III. Life

We seek to love and be loved, to reach our own potential and help others reach theirs, and to enjoy life.

IV. Freedom

We promote and guard freedoms and civil rights among all peoples.

V. Reason

We use only reason to solve problems, and encourage others to shun the falsehoods of the supernatural.

Atheists who follow these tenets will live moral and fulfilling lives. They will individually impact society and their loved ones in a positive way, and their legacy of goodness and purpose will last far beyond their years. Together they will help shape society in a rational, positive manner, and produce benefits for all mankind.

Morality. Purpose. Life. Freedom. Reason. The Five Tenets are not only Atheist ideals, they are the ideals of all of humanity.

Atheists

¹Often there is great misunderstanding about what the term *Atheist* and other related terms actually mean. Just like the term *Christian*, *Atheist* can be divided into many subcategories. We will try to clarify the various categories to improve understanding of what they truly mean.

Freethinker is a good catch-all word that refers to all people who reject religious teachings. Freethinkers seek truth on their own, and will look at all claims of divinity with a critical eye. They are also called *Skeptics*. In the past, theistic religions used the terms *Infidel* and *Heretic* as derogatory terms to describe non-believers, but the freethinking community has taken these words for their own, and many are now proud to wear those labels along with Freethinker and Skeptic. The three main categories of Freethinkers are Deists, Agnostics, and Atheists.

A *Deist* is a person who rejects religious teachings, but who nevertheless believes in some sort of god or superhuman explanation for the world. A few Deists believe in an “interactive” god who can intervene directly in the world, but most don’t. Most Deists are also *Naturalists*, i.e. they believe in natural explanations instead of the supernatural for the occurrences in the world. One subset of Deism is *Pantheism*, which states that all of the universe is god, or the direct expression of god’s intent.

The term *Agnostic* refers to those who don’t know if there is or isn’t a god. There are two main types of Agnostics, Weak Agnostics and Strong Agnostics. A Weak Agnostic would say that they don’t know if god exists or not. A Strong Agnostic would say that they *can’t* know if god exists or not. There is a third, somewhat tongue-in-cheek group that calls themselves the Apathetic Agnostics. Not only don’t they know if god actually exists, they don’t really *care* if he exists or not. If you want to get really technical, “Agnostic/Gnostic” refers to *knowledge*, while “Atheist/Theist” refers to *belief*, so they aren’t technically exclusive. But we’ll go with the more common usages.

Atheists come in two main flavors as well: Weak Atheists who don’t have a belief in a god, and Strong (or Positive) Atheists who believe there are definitely no gods. It’s a little more subtle than the split for Agnostics. Atheists sometimes recognize a third group as well, *Apatheists* (apathetic Atheists), who don’t believe in god but don’t really care about the whole issue. Beyond these classifications, Atheists (and sometimes Agnostics and Deists) have several significant subsets of beliefs and outlooks on life. A *Humanist* is one who believes in the positive power of Humanity to do good in the world. A *Rationalist* believes in the use of reason to solve problems. A *Naturalist* (or *Materialist*) rejects all supernatural claims for the actions of the universe. The *Nihilist* minority believes that all life is pointless, and that none of it will matter after we are dead. *Objectivists*, followers of the philosophy of author Ayn Rand, state that truth is objective and not subject to the desires of man, reason is the only way to perceive the world, and each person should act in their own self-interest without infringing on the rights of others.

There are also several main “religious” groups that have Atheist or other Freethinker members. The Unitarian Universalist Church attracts Deists, Agnostics and Atheists alike, and occasionally even Wiccans or those subscribing to other belief systems. Their services include teachings from Christian, Jewish, and Humanist points of view, and tend to be very general, positive, and welcoming. They are much less dogmatic and more morally true (i.e. based upon sympathy) than traditional churches, but some adherents cling to theistic beliefs. This can cause strife between groups of members. Buddhism also teaches of a world without gods, although its emphasis on transcendence and reincarnation remains supernaturalistic.

The largest and most organized of the naturalistic groups dedicated to Atheists and/or Agnostics is Secular Humanism, which has basic tenets of belief very similar to those in this book, with only some minor differences. Secular Humanism has a positive, human-oriented world view. It has ministers, called Officiants or Celebrants, who serve in the same capacity as any priest, minister, or rabbi. They officiate at naming ceremonies, weddings, and funerals. Secular Humanism also has a list of 21 affirmations, and a declaration that contains ideals in 10 subject areas to promote. Most of the affirmations and ideals fit well into the Five Tenets of the Good and Moral Atheist, but are considerably more specific. However, there are a few teachings in Secular Humanism which go a bit beyond the basic moralities and teachings of Atheism and Humanism. Their affirmations include statements supporting the arts as much as science, and a commitment to negotiation and compromise. While these last two are noble goals, they also are outside the scope of Atheism or Morality. They run a bit closer to the political doctrine of the Left.

⁸Although most if not all Secular Humanists would certainly be Good and Moral Atheists, it is not necessary to support the arts, to believe in compromise with other cultures/governments, or to follow Left-leaning politics in order to be a Good and Moral Atheist. One may subscribe to many of the political leanings of the Right (excluding the emphasis on religion, of course), and still be true to Atheism and Humanism. Such a person might not fit in well with the Secular Humanism movement, but they could still be a Good and Moral Atheist. But on a final note about Secular Humanism, we would like to applaud their impressive efforts to create a positive and inclusive alternative to theistic religion, and acknowledge that writing such a book as this one would not be possible without their background. Secular Humanism is, to date, the single best alternative to traditional religion.

Other groups have followed the lead of the Secular Humanists, while trying to retain the comfortable feel of a traditional religion. There are groups such as Humanistic Judaism (a fairly large following in the United States), Christian Humanism, and there is even a small movement working on Islamic Humanism. Such groups retain their traditional holidays, while giving new, rational explanations of the historical events that brought about those holidays.

There are also tongue-in-cheek “religions” started by Atheists. The most-recognized of these is the “worship” of the *Invisible Pink Unicorn*, commonly referred to as the IPU. While the IPU doesn’t really have followers per se, the stylized logo for the IPU (a minimalist unicorn’s head in a circle, designed by Tim Ahrentlöv and downloadable from his site www.invisiblepinkunicorn.com) is becoming recognized as a symbol for Atheism. A similar parody also well-publicized is that of another deity, the *Flying Spaghetti Monster* (FSM), as related by “prophet” Bobby Henderson. Another well-recognized symbol is the *Darwin-fish*, a parody of the Christian *Jesus-fish* or *ICQUS* symbol, only with Darwin’s name and added feet symbolizing evolution. The Darwin-fish is often displayed on the backs of cars in the U.S. as a response to the ubiquitous Jesus-fish plaques displayed by many Christians.



The IPU logo

Various “non-religious” Atheist groups exist throughout the world as well. These groups meet for social or educational purposes, but usually don’t have a counterpart to a minister or priest. One of the earliest forms of such groups can be found in the Ethical Societies of the American Ethical Union, founded in 1876. Followers of the philosophy of Ayn Rand meet in Objectivist “salons” in many localities. Many other non-religious groups (along with Secular Humanists) affiliate under such other umbrella organizations as the American Atheists, the Atheist Alliance International, or the International Humanist and Ethical Union. Other groups are organized a little more informally, through the Atheist Meetup group website.

There are internet forums that serve as online communities for Atheists and other Freethinkers. As of the writing of this book, the largest of these is the Internet Infidels Discussion Forum (www.iidb.org) on the Secular Web, with thousands of regular visitors. And, there is also an internet movement, the Brights, that seeks to influence society in general. One of their goals is to introduce the term “Bright” to describe all strict Naturalists, whether they are Atheist, Agnostic, or even possibly Deist, and to gain recognition as a political constituency. Also, there is a movement at universities in the United States to encourage skeptical inquiry by organizing campus-level student groups such as the Campus Freethought Alliance (started in 1996) and the Secular Student Alliance (since 2000).

Information about contacting the above-mentioned groups and many other groups and sites of interest to Atheists can be found in the Book of Resources, in the Testament of Life. There, we provide websites, addresses, and descriptions of each group.

Finally, we will categorize the philosophy of this book. The Bible of the Good and Moral Atheist espouses a Humanist, Naturalist, Rationalist point of view. We recognize the strength of the framework of religion, and seek to use it to promote a positive and moral future based upon understanding and rationalism. We understand that Rationalists need not be confined to one particular part of the political spectrum. We are tolerant and accepting of those who cling to the beliefs of traditional religions, and we will gladly work with them toward a moral society and the betterment of humanity. However, we seek to enlighten those who are searching for true answers. This book is not associated with any particular Atheist creed or organization or political viewpoint. Its goal is to give the reader a guide to a more personal form of Atheism, resources for finding the Atheistic viewpoint and structure that best suits them (and for finding groups of like-minded thinkers), and to assist in understanding and coping with life in the absence of a belief in a god. Those who subscribe to the philosophy of The Bible of the Good and Moral Atheist will loosen the shackles of supernatural belief, while strengthening their own morality and virtuousness.

Arguments

¹Here we will outline some of the philosophical arguments for and against god. We'll start with the arguments for god, give you a little historical context for some of these arguments, and show you where the fallacy lies. Then, we'll cover the list of arguments against god. We'll leave the scientific evidence related to this debate for later on, in the Books of Genesis, Biogenesis, and Human Evolution, in the Testament of History.

We are not providing exhaustive detail on each argument, nor the array of subtleties and counterarguments that exist for each one. We are just giving a synopsis of each, so that the Good and Moral Atheist can be familiar with some of the basic arguments that they may encounter when discussing Atheism. For the Atheist who has a deeper interest in these subjects, please see the many suggested readings in the Book of Books. Some of those texts cover these (and other) arguments for and against god extensively, in much greater detail than we could fit into this book.

Arguments for god

Pascal's Wager

This most famous of arguments for god was put forth by Blaise Pascal, a 17th century French mathematician and philosopher who is also famous for Pascal's triangle. The essence of what we now call "Pascal's Wager" (there were actually several) is that the reward for believing correctly in god (heaven) is enormous, while the loss for incorrectly believing in god is inconsequential. On the other side of the coin, the gain for correctly believing there is no god is inconsequential, while the loss for incorrectly believing there is no god, (hell) is enormous. So, according to Pascal, the logical man will believe in god just for the odds.

But Pascal makes several broad assumptions that invalidate his logic. His first assumption is that admittance to a supposed heaven is conditioned only on belief/disbelief of a Christian god, only these two options. But if such were true, would evil people go to heaven merely because they believe? Would we truly *want* to have a god who cast out people of saintly behavior merely for not believing? Plus, the world is not the Christian Europe of Pascal's time. Vast lands of this world not only do not believe in a Christian god, but also have not even been exposed to the concept. Would all of these innocent people be condemned to eternal damnation merely because they have not been exposed to Christianity at all?

Beyond that, we have teachings from many different religions about who the true god or gods are. Islam teaches that those who don't believe in Allah are all doomed to hellfire. Christians claim that denying the divinity of Christ will send you to hell. They can't both be right, yet there is no proof that one is better than the other. And there are innocent people in both Christian and Muslim countries who have not been exposed to the other's teachings. Are they doomed to hell for ignorance? Would a supremely good being with the power to create the universe really do such a thing?

It seems that if Pascal were truly a betting man, he would do his best to believe in *all* possible religious beliefs, to ensure that somewhere along the way he believed in the correct one that held the key to heaven. However, true belief in all religions is impossible, because many religions require exclusivity, i.e. you must follow their beliefs and no other, in order to be a true believer and make your way into heaven. So there is no way to logically win Pascal's Wager, because you don't know which is the correct set of beliefs. And if you do guess right and win, you get a heaven ruled by a god who is more concerned with your beliefs than your actions, who would condemn good men and women and children to eternal torture for merely being born in the wrong country.

Anthropic Principle

The Anthropic Principle is an argument used by theists who understand and support the concept of scientific inquiry. They rationally believe in the Big Bang and Evolution, given the enormity of evidence for them. But they also believe in god, and use science as their proof.

⁸What the principle states is that the workings of the universe depend on many finely tuned variables. These include the strength of the various natural forces such as gravity and the strong and weak nuclear forces, the excess of matter present in space over antimatter, the size of the various constants, the fact that solid water floats on its liquid form unlike most other solids, and so on. They postulate that since any slight shift in these constants would doom the universe, it must have been designed to work this way, obviously by some supernatural creator who set the thing in motion and let it run on its own. It has been compared to finding quarters on a sidewalk. If you find one, somebody must have accidentally dropped it. If you find a dozen, somebody with a lot of quarters could have accidentally dropped them. But if you find 100 quarters, all standing on end, you must assume they were placed there intentionally.

The problem with the Anthropic Principle is that we have no way of knowing if there are other universes with different values of these basic constants. Maybe all such possibilities occur, and we are only here postulating the existence or non-existence of god because we happen to be in the right one. Or maybe we're failing to understand the nature of such constants. It's possible that there's no way to change just *one* of those constants, maybe every last one could be linked together in equations that describe all matter and space, based on only one or two variables. So there aren't really 100 quarters on end, now we have just one quarter. And who's to say it's on end? Maybe we just suppose it is because this universe is right for *us* to evolve. Maybe if the quarter lands a different way, life evolves in a totally different manner, and they assume *their* quarters are all standing on edge.

Simple examples can be found in nature to disprove the Anthropic Principle. Drop a stone into a pool of water. The ripples go out in a mathematically perfect circle. Did a machine create that circle, or was it just natural? You can find crystals that are perfect cubes or octahedrons, yet they prove no intelligent intervention to create such things, just the workings of nature. Maybe what *looks* like a hundred quarters standing on end to us is really just a nice crystal, or a circle of spreading water: something that is near perfect, yet totally natural. The Anthropic Principle is clearly insufficient as a proof.

First Cause

This argument for god is really quite simple: the universe exists, therefore something must have caused it. That something must be god. Nothing that we ever encounter exists without a cause. The Big Bang sounds like it exactly fits the bill for the hand of god creating the universe.

The problem with this is that we have, in our universe now, quite a few things that occur without cause: particles and anti-particles in a vacuum. In empty space, particles appear out of absolutely nothing, for no reason other than that is the very nature of space. For the non-physicists out there, don't worry if this sounds weird or counter-intuitive, because it sounded just as weird and counter-intuitive to the physicists when they started talking about it!

The very nature of the existing universe includes basic uncertainties, and something out of nothing is a common event, no matter how wrong it sounds. Physics, and the nature of spacetime, often comes to some very odd conclusions that just plain strike us as *wrong*. Here's one example of how physics can be completely at odds with common sense. If you shoot a beam of photons, such as a beam of light, through one small slit in a piece of paper onto a further piece of paper, you will see one line of light on the second piece. However, if you shoot the beam through two parallel, close-together slits, you will get an interference pattern, because the light acts like waves, and the waves interfere with each other.

But if you slow it down, and just shoot a single photon at a time toward the slits, the interference should stop, right? After all, a single photon should act like a particle, and there are no other photons to interfere with it. When it hits the second piece of paper, you should be able to tell which slit it went through (it had to go through one or the other), and there should be only two lines. But no! If you shoot single photons through the slits, the resulting pattern of hits on the second piece of paper has the exact same interference pattern. Somehow, the single photons interfered with themselves! From a *common sense* point of view, it sounds very wrong, but that does not make it false. The same applies to the start of the universe. Just because it happened doesn't mean something caused it, and just because there is no way it makes sense to our minds doesn't mean that it is not true.

¹⁵So we do a little research, and find that there exist reasonable scientific hypotheses out there that suggest that the Big Bang is just the way the universe works. It just is. Not only did nothing cause the Big Bang, but nothing existed before the Big Bang, either. It was merely the start of spacetime, the start of time altogether. Again, it sounds wrong—time has a start?—and it hurts our sensibilities to think of such a concept, but that does not mean it is not right.

Which of the various hypotheses about the beginning of the universe is correct? We don't know, maybe someday science will enable us to come up with an answer. But we have already encountered enough natural instances of both something out of nothing and simple breaches of human common sense that we can reasonably discard the First Cause argument as requiring something that may not be required or may not exist.

Revealed Word

You can also call this the “Bible Says So” argument. Since the bible is god's divine word revealed to man, it must be true, right? This argument is actually rather silly, and it quickly devolves into circular reasoning. God revealed the bible to man himself, so it must be true. Who said god revealed it? God said so himself. Where? In the bible. And how do we know again that the bible is true? And we're back to: god revealed the bible to man himself, so it must be true. Start the circle again.

The bible, just like all other holy books, was written down by men a long time ago. These men thought the earth was flat, that rainbows were gifts from the heavens, and that comets and stars foretold our fates. We now know that the earth is round and orbits the sun, rainbows are caused by the refraction of light, comets are iceballs in space, and stars are merely faraway suns. Relying on the “revealed word” is the same thing as trusting that many uneducated men thousands of years ago were all directly contacted by god and perfectly transcribed what god said. However, it also means that you have to assume that many *other* uneducated men from thousands of years ago were *not* directly contacted by god. Is there any logical way to tell which of the many book-based religions is correct? Of course not. There is no revealed word, only the words of man.

Miracles

Some say miracles prove that god exists. They either rely on accounts of ancient miracles, or on modern-day miracles. The ancient miracles are easy to debunk, again we're looking at accounts witnessed by the uneducated, often second- or third-hand accounts, embellished for a text designed to inspire belief and fear, written thousands of years ago. Making the lame walk, the blind see, and liquids change form are common tricks of current-day faith-healers, but we all also recognize them as hokey and fake. Just because they were written down a long time ago does not make them less dubious.

But some claim miracles continue to happen today. Maybe a person is given a one in a million chance of living through a trauma, and they survive. “It's a miracle!” No, it isn't. First of all, many doctors will purposely give a lower chance of survival, to not raise up the family's hopes needlessly. Also, since many of the workings of the human body are still being investigated, doctors may not know the true odds. Still, even if the true odds are only one in a hundred thousand, isn't that still a miracle? Not really. How many people are admitted to the hospital each day? How many are likely to die? How many of those one-in-a-hundred-thousand chances die? Almost all. How many of those fifty-fifty chances die? Quite a few. One success story does not mean a miracle happened. You might just as well have everyone in the United States get ten dice, and roll them one time. If all ten end up exactly the same, it must be a miracle, right? Actually, the odds are that across the country, you'll get over twenty people with all ten dice the same. Winning that one-in-a-hundred-thousand shot in the hospital is just like winning the lottery. It was luck, that's all.

The same goes for water-stains or toast-burns or salt-marks or birthmarks that look like Jesus or the Virgin Mary or the name of Allah or whatever. How many pieces of toast are toasted each year? Maybe a billion? More? With all those random burn marks on random toast, we should be surprised if one *doesn't* have a resemblance to a woman or a man or Arabic script.

Biblical Prophecies

²²If you search the internet, you can find hundreds of sites that will tell you the bible is literally true because certain biblical prophecies within have come true. Often these prophecies require extensive explanation to determine what they *really* meant, because the original wording is quite vague or not really on topic. This is usually explained away as being god's attempt to explain things to men who could not understand them at that time. Is there a way to check to see if biblical prophecies really are accurate?

Well, if the bible was infallible, certainly *all* of its prophecies would come true, right? And for some of the prophecies contained in the bible, the resolution of the situation is actually recorded elsewhere in the bible, so we can see if at least the bible's own prophecies come true in the very same book. Let's check a few:

"Yet hear the word of the Lord, O Zedekiah king of Judah; Thus saith the Lord of thee, Thou shalt not die by the sword: But thou shalt die in peace: and with the burnings of thy fathers, the former kings which were before thee, so shall they burn odours for thee; and they will lament thee, saying, Ah lord! for I have pronounced the word, saith the Lord." Jeremiah 34:4-5, KJV

That's a prophecy that's clear as a bell, by today's standards or the standards of thousands of years ago. Zedekiah will die a peaceful death, and his people will burn "odours" for him upon his death and lament his passing. So, does the bible fulfill its own prophecy?

"But the army of the Chaldeans pursued after the king, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; and all his army was scattered from him. Then they took the king, and carried him up unto the king of Babylon to Riblah in the land of Hamath; where he gave judgment upon him. And the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes: he slew also all the princes of Judah in Riblah. Then he put out the eyes of Zedekiah; and the king of Babylon bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death." Jeremiah 52:8-11, KJV

So Zedekiah lived to see his sons killed before his eyes, then he was blinded. Finally, he was imprisoned until he died. Not exactly the peaceful death originally predicted! Let's try one more prophecy and see if that one came true. This one is about the fate of the city of Damascus, and we can judge it against actual history:

"The burden of Damascus. Behold, Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap." Isaiah 17:1, KJV

Again, a pretty clear prophecy: the imminent destruction of Damascus. Sometime in biblical history, we're looking for a ruinous heap. But the city was never destroyed, and still exists today, proudly claiming to be the longest continually inhabited human city in the world. Isaiah lived in the 8th and possibly 7th century BCE, some 750 years or so before the 1st century apostle Paul. Let's see if Paul recounts a destroyed city.

"Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus." Galatians 1:17, KJV

So when did Damascus become a ruinous heap? The answer is that it didn't. Just as Jeremiah's prophecy failed to come true, so did Isaiah's. And so did dozens more in the bible. If we can't believe the obvious prophecies, then why should we even consider giving weight to the ones that need so much more "interpretation" to figure out? And if such prophecies are so important, why aren't they unambiguous in the first place? Vague prophecies and like the astrology column in the paper. If you twist the words a bit, you're probably going to come sort of close to something real. But just like that astrology column, nobody really predicted anything at all.

Some of the current writings on biblical prophecy also claim that the bible predicted the newest scientific discoveries being announced. Again, there's quite a bit of word-twisting being used to get something that looks like a real confirmation of the bible through science. Apart from the obvious fallacy that such "interpretations" bring about, it's strange that often the same people who are willing to twist the words a hundred different ways to find one passage that sort of resembles something scientifically proven, are also willing to ignore that same scientific proof when it comes to evolution or the Big Bang. It shows a mentality of trying to change the facts to fit an agenda.

Design

³³Those using the argument of Design—also known as the Teleological Argument—say that the human body is designed so perfectly, it couldn't have been a random product of evolution, it must have been designed that way. All the parts fit together nicely, there are no extraneous parts that don't belong there, no vestigial fins or gills or tails. Tails? What about the tailbone, the coccyx? Exactly why do we have that? The development of our coccyx is controlled by the same genes that develop tails in other mammals.

There are numerous similar examples of relics of evolution. Did you know that dolphins have legs? Not adult dolphins, but dolphin embryos do. They develop legs just like any other mammal, then reabsorb them before birth. Adult whales still have a few leg bones, buried deep inside, completely useless. And why do elephants and manatees have toenails? They serve no purpose in either species.

The list goes on and on. Eyes in blind creatures that live in absolute darkness. Nasal passages in birds that have permanently-sealed nostrils. Teeth and limbs in embryos that are reabsorbed. If you look at the DNA of almost any living thing, you can find segments that code for things that are not present in that animal. Instead of removing the code, a separate set of code appears in the DNA that shuts the first part off. Not exactly the best way to design things, is it?

Sometimes, the argument of Design is taken to absurd levels. One common example is the argument that the banana is the perfect fruit. It fits the hand exactly, has an easily removable outer skin that not only protects the fruit inside, it also changes color to tell us exactly how ripe the fruit is! Such perfect design! Of course, bananas are also quite easily bruised, making them difficult to transport and keep, and very difficult to grow outside a narrow tropical climate, and susceptible to various funguses and pests. Like any other evolved plant or animal, bananas (and humans) have advantages and disadvantages. None are perfect. The Design argument falls apart in the face of the great quantity of evidence of evolutionary relics and mistakes.

Personal Experience

Some claim they have “personally encountered” Jesus or god, and can hear his voice in their mind or in their heart. Such a personal god must exist, right, or they wouldn't hear his call?

Well, we can all imagine someone with a serious mental illness who hears voices in their head as well. Are those voices true, do those people exist? If not, then why should a personal Jesus or god heard in a different person's head exist? Who is to say that the “sane” person claiming to hear Jesus really isn't actually slightly mentally ill?

We are all programmed by evolution to have some sort of level of “spirituality.” There were significant advantages throughout history for those who felt spiritual and followed spiritual belief systems without question. Those individuals fit in better with society, and could cope better with the terribleness of war, disease, and unexplained actions around them, by assuming a higher plan for their existence. This coping/conformity mechanism keeps us seeking some sort of higher purpose or spirituality around us. Whether we ascribe spirits to animals, nature, the dead, or the heavens, we are merely following our genetic predisposition to “religious” experiences. We *all* suffer from a little of this mental illness, one that pushes us to see supernatural forces or explanations. What the Atheist will do is recognize that such a feeling is merely an evolutionary solution to the problems of the past, and will turn their wonder and awe to real things such as nature, fate, and the human spirit, rather than some artificial deity.

Negative Testimonial

What we will term a “negative testimonial” is the argument that the most evil people in the world were Atheists, therefore Atheism must be evil. The most common citations for Atheism are Stalin and Hitler. While it is true that Stalin was an Atheist, Hitler was not. Hitler professed Christianity all his life, and his troops wore belt buckles that said “god with us” in German. Is Christianity to be considered evil for the actions of its adherents such as Hitler and Torquemada, the torturer of the Spanish Inquisition? Certainly not, most Christians (just as most people) are good and moral. So why should Atheists be considered evil for the actions of Stalin?

⁴¹Moreover, communism itself is often erroneously described as a result of Atheism, because 20th century communists chose to explicitly encode Atheism into their political philosophy as a way to break the power of the church. But they have misunderstood cause and effect. Atheism did not cause communism, and the Good and Moral Atheist would certainly be opposed to *any* authoritarian regime. Such a regime would violate the most basic tenets of the Good and Moral Atheist, being neither free nor life-valuing.

The phrase “godless communist” is a historical relic of the 1950s, and today it is an insult to the Atheists who love freedom, democracy, and self-determination. Atheists are Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives and moderates. If an old historical link between Atheism and communism is justifiable from an evangelical Christian point of view, why don't we use the phrase “torturing Christian” since Hitler and Torquemada adhered to that religion? Or, if the resulting government explicitly defines the goodness of the values of the founders of that government, why don't the evangelical Christians throw away their biblical literalism and adhere to the Deism and Skepticism of the founders of the United States of America?

Propagating such linkages is a result of inferior reasoning, a mistaking of cause and effect. Communism used Atheism as a tool to increase their power, much as Hitler used Christianity. Such poor usages should not reflect directly on Atheism and Christianity, instead we should hold both creeds accountable on their own.

Positive Testimonial

Oddly enough, the positive testimonial argument against Atheism is not based on the greatness of people who are not Atheists. It instead argues that certain great Atheist or Deist thinkers are actually theists and strong proponents of Christianity, or in the political arena, supporters of a Christian or god-based government. Some of the more famous people often cited this way are Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Albert Einstein.

Most such arguments either use quotes taken out of context, or use quotes that are completely made up. Below we will see an example from each of these three famous figures, and then follow it up with some actual quotes from their recorded writings and speeches.

Thomas Jefferson

Often attributed to Thomas Jefferson, the primary author of the Declaration of Independence and the third President of the United States, are the following quotes:

“The reason that Christianity is the best friend of Government is because Christianity is the only religion that changes the heart.”

“I have always said and always will say that the studious perusal of the Sacred Volume will make us better citizens.”

“I am a real Christian, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus. I have little doubt that our whole country will soon be rallied to the unity of our Creator.”

The first two are not found anywhere in any of Jefferson's recorded writings or speeches, and even some noted Christian revisionists have put out retractions about the second quote after publishing it as Jefferson's. They are so out of character with the rest of Jefferson's writings as to be absurd. The third quote steals a line from Jefferson's correspondence, taken quite out of context, and appends an additional sentence Jefferson never wrote. The actual quote, below, shows that Jefferson meant something entirely different:

⁵¹“I, too, have made a wee-little book from the same materials, which I call the Philosophy of Jesus; it is a paradigma of his doctrines, made by cutting the texts out of the book [Jefferson means the bible], and arranging them on the pages of a blank book, in a certain order of time or subject. A more beautiful or precious morsel of ethics I have never seen; it is a document in proof that I am a real Christian, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus, very different from the Platonists, who call me infidel and themselves Christians and preachers of the Gospel, while they draw all their characteristic dogmas from what its author never said nor saw.”

[Thomas Jefferson's letter to Charles Thomson, January 9, 1816.]

In other words, Jefferson considered himself a student of the philosophical and ethical teachings of Jesus, not a proponent of the divinity and infallibility of Christ. When he said “I am a real Christian,” he meant that in contrast to followers of different philosophers. Below are some more actual quotes from Thomas Jefferson, to compare with the above falsehoods:

“I have recently been examining all the known superstitions of the world, and do not find in our particular superstition [Christianity] one redeeming feature. They are all alike founded on fables and mythology.”

[Thomas Jefferson, letter to William Short, undated.]

“Shake off all the fears of servile prejudices, under which weak minds are servilely crouched. Fix reason firmly in her seat, and call on her tribunal for 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.”

[Thomas Jefferson, letter to his nephew Peter Carr, Aug. 10, 1787.]

James Madison

James Madison, the fourth President of the United States, has had this quote attributed to him since the 1940s:

“We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We have staked the future of all of our political institutions upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves ... according to the Ten Commandments of God.”

Again, the quote is found nowhere in the actual recorded writings and speeches of Madison. Instead, Madison was a staunch and unyielding defender of church-state separation. Compare the above quote to two actual quotes of his:

“Religious bondage shackles and debilitates the mind and unfits it for every noble enterprize [sic], every expanded prospect.”

[James Madison, letter to William Bradford, April 1, 1774.]

“Who does not see that the same authority which can establish Christianity, in exclusion of all other religions, may establish with the same ease any particular sect of Christians, in exclusion of all other sects?”

[James Madison, *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments*, 1785.]

Albert Einstein

One of the most noted physicists of his time, Albert Einstein was uncomfortable at first with the concept of quantum physics. So uncomfortable, that he uttered the following statement:

“God does not play dice [with the Universe].”

Many theists have taken this to be Einstein's admission of a belief in god, and have gone further to say that if the smartest man of his time believed in a personal, biblical god, well, it must be true.

But Einstein was at most a Deist, and most likely an Agnostic. He firmly believed in the use of reason over the use of old religious books in explaining the world, as he clearly stated in this quote:

⁶⁴“It was, of course, a lie what you read about my religious convictions, a lie which is being systematically repeated. I do not believe in a personal God and I have never denied this but have expressed it clearly. If something is in me which can be called religious then it is the unbounded admiration for the structure of the world so far as our science can reveal it.”

[Albert Einstein in *Albert Einstein: The Human Side*, edited by Helen Dukas (his secretary) and Banesh Hoffman.]

About the soul, Einstein said:

“I do not believe in immortality of the individual, and I consider ethics to be an exclusively human concern with no superhuman authority behind it.”

[Albert Einstein in *Albert Einstein: The Human Side*, edited by Helen Dukas (his secretary) and Banesh Hoffman.]

Many other notable personalities have had false quotes, misquotes about their religious stance, or false deathbed conversions attributed to them. The list includes a variety of persons, from the 18th century Deist and patriotic journalist Thomas Paine to modern-day noted Atheist and comedian George Carlin. Sometimes the effort to “prove” such quotes can be extensive, or the false quotation can be so widely circulated, that the inquirer must be quite vigilant to ascertain whether a quote is a true one or not.

Kalam Cosmological Argument

The Kalam Cosmological Argument is one of the more recently touted “proofs” of a god or intelligent design of the universe. It is the most complicated of the arguments for god we will cover here. Philosopher William Lane Craig published a book on it in 1979, and many modern theists have claimed it proves, or at least makes likely, that there is an ultimate maker.

The core of the argument is simple, although the philosophy behind the proof is more complicated. The basic premise comes in three sequential parts:

Part 1. Did the universe have a beginning or not?

Part 2. If it had a beginning, was there a cause to the beginning or not?

Part 3. If it had a cause, was the cause a “personal” one or not?

The argument attempts to prove each part, and use it as a basic proven premise for the following part. Pretty straightforward, but the proofs of each part get a little more detailed. We’ll have to look at each part separately.

For part 1, the “proof” has one major assumption, that there is no such thing as an “actual” infinite series. If we take that as true, then it follows that there cannot be a series of temporal events without a beginning, because that would be an actual infinite. There can be “potential” infinities, which are described as things to which you can add another item or event. An example of a potential infinite would be the counting numbers. No matter how high up you count, you can always add one more, right? So you can go to infinity, but only by adding another item. Such potential infinities lead to counterintuitive results, according to the theory. One example that’s easy to understand is to compare the set of counting numbers vs. the set of even counting numbers. Both sets go on to infinity, but obviously, the counting numbers are twice as many as the even counting numbers. So in the real world, there must be no such thing as actual infinities, without generating such contradictions.

However, there is one huge flaw in this argument, because it completely depends on the assumption that there is no such thing as an actual infinite. Yet none of our astronomical data to date contradicts in any way the possibility of an infinite-sized universe. We cannot see any end, we cannot find anything that looks like a middle, and there’s no evidence that the universe wraps around upon itself. We have one enormous-sized possible “actual” infinite in front of us every time we look up at the night sky. Sure, infinity just doesn’t “sound” right, and in human experience we think that there always must be an end somewhere. But the sky tells us otherwise. That right there pulls out the linchpin of the entire Kalam Cosmological Argument.

⁷⁴But what about the Big Bang? That was the beginning of the universe, regardless of what types of infinities exist, right? Well, it was the beginning of our universe, there's no doubt, and it was the beginning of our time. But there is no proof that there were not events before the Big Bang. Maybe the universe has repeated Big Bangs, we do not know, and there are currently theories that suggest that such a cycle might be possible. "Our" universe, as we know it, had a beginning, but "the" universe may not have had such a beginning. However, there are physicists who say that all time may have started with the Big Bang, so maybe we leave any conclusion on part 1 as uncertain, even though we have taken apart its primary assumption. The "proof" is no longer certain, for sure.

Going on to the second part of the argument, was the universe caused or uncaused? Some physicists have come up with scientifically plausible theories that the universe, and the Big Bang, had no cause whatsoever. They are merely the way the universe works, there was no time before, and the universe arose causeless. Yes, it sounds strange and goes against our basic intuition, but that does not mean it is incorrect. Just like the quantum effects that have a single photon going through a single slit yet interfering with itself, it boggles the mind and yet is true. So for the second part, we can say that it may be false. Again, we are uncertain as to whether the argument holds for a second reason, and the Kalam Cosmological Argument now has two holes.

However, we can still move on to the third part, and find a third hole in the argument. The theistic argument says that if there was a non-personal cause, why didn't the universe always exist? By having an actual beginning, there must have been a "personal agent" that chose to start the universe when they did. If it was non-personal, the cause would've always been there, and so would the universe. One example would be to look at a match. If it is struck, the fire comes instantly. If the cause was non-personal, yet the "struck match" was there, why hasn't the universe always existed? The theistic answer is that somebody must have chosen when to strike the match, and that entity must be god.

But there are several obvious explanations that refute the "personal agent" argument. First would be the possibility, under exploration now, that the universe just arose out of nothing whatsoever. Again, it is weird, but that does not mean it isn't possible. That just simply may be the nature of things. A second possibility would be the "bouncing" universe, a theory that universes exist in a sort of a membrane in some other dimension and occasionally collide with each other (called the "ekpyrotic" model), causing a Big Bang. There are other variations on theories of the second type, which all give us an infinite-time system that has periodic Big Bangs, completely by natural causes. There are also other explanations of a natural system before the Big Bang, which have not yet been proven false. Which of these various theories is true, we don't yet know. However, it is clear that the third part of the Kalam Cosmological Argument has holes in it, much like the first two.

So the result is that the Kalam Cosmological Argument has multiple possible physical world explanations that disprove the so-called "proof." We have shown faults in the underlying premise of no actual infinite, and have also shown faults with each of the three parts of the argument. Much like the other arguments for god, it is essentially Swiss cheese. Once you tear apart the assumptions, there is little left.

Arguments against god

Occam's Razor

Occam's Razor, also called the Principle of Parsimony, roughly states that we should not multiply hypotheses unnecessarily. In a simpler form, we can say that the simplest explanation is the best. It is often used to attack the proponents of intelligent design, the concept that the Big Bang was caused by a god, or the universe was created to *look* like the Big Bang happened by a god.

Which is simpler, that the universe just happened (no matter how hard such a thing is to fathom), or that a more complicated entity such as god created it? If there is a complicated entity such as a god, what created god? Is there yet an even more complicated entity that created god, and so on? Postulating god violates the concept of Occam's Razor by adding an additional layer (or layers) of complexity and hypothesis to the explanation of the origins of the universe.

Riddle of Epicurus

⁸¹Epicurus was a Greek philosopher who lived around 300 B.C.E. He was a supporter of equality, allowing slaves and women to study under him, and a denier of any sort of god-based divinity in a time when neither the concepts of equality or Atheism were accepted. He coined the concept of a nature-given right to “life, liberty, and safety,” which we will later recognize paraphrased in Thomas Jefferson’s words stating our right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

The Riddle of Epicurus, also known as the Epicurean Paradox (or more generally as the Problem of Evil) is often paraphrased as follows:

“Is god willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent.
Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent.
Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil?
Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him god?”

The stock answer to the riddle from those who follow traditional religions is that god gives us “free will,” and we can choose between evil and good. The problem with this answer is that while those in power can control whether to commit acts of evil or good, those who are powerless may suffer under evil without control. Therefore it is not enough to say that we each have control over whether the world is evil or good. Some will suffer horrible evils, which god is either unable or unwilling to prevent.

God of the Gaps

Traditional religions have used the concept of gods to explain things that mankind did not yet understand. Gods were once thought to bring the sun and moon to the sky each day, to bring plagues, to bring weather, to make crops grow. We now know how and why those things happen. Modern theists confronted with fossil evidence have tried to apply the same concept. If we have a fossil from 4 million years ago, and another from 2 million years ago, they claim the transition was due to god. When we later find a fossil from 3 million years ago, they now claim the *two* transitions were due to god. As evidence piles up, the gaps get smaller, until god is completely squeezed out of the explanation.

Science

Contrary to popular belief, science does not disprove god. The application of science to a problem is neither a philosophical nor a theological process. Scientific inquiry, however, has skewered many religious claims about the workings of the world. Science has demonstrated that the Earth revolves around the Sun, that animals and people evolved from earlier life forms, and that the Big Bang created the known universe. An outline of some of the scientific basis for these theories is covered in the Testament of History, in the Book of Genesis, the Book of Biogenesis, and the Book of Human Evolution.

But no matter how much some theists insist on the infallibility of their particular book’s explanations of the workings of the world when compared to science, they will be doomed to failure by the very nature of science. Science will always *test* every hypothesis, and will always discard those that fail. If there *were* a god, and we could *prove* god existed, then science would wholeheartedly agree! Science is about testing and proof, that’s all. Given a concrete, repeatable, undeniable example of the supernatural, science would be forced to accept it as true. But no such supernatural events have ever happened, nor will any happen in the future. Science confirms that supernatural explanations of events are wrong, not out of malice, but merely by definition.

Conclusion

This summary of the main arguments for and against Atheism is not meant to be complete or detailed; it is only intended as a top-level view. Many more intricate examinations of the preceding arguments, plus information on other arguments, are available in some of the texts listed in the Book of Books. The interested reader is directed there for further reading, if so desired.

Quotes

¹In the Book of Quotes, we will list some thought-provoking quotes from famous Atheists, Agnostics, Deists, and other Freethinkers throughout history. We'll separate these into categories, to make browsing them easier for the reader. First we start with philosophy, science, and skepticism. Then, we'll have quotes against theism, on the wastefulness of religion, and pro-Atheism quotes. Next are some positive quotes, followed by a special section of quotes from early American patriots, in honor of the courage of those who sought to create a new type of government free from religious influence. We follow that with quotes from later important American political figures, and finally we end with a section for the most humorous and witty quotes.

Read these and discover the wisdom of Freethinkers from ancient times to the modern day. They will make you think, they may inspire you, and a few might even make you laugh! There are also many collections of quotes on Atheism available on the internet, as well as lists of celebrities who are Atheists or Freethinkers. Check out the Book of Resources for links to some of these sites.

Philosophical Quotes on Atheism

“It is an interesting and demonstrable fact, that all children are atheists and were religion not inculcated into their minds, they would remain so.”

-- Ernestine Rose, 19th century women's rights activist

“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.”

-- Stephen F. Roberts, Atheist activist

“God is only a great imaginative experience.”

-- D. H. Lawrence, early 20th century poet

“God is a word to express, not our ideas, but the want of them.”

-- John Stuart Mill, 19th century English philosopher

“[I]f I were not an atheist, I would believe in a God who would choose to save people on the basis of the totality of their lives and not the pattern of their words. I think he would prefer an honest and righteous atheist to a TV preacher whose every word is God, God, God, and whose every deed is foul, foul, foul.”

-- Isaac Asimov, 20th century science fiction author

“If the ignorance of nature gave birth to gods, the knowledge of nature is calculated to destroy them.”

-- Baron D'Holbach (Paul Henry Thiry), 18th century European philosopher

“When I look up at the starry heavens at night and reflect upon what it is that I really see there, I am constrained to say, ‘There is no God.’ It is not the works of some God that I see there. ... I see no lineaments of personality, no human traits, but an energy upon whose currents solar systems are but bubbles.”

-- John Burroughs, 19th century American naturalist

“You can choose a ready guide in some celestial voice.

If you choose not to decide, you still have made a choice.

You can choose from phantom fears and kindness that can kill;

I will choose a path that's clear... I will choose Free Will.”

-- Neil Peart (from the Canadian band Rush consisting of Peart, Geddy Lee, and Alex Lifeson) in the song “Free Will” from the 1980 album *Permanent Waves*

Science Quotes

¹¹“We are here because one odd group of fishes had a peculiar fin anatomy that could transform into legs for terrestrial creatures; because the earth never froze entirely during an ice age; because a small and tenuous species, arising in Africa a quarter of a million years ago, has managed, so far, to survive by hook and by crook. We may yearn for a higher answer—but none exists.”

-- Stephen Jay Gould, 20th century Harvard University biologist and author

“Science is best defined as a careful, disciplined, logical search for knowledge about any and all aspects of the universe, obtained by examination of the best available evidence and always subject to correction and improvement upon discovery of better evidence. What’s left is magic. And it doesn’t work.”

-- James Randi, magician and paranormal investigator

“The deepest sin against the human mind is to believe things without evidence. Science is simply common sense at its best—that is, rigidly accurate in observation, and merciless to fallacy in logic.”

-- Thomas Huxley, 19th century biologist

“Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored.”

-- Aldous Huxley, early 20th century author and grandson of Thomas Huxley

“When two men of science disagree, they do not invoke the secular arm; they wait for further evidence to decide the issue, because, as men of science, they know that neither is infallible. But when two theologians differ, since there is no criteria to which either can appeal, there is nothing for it but mutual hatred and an open or covert appeal to force.”

-- Bertrand Russell, 20th century English mathematician and Nobel-prize-winner in literature

“Science is the great antidote to the poison of enthusiasm and superstition.”

-- Adam Smith, 18th century Scottish philosopher and economist

“Reason, Observation and Experience—the Holy Trinity of Science—have taught us that happiness is the only good; that the time to be happy is now, and the way to be happy is to make others so. This is enough for us. In this belief we are content to live and die. If by any possibility the existence of a power superior to, and independent of, nature shall be demonstrated, there will then be time enough to kneel. Until then, let us stand erect.”

-- Robert Green Ingersoll, famed 19th century Agnostic and prolific author

“...there is no direct evidence, so how could you ask me to believe in God when there’s absolutely no evidence that I can see? I do believe in the beauty and the awe-inspiring mystery of the science that’s out there that we haven’t discovered yet, that there are scientific explanations for phenomena that we call mystical because we don’t know any better.”

-- Jodie Foster, American actress

“A knowledge of the true age of the earth and of the fossil record makes it impossible for any balanced intellect to believe in the literal truth of every part of the Bible in the way that fundamentalists do. And if some of the Bible is manifestly wrong, why should any of the rest of it be accepted automatically?”

-- Francis Crick, 20th century Nobel-prize-winning scientist and co-discoverer (with James Watson) of DNA molecule

“There are many hypotheses in science which are wrong. That’s perfectly all right; they’re the aperture to finding out what’s right. Science is a self-correcting process. To be accepted, new ideas must survive the most rigorous standards of evidence and scrutiny.”

-- Carl Sagan, 20th century author and star of *Cosmos* television series

Skepticism Quotes

²¹“We wish to find the truth, no matter where it lies. But to find the truth we need imagination and skepticism both. We will not be afraid to speculate, but we will be careful to distinguish speculation from fact.”

-- Carl Sagan

“The church says the earth is flat, but I know that it is round, for I have seen the shadow on the moon, and I have more faith in a shadow than in the church.”

-- Ferdinand Magellan (1480-1521), 16th century Portuguese explorer

“It is a blessed thing that in every age some one has had individuality enough and courage enough to stand by his own convictions. I believe it was Magellan who said, ‘The church says the earth is flat; but I have seen its shadow on the moon, and I have more confidence even in a shadow than in the Church.’ On the prow of his ship were disobedience, defiance, scorn, and success.”

-- Robert Green Ingersoll

“Skepticism is the highest duty and blind faith the one unpardonable sin.”

-- Thomas Huxley

“It is far better to grasp the Universe as it really is than to persist in delusion, however satisfying and reassuring.”

-- Carl Sagan

“The theist and the scientist are rival interpreters of nature, the one retreats as the other advances.”

-- Joseph McCabe, English priest who deconverted to Atheism in the late 19th century and wrote about his experiences

“... as belief is a passion of the mind, no degree of criminality is attachable to disbelief;”

-- Percy Bysshe Shelley, early 19th century English poet and author

“It is easier to suppose that the universe has existed for all eternity than to conceive a being beyond its limits capable of creating it.”

-- Percy Bysshe Shelley

“To argue with a man who has renounced his reason is like giving medicine to the dead.”

-- Thomas Paine, 18th century author and American revolutionary

“No amount of belief makes something a fact.”

-- James Randi

“To recognize that nature has neither a preference for our species nor a bias against it takes only a little courage.”

-- James Randi

“Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.”

-- Carl Sagan

“The cure for a fallacious argument is a better argument, not the suppression of ideas.”

-- Carl Sagan

“Confronted with the universe, with fields of space sown thick with stars, with all there is of life, the wise man, being asked the origin and destiny of all, replies: ‘I do not know. These questions are beyond the powers of my mind.’ The wise man is thoughtful and modest. He clings to facts. Beyond his intellectual horizon he does not pretend to see. He does not mistake hope for evidence or desire for demonstration. He is honest. He neither deceives himself nor others.”

-- Robert Green Ingersoll

“I am against religion because it teaches us to be satisfied with not understanding the world.”

-- Richard Dawkins, English science author

Anti-theism Quotes

³⁶“Religion is an insult to human dignity. With or without it, you’d have good people doing good things and evil people doing evil things. But for good people to do evil things, it takes religion.”

-- Steven Weinberg, Nobel-prize-winning scientist and co-discoverer (with Abdul Salam and Sheldon Glashow) of electroweak force theory

“A God made by man undoubtedly has need of man to make himself known to man.”

-- Percy Bysshe Shelley

“Anyone who has the power to make you believe absurdities has the power to make you commit injustices.”

-- Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet), 18th century French philosopher and author

“The whole foundation of Christianity is based on the idea that intellectualism is the work of the Devil. Remember the apple on the tree? Okay, it was the Tree of Knowledge. ‘You eat this apple, you’re going to be as smart as God. We can’t have that.’”

-- Frank Zappa, 20th century American musician and satirist

“It is thus that the generality of mankind, whose lot is ignorance, attributes to the Divinity, not only the unusual effects which strike them, but moreover the most simple events, of which the causes are the most simple to understand by whomever is able to study them. In a word, man has always respected unknown causes, surprising effects that his ignorance kept him from unraveling. It was on this debris of nature that man raised the imaginary colossus of the Divinity.”

-- Percy Bysshe Shelley

“The Bible and the Church have been the greatest stumbling blocks in the way of women’s emancipation.”

-- Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 19th century abolitionist and women’s rights activist

“How anyone, in view of the protracted sufferings of the race, can invest the laws of the universe with a tender loving fatherly intelligence, watching, guiding and protecting humanity, is to me amazing.”

-- Elizabeth Cady Stanton

“Yet the ivory gods,
And the ebony gods,
And the gods of diamond-jade,
Are only silly puppet gods
That people themselves
Have made.”

-- Langston Hughes, 20th century American poet

“I do not believe I have any immortality. The greatest evil in the world today is the Christian religion.”

-- H. G. Wells, early 20th century English science-fiction writer

“Once people get hung up on theology, they’ve lost sanity forever. More people have been killed in the name of Jesus Christ than any other name in the history of the world.”

-- Gore Vidal, American novelist

“The idea of a good society is something you do not need a religion and eternal punishment to buttress; you need a religion if you are terrified of death.”

-- Gore Vidal

⁴⁷“Religion is comparable to a childhood neurosis.”

-- Sigmund Freud, influential early 20th century psychologist and author

“But amid much elegance and precision, the details of life and the Universe also exhibit haphazard, jury-rigged arrangements and much poor planning. What shall we make of this: an edifice abandoned early in construction by the architect?”

-- Carl Sagan

“Organized religion is a sham and a crutch for weak-minded people who need strength in numbers. It tells people to go out and stick their noses in other people’s business. I live by the golden rule: Treat others as you’d want them to treat you. The religious right wants to tell people how to live.”

-- Jesse Ventura, former governor of Minnesota, former Navy Seal and professional wrestler

“The being cannot be termed rational or virtuous, who obeys any authority, but that of reason.”

-- Mary Wollstonecraft, 18th century British author and women’s rights activist

“The usual Christian argument is that the suffering in the world is a purification for sin and is therefore a good thing. This argument is, of course, only a rationalization of sadism; but in any case it is a very poor argument. I would invite any Christian to accompany me to the children’s ward of a hospital, to watch the suffering that is there being endured, and then to persist in the assertion that those children are so morally abandoned as to deserve what they are suffering. In order to bring himself all feelings of mercy and compassion, He must, in short, make himself as cruel as the God in whom he believes.”

-- Bertrand Russell

“Dear God, don’t know if you noticed, but,
your name is on a lot of quotes in this book.
Us crazy humans wrote it, you should take a look.
And all the people that you made in your image
still believing that junk is true.
Well I know it ain’t, and so do you,
dear God.
I can’t believe in, I don’t believe in,

“I won’t believe in heaven and hell.
No saints, no sinners, no devil as well.
No pearly gates, no thorny crown.
You’re always letting us humans down.
The wars you bring, the babes you drown.
Those lost at sea and never found,
and it’s the same the whole world ‘round.
The hurt I see helps to compound
that Father, Son and Holy Ghost
is just somebody’s unholy hoax,
and if you’re up there you’d perceive
that my heart’s here upon my sleeve.
If there’s one thing I don’t believe in it’s you...
dear God.”

-- Andy Partridge (from the British band XTC consisting of Partridge, Dave Gregory, and Colin Moulding) in the song “Dear God” from the 1986 album *Skylarking*

“Religion teaches the dangerous nonsense that death is not the end.”

-- Richard Dawkins

Wastefulness of Religion Quotes

⁵⁵“The most ridiculous concept ever perpetrated by H. Sapiens is that the Lord God of Creation, Shaper and Ruler of the Universes, wants the saccharine adoration of his creations, that he can be persuaded by their prayers, and becomes petulant if he does not receive this flattery. Yet this ridiculous notion, without one real shred of evidence to bolster it, has gone on to found one of the oldest, largest and least productive industries in history.”

-- Robert A. Heinlein, science-fiction author

“Who can over estimate the progress of the world if all the money wasted in superstition could be used to enlighten, elevate and civilize mankind?”

-- Robert Green Ingersoll

“I want nothing to do with any religion concerned with keeping the masses satisfied to live in hunger, filth, and ignorance. I want nothing to do with any order, religious or otherwise, which does not teach people that they are capable of becoming happier and more civilized, on this earth, capable of becoming true man, master of his fate and captain of his soul. To attain this I would put priests to work, also, and turn the temples into schools.”

-- Jawaharlal Nehru, 20th century statesman and prime minister of India

“Two hands working can do more than a thousand clasped in prayer.”

-- anonymous

Pro-Atheism Quotes

“All religions are auld wives’ fables, but an honest man has nothing to fear, either in this world or the world to come.”

-- Robert Burns, 18th century Scottish poet and publisher of Auld Lang Syne

“The universal cosmic process was not created by any god or man.”

-- Heraclitus, 6th century BCE Greek philosopher

“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.”

-- George Bernard Shaw, early 20th century playwright

“When I contemplate the natural dignity of man; when I feel (for Nature has not been kind enough to me to blunt my feelings) for the honor and happiness of its character, I become irritated at the attempt to govern mankind by force and fraud, as if they were all knaves and fools, and can scarcely avoid disgust at those who are thus imposed upon.”

-- Thomas Paine

“Because morality is a social necessity, the moment faith in god is banished, man’s gaze turns from god to man and he becomes socially conscious. Religious belief prevented the growth of a sense of realism. But atheism at once makes man realistic and alive to the needs of morality.”

-- Gora (Goparaju Ramachandra Rao), 20th century Indian revolutionary and Atheist activist

“Atheism may be defined as the mental attitude which unreservedly accepts the supremacy of reason and aims at establishing a lifestyle and ethical outlook verifiable by experience and the scientific method, independent of all arbitrary assumptions of authority and creeds.”

-- Madalyn Murray O’Hair, 20th century American Atheist activist

“An Atheist believes that a hospital should be built instead of a church. An Atheist believes that a deed must be done instead of a prayer said. An Atheist strives for involvement in life and not escape into death. He wants disease conquered, poverty vanished, war eliminated.”

-- Madalyn Murray O’Hair

“Je n’ai pas besoin de cette hypothèse.” (“I have no need of that hypothesis.”)

-- Pierre-Simon Laplace, late 18th and early 19th century French mathematician and scientist (in reply to Napoleon’s statement that, “You have written this huge book on the system of the world without once mentioning the author of the universe.”)

Positive Quotes

67“Our loyalties are to the species and the planet. We speak for Earth. Our obligation to survive is owed not just to ourselves but also to that Cosmos, ancient and vast, from which we spring.”

-- Carl Sagan

“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 toward a past that is dead which we trust will be far surpassed by the future that our intelligence can create.”

-- Bertrand Russell

“There is no god more divine than yourself.”

-- Walt Whitman, 19th century American poet and humorist

“The happiest people I have known have been those who gave themselves no concern about their own souls, but did their uttermost to mitigate the miseries of others.”

-- Elizabeth Cady Stanton

“An Atheist loves himself and his fellowman instead of a god. An Atheist knows that heaven is something for which we should work now—here on earth—for all men together to enjoy.”

-- Madalyn Murray O’Hair

“I believe in the equality of man; and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavoring to make our fellow-creatures happy.”

-- Thomas Paine

“Independence is my happiness, and I view things as they are, without regard to place or person; my country is the world, and my religion is to do good.”

-- Thomas Paine

“Although the time of death is approaching me, I am not afraid of dying and going to Hell or (what would be considerably worse) going to the popularized version of Heaven. I expect death to be nothingness and, for removing me from all possible fears of death, I am thankful to atheism.”

-- Isaac Asimov

“Isn’t it enough to see that a garden is beautiful without having to believe that there are fairies at the bottom of it, too?”

-- Douglas Adams, 20th century science fiction author

“The world is a thing of utter inordinate complexity and richness and strangeness that is absolutely awesome. I mean the idea that such complexity can arise not only out of such simplicity, but probably absolutely out of nothing, is the most fabulous extraordinary idea. And once you get some kind of inkling of how that might have happened, it’s just wonderful. And... the opportunity to spend 70 or 80 years of your life in such a universe is time well spent as far as I am concerned.”

-- Douglas Adams

“Labor is the only prayer that Nature answers.”

-- Robert Green Ingersoll

“It took me years, but letting go of religion has been the most profound wake up of my life. I feel I now look at the world not as a child, but as an adult. I see what’s bad and it’s really bad. But I also see what is beautiful, what is wonderful. And I feel so deeply appreciative that I am alive. How dare the religious use the term ‘born again.’ That truly describes freethinkers who’ve thrown off the shackles of religion so much better!”

-- Julia Sweeney, American actress and comedienne

“I’m an atheist, and that’s it. I believe there’s nothing we can know except that we should be kind to each other and do what we can for other people.”

-- Katharine Hepburn, 20th century actress

Quotes from Icons of the American Revolution

⁸⁰“If they are good workmen, they may be of Asia, Africa, or Europe. They may be Mohometans, Jews or Christians of any Sect, or they may be Atheists.”

-- George Washington, American revolutionary and first President of the United States

“We have abundant reason to rejoice that in this Land the light of truth and reason has triumphed over the power of bigotry and superstition ... In this enlightened Age and in this Land of equal liberty it is our boast, that a man’s religious tenets will not forfeit the protection of the Laws, nor deprive him of the right of attaining and holding the highest Offices that are known in the United States.”

-- George Washington

“I have found Christian dogma unintelligible. Early in life I absented myself from Christian assemblies.”

-- Benjamin Franklin, American revolutionary, statesman and inventor

“He [Rev. Whitefield] used, indeed, sometimes to pray for my conversion, but never had the satisfaction of believing that his prayers were heard.”

-- Benjamin Franklin

“It is always to be taken for granted, that those who oppose an equality of rights never mean the exclusion should take place on themselves.”

-- Thomas Paine

“As to religion, I hold it to be the indispensable duty of all government to protect all conscientious professors thereof, and I know of no other business which government hath to do therewith.”

-- Thomas Paine

“All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit.”

-- Thomas Paine

“I almost shudder at the thought of alluding to the most fatal example of the abuses of grief which the history of mankind has preserved—the Cross. Consider what calamities that engine of grief has produced!”

-- John Adams, American revolutionary and second President of the United States

“This would be the best of all possible worlds, if there were no religion in it.”

-- John Adams

“As the government of the United States is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion; as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion or tranquility of Musselmen [Muslims] ... it is declared ... that no pretext arising from religious opinion shall ever product an interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries... The United States is not a Christian nation any more than it is a Jewish or a Mohammedan nation.”

-- Treaty of Tripoli (1797), carried unanimously by the Senate, signed by President John Adams

“... I contemplate 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.”

-- Thomas Jefferson, American revolutionary, author of the Declaration of Independence and third President of the United States

“Congress should not establish a religion, and enforce the legal observation of it by law, nor compel men to worship God in any Manner contrary to their conscience.”

-- James Madison, American revolutionary, author of the Federalist Papers and fourth President of the United States

“During almost fifteen centuries has the legal establishment of Christianity been on trial. What have been its fruits? More or less, in all places, pride and indolence in the Clergy; ignorance and servility in the laity; in both, superstition, bigotry, and persecution.”

-- James Madison

Quotes from Later American Political Icons

⁹³“Civil liberty can be established on no foundation of human reason which will not at the same time demonstrate the right to religious freedom... The tendency of the spirit of the age is strong toward religious liberty.”

-- John Quincy Adams, son of John Adams and sixth President of the United States

“The Bible is not my book nor Christianity my profession. I could never give assent to the long, complicated statements of Christian dogma.”

-- Abraham Lincoln, sixteenth President of the United States

“I was born a heretic. I always distrust people who know so much about what God wants them to do to their fellows.”

-- Susan B. Anthony, 19th century American activist against slavery and for women’s rights

“I distrust those people who know so well what God wants them to do because I notice it always coincides with their own desires.”

-- Susan B. Anthony

“Leave the matter of religion to the family altar, the church and the private school supported entirely by private contributions. Keep the church and state forever separate.”

-- Ulysses S. Grant, eighteenth President of the United States

“To discriminate against a thoroughly upright citizen because he belongs to some particular church, or because, like Abraham Lincoln, he has not avowed his allegiance to any church, is an outrage against that liberty of conscience which is one of the foundations of American life.”

-- Theodore Roosevelt, twenty-sixth President of the United States

“I hold that in this country there must be complete severance of Church and State; that public moneys shall not be used for the purpose of advancing any particular creed; and therefore that the public schools shall be nonsectarian and no public moneys appropriated for sectarian schools.”

-- Theodore Roosevelt

“I do not believe in the divinity of Christ and there are many other of the postulates of the orthodox creed to which I cannot subscribe.”

-- William H. Taft, twenty-seventh President of the United States, U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice (1921 to 1930)

“The lessons of religious toleration—a toleration which recognizes complete liberty of human thought, liberty of conscience—is one which, by precept and example, must be inculcated in the hearts and minds of all Americans if the institutions of our democracy are to be maintained and perpetuated.”

-- Franklin Roosevelt, thirty-second President of the United States

“I do not want church groups controlling the schools of our country. They must remain free.”

-- Eleanor Roosevelt, First Lady of the United States and wife of Franklin Roosevelt

“The ‘establishment of religion’ clause of the First Amendment means at least this: Neither a state nor the Federal Government can set up a church. Neither can pass laws which aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another. Neither can force nor influence a person to go to or to remain away from church against his will or force him to profess a belief or disbelief in any religion.”

-- Hugo Black, U.S. Supreme Court justice (1937 to 1971), for the majority in *Everson v. Board of Education*, 1947

“The mixing of government and religion can be a threat to free government, even if no one is forced to participate... When the government puts its imprimatur on a particular religion, it conveys a message of exclusion to all those who do not adhere to the favored beliefs. A government cannot be premised on the belief that all persons are created equal when it asserts that God prefers some.”

-- Harry Blackmun, U.S. Supreme Court justice (1970 to 1994), for the majority in *Lee v. Weisman*, 1992

Humorous/Witty Quotes

¹⁰⁵“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 10 things he does not want you to do. And if you do any of these 10 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 for ever and ever until the end of time... but he loves you! ... He loves you, and he needs money. He always needs money! He’s all-powerful, all-perfect, all-knowing, and all-wise... somehow just can’t handle money!”

-- George Carlin, American comedian and author

“Faith; n. Belief without evidence in what is told by one who speaks without knowledge, of things without parallel.

...

Pray; v. To ask that the laws of the universe be annulled in behalf of a single petitioner confessedly unworthy.

...

Scriptures; n. The sacred books of our holy religion, as distinguished from the false and profane writings on which all other faiths are based.”

-- Ambrose Bierce, 19th century author and satirist

“I was dead for millions of years before I was born and it never inconvenienced me a bit.”

-- Mark Twain, 19th century author, humorist, and satirist

“It’s rather like a puddle waking up one morning – I know they don’t normally do this, but allow me, I’m a science fiction writer – A puddle wakes up one morning and thinks: “This is a very interesting world I find myself in. It fits me very neatly. In fact it fits me so neatly... I mean really precise isn’t it?... It must have been made to have me in it.’ And the sun rises, and it’s continuing to narrate this story about how this hole must have been made to have him in it. And as the sun rises, and gradually the puddle is shrinking and shrinking and shrinking – and by the time the puddle ceases to exist, it’s still thinking – it’s still trapped in this idea that – that the hole was there for it. And if we think that the world is here for us we will continue to destroy it in the way that we have been destroying it, because we think that we can do no harm.”

-- Douglas Adams

“If you want to save your child from polio, you can pray or you can inoculate.”

-- Carl Sagan

“When I told the people of Northern Ireland that I was an atheist, a woman in the audience stood up and said, ‘Yes, but is it the God of the Catholics or the God of the Protestants in whom you don’t believe?’ ”

-- Quentin Crisp, 20th century English writer, actor and homosexual rights activist

“I don’t believe in God because I don’t believe in Mother Goose.”

-- Clarence Darrow, Agnostic and American lawyer in the 1925 Scopes “Monkey Trial”

“Properly read, the Bible is the most potent force for atheism ever conceived.”

-- Isaac Asimov

“A delusion held by one person is a mental illness, held by a few is a cult, held by many is a religion.”

-- Robert Todd Carroll, American author

“Eternal damnation awaits anyone who questions God’s unconditional love.”

-- Bill Hicks, late 20th century American comedian

“I’ve begun worshipping the Sun for a number of reasons. First of all, unlike some other gods I could mention, I can see the Sun. It’s there for me every day. And the things it brings me are quite apparent all the time: heat, light, food, a lovely day. There’s no mystery, no one asks for money, I don’t have to dress up, and there’s no boring pageantry. And interestingly enough, I have found that the prayers I offer to the sun and the prayers I formerly offered to God are all answered at about the same 50-percent rate.”

-- George Carlin

Books

¹Although The Bible of the Good and Moral Atheist should serve you as a comprehensive but concise summary of day-to-day Atheism, we understand that many of you might be seeking more information on various aspects of Atheism or Freethought that were either omitted in this work, such as a detailed history of Atheism, or not covered in great detail, such as the arguments for and against god. Since a great deal has been written about these and other subjects of interest to Atheists, we list here in the Book of Books some important works on the subjects of Atheism and freethinking. Books are listed here by subject matter and format, in approximate chronological order within each group, and we have provided a short description of each book as well. We have tried to shorten the list to only the best of the best out of the numerous books available: the most historical, relevant, well-written, and/or readable books. Of course there are texts we have omitted, but the books shown here should serve as a good list for anyone interested in further study on Atheism.

Those interested in discussing the works they have read here, or wanting to search out other volumes for Freethinkers, are directed to www.booktalk.org. Booktalk.org is an excellent website, dedicated to the discussion of freethought books. More information about this site can be found in the Book of Resources.

Please note that while Atheists, like Freethinkers of all types, encourage additional philosophical exploration, it is not a requirement of any sort. You don't need to be a scholar of baseball history to play baseball, and you don't have to be a walking Atheist's encyclopedia to be a Good and Moral Atheist. Read further in other books if you like, or skip to the next chapter, and maybe come back to the Book of Books some other time.

Early Writers on Naturalism, Deism, and Atheism

An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (John Locke, 1690)

Locke's essay cover quite a few topics other than religion, but in Book IV, Chapter 18, he writes that where there is a conflict between faith and reason (that which can be sensed, seen, or recreated), reason should always come first. A theist, still he relegated faith to the smaller realm of that which cannot be determined by reason.

An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (David Hume, 1748)

Hume's paper disputes the reality of miracles as merely hearsay evidence, and says that religion, as it relates to the demonstrable physical world, is only superstition.

Reason: The Only Oracle of Man (Ethan Allen, 1784)

Allen's treatise on reason attacks religious dogma as superstition, and promotes his Deist philosophy based on reason, nature, and truth.

The Age of Reason (Thomas Paine, 1794-1795)

This work explains American patriot Paine's Deist beliefs, and outright denies the basic dogmatic themes of Christianity. It was very radical at the time, and much of Paine's contribution to the revolutionary movement in the United States was later papered over by those who were upset about his views against the church.

The Necessity of Atheism (Percy Bysshe Shelley, 1810)

This short treatise, written by Shelley while in college, is a wordy philosophical proof against the existence of god, using the logic and reasoning of the day. In 1811, Shelley was expelled from Oxford for publishing the pamphlet. Many of Shelley's later works included strong Atheistic themes.

Early Texts on Evolution

⁹On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life (Charles Darwin, 1859)

Darwin's groundbreaking work outlines the basic principles and processes of evolution for the first time, while gently skirting the issue of whether man evolved as well, only hinting in that direction. He later clarified his stance on human evolution, in *The Descent of Man*.

This text is the one that by itself radically changed mankind's view of the world and how it worked. Although primarily a scientific paper, it was seen as a direct attack on church orthodoxy and established teachings. The result of this work was far-reaching, and any student of either evolution or the history of freethought would do well to read Darwin's work.

Evidence as to Man's Place in Nature (Thomas Huxley, 1863)

Thomas Huxley, famed defender of Charles Darwin and coiner of the term "agnostic," published this follow-up study four years after the publication of *On the Origin of Species*. The work applied Darwin's concept of evolution to humans (and other primates), thus becoming the first book to explicitly suggest that humans were descended from other primates.

The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex (Charles Darwin, 1871)

In no uncertain terms, Darwin states that he too recognizes that man is a product of evolution, just like all other species. This clarified some confusion over his earlier works, in which he had not specifically taken that controversial stance.

Evolution and Ethics and Other Essays (Thomas Huxley, 1886-1894)

This collection of five of Huxley's essays, plus some additional letters he had written, gives us a detailed look into the controversy surrounding the new (in the late nineteenth century) concept of the evolution of species. Additionally, Huxley shows himself to be a strong supporter of capitalism, and interestingly enough he was also an ardent opponent of the founding of the Salvation Army, which in its initial form was much more strident in its aims of promoting Christianity.

The Voyage Of The Beagle Journal of Researches into the Natural History and Geology of the Countries Visited During the Voyage of H.M.S. Beagle Round the World (Charles Darwin, 1909)

This book is a detailed account of Darwin's travels as a naturalist aboard the Beagle. Darwin wrote regularly while on the ship and on shore, keeping a diary of far more than items of interest to scientists. His journal covers every port of call, and details of the various islands and cities visited. In addition to being a brilliant and groundbreaking scientist, Darwin is also quite an entertaining storyteller.

The Late 19th Century: Rationalism, Freethought, Agnosticism, Feminism, Secularism

**¹⁵Essays on Freethinking and Plainspeaking
(Leslie Stephen, 1873)**

These essays by Agnostic and Freethinker Leslie Stephen cover various topics, from the renunciation of the infallibility of the Scriptures by a clergyman in favor of naturalism, to Darwinism, to various philosophical arguments.

**The Science of Ethics
(Leslie Stephen, 1881)**

Stephen's work was adopted as a textbook on ethics, laying the groundwork for post-Christian morality.

**An Agnostic's Apology and Other Essays
(Leslie Stephen, 1893)**

This collection promotes skepticism as the only reasonable method of human thought. Stephen skewers scripted religious doctrine, calling it a rigid adherence to odd explanations of things in areas where we are truly ignorant.

**The Woman's Bible
(Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 1895-1898)**

In 1895, famed women's rights activist Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote (with a group of other women) a book called *The Woman's Bible*, in response to a revision of the bible by the Church of England. In addition to criticizing the degradation of women in the bible, Stanton also "clarified" the bible as being made of a great deal of allegory.

**Secular Morality: What Is It?
(Charles Watts, 1880)**

Watts discusses Utilitarianism, then goes on to explain secular morality, and why it is superior to religious morality.

**The Secularist's Catechism
(Charles Watts, 1896)**

Watts uses a Q&A format to discuss Secularism, its ideals, and the goals and aims of the National Secular Society.

**Which Way?
(Robert Ingersoll, 1884)**

Famed Agnostic Ingersoll writes about the choice between naturalism and supernaturalism, couched in terms that are understandable to the Christian of the day.

**Superstition
(Robert Ingersoll, 1898)**

Ingersoll attacks all superstitions, from religion to everyday superstitions.

**Professor Huxley and Agnosticism
(Robert Ingersoll {and Thomas Huxley}, 1889)**

Ingersoll discusses at length a passage by Thomas Huxley on the subject of infidels and religion.

**The Rationalist's Manual
(M. D. Aletheia, 1897)**

Although *The Bible of the Good and Moral Atheist* was almost completely written before we discovered *The Rationalist's Manual*, there are some astounding similarities. The first half of this well-organized manual covers "Christianism" and its myths (briefly covering other religions as well), explaining the history of biblical teachings and the contradictions and absurdities within. The second part describes Rationalism, covering the origins of the life and the universe using the scientific understanding of the day. It further covers truth and ethics and morality, and the following quote resonates well with our book: "Now, true morality—i.e., the morality the outcome of human love and sympathy, which are the bases of co-operation—will be seen to be of a much higher and purer form..."

Aletheia also has a "moral code" of maxims (similar to the Tenet of Morality), plus special maxims for parents and children, and even a selection of verses for children! There are also sections for holidays, namings, weddings, burials, and the legal concerns of Freethinkers. For those interested in the history of Rationalism, those who want a detailed refutation of Christianity, or those who would like to see what *The Bible of the Good and Moral Atheist* might have looked like if it had been written a hundred years earlier in London, Aletheia's often-quoted work is a must read.

Thinkers of the Middle 20th Century

²⁶The Atheism of Astronomy (Woolsey Teller, 1938)

Teller uses astronomical findings to prove that the universe is in no way “designed” or supernatural in origin, and rather is haphazard, wasteful, and utterly natural. His outlook is a bit nihilist, predicting our future to be doomed as spacedust.

The Philosophy of Humanism (originally titled “Humanism as a Philosophy”) (Corliss Lamont, 1949)

Lamont’s book describes the philosophy behind Humanism, its history and its practice. This is the early authority on the topic, a ground-breaking work that is still quoted by groups as disparate as Humanists and Fundamentalist Christians. For more works on Humanism, look to the sections titled “Modern Works on Humanism” and “Compilations of Humanist Writings” found later in this chapter.

Man and His Gods (Homer W. Smith, 1952)

This book traces the evolution of religious belief, from the first animist inklings to modern-day structured religious teachings, with all steps in between. With a foreword by Albert Einstein, Smith delivers a great study into the how and why man has become a religious animal.

Atheism: Questions and Answers (Gora {Goparaju Ramachandra Rao}, 1969-1974)

This compilation of Gora’s answers to questions that were submitted to his weekly publication, *The Atheist*, covers many philosophical and practical questions about Atheism, religion, and morality. The Q&A format is quite instructive for those wishing to better understand Atheism.

Although Gora disdained totalitarianism and was a strong supporter of democracy and freedom, he was also a devotee to a modified Marxist economic philosophy, and in a few of the questions he attacks capitalism as evil. He improperly bases a purely political stance on his Atheism, which may put off some readers. His insistence on economic equality, though, may have partly stemmed from the inherently unfair caste system in place in India, which left the poor mired in a societal structure that does not exist in many modern democracies, where there are much less of the inherent barriers (besides lack of initial funds) that prevent the poor from working to achieve more in life than that with which they started.

Positive Atheism (Gora, 1972)

Gora describes what he sees as basic Atheistic morals and philosophy. He further proceeds to describe “Atheistic Economics” (again touting modified Marxism), and other concepts considerably beyond mere Atheism, such as Atheistic Aesthetics. Once again, we remind the reader that Gora’s views are based upon his experience with the caste system in India, and we do not endorse his positions on economic issues.

Atheism: The Case Against God (George H. Smith, 1980)

Smith argues against god and faith, leaving no theistic escape possible for the true thinker. His non-technical naturalism is clear and understandable, and he pulls no punches with respect to the Christian faith. His approach may come across as a bit strong for those still attached to Christianity.

Personal Accounts of Atheism

³³Why I Left the Ministry and Became an Atheist (Vincent Runyon, 1959)

Ordained Methodist Minister Vincent Runyon details his questions of faith, and his subsequent conversion, after twelve years in the ministry, to Atheism. Runyon explains the fallacies of religious philosophy, without getting into detailed Biblical criticism. With sections delineated by simple statements—including the eye-catching “Ministers and Priests are Quacks” —Runyon gives a compelling narrative of his own search for truth and subsequent enlightenment.

Why I Am Not a Christian And Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects (Bertrand Russell, 1967)

Author and noted pacifist Russell delivers compelling arguments against Christianity, while still admiring much of the teachings of Jesus himself. This is an excellent book for those considering Atheism but struggling to leave Christianity. Russell’s book has served as inspiration for the quite a few “Why I am not a ...” books and essays, as can be seen below.

We Become Atheists (Gora, 1975)

This autobiography describes the journey of Indian activist Gora and his wife Saraswathi from traditional Hindu beliefs to Atheism, and their experiences with the Indian independence movement, Mahatma Gandhi, and the spread of Atheism in India. Gora also details Gandhi’s economic equality theories (which he supported), his partial disagreement with Marxism over the concept of free will, and his final decision to support a sort of democratic socialism.

Why I Am Not a Jew (David Dvorkin, 1990)

Dvorkin’s essay was published in Free Inquiry magazine in 1990, and a slightly different version can be found on the internet today. In it, Dvorkin challenges the tenets of Judaism, both from a religious and cultural standpoint, and explains why the journey from theist to Atheist is considerably different for former Jews than it is for former Christians. His short essay is a strong and sometimes controversial one, even arguing against cultural traditions and secular celebrations of holidays. However, it is well-reasoned, and presents another thoughtful voice supporting Atheism.

Losing Faith in Faith From Preacher to Atheist (Daniel E. Barker, 1992)

A preacher following in the steps of Vincent Runyon, Barker tells us why he converted to Atheism, and what problems he found in Christian dogma.

Why I Am Not a Hindu (Ramendra Nath, 1993)

Professor Nath’s essay was inspired by two books, Bertrand Russell’s *Why I am Not a Christian*, and Mahatma Gandhi’s *Why I am a Hindu*. In it, Nath covers the four facets of Hinduism as listed in Gandhi’s work: belief in Vedas and other scriptures (including reincarnation), the concept of castes, the taboo on eating beef, and idol-worship. Nath gives reasons for rejecting each of the facets, and concludes with support for rationalist, secular morality. This text may be confusing for those not familiar with the tenets of Hinduism, but for Hindus considering Atheism, it is essential.

Why I Am Not a Muslim (Ibn Warraq, 1995)

This book is to the Islamic world what Bertrand Russell’s *Why I am Not a Christian* is to Christianity. It is a detailed account of the inaccuracies of the Quran and the suffering that the various inflexible doctrines based on literal reading of the Quran have inflicted on the Muslim world. This is a must read for those considering conversion from Islam to Atheism.

Like Rolling Uphill Realizing the Honesty of Atheism (Dianna Narciso, 2004)

Narciso tells us of her personal journey from deep Christian beliefs to Atheism. This well-written, subtle and engaging book is a great plain-English story of living as an Atheist. It focuses on the practical, not the philosophical.

Modern Works on Atheism

⁴¹Arguing for Atheism

An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion

(Robin Le Poidevin, 1996)

Le Poidevin's important and relevant book is one of the strongest works out there on arguments for and against Atheism. Not only does he deflate the claims of theism, he shows how each argument can be properly viewed to show that it ultimately supports Atheism. He also includes standard arguments for Atheism (such as the problem of evil) and further delves into philosophical questions about Atheism, such as whether Atheists should fear death and whether the structure of religion, absent the supernatural myths, has some value, which Le Poidevin agrees it does. As *The Bible of the Good and Moral Atheist* covers both topics similarly, we find *Arguing for Atheism* to be quite a prescient work.

Big Domino in the Sky

And Other Atheistic Tales

(Michael Martin, 1996)

Michael Martin's unique book uses the formats of historical fiction, science fiction, and fantasy to explain Atheism and how to live life as an Atheist. His unforgettable stories could rightly be called the "parables" of Atheism.

What Is Atheism?

A Short Introduction

(Douglas E. Krueger, 1998)

This book lives up to its name. Krueger has written a short introduction to Atheism for beginners. It is written simply for a broad audience, and gives a general conclusion with each chapter.

Why Atheism?

(George H. Smith, 2000)

Another brilliant work by Smith, he covers the relationships between faith and knowledge, belief and free will. Many theories are explained and placed into historical context with their authors. He continues by outlining how Atheists philosophically live their lives and view their own mortality.

Atheism: A Very Short Introduction

(Julian Baggini, 2003)

This book lives up to its title. It is a brief synopsis of Atheist arguments, morality, and purpose, and also delves into Atheism in history. This is an excellent introduction to the positive side of Atheism for those who are questioning religion.

The End of Faith

Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason

(Sam Harris, 2004)

In his hard-hitting book, Harris directly attacks religion, showing how religious beliefs threaten the world. He pulls no punches, and passionately argues that religion is the primary cause of intolerance and war in the world today.

Natural Atheism

(David Eller, 2004)

Natural Atheism is a guide to a good deal of the "why" questions regarding Atheism. In a friendly tone, Eller covers the philosophical arguments for and against Atheism in great detail, and goes on to cover church-state separation, the various types of Atheism, and the future fight between rationalism and fundamentalism.

Sense and Goodness Without God

A Defense of Metaphysical Naturalism

(Richard Carrier, 2005)

Carrier helps explain the nature of the universe, our place in it, our reason for existence, and how we can be moral, good, loving beings without god dominating our beliefs. He gives a new look and fresh explanations to the issues.

Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe

(Erik J. Wielenberg, 2005)

Wielenberg dissects the underpinnings of traditional theistic morality and meaning of life, compares it to the beliefs of the non-theist, and makes the case for a new ethical character in a world without gods.

Modern works on the History of Freethought and Atheism

⁵⁰**Against the Faith**

Essays on Deists, Skeptics and Atheists

(Jim Herrick, 1985)

Herrick's book reads as a history of modern freethought, from early European Deists to Paine's Age of Reason to the secular preachers of Emerson, Ingersoll, and Twain, and ending with Bertrand Russell. He gives biographies of each, and delves into their lives as well as their works.

2000 Years of Disbelief

Famous People with the Courage to Doubt

(James A. Haught, 1996)

This collection by Haught of short biographies and quoted selections shows the large number of skeptics and doubters among the major philosophers and authors, scholars and inventors, leaders and reformers and revolutionaries in the time since Jesus.

Freethinkers

A History of American Secularism

(Susan Jacoby, 2004)

Jacoby gives a great exposé about the truth about the secular founding of the United States, long-hidden by theists seeking to change the nature of the U.S. toward god-belief. Written as a history book, *Freethinkers* demonstrates the founders' original intent, showing the miscarriage of justice due to theistic misinterpretation of secular law.

Compilations of Atheist Writings

Critiques of God

Making the Case Against Belief in God

(Peter A. Angeles {Editor}, 1976 and 1997)

This volume includes many critiques of theism by noted skeptic authors, covering arguments theists use to support their claims. The volume was not updated since the 1976 publication, so more recent arguments have been omitted.

The Encyclopedia of Unbelief/Volumes I and II in One

(Gordon Stein {Editor}, 1985)

Stein's comprehensive (and pricey) text includes over 100 articles on various topics regarding skepticism and Atheism as they relate to various traditional religions, written by many recognizable authors and authorities.

Anthology of Atheism and Rationalism

(Gordon Stein {Editor}, 1989)

Similar to his 1985 *Encyclopedia of Unbelief*, Stein has assembled a shorter compilation of thirty essays covering Atheism and Agnosticism, god, revealed religion, Jesus, evil and morality, and the history of freethought.

Women Without Superstition

No Gods - No Masters

(Annie L. Gaylor {Editor}, 1997)

Gaylor's outstanding compilation includes excerpts from the leading freethinking women of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and their contributions to both freethought and the women's rights movement.

The Cambridge Companion to Atheism

(Michael Martin {Editor}, available in 2006 or 2007)

Martin has pulled together 18 current leading scholars to write on the topic of Atheism, covering the history of Atheism, challenges to theism, and what implications Atheism has on its adherents and on the world as a whole. This is part of the *Cambridge Companions to Philosophy* series of books.

Modern Works on Humanism

⁵⁸**Forbidden Fruit** ***The Ethics of Humanism*** **(Paul W. Kurtz, 1988)**

Kurtz outlines the failures of theistic morality, and substitutes a humanist morality for all to use. He covers a range of subjects in detail, including ethics, a point-by-point listing of human rights, a separate section of privacy, and finally the meaning of life without god.

Humanism **(Tony Davies, 1997)**

Davies' book, part of the *New Critical Idiom* series, is an introduction to Humanist thought throughout history, and the debates and surrounding the philosophy. He gives definitions of terms used in Humanism and related philosophies.

Humanism As the Next Step **(Lloyd and Mary Morain, 1998)**

The Morains' text introduces the readers to the history and philosophy of Humanism. It covers the works of some famous Humanists, and is full of facts and dates for those seeking a good reference on Humanism.

Meditations for the Humanist ***Ethics for a Secular Age*** **(A.C. Grayling, 2002)**

Grayling's text covers a broad spectrum of personal and ethical issues that Humanists face. The book is not prescriptive, and does not give the answers to these tough moral questions, it merely outlines them for the reader to think about on his or her own.

On Humanism **(Richard Norman, 2004)**

This book, part of the *Thinking In Action* series, is a short introduction to science, humanity, morality, and the meaning of life, and how they are represented from the Humanist point of view. Norman also includes an appendix on organized Humanism.

Humanism: An Introduction **(Jim Herrick, 2005)**

Herrick gives a great overview of the history and philosophy of Humanism, and shows how the philosophy relates to morality, religion, politics, the arts, and even the environment. He continues with chapters on Humanist organizations and the future of Humanism. This is a wonderful introductory book for those just beginning to explore Humanism.

Compilations of Humanist Writings

Humanist Anthology ***From Confucius to Attenborough*** **(Margaret Knight and Jim Herrick {Editors}, 1995)**

Herrick has updated Knight's outstanding collection of Humanist writings through the ages (published in 1961) with the addition of chapters by over a half a dozen new authors.

The Black Humanist Experience ***An Alternative to Religion*** **(Norm R. Allen Jr. {Editor}, 2003)**

Allen's collection of Humanist writings includes many from both African-Americans and from Africans. The various authors describe their unique journeys from traditional religion to Humanism.

Modern works on Skepticism

⁶⁶**Flim-Flam!**

Psychics, ESP, Unicorns, and Other Delusions

(James Randi, 1982)

The king of the debunkers, magician James Randi, tears apart the cons and the tricks and delusions, and takes some extra shots at his favorite foil, “psychic” Uri Geller.

The Transcendental Temptation

A Critique of Religion and the Paranormal

(Paul Kurtz, 1986)

Kurtz’s book introduces skepticism, then dissects the underlying premises of the major religions. It goes on to debunk claims of the supernatural, and ends with discussion of our fascination with religion and the paranormal.

Looking for a Miracle

Weeping Icons, Relics, Stigmata, Visions & Healing Cures

(Joe Nickell, 1993)

Nickell debunks the so-called “miracles” of Christianity and other religions. It also covers the current abuses by “healers,” and how they make money off the blind faith of their followers.

The Demon-Haunted World

Science as a Candle in the Dark

(Carl Sagan, 1997)

Carl Sagan, the brilliant mind who brought us the society-changing *Cosmos*, writes on subjects of supernatural and mysterious phenomena as varied as Bigfoot and the Loch Ness monster, fairies and demons, ESP and astrology, UFOs and crop circles and Area 51. He picks apart each myth with a scientist’s trained eye, showing the underlying fallacies. Sagan then goes on to show other, true mysteries of the universe, things just as wondrous yet true. His humor, wit, and most of all his intense wonder shines through, making this book not only informative, but incredibly entertaining.

Why People Believe Weird Things

Pseudoscience, Superstition, and Other Confusions of Our Time

(Michael Shermer, 1997)

Shermer’s book covers skepticism, and how it can be used against the claims of pseudoscientists, literal religionists, and even revisionist historians. His last two chapters explain why people believe in such nonsense, with his final chapter devoted to why *smart* people believe in weird things.

The Skeptic's Dictionary

A Collection of Strange Beliefs, Amusing Deceptions, and Dangerous Delusions

(Robert Todd Carroll, 2003)

Carroll’s book reads like an encyclopedia of quackery, myth, legend, superstition, dogma, and fantasy. With short entries for almost every imaginable topic of interest to a skeptic, including astrology, ESP, Noah’s Ark, numerology, and psychics, this collection is essential for anyone interested in the topic of debunking myths.

Atheist Universe

Why God Didn't Have a Thing to Do With It

(David Mills, 2003)

This book is an excellent introduction to Atheism and critique of theism. Mills’ work includes quotes from people who criticized religion, debunking of common theistic arguments, and even a section on the basic non-Christian ideals of the founding of the United States.

Science Friction

Where the Known Meets the Unknown

(Michael Shermer, 2005)

The newest book from Michael Shermer delves into the borders between science and superstition, and what happens each time science steps forward and takes new ground by explaining a previously unexplainable phenomenon. He covers the history of the Skepticism movement, from Darwin’s discoveries to the latest form of Creationism.

Modern works on the Big Bang, Evolution, and the Evolution/Creationism Debate

⁷⁴The Blind Watchmaker

Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe Without Design

(Richard Dawkins, 1986)

Dawkins brilliantly deconstructs the arguments for Intelligent Design, by elegantly presenting the mountain of evidence in support of the Theory of Evolution.

Climbing Mount Improbable

(Richard Dawkins, 1996)

Again Dawkins goes after Intelligent Design theorists, by showing how quite improbable structures such as the human eye could have arise by a multitude of small steps, over an extremely long period of time.

At the Water's Edge

Fish with Fingers, Whales with Legs, and How Life Came Ashore but Then Went Back to Sea

(Carl Zimmer, 1999)

This book covers a single extremely important topic in evolution: how did life move from sea to land? In great (but still quite readable) detail, Zimmer walks us from the sea to land, covering the development of lungs and hands and other organs, then takes us back into the sea with whales and dolphins, all with copious supporting fossil evidence.

Evolution: The Triumph of an Idea

(Carl Zimmer, 2002)

Zimmer's book that accompanies the PBS series of the same name is a wonderful read. It skewers the main claims of creationism, while showing the mass of evidence supporting evolution. And book doesn't just stick to evolution itself, it also covers its effects on politics, religion, and philosophy.

A Short History of Nearly Everything

(Bill Bryson, 2003)

Bryson's readable history of the universe and discoveries about it (with a few inaccuracies) is written for the layman.

The Ancestor's Tale

A Pilgrimage to the Dawn of Evolution

(Richard Dawkins, 2004)

Dawkins shows us evolution by meeting up with various species, starting from modern humans. In a backward fashion, he shows many of the steps in evolution from our more apelike ancestors. Dawkins then works his way to species farther and farther away on the family tree, showing the various results of evolution in different environments.

Big Bang

(Simon Singh, 2005)

In this well-illustrated volume, Singh presents the history of theories of the nature of the cosmos, from ancient Greece through the most recent information received from microwave background radiation. He describes how the Big Bang Theory arose, the theories competing against it, and how evidence showed it to be correct.

The Counter-Creationism Handbook

(Mark Isaak, 2005)

Isaak's ambitious work is probably the most complete debunking of creationist claims that exists. Packaged into a well-indexed and cross-referenced work, the *Handbook* answers them all succinctly and accurately.

Evolution vs. Creationism: An Introduction

(Eugenie C. Scott, 2005)

Scott, the director of the National Center for Science Education and past president of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists, gives us this easy-to-read introduction to the contentious debate. She covers the basics of science and creationists' attacks on evidence and evolution scientists, and answers their claims directly and forthrightly.

Breaking the Spell

Religion as a Natural Phenomenon

(Daniel C. Dennett, 2006)

Dennett explores religion as a product of evolution. He covers the origins of religion, and why it is both beneficial and harmful. He challenges followers to examine their tenets, to prevent future harm caused by teaching ignorance.

Works geared toward children

⁸⁴Maybe Yes, Maybe No A Guide for Young Skeptics

(Dan Barker, illustrated by Brian Strassburg, 1990)

Barker's book teaches children how to look at things critically, and how to debunk supernatural claims. He directly challenges the concepts of angels and demons, devils and gods. Perfect for older elementary-school age children.

How Do You Know It's True?

Discovering the Difference Between Science and Superstition

(Hyman Ruchlis, 1991)

This outstanding book helps the ten to fourteen crowd learn the tools of rationalism, and understand the failings of pseudoscience and superstition. He uses probability to explain how "miracles" are just unusual occurrences.

From the Beginning: The Story of Human Evolution

(David Peters, 1991)

Peters' book has detailed drawings of the steps along the line from the emergence of life to animals and modern humans. He also includes explanations of why various features emerged in different animals. For pre-teens and teens.

Maybe Right, Maybe Wrong

A Guide for Young Thinkers

(Dan Barker, illustrated by Brian Strassburg, 1992)

Barker's follow-up to *Maybe Yes, Maybe No* gives children lessons in morality without gods, using realistic examples and illustrations. Like his earlier work, this is geared toward older elementary-school age children.

Big Bang

(Heather Couper & Nigel Henbest, illustrated by Luciano Corbella, 1997)

Big Bang covers the details and timeline of the Big Bang, at a level appropriate to high-schoolers.

Eyewitness: Evolution

(Linda Gamlin, 2000)

This book from the *Eyewitness* series is a great resource for middle school or older elementary-aged students. It provides a wealth of detail on evolution, and also briefly covers the age of the earth.

The Birth of the Earth

Cartoon History of the Earth, Volume 1

(Jacqui Bailey, illustrated by Mathew Lilley, 2001)

This comic-format book is a fun and informative way to explain the Big Bang to older elementary-aged children.

Life on Earth: The Story of Evolution

(Steve Jenkins, 2002)

Jenkins' book poses many questions that elementary-school children ask, and answers in words and pictures.

Our Family Tree: An Evolution Story

(Lisa Westerberg Peters, illustrated by Lauren Stringer, 2003)

This illustrated book covers the timeline of evolution from the first organisms to modern species. It is aimed at younger elementary-age kids, and can be read to pre-schoolers.

The Tree of Life: Charles Darwin

(Peter Sis, 2003)

Another illustrated book, this one gives a fascinating look at the life and achievements of Charles Darwin. It is geared toward older elementary school students.

The Testament of History

The Books of the Testament of History

Genesis

Biogenesis

Human Evolution

Religion

Science

Genesis

Timeline

¹In the beginning, there was the Big Bang. We do not yet know what came before the Big Bang. The initial explosion and expansion of our universe occurred about 12 to 15 billion years ago. This release of an incredible amount of energy cooled and expanded over billions of years, eventually coalescing into the matter that makes up the atoms and molecules of our bodies, our world, our sun, our solar system, our galaxy, and all the galaxies of the universe.

The universe continues to expand, and the latest research shows that this expansion is accelerating. This means that the underlying space is expanding, not that objects such as galaxies, planets, and people are expanding. The space which we occupy is expanding slightly, but gravity and molecular attraction are much stronger on a local scale than the current expansion of the universe, and thus each person, planet, star, galaxy, and even cluster of galaxies remains whole. Far away galaxies, however, are receding from us. We do not yet know if the universe is finite or infinite, or if the expansion will continue to accelerate or not.

The Earth formed about 4.5 billion years ago from the disk of matter spinning around the Sun, which formed about half a billion years earlier from swirling clouds of gas in space in the outer arms of our galaxy, the Milky Way. The matter forming the earth was a combination of dust, ice, rock, and gas. As the Earth grew larger, the individual pieces of matter were initially crushed by gravity, then melted under the intense heat and pressure inside what grew to a planet-sized body. Heavier elements such as iron sank to the center, while the lightest constituents such as water and nitrogen rose to the surface. At around 4.1 billion years ago, the surface of the molten earth cooled down enough to become solid land.

Theory & Evidence

As we know, the first event in our known universe was the Big Bang. For our universe, the Big Bang was the beginning of not only space but time as well. Some hypotheses about what happened before include repeated cycles of Big Bangs. Other hypotheses assume that universes can create daughter universes, or that the universe is a multiverse. Still others posit that it is mathematically possible that the universe just *began*, starting from absolutely nothing. We have not yet figured out ways to test these hypotheses, but maybe in the future we will be able to explore these issues more thoroughly.

However, the theory that there was a Big Bang itself, that the universe is expanding, and many of the actual mechanics of the Big Bang have been thoroughly tested in many different ways. Unlike religious theories of the beginning of existence, which are based on the writings of men hundreds or thousands of years ago, the Big Bang theory was only proposed in 1927, by Catholic priest Georges Lemaitre. (The name “Big Bang” wasn’t coined until its use in a 1949 BBC radio show by one of the theory’s detractors, British astronomer Fred Hoyle.) The initial concept that the universe was expanding came as a surprise to many scientists. But, just like any good detective, you have to go where the evidence leads you.

The fleshing out of the Big Bang theory started from the evidence that the universe is expanding, and worked backwards to the conclusion that the universe must have started as an enormously dense, extremely hot and energetic, very small point, sometimes called a singularity. This point exploded out into what has become our universe, with the energy coalescing into matter that gravitated together to form stars and galaxies. Some of the major pieces of evidence supporting the Big Bang Theory are listed below, along with one of the failed hypotheses that attempted to explain the universe without a big bang.

Hubble’s Law

In 1929 Edwin Hubble and Milton Humason put forth what is now known as Hubble’s law. The law explains the redshift in the light arriving from distant stars. This redshift is similar to the well-known Doppler Effect, where an approaching train or ambulance has a higher-pitched sound than a receding one. Sound from a receding object like a

train is stretched out into longer wavelengths and lower frequencies. Similarly, light from a receding star is stretched out into the longer wavelengths and lower frequencies of the red side of the spectrum. What Hubble's Law states is that the redshift in light observable from faraway stars and galaxies is proportional to the distance of the object from the earth. This makes sense if the universe is expanding in all directions, because something twice as far away will be receding twice as fast. (Picture holding a long rubber band, with a pen mark on it one inch away from your hand and another mark two inches away. Now stretch it to twice its length. The closer mark moved slower, only one more inch, while the farther mark moved two inches, twice as fast.) Hubble's Law showed cosmologists the true size and expansion of the universe, and led scientists to work backwards to the theory of a Big Bang.

Olbers' Paradox

Olbers' paradox can be most simply stated by saying, "Why is the night sky dark?" With infinite size, or even just extremely large size, every single point in the night sky should contain a star, and even though that star might be very distant, it should still give us light. So why isn't the night sky as bright as the sun? The answer lies in the Big Bang, which gives two reasons why the sky is mostly dark. First, the universe is expanding, which will take faraway stars out of our "observable universe" so that no light from them will reach us. The expansion of the universe is pulling them away from us faster than their light is moving. (Yes, no things can move faster than the speed of light, but the expansion of the universe itself can be faster than light.) Second, the universe is not infinitely old, which means that some stars are young enough that their light hasn't yet had a chance to reach us. Both limited age and expansion support the Big Bang theory.

Homogeneity/Isotropy (Sameness)

The Big Bang theory says that all of the part of the universe we can observe was compressed into an extremely small point back at the time of the Big Bang. Since everything was compressed into the same spot and arose from the same process, we should expect that the universe should be homogeneous, that is, it should look roughly the same in all directions. The homogeneousness, or isotropy, of the universe has been tested, and the universe has been shown to be isotropic on a scale as fine as 1 part in 100,000.

Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation

In the 1940s, scientists predicted that the heat of the early stages of the Big Bang would have left an observable amount of background radiation in the form of microwaves. Equipment was not sophisticated to test this hypothesis until the 1960s, when evidence of the background radiation was detected. Further data regarding the specific nature and pattern of the background radiation was found in the 1990s, and again it matched up with the predictions of the Big Bang theory.

Failure of the Tired Light Hypothesis

The "tired light" hypothesis states that light from distant stars can be redshifted by a gradual energy loss from the travel over such long distances, possibly slowed down by the fabric of space or something like that. However, this hypothesis has been disproved several ways. First, there isn't any way to change the energy of a photon without altering its momentum as well. Any change in momentum would cause blurring of distant objects, and as we can tell from the views of distant stars and galaxies, this does not occur.

Second, the Big Bang predicts that light from distant events will arrive with time dilation. (What that means is that some objects are so far away that a two-week flash of light might appear to take three weeks from the earth, since by the end of the two weeks the source of the flash has moved the distance that light would take a week to travel.) With supernovas, we have a good idea of how long the event should last if it were nearby, they follow calculable rules. If the tired light hypothesis were true, the duration of supernova events would be the same regardless of distance, where with the Big Bang theory, far away ones should appear to take longer, in proportion to the distance from the earth. The time dilation matches the prediction of the Big Bang, so we must discard the tired light hypothesis.

Conclusion

¹³The above is just a summary of a much larger body of evidence supporting the Big Bang Theory. With so much evidence behind it, the Big Bang is a robust theory, subject to minor modifications but fully tested on its major premises. We may accept it as a scientific “fact.” More details on the Big Bang are available in some of the works in the section of the Book of Books covering the Big Bang and Evolution. Also, more information on the Big Bang can be found at EvoWiki (www.ewowiki.org), and detailed refutations of creationist claims of the origins of the universe are available on the Talk.Origins (www.talkorigins.org/indexcc/) website. If you are interested, please consult those sources for further information.

Biogenesis

Timeline

¹Four billion years ago, approximately a hundred million years after the emergence of solid land, life arose on Earth. We are not sure which of several hypothesized mechanisms accidentally created the first self-replicating molecule, most likely ribonucleic acid (RNA). It could have arisen from deep-ocean hydrothermal vents, from pools of organic “soup,” from alkaline seepages along the ocean floor, or from several other processes. However it happened, once this molecule was formed, it copied itself repeatedly. But not all copies were perfect, either through copying errors, or through environmental attacks on the molecules. The mini-environment in which the molecule first arose was soon filled with a number of slightly different versions of the original.

And evolution began. The four keys to evolution, as enumerated by Charles Darwin, are variation in a population, inheritance of traits from a parent, reproduction, and limited resources. This mini-environment of self-copying molecules had all the ingredients necessary. Once the environment was filled, offspring could only be made by those who could compete better for the scarce resources, or who could survive and copy at the fringe or outside the environment. Molecules with beneficial variations survived and reproduced in greater numbers. Those without did not. And the cycle repeated: variation due to copying errors or the environment, better survival and reproduction by those with certain beneficial traits, a new generation with variation, a new wave of survival and reproduction. Individual molecules usually did not change, but the population changed generation by generation, one tiny modification at a time.

One of the reasons it is sometimes hard to fathom how evolution works is that it is excruciatingly slow. One form does not change into another over one generation, or over a dozen. The time for the evolutionary step from the first living, replicating molecules to the first organisms that had cellular walls may have been on the order of a hundred million years. That means billions of generations of trial and error passed, tiny step by tiny step, until one-celled organisms emerged on the Earth. We can hypothesize about possible steps along the way: the accidental changes that allowed a self-replicating molecule to make proteins which attached to itself, thus either shielding it from harm or helping draw in building blocks for new copies or energy for the steps necessary to make a copy; the growth, generation by generation, of such shielding until it curved around upon itself and created a bubble; the advantages that the organism would have if the key molecular strand were on the inside of the bubble and the bubble allowed only nutrients through; the additional nutrients it would receive if the bubble folded back upon itself to increase surface area; the extra layer of protection the key strand would have if it pinched its own fold off from the main bubble in a tiny central bubble. Whatever the exact steps, by about 3.9 billion years ago single-celled organisms had developed, using deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) as the key molecular strand, RNA as a messenger, and proteins built in the folds of the DNA and RNA as the building blocks of the other components of the cell.

Eventually, some cells began to use forms of photosynthesis to generate energy for the cellular chemical reactions. After more evolution, cyanobacteria evolved that produced oxygen as a waste product. Again, the timeframes are enormous; we have traveled close to a billion years from the first one-celled organisms to get to cyanobacteria, which arrived around 3 billion years ago. The waste oxygen that they produced increased in the atmosphere to a much higher concentration than had ever been on the earth. Oxygen was toxic to most of the one-celled life at the time, and killed off the vast majority of it. However, some of the cells had various random mutations that allowed them to tolerate higher concentrations of oxygen, and in maybe a half a billion more years, evolved the ability to use oxygen as a way to extract energy from food.

Over a billion years after that, around 1.2 billion years ago, some of these cells evolved a novel strategy to increase the probability of successful offspring: the ability to share DNA with another similar cell. The advantage this conferred was that beneficial mutations could be shared within a population and would evolve to the higher percentages in the population more quickly. For example, if one cell had a mutation that made it use food more efficiently, and another cell had a mutation that made it produce more offspring, some of the offspring of the shared DNA between these two might have both mutations, and would thus have a much greater advantage over its peers. This advent of what we call sexual reproduction greatly sped up the evolutionary process.

Another 200 million years later or so, the first multi-cellular organisms arrived on the scene. For organisms, the ability to sense and move toward food nearby spurred the evolution of nerves, sensory organs and eventually a brain.

Such organisms are called animals, and the first rudimentary animals in the ocean, such as jellyfish and sponges, arrived about 600 million years ago. Animals continued to achieve evolutionary success through a variety of means. Some became predators eating other animals and gained food through size or speed or enhanced sensory ability. Some ate only plants and succeeded where there was an abundance of plants available to eat. Some reproduced in such large numbers that even though most of their offspring might starve or be eaten, some would survive. Some evolved the ability to eat many different plants and animals, ensuring that food would always be available. Some developed armor-like structures or speed to either defend against or run away from predators. Most animals evolved based upon a combination of these various strategies for reproductive success. This great explosion of evolutionary changes and strategies among animals occurred relatively quickly on the evolutionary timeline, and animals soon filled the oceans. This event is called the Cambrian explosion, and occurred roughly from 565 to 525 million years ago.

In the next 200 or so million years, plants and animals finally evolve to colonize the land. The animals included insects, arachnids, and some that resembled amphibians and reptiles. The Earth was now teeming with life. But about 250 million years ago, there was a massive die-off, killing maybe 95% of all animal species. Scientists are still debating possible causes of this mass extinction (called the Permian-Triassic extinction event, or P-T event), and have several different theories that alone or in combination could have caused it. However it happened, it set the stage for the emergence of mammals and birds from early reptilian ancestors. Also appearing on Earth were the first giant reptiles, the dinosaurs. In the 185 million years following the P-T event, plants evolved flowers, birds evolved flight, and mammals evolved placentas. Mouse-sized placental mammals from that time are the ancestors of all placental mammals on Earth today, including humans. Man's last common ancestor with rodents was about 100 million years ago.

But about 65 and a half million years ago, a meteor struck the Earth at what is now the Yucatan peninsula in Mexico, and the ensuing environmental catastrophe wiped out about half the animal species. This event is known as the Cretaceous-Tertiary extinction event (the K-T event), and the change in temperature wiped out virtually all of the cold-blooded dinosaurs. Without the threat of large predators, mammals diversified, and larger mammals appeared. Many species of mammals, with a wide range of adaptations, arrived. The world had begun to take on a familiar appearance, with a high degree of variety in flora and fauna, and mammals dominating the land.

Theory & Evidence

The process of evolution starts with the first self-copying molecule or process. What caused this first molecule or process to arise is still unknown, although we have several hypotheses about how this happened. But evolution is only concerned with what happened *after* that molecule came to be. Once it did arise, the process of evolution took over. Charles Darwin described evolution as being based on four principles: variation between individuals, the inheritance of traits from a parent, the ability of an organism to reproduce more than just enough to replace itself, and a limitation of resources such as food or habitable space. We will describe these in a bit more detail.

Variation between individuals arose even before there existed sexuality and sharing of genetic material (which greatly speeded up the process of evolution). Since organisms were merely copying themselves, it stands to reason that some of these copies were not perfect copies. These imperfections arose due to both environmental factors such as radiation or contamination, and some inherent uncertainty in the copying process. Any evolution toward perfect copying would be limited by the loss of adaptability of the resulting offspring. If you only make perfect copies, and the environment changes so you don't have enough resources to survive, all of your offspring will die, too. But if you made some mistakes, some of your offspring might be able to adapt to the new environment.

There is a common misconception about evolution that species had members that *changed*, morphing from one type of animal to another. Such thinking is related to our human experience, where we see events occurring over days, years, or decades. Evolution is much, much more subtle than that. What evolution does is take those very minor copying imperfections, the variations we already described, and pass them on to the next generation. Every subsequent generation will inherit the new genetic sequence, whether it helps or hurts them. When the new generation is confronted with new challenges for survival, some will be better suited to live and reproduce than others. Those who survive and reproduce at a greater rate will have more offspring in their next generation. No individual changed any more than the initial copying error. But the group of organisms did change, because each new organism inherits changes from the previous generation. Such changes are quite small, but they add up over long enough periods of time.

¹²So we understand variation between individuals, and the inheritance of traits from parents. Now we still need sufficient reproduction to grow the group, or at the very minimum keep it stable. If a copying imperfection lowers the rate of reproduction (net of other mortality factors) of an organism, it will lose out to those organisms that did not have such an error, over enough generations of low reproduction.

The final piece of Darwin's theory is the limitation of resources. Even if a species were to end up, for example, on an island where it had more than enough food, water, and space to live, it would soon reproduce to the level where there was competition for food, water, or space. Resources are always limited or on their way to being limited. With such limitations, mutation through variation, reproduction, and inheritance can give a competitive advantage to particular imperfections. In organisms that share genetic material, the new successful genes will spread throughout the population over generations of reproduction. Simultaneously less successful genes will dwindle in numbers, swamped by the more successful ones.

Those are the basic ideas behind Darwin's theory. He also coined the phrase "survival of the fittest." Again, this may cause some confusion, due to the lens of human experience. Say we compare a handsome, strapping man married to a beautiful, athletic wife. Both are intelligent and charming, and together they run a successful business. They have a handsome son and a beautiful daughter, both very healthy, who they dote upon. Compare them to another couple, both of whom work at low-wage jobs. They are out of shape, unintelligent, have a horrible diet, and have a rocky marriage. They have seven children, all of whom are dirty and ill-mannered, and two of whom have diseases due to poor pre-natal care that will not allow them to reproduce. Who was the fittest? From an evolutionary point of view, it was the second couple, because they succeeded in reproducing more children capable of reproduction than the first.

So the theory of Evolution, basically tells us that all life (including humans!) evolved from earlier life forms through successive generations of mutation, combination, and selection. It is the rule of "survival of the fittest," and it explains how humans and all life on earth came to be. Below we will list some of the primary pieces of evidence for evolution, and direct interested readers to the Book of Books for further reading on evolutionary theory.

Common Physical Structures

We can find in diverse living animals structures that are shared, and almost identical. For example, the formation of blood vessels is very similar in almost all mammals, from humans to hamsters to hippopotamuses. Most mammals share appendages with 5 countable "fingers" or "toes," even if some of those digits have since evolved to fit other purposes, such as the formation of wings in bats. As you narrow down to smaller, more-closely related groups, you can find specific similarities that are not shared by larger groups. The basic cycle of converting food into energy is nearly identical for all primates, who need for vitamin C in their diets. Most mammals produce their own vitamin C, but only those mammals which look the most like humans have the same dietary requirements as humans. Our common ancestry is more recent than that with hippos or hamsters.

And we can see what happens when diverse, distantly-related creatures evolve similar structures to fill the same purpose: the structures end up different. Humans and squid and bumblebees have all developed eyes, but the eyes are extremely different. They don't show much in the way of common ancestry, unlike the eyes of humans, gorillas, and chimpanzees, which are extremely similar. Here's a great quote on the topic from the late Allan Glenn:

"Without evolution, what reason is there to suppose a bat's wing—meant for flying—will have more similarity to a hoof than any bird's wing, also meant for flying? What reason is there to suppose shark and dolphin flippers, which function identically and can look similar enough to fool mariners, are much more different—on the inside—than a dolphin's flipper and a human hand, which have totally different 'purposes'?"

"Evolution answers this. The common ancestor of all mammals had a paw, and no matter which environment its descendants moved into, all of their paws/claws/feet/wings/flippers/hooves are obvious modifications of that original structure—muscle groups, bone and all. The same answer applies to vestiges. And this, along with a huge number of other experimental consequences, is perfectly logical and downright expected if evolution is true."

-- Allan Glenn

Fossil Record: The Law of Fossil Succession

²⁰A simple conclusion that can be found from a quick examination of the fossil record is stated in the Law of Fossil Selection. This states that as you dig down into older and older layers of rock, we can work our way back in time to where there are no birds, then no mammals. Further back in older layers of rock we eventually lose reptiles, then fish, then shells, and far enough back there are no animals at all. Furthermore, geologists discovered that many types of rock can be time-dated by the relative levels of radioactive elements inside the rocks at formation. With this radioactive “clock” inside rock formations, we can add times to the fossils we see, and come up with a timetable for the evolution of various animals like the history.

Developmental Similarity

Developmental similarity is way of saying that embryos of different animals can look and be structurally very similar in the womb or egg, especially in the early stages. The very early stages of a human fetus look almost identical to the earliest stages of the fetus of a monkey, a dog, or even a chicken. In some cases, these similarities can extend beyond the obvious observation that monkeys, dogs, and chickens have heads and forelimbs and hindlimbs just like humans. They go through almost the exact same sequence of embryo formation, especially in the earliest phases, sometimes even if that step is not necessary for the final animal! For example, dolphin embryos in the womb form hind legs, just like human embryos. And then, after those legs are formed, they are reabsorbed, and the dolphin calf is born without legs. Why did those legs form in the first place? They are a developmental similarity, and they also fit in with our next topic, evolutionary leftovers.

Evolutionary Leftovers

So if all this evolution happened, where are the transitional forms? Humans don't have extra, useless appendages like tails, right? Wrong, actually we do have extra pieces, and we even have a tail! The human tailbone, the coccyx, is our evolutionary relic from the time when our distant ancestors had tails. Even today, children are occasionally born with a birth defect where the signal to cancel the formation of a tail has failed. We also have other evolutionary relics like our appendixes and the nipples on men. The appendix served a purpose at a time when much more of our diet consisted of insects, and nipple formation occurs in the embryo before sexual differentiation starts.

In animals other than humans, the transitionality can be even more striking. Why exactly do elephants and manatees have toenails? They serve no purpose whatsoever, besides showing us that in the distant past their ancestors had separated digits and claws. Why do whales have legs? They don't have legs, you say? Sure they do, deep inside whales they have leg bones. Totally useless leg bones. And then there are gannets, birds that dive into the water for food. Since they dive, they have no nostrils, so water can't get in. But gannets do have completely developed nasal passages that are permanently sealed off. Why are the passages there in the first place?

Molecular and Genetic Evidence

If you go down farther to the molecular level, you can find more evidence for evolution. Did you know birds have the genes for teeth? And horses have the genes for toes? In both cases, those genes are turned off by a different gene. But the evolutionary relic still exists in their genetic code. Beyond that, we can find similarities on the molecular level. Hemoglobin is used to transport oxygen by virtually all multicellular animals. We all use the same structure to process oxygen because we all came from the same ancestor.

Failure of the Organs Are Too Complex Hypothesis

As we did in the Book of Genesis, we'll cover one of the most common counterarguments, and show why it is false. (This hypothesis is one offered only by creationists. For a full debunking of all creationist claims, again please see the works in the Book of Books, or the list at www.talkorigins.org/indexcc/.) Creationists often say that an organ—they

usually cite the eye—is too complicated to develop on its own. After all, what use is half an eye? How come we don't see creatures with half an eye?

²⁶Well, instead of dismissing such a thing out of hand, let's look at the actual evidence like scientists. Eyes might form from light-sensitive patches, which would then evolve to form an indented shape and eventually a small hole to help focus the light. Do any animals have that? Let's consider the flatworm, which has light-sensitive eye spots, exactly the first step we're looking for. Next we look for indented eyes. The pit viper has just such organs, called titular pits, that sense infrared light, and similar hole-type eyes are found in some invertebrates. A slightly more developed eye called the "parietal eye" in lizards (it's on the tops of their heads) has a rudimentary retina and lens, much less complicated than their actual eyes. The box jellyfish Cubozoa has rudimentary retina-lens eyes (along with pit-type eyes) that are even more developed. So we have multiple examples of transitional eye development from spots to the complex retina-eyeball-lens of most vertebrates, plus the divergent eye types of different groups, as mentioned earlier with respect to humans, squid, and bumblebees. There are plenty of "half-eyes" out there, if you take the time to look for them instead of dismissing such a thing out of hand.

Was there enough time to develop eyes? A few scientists tackled that question, and with a little math, came up with a requirement of approximately 400,000 generations to develop a full eye such as that in mammals like humans. Since animal life has been on the earth for some 600 million years, it looks like there was plenty of time for eyes (and other organs) to evolve. The "organs are too complex to have evolved" hypothesis is discarded, under the weight of contrary evidence.

Conclusion

There is much more evidence supporting the Theory of Evolution than just the short summary above. Again, the theory is so robust that it may be accepted as scientific "fact," just like the Big Bang theory. If you would like more details on the evidence for the natural development of the universe and the world we live in, or if you would like information on the falsehoods and distortions of creation science, there is a section of the Book of Books listing modern works on the Big Bang and Evolution. There is a great deal of information available on evolution at EvoWiki (www.evowiki.org) and on creationist claims at the Talk.Origins website (www.talkorigins.org/indexcc/) as well. We encourage the interested reader to seek out those works.

Human Evolution

Timeline

¹Somewhere roughly 6 to 12 million years ago, the hominids, ancestors of humans, split off the evolutionary tree from the precursors of modern chimpanzees, our closest genetic relatives. Humans and chimpanzees share between 94% and 98% of our genetic makeup depending on how you measure, and are so similar that we share susceptibility or immunity to almost all diseases. Our hominid ancestors lived in Africa, and continued to evolve through the generations. Many theories conjecture that the loss of body hair and the upright posture of later hominids was an evolutionary response to life on or near the hot savanna of southern Africa. Both changes would serve to keep the hominid cooler, and the posture might also give an advantage in seeing predators or prey.

One of the more successful early hominids, *Australopithecus*, arrived about 4 million years ago. Roughly 2.5 million years ago, the first hominids known as *Homo* split off from the *Australopithecus* group. Their descendants, *Homo habilis* and *Homo rudolfensis*, began using stone tools. From the *Homo rudolfensis* line hominids became progressively smarter, and by about 1 million years ago they started using fire. They spread out geographically from Africa to Europe and Asia. Several groups of hominids coexisted and possibly competed against each other for resources. They continued to evolve, as shown by the extensive fossil record.

Around 195,000 years ago, we find in Africa the first fossils of *Homo sapiens*, the earliest human beings. The earliest “modern” human beings, or *Homo sapiens sapiens*, arrived approximately 150,000 to 130,000 years ago, and migrated out of Africa about 100,000 years ago. *Homo sapiens sapiens* evolved from earlier hominids, but did not eliminate all other evolutionary cousins right away. Populations of other hominids continued to exist for some time, and some of them evolved to give us the squat muscular *Homo neanderthalensis* (Neanderthal Man) in Europe and the tiny *Homo floresiensis* (Flores Man) in Indonesia, both intelligent species who survived until *Homo sapiens sapiens* eventually won out through evolutionary success. By around 50,000 years ago, *Homo sapiens sapiens* had spread out from Africa and Asia to inhabit Europe and Australia, and 20,000 years later some migrated from Siberia to Alaska, and then down to inhabit North and South America. The last Neanderthals held out until about 27,000 years ago. The last Flores Man died out sometime in the last 20,000 years, possibly as recently as the last several hundred years.

In the last 30,000 or 40,000 years, man began drawing pictures. Around 15,000 to 10,000 years ago, man discovered agriculture and began domesticating animals. With a more plentiful source of food, man had more time to devote to intellectual pursuits, and developed writing, with symbols standing for sounds. Some of the earlier forms of writing (from about 6,000 years ago) in the form of markings called “cuneiform” on clay tablets have been found and studied. With the advent of writing begins the recorded history of mankind.

This is the history of the evolution of man, from the split of hominids from chimpanzees until the beginning of written accounts of historical events. Remember, this chapter is a rough outline of the steps involved in our arrival here at this day and this time. Unlike in a traditional religious tome, the timeline above is based on theories and on interpretations of evidence, which may evolve and change as more evidence to back them up or break them down come to light. But the basic theoretical themes of human evolution have been shown valid again and again, with only adjustments in minor details. Below, we will present some of the major pieces of evidence for the evolution of man from other primates.

Theory & Evidence

Beyond the obvious physical and functional similarities between humans and other primates, there exists substantial evidence for the descent of man from earlier great apes. There are really two primary sources of this evidence: the extensive fossil record, and the biological and genetic similarities between humans and other primates.

Specific Fossil Evidence for the Descent of Man from Apes

Even with the incredible amount of developmental similarity and obvious common structures between man and other primates, some still dispute our lineage. They claim there are gaps in the fossil record, and say, “where’s the missing link?” In the fossil record, there are indeed two spots that are a bit sparser. Between the *Australopithecus* specimens—advanced but still somewhat “ape-like” precursors to humans that appeared around 4 million years ago—

and the earliest fossils of *Homo erectus* and *Homo heidelbergensis* there was a gap of about a million years. And before *Australopithecus Afarensis* (one of the earliest *Australopithecus* fossil specimens), which dates back to about 4 million years ago, there's a fossil gap of about 3 million years before we get back to the estimated time when hominids split off from chimpanzees. Where are the missing links?

8Again, we're being misled by arguments that are nearly a hundred years old. Since the 1960s, we have found fossil evidence for *Homo rudolfensis* and *Homo habilis*, two of the earliest groups to split off from *Australopithecus*. The first of those is closer to a direct ancestor of modern humans, while the second is likely a cousin on the family tree. (There is also some fossil evidence in the much-shorter gap between those two and *Australopithecus*, although scientists are still debating the analysis.) And after *Homo rudolfensis*, we now have fossil specimens of *Homo ergaster* and *Homo antecessor*, both likely near the ancestor line to *Homo heidelbergensis* (a later hominid) and *Homo sapiens*, human beings. There isn't one individual specimen in the more recent "missing-link" gap, there's over forty.

Even more recently, since the 1990s we have found ancient, more ape-like hominid ancestors in the gap between chimpanzees and *Australopithecus*. *Ardipithecus ramidus*, also called *Australopithecus ramidus*, was first described in 1994. The species, which lived approximately 4.5 million years ago, in many ways resembled chimpanzees. More recently, since 1997 there have been discoveries of older fossils in the gap between *Ardipithecus ramidus* and our common ancestor with chimpanzees, including four distinct species near our likely ancestor line, plus another older specimen near the point where humans and chimpanzees split from the other great apes.

So let's give a timeline of some of the fossil evidence for human evolution from a common ancestor with chimpanzees. Again, there is still some debate over whether specific fossils are along the ancestor line or are merely cousins on the family tree. There is also debate as to where to draw the exact line between various species, since such lines by nature are quite fuzzy, and within any population there is a significant amount of variability between individuals. But we will show below the most common scientific namings for the various fossils, along with the discovery dates and the numbers of specimens found. For clarity regarding the old "missing link" arguments, we will show where the old gaps were as of 1925, the year of the famous Scopes Monkey Trial in Tennessee.

Specimens found by 2006

Older specimens

Pierolapithecus catalaunicus – 13 mya (million years ago)
discovered in 2004 (1 individual)
*near ancestor line or close cousin, possibly near common ancestor
with all great apes (chimpanzees, gorillas, and orangutans)*

Samburupithecus – 9.5 mya
discovered in 1997 (1 individual)
near ancestor line or close cousin, possible common ancestor with chimpanzees

Sahelanthropus tchadensis – 7 to 6 mya
discovered in 2002 (1 individual)
near ancestor line or close cousin

Orrorin tugenensis – 6 mya
discovered in 2000 (at least 5 individuals)
near ancestor line

Genus *Ardipithecus*

Ardipithecus kadabba – 5.8 to 5.2 mya
discovered between 1997 and 2001 (at least 7 individuals)
near ancestor line or close cousin

Ardipithecus ramidus – 4.4 mya
discovered in 1994 (at least 17 individuals)
near ancestor line or close cousin

Specimens found by 1925

Older specimens

*None found - early gap
from common ancestor
through *Australopithecus*,
early "missing link"

*None found - early gap

*None found - early gap

*None found - early gap

Genus *Ardipithecus*

*None found - early gap

*None found - early gap

Specimens found by 2006

Genus Australopithecus

¹⁷**Australopithecus anamensis** – 4.2 to 3.9 mya
discovered in 1994 (at least 2 individuals)
near ancestor line

Australopithecus afarensis – 3.9 to 3.0 mya
discovered in 1974 (over 100 individuals)
near ancestor line

Australopithecus africanus – 3.3 to 2.3 mya
discovered in 1924 (at least 4 individuals)
cousin

Genus Homo

Homo rudolfensis – 2.5 to 1.8 mya
discovered in 1972, proposed as a separate species 1986
(at least 2 possible individuals)
near ancestor line

Homo habilis – 2.4 to 1.5 mya
discovered in 1961 (at least 10 individuals)
cousin

Homo ergaster – 1.9 to 1.6 mya
discovered in 1975 (at least 2 possible individuals)
near ancestor line

Homo erectus – 1.8 to 0.3 mya
discovered in 1891 (dozens of individuals)
early specimens near ancestor line, later ones coexisted with more advanced hominids

Homo antecessor – 780,000 ya
discovered in 1994 (1 possible individual)
near ancestor line or close cousin

Homo heidelbergensis – 700,000 to 400,000 ya
discovered in 1907 (at least 2 possible individuals)
near ancestor line or close cousin

Homo neanderthalensis – 230,000 to 30,000 ya
discovered in 1856 (dozens of individuals)
cousin

Homo floresiensis – 18,000 ya
discovered in 2003 (at least 1 individual)
cousin

Homo sapiens – 195,000 ya to present
modern human beings

Specimens found by 1925

Genus Australopithecus

*None found - early gap

*None found - early gap

Australopithecus africanus
2.8 to 2.3 mya

Genus Homo

*None found - later gap
between Australopithecus
and Homo erectus,
later “missing link”

*None found - later gap

*None found - later gap

Homo erectus
1.6 to 0.7 mya

*None found

Homo heidelbergensis

Homo neanderthalensis

*None found

Homo sapiens

So the biggest gaps in the fossil record have been filled. The record itself is a full history of the evolution of man from earlier primates, much more than creationists would have you believe. Although the exact details of human evolution are still under review, the overall theory is valid and may be regarded as scientific “fact.” Again, you have to go where the evidence leads you, and we have hundreds of fossils showing the evolution of man.

Biological and Genetic Evidence for the Descent of Man from Apes

³⁰Beyond fossil evidence, there is significant evidence that humans are related to other great apes in their biology and genetic makeup, more than even the evidence we previously covered in the Book of Biogenesis. Humans and the other 3 great ape species (chimpanzees, gorillas, and orangutans) have almost identical ability or inability to eat various foods—all need vitamin C (unlike most mammals), though humans and our closest relative the chimpanzee have a further enhancement allowing them to be much more carnivorous—and are susceptible to almost the exact same set of diseases. Both types of hemoglobin in humans, the substance that allows our blood to carry oxygen, are identical to that of our closest relative, the chimpanzees. Our next closest relative, gorillas, differ by only one amino acid on each of the two types of hemoglobin.

And our chromosomes show our common descent, too. Humans carry 23 chromosomal pairs, while the other three great ape species all carry 24. If we evolved from a common ancestor, we should find evidence that two of the ape chromosomes fused together to form one of our human chromosomes. That exact evidence is found on human chromosome number 2. We can find there markings from leftover “ends” from the old great ape chromosomes where the two connected. We can also find markings from the leftover centromere (the bend in the middle) from the one chromosome that had to lose the centromere when the two joined together. These are clear-as-day evidence of evolution in action, marked in every cell in our body!

Note that mismatched chromosome numbers in and of themselves do not directly prevent fertility, as some creationists might argue when presented with the impressive evidence found in human and ape chromosomes. There are present day cross-breeding species with different chromosome numbers. As always, we must grade our hypotheses against the evidence at hand.

Conclusion

The data supporting man’s descent from the apes is overwhelming and irrefutable. The biological and genetic evidence supporting evolution from a common ancestor with chimpanzees is so strong that denial of it is tantamount to an outright falsehood. The fossil record is quite extensive, and all supposed “gaps” have been filled in with recent discoveries. We have the proverbial “mountain” of evidence that turns a hypothesis into a theory so strong that it is a scientific fact. We can trace our evolution from apes to humans quite clearly, and see the steps in our development, era by era.

But remember, these steps in the evolution from more primitive hominids to modern man were usually not large, discrete steps. Yes, along the way there was the occasional highly beneficial mutation, but for the most part evolution, even along the line to modern man, is a great sliding continuum. Has there been human evolution in the last 10,000 years? Absolutely. The size or thickness of the jaw and teeth of humans from 10,000 years ago were approximately 10% larger than now. But a person from 10,000 years ago is certainly a member of our species, and would for the most part be indistinguishable from a modern human.

What about a human from 50,000 or 100,000 years ago? The genetic differences and surface differences and possibly behavioral differences would be much more pronounced, but such a person would still be *Homo sapiens sapiens*. How about 150,000 years ago? Now we’re reaching that fuzzy border of our specific species. If we raised an infant from that time in modern culture, there would likely be significant noticeable differences in features, behavior, and intelligence, although such a person could probably breed with a modern human. Such an effect is seen with the differences between dogs and wolves. But as we travel farther back, at some point we will reach an ancestor with which we would only likely breed sterile offspring (similar to how horses and donkeys breed only mules), and even farther back we would reach a level where crossbreeding is not possible. Once again, we emphasize that human evolution—indeed all evolution—is a long continuum of intermediate steps.

Much more detailed evidence on human evolution can be found in some of the titles offered in the Book of Books; we encourage those interested to read further from those highly-credentialed authors. And once again, we also list the Talk.Origins website (www.talkorigins.org/indexcc/) as a great source for tearing apart the false claims of creationists, and EvoWiki (www.evowiki.org) as an excellent source for detailed information on evolution in general, and specifically

the history of the evolution of *Homo sapiens sapiens*. The descent of man from the apes is a fact, and not one we should shy away from. The wonders of evolution have fortunately brought the light of intelligence to humanity, so that today we can think and can write, and can even read books such as this one!

³⁷The Big Bang, evolution, and the descent of man from apes are all facts, proven again and again by a vast encyclopedia full of evidence. We have given just the tip of the iceberg of evidence here in this book; the actual details are far too many to be contained here, or in any single volume. To those who say “evolution is just a theory,” we must respond “creation is just a fairy tale.” As rational, reasoning adults, it is incumbent upon us to teach our children facts—and that includes undeniably proven, robust scientific theories—not myths and fairy tales.

Religion

1Why do many people follow traditional religions? Why do traditional religions exist in the first place?

Belief in the supernatural originally arose from man's failure to understand all of the workings of the world around him. Man is curious by nature, and is unsatisfied when unable to figure out how something works. Early attribution of unknown processes to various supernatural "spirits" were passed down from parent to child, and changed through the generations into religions with definite beliefs. Both the spirit-based religions and more traditional religions served to eliminate man's discomfort with not knowing why things happen as they do, and not knowing how to control everything. As scientific understanding challenged religious beliefs, religious authorities resisted as long as they could, until the mountain of evidence was so overwhelming that they had no choice but to alter their doctrines. Religious authorities once considered the concept of a round earth or the earth revolving around the sun to be heresy, yet with spacecraft we can now view the roundness of the earth and watch the earth as it revolves around the sun. But with each additional scientific insight, religion continues to fight against progress. Many still believe in the biblical story of creation, a story that was crafted long before people had discovered that the earth was round. They will steadfastly defend it, and make up supposed evidence for it, even when faced with the enormous skeleton of a dinosaur.

Why do people adhere so strictly to such absurd teachings? There are several reasons. The first and foremost is that they believe what they were taught by their parents. From a young and impressionable age, many children are taught the fables of god, biblical creation, Adam and Eve, a flood that covered the earth killing most people, and various supernatural miracles along the way. If such beliefs are not dispelled by their parents, but instead reinforced, many of these children will mature into adults who are absolutely convinced of the inerrancy of their teachings, regardless of the evidence in front of their eyes. Especially as children, we are built to absorb and accept knowledge. We are built to accept that certain actions are dangerous, due to our parents' warnings, before actually experiencing the consequences. We accept words and speech patterns and games and songs from our parents without argument. It is crucial for children to accept such information without question, for their safety and their development as people. So it should be no wonder that they will also accept myths without question if presented to them by their parents.

Another reason that people continue to believe in traditional religions is that it provides them comfort. It is comforting to think there is some grand plan for our existence, that there is some fascinating place we go to after we die, that our loved ones who have died aren't merely dead bodies but have gone on to someplace where they are loved. If everything worked according to some god's plan, we would be free of the burning desire to explore, to find out why the world is as it is, for it is merely god's work. We would not have to challenge our station in life and seek better things for ourselves and our children, as our reward awaits us in some perfect afterlife. If bad things happen, our suffering is mitigated by the fact that "god works in mysterious ways." This coping mechanism was very important in the past when death before old age was much more common. Such beliefs are comforting, especially in times of suffering, but that does not make them true.

Finally, there is a genetic component to our so-called spirituality. As societies evolved and became more and more important in the lives of people, various religions came to dominate in different societies. Those who followed the dominant religion were better-received in society, and thus were more marriageable and had an evolutionary advantage. Those who saw religion as a sham were outcast, and less likely to procreate. As this cycle continued, people who had feelings of spirituality and were thus more religious gained a genetic foothold in our population. Those with genetic traits for less spirituality did not always die out as outcasts or heretics, as they were sometimes more driven to solve problems—instead of blindly accepting previous teachings—and thus better themselves, improving their chance of passing on their genes. But with continued intermarriage, it is likely that we all now carry the genes that give us a sense of spirituality in one degree or another. Too much and you're obsessed with religion (possibly hurting reproduction), too little and you're somewhat more likely to be outcast (again possibly hurting reproduction).

Carrying the genetic preferences for spirituality and constantly sensing or feeling that the supernatural is around you does not prevent you from recognizing the world as it truly is, without any supernatural forces. You simply must recognize that such feelings are the product of your genetic makeup. Just as optical illusions take advantage of the makeup of our eyes and our brains to present something that isn't really true, so do religious beliefs. You may use that religiosity, that spirituality within you to experience wonder at the awesomeness of nature, or at the complexity of the universe. But attempts to experience the supernatural must be recognized as mere fancy.

Can a person be a member of a traditional religion and yet be an Atheist? Certainly. Membership in a traditional religion often is much more than merely swearing a faith in a supposed god. Although some houses of religion pressure members for unwavering faith, often churches and temples are places of community, where like-minded families congregate to network with other families, celebrate holidays, contribute to charity, and deal with life events such as birth, marriage, or death. However, all of these do try to indoctrinate children into the tenets of their religion, so the Atheist who chooses this route must be careful to monitor their child's education and understanding of the world carefully, in order to dispel the myths of traditional religion.

How should an Atheist deal with religious people in everyday society? We have learned in the Book of Morality that the morality of a god is a false morality, based upon threats and rewards. True morality is always based upon sympathy. But many members of traditional religions claim that there is no morality without a god. Theists may feel threatened by Atheists, assuming we are inherently immoral and evil. With such prejudices in our society, each Atheist should consider carefully to whom they discuss their Atheism. However, we should also remember that a lot of good things can come from organized religions, including a sense of community and giving to charitable causes. While we should be wary of the reactions of theists to Atheism, we should also be aware of our own reactions to the religious. We may have judgements about the religion itself, but casting that light on each follower is prejudicial and unfair.

How should one deal with family members or friends who are deeply religious? You must choose whether or not to discuss your Atheism with them, as they may feel the need to try to "convert" you, or failing that, exclude you from their lives. (The attempt at conversion is, given their false belief in the supernatural, actually a well-intentioned "moral" action, since they are trying to prevent you from suffering.) However, most of the religious are comfortable with those who are less religious, so professed Agnosticism, saying that you don't know, may be an acceptable compromise in cases with extreme family members. This is a bit of a mistruth, but not all mistruths are immoral. We all tell "white lies," harmless falsehoods that smooth over our interaction with one another. The morality of a lie will rest with the person telling the falsehood, and the expected result. Are others hurt by it, or helped? Truth is usually the best option, but not always. If the truth would cause undue pain to a family member without any gain to the relationship, for example with a much-older relative who you seldom see, it may not be appropriate to do so.

How should one deal with the religiousness of other people's children? The raising of a child in a set of beliefs is the responsibility and the right of the parents. Interfering in that choice is not the right of a government, or of another person. Would you be pleased if a person tried to convert your child to a traditional religion? If another person's child—especially a young child—asks you about your belief in a god, referring them to their parents is probably best.

How should we teach our children about Atheism? Much as we dispel beliefs in fairies, monsters, magic, Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny, we should also dispel any myths of angels, demons, gods, heaven and hell. Most children will be able to understand these concepts, and discern between what is real and what is imaginary, around the age of reason (often quoted as age 7), or maybe a few years earlier. But especially for Atheists living in strongly religious communities, we must be careful to tell younger children that beliefs are a personal matter, one to be discussed in the home and not on the playground. Atheism can be a difficult subject for those indoctrinated in religion, and discussion between children about the nature of god may be seen as an attack on a parents' right to raise their child as they see fit. It may also, as innocent as Atheism is, lead to ostracism for your child. So again, we must carefully teach our children about when we should and should not have such discussions.

Older children such as teenagers should be told to deal with the beliefs of others as they deem appropriate, but be sure to warn them of the possible consequences, especially if you live in a strongly theistic area. For teenagers, the acceptance by their peers is often the most important force in their lives, more important than the teachings of their parents. If appropriate, Atheism should be kept within the family, and not discussed outside, depending on the character of your community. Discrimination against Atheists is still a very strong force in parts of the world.

But the most important concept to remember when dealing with those who follow traditional religions is *respect*. You don't have to respect the belief, but you should respect the individual. Different circumstances (such as indoctrination at a young age) may lead a person to unshakeable beliefs in the supernatural. Such a belief does not make that person any less moral, or any less a human being. We should judge their morality and humanity on their actions. If they seek out our guidance about the nature of the world, we may offer it, and if they engage us in debate about religion or science or origins, we may discuss it. We can even, if desired, publicly proclaim our Atheism and debate those who question it. But we should not force the truth on the unwilling or hate those who can't accept it.

Science

¹What is the nature of science?

Science is the study of the nature of the world. We discover how the world works by using the Scientific Method. This method involves observing the world, and making a reasonable guess, called a hypothesis, about why a particular thing happens. With a working hypothesis, you may test other such situations to see if the hypothesis continues to hold true. If it fails a repeatable test, the hypothesis must be discarded or altered. Through time and testing, most hypotheses are discarded or altered. Those that are consistent and have passed all tests are called theories. A scientific theory as defined here is considerably different from the common usage of the word theory, and the differentiation between the two meanings is extremely important. For example, if a crime is committed, we might say we have several theories about who did it and why. In common language, we might state something to the effect of, “I think the butler did it, but that’s only a theory.” But this is not a scientifically-tested *theory*, this is merely an untested *hypothesis*, in the language of the scientist.

The proper use of the word theory is closer to something between the common usages of the words theory and fact. Even then, some theories have considerably more evidence behind them than others. Included among those are the theories of the Big Bang and Evolution. Such theories have what is often called a “mountain of evidence” behind them, to such extent that they are for the most part treated as scientific fact, with only minor adjustments possible to a strong underlying theory.

So the whole gist of science is guessing, and either disproving your guess—your hypothesis—or not disproving it. If your guess withstands many attempts to disprove it, it becomes a theory. If your guess withstands all attempts to disprove it from many different angles, and has much evidence to support it, then it is a strong, robust theory, and may be considered by the general public to be a scientific fact.

Science has no outright bias for or against religion. On the contrary, science welcomes all possible explanations of observed phenomena. Explanations that hold up to testing are kept, but those that fail are discarded. Those tied to traditional religions get upset when science disproves supposed explanations in their scripted works, usually explanations of the workings of the world written by men centuries or millennia ago who did not understand most of the scientific basics we recognize today. The testing itself is based upon observation and logic, the only real way to encounter the truth.

Scientific Evidence

How do we *know* that the Big Bang and evolution are true? After all, when dissecting the reasons for rejecting theist claims, we say over and over that merely taking someone’s word that something extraordinary happened isn’t good enough, we need evidence. Should we just take the word of scientists, or science teachers, or even the authors of this book, merely because they say so?

Of course not. But there’s a huge difference between “evidence” from a “witness” to an event like a supposed spiritual healing or miracle, and actual evidence such as that from a scientific experiment. That difference is repeatability (or verifiability). The scientific evidence mentioned in the rest of this chapter is repeatable. If you really want to, you can study enough about whichever particular field, and go repeat any desired experiment yourself. Since this repeatability is tested and questioned by other scientists, we can take those pieces of evidence which have received heavy scrutiny as being factual. Newer pieces of evidence, with less skeptical inquiry into them, are usually viewed with a more critical eye, and others often request data to test the repeatability of the evidence. (Even such things as fossils are verifiable and have an element of repeatability, in that we can find other fossils that can confirm or disprove our theories about existing fossils.) But overall, the scientific process builds its theories and conclusions on repeatable, verifiable, observable data and events and experiments. If there is sufficient credible contradictory evidence, a theory must be discarded.

So scientists don’t lend credence to theories like the Big Bang and the Theory of Evolution based on nothing, or based on what some authority in the field told them. Their trust in those theories is not “faith” or a “belief,” they look

at the underlying evidence. When the Big Bang theory was first proposed, some respected scientists argued against it. The community was divided, so many scientists developed experiments to test whether the universe was static or expanding. The experiments matched the predictions of an expanding universe. The old static universe theory was discarded, because it did not match observable evidence.

¶ Sometimes people who misunderstand the scientific process try to turn it and the evidence toward their own ends. This is especially true among creationists, who are trying to twist statements and tiny anomalies into large-scale evidence for their pet theories. Unfortunately for them, the scientific process is not something that can be bent to give a desired outcome. You cannot change or discard evidence as suits your needs! If evidence contradicts your hypothesis, you *must* change your hypothesis to take account of the new data. This leads us to our next section.

Creation Science is Not Science

Earlier in this chapter we explained how science works, and how it depends on repeatable or verifiable evidence as analyzed by trained experts. So what about evidence from “Creation Scientists,” who say they are also experts and view the evidence in a different light? Why aren’t their claims given as much weight as Big Bang scientists or evolutionary scientists?

First and foremost, let’s look at credentials. An awful lot of the folks who support creation science have doctorates, aren’t they well-educated enough to properly analyze the evidence? Check a little more closely, and you’ll find quite a few of the creationist “doctors” have degrees in fields such as education or engineering or agriculture or chemistry, wonderful fields all but certainly *not* geology or biology or anthropology. Dig a little deeper, and you’ll also find that some of their degrees come from bible colleges or unaccredited “diploma mills” posing as universities. A list of prominent creationists with such questionable degrees can be found at www.talkorigins.org/faqs/credentials.html.

And even if you find that less common, truly accredited scientist, why is he or she the only one? If there is truly a controversy, why isn’t there a large group of accredited, respected scientists in the correct field who are disputing evolutionary theory? You can’t find it because such a group doesn’t exist. One creationist group circulated a document that now lists 500 scientists who support creation, trying to prove that there is a controversy. In response, the National Center for Science Education—see the Book of Resources for more info—published a list that now contains the names of over 700 scientists who say they support the theory of evolution. Seven to five, still sound like a controversy? Take a closer look at the NCSE’s list, every single one of their scientists is named Steve! Steves (or Stephanies, or Stefans, or Estebans, etc.) make up only about 1% of the population in the United States (there are six Steves on the list of 500 creationist scientists), so it’d be reasonable to say there are probably about 70,000 scientists who support evolution. You can see the “controversy” doesn’t really exist. On top of that, about two-thirds of the Steve list consists of biologists, who are few and far between—only one of their six Steves is a biologist—on the creationist list.

When looking at creationist claims, you can also often find hyperbolic inflation of credentials. You’ll see the phrases “leading scientist,” “world-renowned,” “top researcher in the field,” and the like. These claims are imaginary, with the goal of changing the mind of the casual reader who doesn’t take the time to investigate further. Often, to bolster such claims, inappropriate quotes or misquotes from real scientists are included. Here’s a sample quote used by creationists:

“The more one studies paleontology, the more certain one becomes that evolution is based on faith alone.”
-- leading evolutionist Louis T. More

Sounds like evolution scientists are in a tizzy, right? Wrong. The truth of this quote is that it is from a relatively obscure evolutionary scientist, in 1925, long before many of the fossils we recognize in the current fossil record were found. Attempts to dupe people by presenting obscure 80-year-old quotes from little-known authors show the lengths that people will go to when trying to reinforce a worldview that conflicts with actual evidence.

Debunking all the specific claims of “Creation Science” is beyond the scope of this book, but several others have done so. The interested reader is directed to the impressive list at www.talkorigins.org/indexcc/ compiled by Mark Isaak, or to the section in the Book of Books entitled “Modern works on the Big Bang and Evolution.” There you can find more than enough information to counter claims that the theories of the Big Bang and/or Evolution are flawed.

¹⁷It's unfortunate that such steps to counter false claims are necessary, or that we even have to have a section in this book on the subject. But there are still many out there who cling to a biblical literalism that denies the factual evidence for these established scientific theories, and continue to teach such absurdities to children. (Recall that at one time church teachings taught us the earth was flat, and later that the sun revolved around the earth!) Such biblical literalism is dangerous, for it teaches that we should deny facts we can see with our own eyes, in favor of the writings of men from thousands of years ago.

Those pushing such ideas sometimes also support a theocratic state, and harsh or capital penalties for those who do not believe in their particular brand of theism or deny their "facts" or do not follow their particular set of prescribed morals. We cannot allow biblical literalists to commandeer the scientific education of our children and pervert it into something that is no longer science, for this would be the first step toward their goal of a theocracy. So, we must take pains to lay out detailed, organized evidence for these truisms that should be obvious to any rational observer. The Bible of the Good and Moral Atheist includes some short summaries of such evidence, but interested readers should also consider looking over the list at the TalkOrigins website or reading some of the works in the Book of Books for a much more detailed look at the evidence and the arguments.

When the theist argues the metaphysical, we must certainly allow them their beliefs. After all, they are by definition beliefs about which no definite proof can be given. But when the theist pronounces on the physical world, in contradiction to physical evidence, it demands that all Freethinkers stand up for the truth.

The Testament of Life

The Books of the Testament of Life

Life & Death

Inspiration

Charity

Celebrations

Reflections

Questions

Resources

Future

Life & Death

Life

¹Why should an Atheist care how they live their life, knowing that a thousand years from now no one will remember or care?

One reason is that small actions can have large effects. Chaos theory has shown us that the flap of the wings of a butterfly can change the track of a hurricane, years later. Of course, this does not mean that every small action we take will have such an impact. But if we live our lives in such a way that we commit many acts of kindness and morality, the sum of those acts will certainly make a difference in the lives of those people around us. Now, no one in our small circle of friends and loved ones may ever end up wealthy or powerful or famous. But our kindness and morality will help them to show kindness and act in a moral way to those around them, affecting their circle of family and friends as well. All of the small acts add up to large effects, given time.

And unlike the butterfly, who knows not the effect of its wings, we have control over our actions and the intended effect. We can choose to make the world a better place, or not. We can choose what mark we make upon the world in our time here. Our choices, good or bad, will be the sum of our existence. We each get to decide what the point of our lives will be.

What is the ultimate goal of life? The goal of life is continued existence, understanding, joy, love and comfort. In the present, we should do what we can to help the human race. We should seek to end the hazards that threaten us, such as war, persecution, disease, poverty, famine, drought, and destruction of our environment. We should work against intolerance, ignorance, and hatred. We should encourage the spread of humanity beyond the Earth, to ensure humanity's continued existence.

Some say the expansion of the universe is accelerating, and that the universe may one day be cold and dead, unsuitable for life. Without understanding the nature of the universe, we will not be able to seek ways to prevent or avoid this fate. We should promote scientific efforts to improve our understanding of the world and of our universe, as understanding is the best protection we have. Through science and inventiveness we have already reduced the threats of drought, pestilence, diseases, earthquakes, tornadoes, tsunamis, fire, flooding, and even comets and meteors. We must continue our scientific efforts to understand and conquer those things that still afflict and threaten the human race. The only path to curing current-day diseases, stemming political and environmental threats in the next hundred years, maybe even solving the threat of aging itself after that, and possibly even dealing with an ever-expanding universe, is the path of science and education.

We should pass on our genes and/or our knowledge to the next generation, and raise children to be moral, positive, rational, educated, and curious. We should dispel myths, and not allow them to believe in falsehoods as they mature to adults. We should give our insights on the world to other adults who inquire, to allow them to choose whether to follow rational truth or the misguided myths of the supernatural. All of these individual actions on our parts will serve to help humanity, to bring mankind forward to a more secure, more enlightened and more moral position.

But we should remember that this life is our only life. We should take enjoyment in life as well. We should not feel guilty in spending some of our time and efforts on our own happiness and well-being. We should make time for play, and camaraderie, and affection, and love, and entertainment, and reflection, and self-care, for these enrich our lives and the lives of those around us. While we should each know accomplishment, we should also each know joy and love and comfort.

Ultimately, our lives will have an impact on the future. It is up to each of us to determine what that impact will be. We may withdraw into ourselves and leave little or no lasting positive impression upon the world. Or, we may live a life measured in kindnesses and good deeds and charity, in works and efforts and teachings great and small, in love and caring and friendship. We each choose our own purpose here. We each get one chance at life.

Death

Should an Atheist fear death?

Certainly not. Each of us experiences the world while we are here. In essence, for you, the world only exists while you are alive. When you are not alive, you are not there to experience your death. There is no uncertain afterlife. There is no heaven. There is no hell, nor is there a limbo. There is no pain or pleasure. There is not even a void or a blackness or a nothingness. You will not perceive anything at all, for your perceptions are a function of your working brain and body. Without those, you are no longer able to perceive.

Another way to understand death is that for each of us, we are always alive. We will never notice our own death. Every perception we have of the world will be while we are alive. So, while we are alive, the world exists for us. If we are not alive, the world does not exist, for us. Our perception of everything ends at the moment of death. Yes, we of course know that the world goes on without us, but as part of what we experience, it does not. We are not a ghost or a spirit in a future world, we are simply not there.

Death is not to be feared, but it is reasonable to fear dying. Dying might be painful or terrifying. It is also reasonable to avoid death, so that we may continue to experience the world. Again, with respect to ourselves, we live always, but the amount of that “always” can be longer or shorter. Seeking to make it longer is a rational, instinctual act.

Also, one may regret death in that plans you have made while alive may go unfinished if you die before they are complete. For an Atheist, this means that we must all plan for our death, knowing that we will no longer be able to affect the world in any way once we have died. Being prepared for death with a will or insurance is a rational response to the uncertainty of the actions around us that may cause us death.

What about the death of a friend or loved one? We should certainly feel sad. We should feel regret for them if they were not able to complete their goals in the world, or were not able to reach their potential. But we must know that they have not moved on to some other place, for once you have died, you no longer experience anything. There is no suffering, nor is there comfort, pleasure, or love. There is no void nor blackness, their brain has ceased to function and therefore no longer receives perceptions and no longer generates thoughts.

We can be comforted by the fact that during their time here, we were able to make their life better, and they were able to make our life better. If we mourn that they are no longer able to make an impact on the world, this would be a good time to do what we can to help those plans to be fulfilled, to help them make one final impact. If your loved one had a favorite charity, it would be appropriate to donate or set up a trust in their name for such efforts. Although they will not be able to appreciate your efforts, this will help them achieve their plans on this world, and will affect the lives of others. You can be their agent on this world for one last effort. Others have also worked to get laws changed if your loved one died an untimely death. New laws protecting children from sexual predators and kidnappers have been enacted, and there are now Megan’s Laws and Amber Alerts throughout America, protecting children in the names of those children who were harmed. In such a way, the death of a loved one can have one last positive impact on the lives of those around them.

Why is the religious treatment of death false? The promises of a “better place” are mere myths, well illustrated by the story Patti Davis told upon the death of her father, President Ronald Reagan:

“He was the one who generously offered funeral services for my goldfish on the morning of its demise. We went out into the garden and we dug a tiny grave with a teaspoon and he took two twigs and lashed them together with twine and formed a cross as a marker for the grave. And then he gave a beautiful eulogy. He told me that my fish was swimming in the clear blue waters in heaven and he would never tire and he would never get hungry and he would never be in any danger and he could swim as far and wide as he wanted and he never had to stop, because the river went on forever. He was free.

“When we went back inside and I looked at my remaining goldfish in their aquarium with their pink plastic castle and their colored rocks, I suggested that perhaps we should kill the others so they could also go to that clear blue river and be free. He then took more time out of his morning, I’m sure he actually did have other

things to do that day, and patiently explained to me that in God's time, the other fish would go there, as well. In God's time, we would all be taken home. And even though it sometimes seemed a mystery, we were just asked to trust that God's time was right and wise."

¹⁹Of course, the explanation is falsely based upon a god. Without "god's time," why wouldn't a child kill the other goldfish to send them on to such a wonderful place? Why shouldn't we all commit suicide in order to reach that mythical place of infinite love or fabulous riches and rewards sooner? The only answer the traditional religions can come up with is "god's time" and "god's plan," which do not truly address the core issue.

The only true answer to a child comes from the Atheist, who would tell the child that there is no heaven. Your fish enjoyed their time on earth, because you saw to it they were fed, had clean water, and a nice place to live. Their time is now over, but we can remember the joy they brought to us, and take comfort in knowing that we made their lives better while they were here.

The Atheist will value life more than the religious, for we see that life itself is the most precious gift there is, one that physics and nature and random chance have brought to us. Since there is no supernatural reward, and our time is finite, we must live every day as if it was precious, for it is. We have but one chance to live and affect the world around us. We should love our family and friends, to make their lives better while here on the earth. We should do good works, so that our effect is felt by people long after we are gone.

We should not fear death, for there is nothing to fear.

Inspiration

Theists often look to their religious books or to prayer for “divine inspiration,” a way to recover an uplifting feeling and a sense of purpose in their lives. Atheists understand that there is no such thing as divine inspiration, but that feelings of well-being and purpose are quite real. What should the Good and Moral Atheist look to for inspiration?

Of course, there are many things that might give us inspiration, and each individual will find different values in different sources. But there are some common themes that provide inspiration to all people, and may be particularly powerful for the Atheist. We will list some of these here, for the Atheist to look to when inspiration is needed.

The Innate Goodness of Humanity

Regardless of the day-to-day struggles and conflicts and injustices in the world, humanity on the large scale has made impressive strides toward a good, just, and fair society. Once the rule of countries was at the whim of despots and their families, now most countries elect their leaders. Once genocide was a common tactic, now it is bemoaned, shunned, protested, and even prevented by force of arms. Once slavery was common, now it is almost eradicated. Once women were chattel and second-class citizens, now in many countries they are the equals of men. Once the starving and suffering and afflicted were ignored, now mankind gives billions in anonymous charity. The march toward worldwide human rights and freedom continues inexorably forward. One day in the not-too-distant future, that American ideal of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” born of the Enlightenment, will be available to all the people of the world.

And beyond the great strides of humanity as a whole, there are the individual triumphs of goodness in the face of evil. Former slave Harriet Tubman risked imprisonment or death for personally helping free over 300 slaves from the Southern states in the United States in the mid-1800s, then again risked her life as a spy for the North to help defeat the South and end slavery in the U.S. for good. Oskar Schindler risked his life and spent his fortune saving approximately 1,200 Jews from death in Hitler’s concentration camps during World War Two. Paul Rusesabagina, a Hutu managing a hotel, saved 1,268 Tutsi from genocide by sheltering them in his hotel during the 1994 civil war in Rwanda.

Every time evil arises, the spirit of humanity comes alive in the form of a Tubman, or a Schindler, or a Rusesabagina. The true strength of the goodness of our nature always shines through, and although we have setbacks, we continue in our progress toward a worldwide society completely absent of wholesale horrors such as slavery and genocide. With common effort, we will soon reach that noble goal. From the smallest of everyday kindnesses to the wondrous acts of the heroes of humanity like those mentioned above, we can all take comfort in the innate goodness of humanity.

The Wonder of the Universe

Since the earliest times, man has been awed and inspired by the stars. Now, with much greater understanding of how the universe works, and with pictures of the surface of Mars and galaxies and celestial dust clouds available at our fingertips, has the luster gone away? Not at all. More than ever, man seeks to view and know the planets and the stars, and to spread the race out into the cosmos. Man has set foot on the moon, and our creations have touched Mars and a moon of Saturn, but still we yearn for more.

One of our biggest questions, of course, is: Are we alone? If the universe is infinite, certainly not. But will we ever meet our fellow creatures somewhere, out among the stars? Will they look anything like us, will they think like us, will we be able to communicate with them?

Although we can see much more of the universe now than ever, still there are countless wonders out there for us to find. Dreams of such knowledge in the future certainly inspire us all. We all dream that one day our children or grandchildren or great-grandchildren will live on another world, and that our distant descendants will explore and spread out through the vast reaches of space, to see more and know more than we ever have.

The Beauty of Nature

⁹There's a reason that artists learning their trade often end up painting such natural scenes as mountains, lakes, or wildlife. The intense beauty of such simple things moves us. Whether it's the majesty of a snow-capped mountain against a blue sky, the fury of a lightning strike on the plains, the fierce presence of a lion, or the delicateness of a bird-of-paradise flower, nature unfolds before us in a way that tugs at our very being. We are awed by the power and complexity of natural processes.

Why would a rational person forego the conveniences and protection of a modern home to instead go pitch a tent in a forest? We do this to "get back to nature," to remind ourselves of the sights and smells and sounds that our modern life has sheltered us from. We build parks and nature preserves and zoos, we section off forests and wildlife areas from development, all to keep the mystery and wonder and pristine charm of nature alive and protected from our own disruptions to the environment.

"I think that I shall never see, A poem lovely as a tree." Although the rest of his poem pays homage to a fictitious god, the first lines of Joyce Kilmer's poem "Trees" certainly ring true in the hearts of all humanity. We all feel, deep down, the awesome beauty of nature.

The Enormity of Evolution

What an amazing engine of the history of the world is evolution, the force that gave us life! Each and every one of us is the culmination of four billion years of evolution. Our lineage can be traced back to early hominids, back through a common ancestor with monkeys, back to the first mouse-sized placental mammals, back through ancestors that looked progressively more and more reptilian, back to sea creatures first developing lungs, and back before they developed lungs at all and lived only in the sea. Before that, you can trace us back from complex animals to rudimentary animals to multi-celled organisms and back to single-celled organisms. At each step along the way, every single one of our ancestors survived to maturity and had offspring.

If just one of those early ancestors had failed to survive or reproduce, the entire history of the earth would be completely different. We are completely dependent on their past successes, just as our descendants will be dependent on our genetic legacy. Evolution ties us all in an unbroken chain to that very first strand of RNA. We all come from a tree that ultimately narrows down to a single root. How magnificent is that history that we all share!

The Thirst for Knowledge

Some philosophers date the first appearance of true *Homo sapiens* to that first hominid who stood up, looked up at the stars, and thought, "Why are we here?" The query, unsolvable at the time, has spawned countless religions and philosophies, all in the name of wanting to know the answer to a question.

Our thirst, our undeniable need for knowledge has been indelibly stamped upon our genetic code. We revere our scientists, who answer our questions about the physical world. We pay homage to and tithe to our philosophers and religious leaders in our quest for knowledge about the metaphysical. Our political leaders debate about the answers to the problems of our society. We hire teachers in every locality, for education of children in the knowledge of the day is mandatory almost worldwide.

And our culture is driven by the quest for knowledge, as well. We read and watch science fiction, and try to extrapolate the technology of the future. We consume historical movies and books, learning about history while we are entertained. We support enormous "how to" industries which teach us things as varied as foreign languages, furniture making, and the art of stained glass. If we enjoy drinking wine, we may go further and learn the different varieties, the histories of the different types of wine, and practice differentiating between wines. If we find pleasure in watching birds, we might soon progress to buying a book on birdwatching, so that we may know the species we spot in our binoculars. If we are enchanted by the night stars, we may very well end up buying a guide to the constellations or delving into astronomy, in order to know more.

¹⁷It is that very thirst for discovery that encouraged Marco Polo to journey to China, that set Columbus and Magellan to sea, that drove Lewis and Clark to explore the wilderness, that sent Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay on their quest for the peak of Mt. Everest, and that propelled Yuri Gagarin to space and Neil Armstrong to the Moon. It pushed Salk to develop a vaccine for polio, Marie and Pierre Curie to discover radiation, Edison to invent the electric light bulb, Einstein to formulate the Theory of Relativity, and Crick and Watson to deduce the structure of DNA. That intense curiosity marks us as human, and all of our discoveries and explorations spring from it.

The Miracle of Birth

The power of the image of the birth of a child is quite a human trait. Few other species have females that suffer as much or labor as much to bear children, due to our unique larger cranium—allowing us to reason—combined with our upright posture. So we value an already special event even more, and invest special significance in each and every birth, celebrating that day annually thereafter.

And our infants are so much more helpless than those of almost any species. They arrive completely dependent on us for their every need, capable of only expression. Their small hands grasp reflexively, and their heads turn to seek food, but even rolling over is a feat that it takes many weeks to learn. They must be watched at all times, and we come running to soothe them and take care of them whenever they cry out. They are small, soft, cute, and helpless to do anything but hold on tight to our heartstrings.

We see in a baby the awesome potential of a future adult, with the ability to understand and shape the world around them. We know that pregnancy and the process of birth can be difficult, and the efforts to raise children involve a great sacrifice. Yet still we have children, satisfying our undeniable urge to procreate and love and pass on our genes. Children are the ultimate expression of the future, rolled up into a tiny bundle of the love of their parents and family. Babies are precious, and although there are no such things as supernatural “miracles,” certainly birth well deserves the title of a “natural miracle.”

The Power of Love

What is love? That question is one for the ages. We now know that the good feelings we have when we are with the ones we love are partially the result of oxytocin, a chemical that our body releases when we are touched or loved. But knowing that in no way changes the ephemeral nature of one of man’s greatest mysteries.

Love is one of the most powerful forces we know. The love of a mate drives some to abandon their fortune, their throne, their culture, or even their family. In others it inspires great works. Unrequited love can drive some to insanity, and others to create art and literature of haunting sadness. The richness of a life with a partner in a loving relationship is one of the most sought-after goals in every culture. Our love for our children goes far beyond our genetic legacy or our instincts, and most of us would unquestioningly lay down our lives to save them.

Some day we may better understand the chemical pathways and cortical reactions that correspond to love. But we may never fully understand or be able to describe the sheer intensity and necessity of love, the love of family and friends and mates, or the greater love for humanity. Love and friendship make life worth living, gives meaning to our efforts and achievements, and lets us take time away from the hustle of the day to share a moment, a word, a touch or an embrace, with another person whom we care about.

Conclusion

The seven concepts mentioned here certainly can provide inspiration for anyone, and will have special meaning for the Good and Moral Atheist. We hope that you will read these passages in times of need, and be reinvigorated with the spirit of humanity and the awesomeness of nature.

Charity

¹The Second Tenet of the Good and Moral Atheist is that of Purpose. To quote, “We each strive to better the world in the time we have.” One way to follow such a tenet is to give charitably to the less fortunate or the needy in the world.

Some may dislike the concept of charity, welfare, or social insurance, considering it to be a handout. For certain types of charity, this may be true, especially where able-bodied adults are rewarded for not working. But most charities help those truly in need and without control over the situation they find themselves in: children, victims of spousal abuse, victims of natural disasters, victims of war or oppression, and so on. Each of us can choose which charity best expresses our desire to help make the world a better place.

Occasionally you will hear arguments that Atheists or other non-believers are selfish, uncharitable people. Nothing could be further from the truth. Many great Atheists and skeptics have given substantially of their fortunes or their time to help others, while everyday Atheists give to charity and donate time just as other people do. Below we have listed some of the more notable charitable Atheist and Freethinkers.

Freethinker Stephen Girard (1750-1831), a French immigrant to Philadelphia who started a shipping business while in his teens, adopted Philadelphia as his home, and was an ardent supporter of the new country of the United States. When yellow fever struck Philadelphia in 1793, many affluent citizens fled the city, including George Washington. Girard did not, and more than just give of his personal fortune, he commandeered the hospital and arranged for supply deliveries. For the afflicted, Girard also personally assisted in their care, nursing the sick, going into houses to find the weak, and even helping to wash those suffering from yellow fever despite the risk to his own health.

After the epidemic, Girard gave generously to the hospitals, and even donated to some churches. When the war of 1812 broke out between the United States and England, the country was running quite low on money. The government asked citizens to buy bonds totaling \$5 million to finance the fight against the British. Businessmen balked, and few were sold, until Girard stepped in and bought the entire \$5 million himself. His act shored up confidence in the U.S., and other businessmen soon bought parts of his holdings. Girard used his fortune similarly for other financial crises of the government in the next decades, so strong was his faith in the U.S. On his death, Girard, who had family but no living children, freed his servant Hannah (with a stipend for her care in the form of an annuity) and bequeathed over 98% of his fortune, close to \$8 million in 1831 dollars and probably the largest fortune in the U.S., to the community. His will included funds for hospitals, widows, the poor, the deaf, education, the police, the city of Philadelphia, and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. But the largest part of Girard’s fortune was set aside to create an institution for schooling orphans—unfortunately following the racist and sexist mores of the time, his will specified white boys only—free from religious instruction. The executors of his will and the judiciary at the time altered his original intentions, and Girard College soon had mandatory religious participation, albeit by laypeople instead of clergy.

Atheist James Lick (1796-1877) made his fortune buying land in San Francisco just before the gold rush. Before his death, he donated \$3 million to a trust for helping California in scientific endeavors. The trust helped the University of California build an observatory and install the largest telescope in the world (at the time); the Lick observatory is still in use as of the writing of this book. Among his other instructions, he also requested that some of the trust be used to establish a home for elderly women.

Philosophically, Atheist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919) went further than most, stating that there is a moral obligation for the rich to give away all their riches beyond the needs for their families. Carnegie donated over \$350 million in his lifetime (well over \$100 billion if converted into 2006 dollars) to his trusts, which have supported projects such as public schools, libraries, child welfare centers, and efforts to achieve peace between nations.

Although George Soros is well-known for his liberal political activities, his charitable work is impressive as well. Atheist Soros (born in 1930) started his large-scale philanthropy work in the late 1970s, when he gave funds to help black South African students to enroll at the University of Cape Town, as a protest against the country’s apartheid stance at the time. He began funding democracy initiatives in Eastern Europe—Soros is a Hungarian immigrant—in the 1980s, and in 1993 founded the Open Society Institute. OSI is a group dedicated to democratic reform and human rights, and supports efforts in the areas of healthcare, legal reform, reduction of government corruption, and education.

⁹Agnostic Warren Buffett (also born in 1930) will reportedly give most of his fortune—currently second only to that of Bill Gates, mentioned next—to his Buffett Foundation, a charitable trust, upon his death. The foundation supports boys and girls clubs, hospitals, minority-student scholarships, population control efforts, Planned Parenthood groups, and Omaha-area community charities.

Agnostic and billionaire Bill Gates (born in 1955) has, through the Gates Foundation founded by him and his wife, given billions of dollars to charity. The foundation has an endowment of over \$20 billion, and donates large sums to vaccination research and vaccination programs, educational scholarships for disadvantaged and minority students, library initiatives throughout the world, and efforts to improve the lives of people in the Pacific Northwest, including the homeless.

Even ordinary people can make a huge difference if they put forth the effort. Dr. Indumati Parikh (1918-2004), a Humanist doctor who lived with her husband in a nice suburb of Mumbai (Bombay) in India, sold her house and moved to the impoverished section of the city to help poor women with contraception. Once there, she realized the desperate nature of the health care situation there, and set up an organization in 1964 called Streehitakarini (SHK). SHK covered many health care needs for poor women and their children, including vaccinations, nutrition, hygiene, contraception, and even literacy programs. Dr. Parikh, known as “Indu Tai” to the people of the slums, later started the Women of India Network (WIN), also dedicated to the health of poor women in India. WIN opened a series of health clinics and a hospital, WIN Central, to serve the needs of the millions of poor in Mumbai without access to basic health care. In addition to her activities in Mumbai, Dr. Parikh served as the president of the Indian Radical Humanist Association for several years. Dr. Parikh worked for the betterment of the poor in India and for funding for her WIN program up until her death in 2004.

And in Las Vegas, the magic/comedy duo act of Penn & Teller—both avowed Atheists—have since 2003 organized an annual blood drive during the critical need time around Christmas, offering two free tickets to their show (2005 value: \$150 per pair of tickets) for everyone who donates blood. Each year thousands of pints of blood are donated through this effort. The ever-sarcastic Penn Jillette, speaking for himself and his silent partner Teller, said of the drive, “You donate blood, you save a life and you get to see our stupid show.”

As you can see, for hundreds of years Atheists and other Freethinkers have given their time, efforts, and money to charity in order to better the lot of their fellow man. Even today, there are Atheist-sponsored aid organizations. Recently, the Secular Humanist Aid and Relief Effort (SHARE, sponsored by the Council for Secular Humanism), the International Humanist and Ethical Union, and the IHEU’s Indian affiliate the Atheist Centre (founded by Gora) all directly collected significant donations for the victims of the December 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean. SHARE also collected many tens of thousands of dollars of donations for victims of the devastation from August 2005’s Hurricane Katrina. They were joined in their efforts in securing charitable donations from Atheists by the American Humanist Association and the Atheist Alliance, which also set up Hurricane Katrina charities. And unlike some religious charities, no aid donations to secular or Atheist organizations are diverted to “ministry” programs or non-aid items such as bibles, pews, rosaries and the like.

There are also quite a few charities that have no religious affiliation whatsoever, and are wholly secular. Doctors Without Borders, Amnesty International, Oxfam, Save the Children, AmeriCares, the Nature Conservancy, and even the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are completely non-religious charities. Many Atheists give money and donate time to such noble organizations.

To strive to better the world. That is our purpose. As Stephen Girard wrote, during the yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia in 1793:

“...if I have the misfortune to succumb, I will have at least the satisfaction to have performed a duty which we all owe to each other.”

Charity is a duty we owe, part of our purpose in life as Good and Moral Atheists.

Celebrations

¹Contrary to popular belief, you do not have to quit celebrating Christmas if you quit believing in god! Most holidays, Christmas included, have a strong secular component. There is nothing in the bible about Santa Claus or decorating fir trees—there are actually admonitions *against* decorating trees!—nor is there anything about the Easter Bunny or crème eggs. We can separate the joy of tradition from the false supernatural underpinnings. Atheists should—and do—feel free to keep celebrating any and all traditional holidays, if they so wish.

Even solemn holidays may be represented in a secular manner. Yom Kippur, the Jewish day of fasting for the atonement for sins, may be recast as a day for self-reflection and renewal, where one should look inward and make decisions about how to be a better person in the coming year. Holidays of remembrance fit in extremely well with the Atheist viewpoint, for we recognize that fairy tale rewards such as an afterlife do not exist. The only true value of our lives after we are gone is our impact on others and on the world, partly through their remembrance of us.

But there are also a few additional holidays that many Atheists observe or celebrate, which should be covered here. The first and most recognized one is Darwin Day, February 12th. This is the birthday of Charles Darwin, the man who first put forth a robust theory of evolution, and directly challenged established church teachings about the origins of animals and man. Darwin's works, *On the Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man*, threw clear scientific light for the very first time on the age-old question, "where did we come from?" In spite of the attacks of religionists, Darwin's core theories have held up to all scrutiny, and are now accepted as tantamount to scientific fact. We celebrate his birthday as a reminder of the advancements of science and the ending of theistic superstitions.

On October 12th, we celebrate Freethought Day. The date was chosen because it marked the end of the superstition- and religion-inspired Salem witch trials. On October 12th, 1692, the Governor of Massachusetts, William Phipps, issued an edict stating that evidence of a spectral (a.k.a. supernatural) nature was inadmissible in legal proceedings. Sometimes the week around October 12th is celebrated as Freethought Week as well, and the week may also include what has been termed "N-Day" a day for non-believers who wish to do so to publicly declare their non-belief, in word or by displaying symbols of Atheism.

Also, many holidays, religious and nonreligious, came about as seasonal celebrations relating to crops and weather. The English and Welsh had certain holidays designated as "quarter-days" (Lady Day, Midsummer Day, Michaelmas, and Christmas) that fell almost exactly on the solstices and equinoxes. Some countries, such as Latvia, still celebrate Christmas on the winter solstice. Easter often falls quite near the spring equinox. Most northern Europeans still celebrate Midsummer Day on the summer solstice, and the Chinese calendar has a Mid-Autumn Festival on the full moon nearest to the fall equinox, which is also very near the dates of the Jewish High Holidays. As the marking of time was an important human trait in the times before reason, so it may continue to be important even with the advent of logical discovery.

So, some Atheists celebrate the turning of the seasons as a way to mark the passing of time, and to take a break from the hectic schedule of daily life. They serve as an alternative to traditional holidays for some, while many others simply add a secular meaning to an existing traditional holiday. The spring Equinox (usually March 20th in the northern hemisphere) can be celebrated as a holiday of renewal and rebirth, much as the season of spring brings us forth anew the trees and the flowers. Similar return-of-spring messages are found in the traditional holidays of Easter and Passover, which include greens and eggs in their modern celebrations, and in Holi, the Hindu festival of color.

Midsummer Day in the northern hemisphere (the summer solstice, on or around June 21st) also serves as World Humanist Day, a celebration of the spirit of humanity. As mentioned earlier, Midsummer Day is celebrated as a secular holiday in much of northern Europe—in other parts it is celebrated as the feast of St. John—and is often celebrated by a feast and the lighting of a bonfire. The day is especially important in Scandinavia, and there are celebrations in Scandinavian communities in the United States in New York City and in Minnesota.

The fall equinox (usually September 22nd in the U.S., sometimes on the 23rd) also falls during Banned Books Week. Originally started by the American Library Association, this week serves to remind us of the loss of intellectual liberty if we do not remain vigilant, and of our thankfulness for the freedoms we have. It is always within a week or two of the Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival or Moon Festival (as previously mentioned), which is celebrated by reuniting with family, lighting lanterns, and eating moon cakes.

⁹And, the winter solstice (December 21st in the northern hemisphere), falling near Christmas, is often celebrated as a time to gather together with friends and family, to send cards and give gifts, to celebrate the end of another year, and to anticipate the coming of the New Year. Humanists also recognize a winter holiday, HumanLight, timed (on December 23rd) to be near both traditional holidays and the solstice. The solstice and the other seasonal holidays are used by Atheists to mark the passage of time, just as traditional holidays have done for people throughout history.

Beyond traditional holidays, and the more important days such as Darwin's birthday, Freethought Day, and the seasonal days mentioned above, some Atheists also recognize other days of the calendar as being special. Earth Day (April 22nd) is a celebration of the world in which we live. The first Earth Day was held on April 22, 1970, the culmination of the environmentalist movement of the 1960s. The concept was the brainchild of Senator Gaylord Nelson, who first conceived of it in the early 1960s. Although we celebrate what was originally an environmentalist holiday, the Good and Moral Atheist need not follow a liberal political philosophy on environmental issues. Maintaining a reasonable stewardship of the earth and the environment has become a mainstream issue, with liberals and conservatives dividing on how best to implement these initiatives. Our duty is to "strive to better the world in the time we have," according to the second tenet of the Good and Moral Atheist.

Hume Day, May 7th, celebrates the birth of British philosopher David Hume (1711-1776). Hume was probably the most influential skeptic and naturalist of the 18th century. His works, the *Treatise of Human Nature* (1740), the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (1748), and the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), plus his *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (published after his death, in 1779) influenced such important thinkers as economist Adam Smith, philosopher Immanuel Kant, and 19th century biologists Charles Darwin and Thomas Huxley. The International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) supports the celebration of the birthday of Hume on their site. Additionally, in the United States there is a "National Day of Prayer" on the first Thursday in May, which Freethinkers counter with Hume Day or a similar day called the "National Day of Reason."

August 11th is Ingersoll Day, in honor of Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll (1833-1899), Illinois Attorney General and author known for his defense of Agnosticism and attacks on church doctrine. Ingersoll, known as "The Great Agnostic," was a prolific writer and a speaker in extremely high demand, and he often spoke about freethought and humanism, in addition to giving his views on slavery and suffrage. Humorist Mark Twain once said of Ingersoll, "What an organ human speech is when employed by a master." Ingersoll, a veteran who fought for the North in the American Civil War, is buried in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C.

Church-State Separation Week is the last week in November, coinciding with Thanksgiving in the United States. It recognizes the progress that people the world over have made in divorcing our systems of government from the shackles of religious interference. It also is a time to reflect upon the horrors that can arise in countries where religion is state-enforced, and the countless battles and wars that have been and are currently being fought over religious doctrine.

Soon after that is Human Rights Day, December 10th, which commemorates the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted on December 10th, 1948 without dissent by the United Nations. The declaration came about after three years of work by the Commission on Human Rights, which included among others former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. The protection of civil rights is so extremely important to Atheists—and to humanity as a whole—that it is embedded in the Five Tenets of the Good and Moral Atheist, as the tenet of Freedom.

Finally, there are a few lighthearted "holidays" that many Atheists enjoy celebrating. April Fools' Day (April 1st) is an especially fun day that Atheists have adopted as part of their calendar. The concept of playing tricks, and exposing how those tricks work, resonates strongly with the philosophy of naturalism or rationalism. Interestingly, such "spring fever" holidays near the Spring Equinox fall on the calendars of traditional religions as well, with the green attire and green beer of the adopted Irish holiday of St. Patrick's Day, and the plays, carnivals, and drinking of the Jewish holiday of Purim both falling in mid-March.

Halloween (October 31st) is another such humorous day that Atheists enjoy. And, with some fundamentalist churches now shunning the practice of dressing up and trick-or-treating, recognizing Halloween is also a way to stand up and count ourselves as being against superstition and myth, and to let our children be children and have some harmless fun.

¹⁷To summarize, here are the commonly-recognized days of importance to the Good and Moral Atheist, in addition to regular holidays such as New Years' Day and nation-specific holidays similar to the United States' Thanksgiving, Memorial Day, Labor Day, and Independence Day. The holidays have been arranged by season, and the more important ones have been bolded. Websites with information on some of these holidays can also be found in the Book of Resources.

Winter

December 21st/23rd	Solstice/HumanLight
February 12th	Darwin Day

Spring

March 20th	Spring Equinox
April 1 st	April Fools' Day
April 22 nd	Earth Day
May 7 th /1 st Thurs. in May	Hume Day/National Day of Reason

Summer

June 21st	Midsummer Day/World Humanist Day
August 11 th	Ingersoll Day

Fall

September 22nd/week of	Fall Equinox/Banned Books Week
October 12th	Freethought Day ("N-Day")
October 31 st	Halloween
End of November	Church-State Separation Week
December 10 th	Human Rights Day

Since Atheist and Humanist communities, especially in the United States, are currently still small, little in the way of standard celebrations have so far been set forth, and many Atheists simply observe only the secular portions of traditional holidays like Christmas and Easter. However, Midsummer Day bonfires are common throughout Europe and the Scandinavian communities of America, Darwin Day and Freethought Day are fairly widely recognized, and Solstice cards are becoming more common around the December holidays. With the growth of Atheism and of communication avenues such as the internet, more traditions are being established each year.

Reflections

¹Atheists do not believe in the power of intercessory prayer or prayer for actions, for prayer requires a supernatural action to occur, and we know that such things do not happen. However, many religious people also use prayer as a way to reflect on their own behavior, and to call on a fictitious god or gods to give them the strength to better themselves. These types of prayers can be useful, as they are a way to review and modify our own behavior. Prayers are also often used by the religious as a way to give thanks for good fortune at times of life events or holidays. Such prayers are also somewhat reflective, and also serve to mark occasions in the minds of the observers. Finally, prayers also give voice to our hopeful thoughts for the future. Although theists ask god for good fortune, the Atheist will merely voice hopefulness for good fortune or fate in the things we don't control, and good choices for the things we do.

Among major religions, there are many prayers for holidays and life events. Having an Atheistic philosophy doesn't exempt us from the desire for solemnity, reflection, and a formal recognition of such events with something that resembles a prayer. For Atheists, a better way to refer to all such useful prayers might be to call them "reflections." The word "pray" implies seeking favor from a higher being. However, Atheists may still end a reflection with "amen," which derives from older words meaning "certainly."

Among the various religions and communities, people celebrate positive holidays, holidays of mourning, and holidays of reflection. There are also usually celebrations for birth and marriage, plus a recognition of a child as a person to be taught in the community (akin to a first communion or first confession, usually around the ages of 5 to 8 or the "age of reason"), and a recognition of the attainment of the "age of majority," variously recognized as a bar or bat mitzvah (age 13), a quinceañera in the Hispanic community (age 15), a sweet sixteen or coming-out party (age 16), the Muslim shahada (often in the late teens), a high-school graduation party (age 18), or a confirmation in the church or temple. Participation in such culturally significant rituals can have great meaning for Atheists, even with some of the structural framework of traditional religion. Some sort of special "reflection" is needed for these events.

Below are some sample reflections that an Atheist might use when the need arises, for specific holidays they should be amended as needed. Also included are many traditional prayers adapted into reflection form for the Atheist. Many such prayers from traditional faiths are so well-known and comforting that we might keep their honest sentiment while offering an Atheist version to use on a regular basis.

Note that where many theists would thank a god for their fortune, the Atheist recognizes that fortune itself is responsible for their ability to offer up such a reflection. We are fortunate to be here, reading this very passage, although of course that luck is the result of sheer chance interactions, plus the choices of our ancestors. We can be thankful for it, while rationally realizing that there is no higher being out there to thank. Sometimes we may thank our ancestors for their efforts, but this is in no way a worship of ancestors, merely a way to honestly give voice to our thanks that their actions in a very definite way gave us the chance to be here today.

Many Atheists may see no need for such reflections. Whether or not this chapter is viewed as helpful is up to each individual. We offer these reflections for those individuals who might seek comfort in words, following the comfortable framework of religion. If saying these words out loud helps to reaffirm your thoughts, your hopes, your goals, and your thankfulness for each day and special event, feel free to do so.

However, if deeper self-reflection does not interest you, go ahead and ignore this chapter. It is purely up to you, we offer such reflections here for those who enjoy and are comfortable with the feel and structure of traditional religion, but don't subscribe to supernatural beliefs. For those seeking further guidance, the Secular Humanist movement has Officiants and Celebrants, who act as counterparts to ministers. Officiants and Celebrants may be able to provide you with further words of reflection beyond those provided here, and can officiate at holidays, special events, and times of hardship or mourning. Also, information about other traditional religious groups that welcome Atheists can be found in the Book of Atheists.

The reflections below are categorized by type. While some are new, many are modifications of theistic prayers that may be familiar to you. Use them if you wish, to help you reflect upon life's events.

Daily

Coming Day (adapted from Eastern Orthodox Daily Prayer)

May I greet the coming day in peace.

In every hour of the day may I choose goodness in my dealings with all who surround me.

May I treat all that comes to pass throughout the day
with peace of mind and with firm conviction in the goodness of humanity.

May I choose positive deeds and words, positive thoughts and feelings.
In unforeseen events, may I see challenges, not obstacles.

May I act firmly and wisely,
without embittering and embarrassing others.

May I have the strength to bear the fatigue of the coming day,
with all that it shall bring.
Amen.

Salutation to the Dawn (Hindu)

Look to this day!

For it is life, the very life of life.

In its brief course

Lie all the verities and realities of your existence:

The bliss of growth;
The glory of action;
The splendor of achievement;

For yesterday is but a dream,
And tomorrow is only a vision;

But today, well lived, makes every yesterday
a dream of happiness,
And every tomorrow a vision of hope.

Daily Reflection

Let us reflect.

We are thankful for the fate that has allowed us to arrive at this moment,
and for our ancestors who sacrificed that we, their offspring, could live on.

We are honored by the good deeds of humanity,
and hope that those actions will increase in number, while evil wanes.

We reflect on our own actions and feel regret at our misdeeds
while we rejoice at the goodness we have brought to the world, to our loved ones, and to ourselves.

We commit ourselves to be morally upright,
and to strive to be virtuous and ethical.

We seek to improve our world,
to give love and comfort to those who are dear to us, and to better our own lives.

We promise to take joy in each day we are afforded here,
for we each have only one precious life to experience.
Amen.

Strength and Wisdom

²⁵Serenity Reflection (adapted from the Serenity Prayer)

May I find in myself:
The courage to change the things I can,
The serenity to accept those I cannot,
And the wisdom to know the difference.
Amen.

Strength (adapted from Lord Help Me)

May I find in myself the strength to bring
Comfort where there is pain,
Courage where there is fear,
Hope where there is despair,
Acceptance when the end is near, and
A touch that is gentle,
With tenderness, patience and love.
Amen.

Steer the Course (adapted from Eastern Orthodox Show Me the Course)

May I be wise enough to steer the ship of my life,
to quiet harbors,
where I can be safe from the storms of sin and conflict.

May I be discerning,
so that I can always see
the right direction in which I should go.

And may I have the strength and courage to choose the right course,
even when the sea is rough and the waves are high,
enduring hardship and danger,
until I find my way back to comfort and peace.
Amen.

Be (Baha'i)

Be generous in prosperity,
and thankful in adversity.

Be fair in judgement,
and guarded in thy speech.

Be a lamp unto those who walk in darkness,
and a home to the stranger.

Be eyes to the blind,
and a guiding light unto the feet of the erring.

Be a breath of life to the body of humankind,
a dew to the soil of the human heart,
and a fruit upon the tree of humility.

Peace and Brotherhood

Peace Unto All (adapted from Hindu Prayer for Peace)

From the unreal to the real.
From darkness to light.
From death to life.
Peace, Peace, Peace unto all.

May there be peace on Earth and in the universe.
May waters be appeasing.
May herbs be wholesome,
and may the fruits of the earth bring peace to all.

May all good people bring peace to us.
May the spirit of humanity propagate peace all through the world.
May all things be a source of peace to us.
And may peace itself, bestow peace unto all and to me also.

Brotherhood Reflection (adapted from Muslim Prayer for Brotherhood)

Humanity is but a single brotherhood:
So make peace and reconciliation
between your brothers and sisters;
and may fortune give us mercy.
Amen.

Peace Prayer (Native American)

Let us know peace.
For as long as the moon shall rise,
For as long as the rivers shall flow,
For as long as the sun will shine,
For as long as the grass shall grow,
Let us know peace.

May We Move (adapted from Jain Prayer for Peace)

May we move from death to life, from falsehood to truth.
May we move from despair to hope, from fear to trust.
May we move from hate to love, from war to peace.
May peace fill our hearts, our world, our universe.

Reflection for Peace (adapted from Muslim Prayer for Peace)

We are thankful for the Universe
which has given birth to us
and made us into tribes and nations,
that we may know each other,
not that we may despise each other.

If your enemy inclines towards peace,
do also incline towards peace,
and trust in the power of humanity.
Most gracious are those who walk on the Earth in humility,
and when we address them, we say
“Peace.”

Meals

⁴³Bounty (adapted from traditional Christian Table Blessing)

We are thankful for this bounty
which we are about to receive
through the labor of man and the grace of nature.
Amen.

Reflection Before Meals (adapted from Jewish Blessings over bread and wine)

Thankful are we this day for our lives, our fortune in this Universe,
For the lessons of goodness,
And for bread from the earth,
and the fruit of the vine.
Amen.

Mindfulness (adapted from Buddhist Prayer Before Eating)

We are reminded of
the joys and pains of all beings
in our good fortune to have this food.
Let us receive it in gratitude.

And in mindfulness of our sisters and brothers
among living beings of every kind
who are hungry or homeless,
sick or injured,
or suffering in any way.
Amen.

Travel

May the Road Rise (adapted from traditional Irish blessings)

May the road rise to meet you,
May the wind be always at your back.

May the sun shine warm upon your face,
The rains fall soft upon your fields.

And until we meet again,
May fortune smile upon you.

Holidays

⁵⁰Reflection for Positive Holidays

Let us reflect.

We are thankful for the fate that has allowed us to arrive
together at this special day,
and for our ancestors who sacrificed that we, their offspring, could live on.

We are thankful for the good fortune
that has allowed us to enjoy
this meal and these gifts.

We take time from our busy lives
to celebrate this day with our loved ones,
and to enjoy laughter and love and tradition.

Let us remember good holidays past,
while we make this day one to remember,
and teach our children so that our traditions may continue.

In the spirit of this holiday,
we renew our commitment to goodness, to self-improvement,
and to the enjoyment of life.
Amen.

Reflection for Holidays of Mourning

Let us reflect.

We are thankful for the fate that has allowed us to arrive
together at this solemn day,
and for our ancestors who sacrificed that we, their offspring, could live on.

On this day,
we remember a great tragedy,
and commit ourselves to prevent such tragedies from occurring again.

The dead lie still now,
Not seeing,
Not hearing,
Not feeling,
Not moving,
Not in pain.
They are no more.

Yet we remember, and their memory still moves our hearts.
We remember their lives and their sacrifice.
Through our actions in their name, they may still make a difference in this world.

Today we thank them.
Today we honor them.
We promise to never forget.
Amen.

62 Reflection for Holidays of Atonement

Let us reflect.

We are thankful for the fate that has allowed us to arrive
together at this hallowed day,
and for our ancestors who sacrificed that we, their offspring, could live on.

On this day,
we look back at our lives and our actions over the past year,
and judge ourselves.

We take full responsibility for our deeds, good and bad.
We apologize for transgressions and misdeeds against others,
and endeavor not to commit transgressions in the coming year.

We take stock of ourselves, and look at our strengths and our failings,
our motivations and our desires, our relationships and our loves,
with a critical and unbiased eye.

We recognize and learn
from the past,
but promise not to dwell upon it.

We plan for a better future in a better world
as a better and happier person,
and promise to work to attain these goals.

We renew our commitment to goodness,
to self-improvement,
and to the enjoyment of life.
Amen.

Atonement

Atonement (adapted from Catholic Act of Contrition)

I apologize for my sins with all my heart.
In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good,
I have sinned against myself, and have wronged my own nature.

I firmly intend to right what wrongs I can,
and to avoid anything that leads me to sin.
I shall better myself, and strive to be virtuous.
Amen.

Children

72 Reflection for the Birth of a Child

Let us reflect.

We are thankful for the fate that has allowed us to arrive
together at this special day,
and for our ancestors who sacrificed that we, their offspring, could live on.

Today,
we celebrate the birth
of the newest member of our family.

We are thankful for their safe arrival,
and for their health
and for that of their mother.

We see this new child,
and recognize their awesome potential
to forever change the world.

Each of us here,
friend and family alike,
will take responsibility to protect and nurture them.

We will teach them right from wrong, good from evil, virtue from vice,
in order that this innocent child will grow up
to be a good, moral, virtuous, and productive person.

We hope that their life
will have a positive impact on the world,
and that all of their dreams will be fulfilled.

And, in seeing such beauty and promise,
we ourselves renew our commitment
to goodness, to self-improvement, and to the enjoyment of life.
Amen.

Reflection for a Newborn Child (adapted from Jewish Prayer for a Newborn Child)

We are humbled by the awesome power of this moment.
From our lives we have brought forth life.
Through our love we have fashioned a child of love.

May our child bring goodness to all he meets.
And may he count us among his good fortune as well.

⁸³Parent's Reflection (adapted from Catholic Parent's Prayer)

I thank the fate that has brought to me these my children,
and committed them to my charge.
I hope that I may be able to fulfill this most important duty and stewardship.

May I know what to give and what to withhold,
when to reprove and when to forbear,
when to be gentle, and when to be firm.

May I be considerate and watchful,
and spare myself and my children the weakness of indulgence,
and the excess of severity.

And by word and example,
may I be careful to lead them in the ways of wisdom and reason,
so that at last I may be able to say that I raised my children well.

Amen.

Reflection for a Child Reaching the Age of Reason

Let us reflect.

We are thankful for the fate that has allowed us to arrive
together at this special day,
and for our ancestors who sacrificed that we, their offspring, could live on.

Today,
we celebrate our children,
as they reach the Age of Reason.

While in the past, they looked to us for pronouncements on every issue,
they are now of the age where they can think for themselves,
and understand right and wrong, good and evil.

We will strive to nurture
this budding intellect in our most precious of possessions,
our offspring.

And we will walk together with them through the trials and tribulations of childhood,
still their primary source of attachment to the world,
yet knowing that they will now begin to seek their own path in this life.

We promise to encourage their identity,
their joys and their goals,
while gently guiding them around the pitfalls of life.

And, on seeing their newfound independence and self-direction,
we ourselves renew our own commitment
to goodness, to self-improvement, and to the enjoyment of life.
Amen.

⁹⁶Reflection for a Child Reaching the Age of Majority

Let us reflect.

We are thankful for the fate that has allowed us to arrive
together at this special day,
and for our ancestors who sacrificed that we, their offspring, could live on.

Today,
we celebrate our children,
as they reach the Age of Majority.

What we brought into this world as infants,
and nurtured as children,
have now become young men and women.

They are separate from us,
with their own goals, their own friendships, their own likes and dislikes,
their own ideas on how to run their lives.

Yet they are still
and will always be
a part of us.

We promise to offer
assistance, guidance,
love, and support.

But we know that they will make their own way,
and that through the next years they will make more of their own choices,
and rely less on our decisions.

We hope that we have taught them well.
Our children will soon be the adults of the next generation of humanity,
and we rejoice in their success.

And, upon seeing these new adults
and their commitment to their own futures
and the future of humanity,

We ourselves
renew our own commitment
to goodness, to self-improvement, and to the enjoyment of life.
Amen.

Reflection upon Majority (adapted from Jewish Bar Mitzvah Blessing)

Thankful are we this day for our lives, our fortune in this Universe,
For the lessons of goodness,
for life, for sustenance,
and for the fate that has enabled us to reach this joyous occasion
of our child reaching the Age of Majority.
Amen.

Marriage

108 Wedding Prayer (Native American)

Now you will feel no rain,
For each of you will be shelter to the other.

Now you will feel no cold,
For each of you will be warmth to the other.

Now there is no more loneliness,
For each of you will be companion to the other.

Now you are two bodies,
But there is only one life before you.

Go now to your home,
To enter your days of togetherness.

Reflection for the Bridegroom and Bride (adapted from Jewish Wedding Prayer)

Thankful are we this day for our lives, our fortune in this Universe,
for mirth and joy, bridegroom and bride,
gladness, jubilation, dancing, and delight,
love and brotherhood, peace and fellowship.

Quickly, may the sound of mirth and joy
be heard in the streets,
the voice of bridegroom and bride,
jubilant voices of bridegrooms from their canopies
and youths from the feasts of song.

We celebrate good fortune, and the rejoicing of the bridegroom and bride.
Amen.

Reflection Upon Marriage

Let us reflect.

We are thankful for the fate that has allowed us to arrive
together at this special day,
and for our ancestors who sacrificed that we, their offspring, could live on.

Today, we celebrate as two of our loved ones
are joined together in matrimony.

We bestow upon them our wishes
for a long and loving life together, filled with joy.

May each of them take the other completely into their hearts,
and may they be so joined,

in love and life,
for as long as they both shall live.

And, upon recognizing their commitment to their future,
and the future of humanity,

we ourselves renew our own commitment
to goodness, to self-improvement, and to the enjoyment of life.
Amen.

Death

¹²⁴Reflection of Solace (adapted from Catholic Prayer of Solace)

May love and friendship support us all the day long,
till the shadows lengthen,
and the evening comes,
and the busy world is hushed,
and the fever of life is over
and our work is done.

May our good words and deeds endure,
and help to give humankind a safe lodging,
in goodness and righteousness, until the end of time.
Amen.

Remembrance (adapted from Catholic Prayer of the Faithful)

For our loved one,
that they may always remain in our hearts.
We remember.

For all of our deceased relatives and friends and for all who have helped us,
that their acts of goodness may live on in us.
We remember.

For the family and friends of our loved one,
that we may console each other in our grief.
We remember.

For all of us assembled here to say goodbye,
that we may not forget our loved one, but gather together again under happier circumstances.
We remember.

Questions

¹Below we cover some simple questions about Atheism that are often asked, and give some reasoned answers. Many questions have also been answered by other authors, so if you would like more detail, feel free to search out some of the texts listed in the Book of Books.

Q. How can Atheists be sure there is no god/soul/heaven?

A. Before you can even ask such a question, you have to define god, and where such a concept came from. Were you born thinking such a thing existed? Or were you taught it from a young age? You *want* to believe such a thing exists, that there is also some sort of supernatural afterlife; we all have such feelings as children. It alleviates our fear of our own deaths and the fear of the deaths of our loved ones. But no such thing exists. When you die, your body decomposes. None of us wants to end existence, but we all will, someday.

Also, you need to ask yourself *why* people claim a god exists. Beyond blind faith in a religious tome and fear of death, there is the additional attempt to explain why the natural processes happened that brought us here. People once thought that the gods occasionally stole the sun. Now we have learned what a solar eclipse is. People once thought god caused earthquakes. Now we know how plate tectonics work. People once thought god caused wind, rain, pregnancy, the moon, the sun, infections, disease, and war. We now know the true causes of those. One day in the future, they will say, "People once thought god caused the Big Bang. We now know the true cause of that."

Once you answer the questions of the definition of god and why people claim such a thing exists, you will realize that asking Atheists why they are sure god doesn't exist is really putting the cart before the horse. A much better way to attack the problem is to ask a theist why they are sure that god does exist. With no logical answers to the question, and no proof of their point of view, why should we believe in such a made-up concept? The viewpoint of the Atheist makes infinitely more sense.

Q. Isn't it true that all Atheists are immoral/communists/satanic/depressed/crazy/fatherless?

A. No. Atheists are just regular people like you. Read the Book of Morality to discover the true source of morals. Most Atheists are moral, just like most people in general. Atheists come in all political stripes, and do not believe in the concept of a devil, just as they don't believe in a god. Just like the general population, a few are depressed but most are not, a few have mental problems but most do not, a few were raised without a father figure but most were not.

Q. Isn't it true that Atheist countries are poorer, more immoral, and less prosperous?

A. Again we have an old myth based upon communism's usage of Atheism as a way to break the power of churches. Totalitarian institution of a doctrine, such as was done in the USSR and is currently done in China, does not equal a cultural belief in that doctrine. Few in those countries self-identify as "Atheist," most instead identify as "non-religious." In cultures where Atheism is widely accepted and not forced upon the population by government—some researchers call this "organic Atheism" as opposed to the "coercive Atheism" above—there are statistically lower rates of poverty, homicide, infant mortality, and illiteracy; and high rates of income, education, and gender equality.

These findings are well-documented in Phil Zuckerman's chapter *Atheism: Contemporary Rates and Patterns*, part of *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism* referenced in the Book of Books. This chapter can be found on the internet at www.pitzer.edu/academics/faculty/zuckerman/atheism.html as well. Zuckerman includes numerous statistics on the population of non-believers (he estimates between 500 and 750 million people do not), and on the measures of societal health mentioned above.

Q. Should Atheists be worried about going to hell? What about Pascal's Wager?

¹²A. Not at all. There is no such thing as hell. Even Agnostics (who say they don't know if there's a god or not) have no such worries. They say that if there is a god, he surely judges you on the content of your character and actions, not on which of the hundreds of different god-beliefs you subscribe to. Read the Book of Arguments for more detail on this subject.

There is neither god nor hell to worry about. We all get to live on this earth for a while, and then we die, end of story. It's really not that scary of a proposition. Death is not to be feared, for you will never experience it. Once you stop concerning yourself with death, you can better get on living your life.

Q. Do Atheists hate or deny god or the concept of a soul?

A. There is neither god nor soul to deny. And there certainly is no hatred, saying that you hate god is like saying that you hate Yosemite Sam. Both are fictional characters. How did you come up with a god to ask the question about anyway? The same way Yosemite Sam came about: somebody made him up.

In theory, I could raise a generation of children on a deserted island, and instruct them from the earliest ages that an invisible pink unicorn created the world, and she creates miracles such as the sun going up and down every day, and that we must eat ham and pineapple pizza once a week lest we be cast down into a pit of poison ivy after our death and left there to itch for all eternity. Add on a "holy book" that has the teachings of the invisible pink unicorn, plus some additional moral teachings and stories. Then we could have weekly ham and pineapple pizza dinners, and read the holy book, and I could tell them they're all safe now, after they die they'll go to the sunny field of clover instead.

Then say that one day those children grew up, had children and grandchildren, and taught them the holy word of the invisible pink unicorn. And one day one of those grandchildren came knocking on your front door, and preached the holy word of the invisible pink unicorn, and you denied it. Those grandchildren could ask you the very same question asked above. Why do you hate the invisible pink unicorn? You're just denying her existence. You have been presented with her holy words, why do you say they are untrue? Aren't you afraid of the pit of poison ivy? Don't you want the sunny field of clover? Heck, without her, the sun won't go up!

And of course, you would reply as I do: Where did you hear about invisible pink unicorn? How do you know the source was correct? Just because the "holy word" is several generations old doesn't make it true. How could such a being cast you into torment just because you weren't raised on the island? Through the science of astronomy, we know the earth rotates and the sun is fixed, why do you say the sun goes up and down because of the actions of the invisible pink unicorn?

Of course such a religion is silly. But it is just as logical, and just as well-based, as Christianity or any other religion. The premises are all false.

Q. Aren't Atheists terrified of death, since they don't think there is a heaven?

A. Actually, Atheists are probably less afraid of the state of "being dead" than theists. Unlike the traditional theist, who might worry about being judged in some way and possibly found wanting, or might worry that the afterlife is different than they imagined; the Atheist knows that there is no afterlife, and they will not experience anything. You'll never know what it's like to be dead, because to "know," you have to be alive. Atheists rightfully avoid death and celebrate life, though, because they know that this life is all we get.

Q. Is homosexuality (or gay marriage) immoral?

A. We have learned that all morality is based on sympathy, so we must go back to that. Are homosexual actions between two consenting adults harmful to anyone else? Of course not. Do the participants consider it harmful to them? Obviously not, they consented to it. So why should the rest of us care whether someone is homosexual or heterosexual or something in between?

Questions 24-34

²⁴As for gay marriage, we do see a large societal benefit in marriage, straight or gay. Pair-bonding creates a more stable family environment, and gives a person someone to rely on for support. Since it hurts no one, and helps those in such a relationship, why should there be a problem with gay marriage? The same goes with raising children. There is no evidence whatsoever that children of gay couples suffer more abuse, are less well-adjusted, or are in any way less nurtured or cared-for than children of straight couples.

To paraphrase Thomas Jefferson, homosexuality and gay marriage neither pick your pocket nor break your leg.

Q. Since homosexuality is okay, have we opened the door to child molestation, bestiality, and polygamy?

A. This is a commonly-used extrapolation by theists who argue the immorality of homosexuality. It is also quite an absurd argument. As stated above, homosexuality between consenting adults is morally acceptable. However, neither children nor animals have the capacity to consent, so any sexual activity with them would be morally unacceptable. Especially in the case of children, sexual activity is doubly immoral, in that we are both causing harm to the child and to the child's parents.

The extrapolation to polygamy is quite curious, given the history of many religions in support of it. The bible supported polygamy and extramarital concubines, and polygamy was supported by the Mormon religion until they sought statehood in the United States. And, in some Islamic countries polygamy is still legal. Should polygamy be legal? Now we are treading into the area of cultural norms, and (if all participants are willing adults) outside the concern of mere morality. There are significant cultural benefits to only officially sanctioning pair-bonding, not the least of which is simplicity of laws. Beyond that, many cultures with polygamy have been tied to the subjugation of women and to attempts at child marriage, which are immoral.

So, although lasting polygamous relationships between consenting adults are possible and the participants should not be guilty of any crime, still there is a legitimate argument that society should only officially sanction pair-bonding with a legal status such as marriage, due to the inherent complexities and confusion of polygamy. Preventing homosexuals from using the "marriage" structure only causes undue hardships on innocent people who are otherwise fulfilling all the other duties of members of society. And granting them marriage causes little to no confusion, harm, or complexity to the rest of us.

Q. Do Atheists believe that religious people are inherently immoral?

A. No, as we learned in the Book of Morality, most people apply the concept of sympathy for other people in their daily lives, regardless of religious beliefs. In fact, attempts at converting non-believers are, in their eyes, "helping" or "protecting" another person. They are misguided, but most are moral. However, some theists will cross the border, and in certain cases accept written teachings or the words of preachers over their own innate sensibilities. When this happens, you can have otherwise good people committing immoral actions, in the name of religion.

Q. Is it true that there are no Atheists in foxholes?

A. Absolutely not. In the United States, there is a group called the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers, or M*A*A*F. (We list their website in the Book of Resources.) There are larger secular and Atheist populations in Europe, and there are undoubtedly quite a few Atheists in their military organizations. The Czech Republic, a military ally of the United States, is incredibly secular, with only a third of its population self-identifying with a religion, and less than twelve percent attending services regularly. By many estimates over half of their population consider themselves Atheists. So it would be absurd to say that a country that openly boasts of being the most Atheistic in Europe has "no Atheists" in their foxholes.

Q. Why do Atheists dislike religion or prayer in public schools? Couldn't Atheist children just ignore that part or opt out?

³⁵A. The easiest way to answer to this common question from theists is to turn it around. What if the particular school was 90% Muslim and you were Christian? Would you be comfortable having your child exposed to daily prayers that say that infidels will burn in hell? Would you like your child to be ostracized for opting out?

Of course not. The choice of religious indoctrination is a choice for adults (for themselves) and of parents (for their children). Children should not be exposed to religious indoctrination against their parents' wishes in a vulnerable setting such as a public school.

Q. So why should children who believe in creationism and a young earth be exposed to "indoctrination against their parents' wishes" like the Big Bang Theory and the Theory of Evolution? Isn't that indoctrination into Secular Humanism?

A. Merely because a religion says that $2+2=5$ does not make it so, nor should it exempt their child from mathematics. If religious teaching says something that the physical world shows is obviously false, schools have no obligation whatsoever to give in to such religious beliefs. Schools are charged with teaching our children about the physical and social world around them, and the tools used to understand it. Religion should deal only with the "metaphysical," that which is beyond the inspection of the physical world. Schools must remain silent on such issues, to permit parents to teach as they see fit. But if a religion tries to pronounce on the physical world, and science clearly shows a different conclusion, science must be taught, as religion has overstepped its bounds.

Theists often confuse Atheism and Secular Humanism with science. While Atheism and Secular Humanism actively oppose the tenets of religion, science does not. Science merely tests the physical world objectively, and accepts what is provable, and discards what is not provable. That science has shown us the Big Bang Theory and the Theory of Evolution are supported by vast mountains of evidence with no credible evidence against does not mean science is anti-religion, just that it is pro-evidence. If that physical evidence disproves a major religious belief, it is incumbent on the theist to question why their beliefs contradict actual evidence. Religious beliefs, absent evidence, should be confined to the metaphysical, and have no place whatsoever in the curriculum of a public school beyond history class or something like a comparative religions class.

Q. Hasn't it been proven that prayer helps the ill?

A. Individual prayer by ill people can help a person calm themselves down, which can have a positive health effect by lowering blood pressure and stress. This effect is the same as that of non-prayer meditation, and it comes completely from a person's own mind and body, there is no supernatural effect. In addition, a religious person who is informed of the prayers of others may gain the same sense of well-being, again a product of their own minds. If you have a firm (but erroneous) belief that prayers will help you, and you are told that dozens of others are personally praying for you, you might achieve a state like meditation. Of course, this would work even if they were not praying for you, but you were told that they were.

But as for "intercessory" prayer, or prayer from a distance without knowledge of the prayer being given, there are no credible, peer-reviewed, repeatable studies that have shown any effect whatsoever. None at all. And there never will be, because supernatural happenings such as healing by intercessory prayer do not occur in the real world.

Q. Can an Atheist/skeptic believe in things like UFOs or Bigfoot?

A. The short answer is yes, simply because such things are scientifically and demonstrably possible. Intelligent beings on other planets could build spaceships, just as we have, and visit other worlds. There were other intelligent hominids who coexisted with *Homo sapiens* (we now have evidence of the existence of *Homo floresiensis*, who anecdotally might have become extinct only as recently as the last few hundred years), and it may be possible—though quite unlikely—that a few remaining specimens are still alive and successfully hiding from us.

Questions 45-49

⁴⁵However, such claims should always be met with a healthy dose of skepticism. Many who promote such beliefs very much *want* to believe in something different, much as theists very much *want* to believe in a god. Without firm evidence, we must assume that such claims are likely untrue. So for Bigfoot, the jury is out, but he likely doesn't exist. Regarding UFOs, aliens likely exist somewhere (certainly if the universe is infinite, much as the ten dice will all land with the same number if you roll them enough times), but there is a great deal of doubt about whether they have yet visited the Earth, or even if they ever will.

Q. There are so many charities/hospitals out there that are associated with religion, why aren't there any Atheist/skeptic charities/hospitals?

A. This misconception arises because in the United States quite a few hospitals are named by their religious affiliation, or after a particular Catholic saint, even though they receive a considerable amount of public funding. This testifies to the organizational powers and pervasiveness of religion in the U.S., not to any uncharitable nature of the small minority of Atheists in America. It would be akin to saying that Sikhs must be uncharitable, why aren't there any Sikh hospitals in America? Logically, it's an absurd argument.

But moreover, it's patently untrue. As mentioned in the Book of Charity, Atheists have started quite a few charities and donated to and started many hospitals. Many Atheists and skeptics have given billions of dollars toward charities that have improved the lives of their fellow citizens. In the Book of Charity, we read about Girard's support of hospitals and orphans, Lick's donations for science, Carnegie's libraries, Soros' democracy initiatives, Buffett's boys and girls clubs, Gates' efforts to vaccinate against disease, Indu Tai's clinics and hospitals, Penn & Teller's blood drives, and the donations of the Atheist community to help the victims of the 2004 tsunami and the 2005 hurricanes. Atheists have time and time again donated time and money to helping out humanity.

It is clear that Atheists and Freethinkers have made enormous contributions specifically to hospitals, and in general to a host of other charitable causes.

Resources

¹Below is a list of the major, active English-language Atheism and freethought groups and websites and forums, as of 2006, categorized by type. Many of these have further links to more specific groups—such as local Atheist groups— or more specific websites. Where appropriate, we have also listed addresses. Although the mail and web addresses will gradually change after 2006, this list should be useful for quite some time, as we have listed only well-traveled and important groups. Also note that some of the sites and the forums available from these sites may have threads with adult topics not suitable for children.

Major Atheism/Freethinker Information Portals/Communities/References

The Brights' Net

www.the-brights.net

P.O. Box 163418, Sacramento, CA 95816

The Brights seek recognition and acceptance for a naturalistic worldview, and seek to be an umbrella group for all Freethinkers. They have dozens of organized local groups worldwide, and a forum that attracts hundreds of regular users.

Council for Secular Humanism (Center For Inquiry)

www.secularhumanism.org (centerforinquiry.net)

P.O. Box 664, Amherst, NY 14226-0664

CSH promotes secular humanist principles (including reason, personal fulfillment, ethical conduct, good will) and programs, and through the Center For Inquiry critically examines the claims of religion. The largest organized secular “religious” group, they have hundreds of organized local Secular Humanist groups worldwide, plus around a dozen local CFI communities. They have a great deal of useful articles, research, and links on their websites.

Secular Web (Internet Infidels Discussion Board) (Atheism Web)

www.infidels.org (www.iidb.org) (infidels.org/news/atheism)

P.O. Box 142, Colorado Springs, CO 80901-0142

The Secular Web is a treasure trove of freethought articles, resources, and links. They also have an extensive online library of historical and modern works on skepticism and Atheism. In addition, their well-regulated forum, the Internet Infidels, is the single most-visited freethought forum on the web, with over two thousand active visitors each month. Visit, but be sure to read the rules before you post! Atheism Web has categorized content much like parts of the Bible of the Good and Moral Atheist, with articles covering some similar topics.

Major Objectivism Information Portals/Communities/References

The Ayn Rand Institute: The Center for the Advancement of Objectivism

www.aynrand.org

2121 Alton Parkway, Suite 250, Irvine, California, 92606-4926

ARI follows the rational self-interest philosophy of Ayn Rand more strictly than The Objectivist Center (mentioned next), not accepting compromise with other philosophies. ARI also owns the rights to Rand’s written works. ARI promotes the philosophy of Objectivism through over 80 student organizations in the U.S. and abroad, and supports contests, offers internships, gives out teaching materials, and sponsors lectures and conferences.

The Objectivist Center

www.objectivistcenter.org

1001 Connecticut Ave. NW, Suite 425, Washington, DC 20036

TOC follows the teachings of Ayn Rand, sometimes described as “rational selfishness,” and promotes “reason, individualism, freedom, and achievement.” They have dozens of local groups in the U.S. and Canada, plus some international groups as well. Unlike ARI (mentioned previous), they support compromise and collaboration with other groups when seeking a common goal, and consider Objectivism to be an open system available to future interpretation.

Predominantly American Organizations/Communities

7American Atheists (American Atheist quarterly journal)

www.atheists.org (www.americanatheist.org)

P.O. Box 5733, Parsippany, NJ 07054-6733

Founded by Madalyn Murray O'Hair, American Atheists seeks to protect the rights of Atheists and promote the separation of church and state in the United States, through activism, legal action, press releases, scholarships, and radio and television appearances. They have dozens of affiliated groups, including M*A*A*F and some Secular Humanist groups. Their website also has some strong articles against religion, reflecting their pro-Atheism and anti-religion stance.

American Ethical Union

www.aeu.org

2 West 64th Street, New York, NY 10023

The AEU is a federation of several dozen Ethical Societies (humanist groups which date back to 1876), mostly in the U.S., which place high value on human dignity and seek to study and improve the lot of humanity through critical analysis.

American Humanist Association (Humanist Society)

www.americanhumanist.org (www.hsof.org)

1777 T Street, NW, Washington, DC 20009-7125

The AHA, founded in 1941, stands for the Humanist ideal, defends the freedoms of Humanists, and pushes for change in society. They have many dozens of affiliates, including many that are also listed on the Council for Secular Humanism website. The AHA promotes grass-roots activism with Action Alerts, press releases, and letter-writing campaigns.

Atheist Alliance International (Atheist Alliance)

www.atheistalliance.org

P.O. Box 26867, Los Angeles, CA, 90026

AAI seeks to promote democratically-elected Atheist societies and Atheist educational programs. Its affiliates include over fifty groups in the U.S. and abroad. They exist as somewhat of an alternative to American Atheists, with a different political stance.

Atheist Meetup Groups

atheists.meetup.com

There are hundreds of worldwide meetup groups listed here, with dozens having more than fifty members. Most groups meet monthly. These groups are a great way to meet other Atheists for those who are just seeking others for social contacts and might be uncomfortable with the more religious constructs of Secular Humanism or Unitarian Universalism.

Atheist/Freethinker Charities

Humanist Charities (American Humanist Association charity)

<https://www.americanhumanist.org/secure/humanistcharities.php>

Humanist Charities is the charitable office of the American Humanist Association. This is still in the startup phase, set up for relief for Hurricane Katrina as of the writing of this book. They give the option of giving 5% to help establish Humanist Charities as a permanent entity for charitable giving.

Secular Humanist Aid and Relief Efforts (S.H.A.R.E.) (Secular Humanist charity)

www.secularhumanism.org, under "Home" menu

S.H.A.R.E., started in the 1980s, is the charitable office of The Council for Secular Humanism.

Political/Issue Organizations/Resources

¹⁴American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)

www.aclu.org

125 Broad Street, 18th Floor, New York, NY 10004

The ACLU seeks to preserve the civil rights of Americans including privacy issues, freedom of speech, and freedom from government support of or intrusion into personal beliefs about religion. They are very active in speaking out about and litigating against abuses of government. Founded in 1920, they deal with thousands of court cases each year.

Americans for Religious Liberty

www.arlinc.org

P.O. Box 6656, Silver Spring, MD 20916

Founded in 1981 in response to the increase of religious fundamentalism in the United States, the Americans for Religious Liberty organization supports the separation of church and state through litigation, education, publishing, public speaking, and other means. ARL publishes a quarterly newsletter called *The Voice of Reason*, and has available for sale on their website many publications on the topic of separation of church and state, and on the influence of the religious right.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State

www.au.org

518 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002

AU, founded in 1947, seeks to keep church and government completely separate in the United States. Members of the group—AU counts over 75,000 members as of 2006—include people from many different religious affiliations who believe in keeping religion out of government. They are active in litigation and advocacy for all church-state issues in the U.S.

AU also publishes a monthly magazine called *Church & State*, and also a blog called *The Wall of Separation*, a compilation of articles written by multiple contributors. Additionally, the site includes extensive coverage of news related to issues of separation of church and state. The “Resources” section of the AU site contains a great deal of excellent material on the history of church/state separation as well as background material on key figures from the religious right.

Coalition for the Community of Reason

www.communityofreason.org

6 Peele Place, Charleston, SC 29401

CCR is a coalition of other national-scale Freethinker organizations, dedicated to “publicize, advance, & defend the community of reason.” Its members include the American Humanist Association, the Institute for Humanist Studies, Atheist Alliance International, the Secular Student Alliance, the Secular Web, the Humanist Institute, Camp Quest, and the Humanist Society.

Council of Ethics-Based Organizations

cebo.org

777 UN Plaza, AHA office, New York, NY 10017

CEBO is associated with the Department of Public Information of the United Nations, and includes the American Ethical Union, the AHA and the IHEU. The goal of CEBO is to coordinate and raise awareness of Humanist viewpoints in the UN.

²⁰**DefCon**

www.defconamerica.org

DefCon's tagline describes them as a "Campaign to Defend the Constitution, Because the Religious Right is Wrong." The goal of the group is to stop the religious right in every political arena, including the following issues: judicial appointments, medical research, reproductive rights, gay and lesbian rights, the evolution/creation debate in classrooms, church/state separation, and end-of-life decisions. The site includes great news coverage of the various issues, detailed information on the biggest figures of the religious right, and blogs from several different sources. DefCon's supporters and board members include both people from traditional religions and Freethinkers.

Freedom From Religion Foundation

www.ffrf.org

PO Box 750, Madison, WI 53701

The FFRF is active for Freethinkers in many arenas, including litigation, scholarships, and publishing. They actively campaign against any religious entanglement in government, and for civil rights for women and homosexuals. Their website provides a great deal of useful information about the Skepticism of the founders of the United States, and the intentional separation of church and state they embodied in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

The FFRF also sponsors the annual July 4th freethought celebration at Lake Hypatia, in Alabama, where the "Atheists in Foxholes" monument resides. For more information about this event, see the "Lake Hypatia Advance" entry on the next page under "Student/Youth/Educational Organizations and Camps."

Godless Americans Political Action Committee (GAMPAC)

www.godlessamericans.org

PO Box 5674, Parsippany, NJ 07054

GAMPAC is the political arm of American Atheists. They endorse candidates who support separation of church and state, and report on legislative activity that affects Atheists.

Institute for Humanist Studies (Humanists Net)

www.humaniststudies.org (humanists.net)

48 Howard Street, Albany, NY 12207-1608

The Institute for Humanist Studies is a non-membership think tank dedicated to promoting humanist values, through education, media releases, newsletters, grants, and political action. Their site also has a lightly-traveled discussion board.

People For the American Way

www.pfaw.org

2000 M Street, NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20036

PFAW supports the American ideals of "pluralism, individuality, freedom of thought, expression and religion, a sense of community, and tolerance and compassion for others." They are active in the arenas of civil rights, religious liberties, judicial independence, public education, and countering the effect of the religious right. They produce scorecards for the legislative votes of elected representatives.

Secular Coalition for America

www.secular.org

The Secular Coalition for America files legal briefs and seeks lobbying opportunities in Congress. They function politically much as GAMPAC does, and its members include the American Humanist Association, the Atheist Alliance International, the Institute for Humanist Studies, the Secular Student Alliance, the Society for Humanistic Judaism, the Secular Web/Internet Infidels, and their newest member, the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

Student/Youth/Educational Organizations and Camps

²⁷Camp Inquiry (Inquiring Minds educational program)

www.campinquiry.org (www.inquiringminds.org)

Camp Inquiry is a residential summer camp for Humanist and other Freethinker children ages 7 to 16. Their program offers some traditional summer camp activities, altered slightly to focus on science, critical thought, ethics, and diversity. They will rent facilities near Holland, New York, for their first camp in 2006. The camp is sponsored by the Center For Inquiry.

Camp Quest

www.camp-quest.com

Camp Quest is a residential summer camp for Freethinker children ages 8 to 17. They emphasize critical thought and interest in history and science, while also offering traditional summer camp outdoor activities. They have facilities in Ohio, Michigan, Minnesota, Tennessee, Ontario, and California, all of which can be found from links on the site.

Center For Inquiry – On Campus (formerly Campus Freethought Alliance)

www.campusfreethought.org

PO Box 741, Amherst, NY 14228

CFI – On Campus promotes freethought and skepticism at college and high schools, with over a hundred affiliated groups in the in the United States and dozens more outside the U.S. They are sponsored by the Center For Inquiry, listed below under groups investigating paranormal claims. CFI – On Campus functions very similarly to the Secular Student Alliance.

COHE: The Continuum of Humanist Education

humanisteducation.com

48 Howard Street, Albany, NY 12207-1608

COHE is “the Internet’s first website offering interactive courses in humanist thought.” They are affiliated with the Institute for Humanist Studies (below under political groups) and staff mostly PhD’s to teach their courses.

Lake Hypatia Advance

www.ffrf.org/lakehypatia/

Roger, Pat, and Melody Cleveland deeded land to the Freedom From Religion Foundation for the location of this “advance” (as opposed to “retreat”) in Alabama. The FFRF raised funds and constructed buildings there, and each year the Cleveland family and the Alabama Freethought Association invite Freethinkers from around the country to visit on Independence Day for speeches and outdoor recreation at these campgrounds in rural Alabama. Lake Hypatia is also the location of the Atheists in Foxholes monument.

The Humanist Institute

www.humanistinstitute.org

PMB #220, 8014 Olson Memorial Hwy., Golden Valley, MN 55427-4712

The Humanist Institute is “a leadership training program” created and sponsored by the North American Committee for Humanism. The Institute offers a three-year program at the graduate level toward a Graduate Certificate in Humanist Leadership. Many graduates of this program continue on to work in various Humanist organizations.

Secular Student Alliance

www.secularstudents.org

P.O. Box 3246, Columbus, OH 43210

SSA was started in 2000 with the help of some of the former founders of the Campus Freethought Alliance (now CFI – On Campus), as another umbrella group for college and high-school secular groups. SSA has grown to about a third the size of CFI – On Campus in that short time, with over forty groups in the United States and several outside the U.S.

Secular Organizations and Resources that Reference Religious Backgrounds

³⁴ChristianHumanism.org

www.christianhumanism.org

The web site promotes a Freethought, Humanist approach to the teachings of Jesus, welcoming Deists, Agnostics, and “non-theists” alike. Although not updated in some time, it has a great list of links to Humanistic Christian groups.

ExChristian.Net

www.exchristian.net

This site encourages ex-Christians and helps them sort through the errors in Christianity and the bible. It has an active forum with hundreds of regular posters. Also here are regular articles and testimonials from other ex-Christians.

The Rejection of Pascal’s Wager: A Skeptic’s Guide to Christianity

www.geocities.com/paulntobin/

Paul Tobin’s site is likely the single most well-organized, detailed refutation of the Christian myth that exists today.

Skeptic’s Annotated Bible

www.skepticsannotatedbible.com

After visiting the Skeptic’s Annotated Bible, you’ll never look at the Bible the same way again! This amazing, well-organized site covers the bible by chapter and verse, with special notations for categories such as violence, intolerance, contradictions, interesting family values, treatment of women, and sexual content. Everything is cross-referenced and categorized. The site also covers the Quran and the Book of Mormon, and has many useful links for Atheists.

Apostates of Islam

www.apostatesofislam.com

A great site for ex-Muslims, Apostates of Islam also includes a discussion forum with nearly a thousand registered members. The site looks at controversial passages in the Quran, and has explanations covering flaws of Islamic theism. Their “Meet the Apostates” page lists close to 200 individual ex-Muslims with contact information and links to good sites. This list includes over 100 who self-describe as Agnostic, Atheist, Humanist, or something similar.

Institute for the Secularisation of Islamic Society

www.secularislam.org

The goal of this group is to create a network of freethinkers in Islamic countries. Their site has quite a few links to other useful sites on the topic, although some links are outdated.

Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations

www.csjo.org

320 Claymore Blvd., Richmond Heights, OH 44143

CSJO promotes Jewish culture in a secular setting. They have several dozen secular Jewish affiliates (including many adult meeting groups) in the U.S., Canada, and England. They link to the Society of Humanistic Judaism as well.

The International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism

(International Federation of Secular Humanist Jews, Leadership Conference of Secular and Humanist Jews)

www.iishj.org (www.ifshj.org www.lcshj.org)

28611 West Twelve Mile Road, Farmington Hills, MI 48334

The IISHJ serves as an umbrella group and central portal for the various Humanistic Judaism groups, including both the Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations and the Society for Humanistic Judaism among its affiliated groups.

Society for Humanistic Judaism

www.shj.org

28611 West Twelve Mile Road, Farmington Hills, MI 48334

SHJ’s site has much information on Humanistic Judaism, its history, and secular celebrations of Jewish holidays. They have dozens of affiliate groups (mostly full congregations), and affiliate with many organizations worldwide.

theinfidels.org (Unitarian Universalist Infidels)

www.theinfidels.org

UU Infidels, 16265-D Dahlgren Road, King George, VA 22485

This site is for Atheists within the Unitarian Universalist church. They seek to protect the ambiguous stance of the UU church with respect to deities. They have a good deal of links here to other useful sites.

Culture-Specific Organizations

⁴⁴African Americans for Humanism

www.secularhumanism.org under "Programs" menu

P.O. Box 664, Amherst, NY 14226-0664

AAH promotes Humanism among the African American community, primarily through their publication of articles in the *AAH Examiner*, a newsletter started in 1991.

AtheistParents.org

www.atheistparents.org

This site has many articles of interest and resources for Atheists who are raising children. Although the front page has not been recently updated, their forum has over a hundred active posters and many more occasional visitors.

Gay and Lesbian Humanist Association [UK]

www.galha.org

34 Spring Lane, Kenilworth, CV8 2HB, England, UK

GALHA is the largest autonomous gay and lesbian humanist association in the world. Based in the UK, they also have members in other countries, and have links to the Council for Secular Humanism (based in the U.S.) as well as other UK-based Humanist groups.

Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers (M*A*A*F)

www.maaf.info

M*A*A*F is a group for Freethinkers who are active or who served in the armed forces (primarily from the U.S.), or for their families. They serve as a voice for military Freethinkers when abuses occur, and offer quite a few resources. They have a lightly traveled forum, as well.

Secular Organizations for Sobriety

www.secularsobriety.org

4773 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, CA 90027

SOS is a sobriety group where steps to recovery (unlike other programs) are from a secular, non-theist perspective.

Skepchick

www.skepchick.org

Skepchick is a new women-oriented site/internet magazine with news, featured articles, special reports, fan mail, and a related blog. It also has an active internet discussion forum, and an annual photographic Skepchick calendar.

Other Useful Atheism References

Atheist Directory (AtheistWorld)

atheistworld.com

This is just a site of links to other sites, with a few out-of-date ones. But as it has such an impressive categorized and annotated list (over 200 sites), including many links not found elsewhere, we include it here as a good resource.

Atheist Empire

atheistempire.com

This site has a great variety of useful and fun information. The related forum is unfortunately the list of posts type.

CelebAtheists

www.celebatheists.com

CelebAtheists is just that, a list of celebrity Atheists—and other Freethinkers—in Wiki form. Take a look and see which of your favorite celebrities are also Atheists!

Positive Atheism

www.positiveatheism.org

This ambitious website has an impressive list of quotes and downloadable historical texts on Atheism, plus articles and de-conversion stories. They also host the official website of The Atheist Centre, founded in India by Gora, and have a large collection of his written works.

Media-Related Sites

⁵⁴**Atheist Network** [online radio network and discussion forum]

www.atheistnetwork.com

This is an online radio network and a related forum with hundreds of active posters.

Booktalk.org [book site and online discussion forum]

www.booktalk.org

P.O. Box 4624, Clearwater, FL 33758

Booktalk.org is a site dedicated to freethought books. They have an active discussion forum, and sponsor chats with such notable authors as Richard Dawkins, Massimo Pigliucci, and Michael Shermer. They also set up discussions for a book each quarter, similar to a book-of-the-month club, and review not only non-fiction work, but fiction as well.

Freethought Media (Rational Response Squad) [online radio network and discussion forum]

www.freethoughtmedia.com (www.rationalresponders.com)

This is a brand new online radio network, affiliated with The Infidel Guy. They also have a discussion forum.

The Infidel Guy [online radio show and discussion forum]

www.infidelguy.com

This is the site of Reggie Finley, an Atheist who hosts a popular online radio show. The Infidel Guy has had dozens of famous Atheist and Skeptic guests on his show, from James Randi to Michael Shermer to Julia Sweeney. Finley's site also has quite a few resources and links, plus an active forum with many hundreds of regular contributors.

Prometheus Books [book publisher]

www.prometheusbooks.com

59 John Glenn Drive, Amherst, NY 14228-2197

Among their offerings, Prometheus publishes a great deal of books on the subjects of Skepticism and Atheism.

Rationalist Press Association [book publisher]

www.rationalist.org.uk

One Gower Street, London, WC1E 6HD, England, UK

The RPA, affiliated with the IHEU and the British Humanist Association, publishes works covering "rationalist thought and debate in the UK and worldwide." Their offerings include books and their magazine, the *New Humanist*.

Atheism Retailers and Dating Sites

4 Atheists

www.4atheists.com

4 Atheists has a marketplace for Atheist-owned/related businesses, plus news and links.

The Affable Atheist's Store

www.cafepress.com/affable_atheist

Retailer offering Atheist apparel, bumper stickers, mugs, greeting cards, and more.

EvolveFish.com

evolvefish.com

Retailer offering Atheist apparel, bumper stickers, jewelry (EvolveFish & Humanist), greeting cards and more.

Ring of Fire Enterprises

www.rof.com

Retailer offering Atheist apparel, bumper stickers, jewelry (IPU & FSM), car emblems and more.

FreethinkerMatch

www.freethinkermatch.com

A secular Freethinker matchmaking/dating site.

Secularity

www.secularity.com

A secular Freethinker matchmaking/dating site.

Inquiry into Paranormal or Creationist Claims

66 Center for Inquiry

centerforinquiry.net

P.O. Box 741, Amherst, NY 14226

The goal of the Center for Inquiry is to promote and defend science and reason. Founded in 1991 as a joint venture between CSICOP and CSH (Council for Secular Humanism), CFI conducts conferences and seminars, and publishes newsletters and reports. They link to the Commission for Scientific Medicine and Mental Health (CSMMH) which investigates claims regarding alternative medicine, and the Committee for the Scientific Examination of Religion (CSER) which investigates supposed miracles and other supernatural events of a religious nature.

Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP)

www.csicop.org

P.O. Box 703, Amherst, NY, 14226

CSICOP encourages critical scientific review of paranormal claims. They support research, conduct meetings and seminars, and publish articles relating to skeptical review of such claims.

EvoWiki

www.evowiki.org

EvoWiki is a Wikipedia-style site covering evolution and the Big Bang from a pro-science point of view. It is one of the most complete resources on the topic that exists today, and serves as a great reference.

James Randi Educational Foundation

www.randi.org

201 S.E. 12th St. (E. Davie Blvd.), Fort Lauderdale, FL 33316-1815

Founded by magician James Randi, JREF tackles claims of the paranormal, and has a long-standing million-dollar offer to anyone who can prove in a controlled setting that they do have “super” powers. The site has an active forum with hundreds of regular users, and if you look, you can find a list of recent applications for the million dollar challenge.

National Center for Science Education

www.natcensied.org

420 40th Street, Suite 2, Oakland, CA 94609-2509

The NCSE promotes the teaching of evolution in U.S. public schools. The site provides news and history on the debate, and resources for parents and teachers. They have a great response to creationist Jonathan Wells’ “Ten Questions to Ask Your Biology Teacher,” found in the Resources section under “Teaching Evolution.” They also keep “Project Steve,” a list of scientists named Steve (or Stephanie or Stefan, etc.) who support evolution, to counter lists of scientists who question evolution. (The project can be found at www.ncseweb.org/article.asp?category=18.)

Skeptic Friends Network (Skeptic Friends Network Forum)

www.skepticfriends.org

SFN is an informative, detailed site with regular features on skepticism, a dubious claims list, and an active forum.

The Skeptics Society, Skeptic Magazine (The Skeptics Society Forum)

www.skeptic.com (www.skepticforum.com)

P.O. Box 338, Altadena, CA 91001

The Skeptics Society, founded by author and Scientific American columnist Michael Shermer, is an educational and scientific group. They publish Skeptic magazine, sponsor lectures and conferences, and support an active web forum.

Snopes.com (Urban Legends Reference Pages)

www.snopes.com

Snopes is one of the best authorities out there on the topic of urban legends. We include it here because it’s a good resource for debunking of incorrect “chain” emails, including ones regarding Atheism or supposed miracles.

The Talk.Origins Archive (The TalkOrigins Foundation)

www.talkorigins.org

5914 Hummingbird, Houston, TX 77096-5828

This site has articles and essays on the evolution/creation debate from a Usenet newsgroup. The site provides scientific responses to the most common questions on the debate, and www.talkorigins.org/indexcc/ is an impressive sorted index of all creationist claims, with answers to them all.

References for Atheist Holidays

⁷⁵Banned Books Week (American Library Association)

www.ala.org/ala/oif/bannedbooksweek/bannedbooksweek.htm

The ALA has co-sponsored Banned Books Week since its inception in 1982, along with other groups of librarians, journalists, publishers, and booksellers. Their site offers posters, historical information on Banned Books Week, lists of books challenged in the past, and information on what to do if a book is challenged in your community.

Banned Books Week (Amnesty International USA)

www.amnestyusa.org/bannedbooks/

Amnesty International lists authors and journalists around the world who are threatened or jailed for their writings. They also have a good list of resources and links to other sites on the topic of censorship.

Darwin Day Celebration

www.darwinday.org

Darwin Day Celebration promotes the celebration of the birthday of Charles Darwin as a way to encourage public education about science. The organization, supported by such luminaries as Richard Dawkins and Michael Shermer, registers Darwin Day events for each year. They are now counting down to Darwin's 200th birthday, coming up on February 12th, 2009.

Earth Day Network

www.earthday.org

1616 P Street NW, Suite 340, Washington, D.C. 20036

Founded by the organizers of the first Earth Day, this site promotes Earth Day celebrations and environmentalist activities throughout the world.

HumanLight

www.humanlight.org

P.O. Box 8212, Somerville, NJ 08876

This site promotes and publicizes the Humanist holiday of HumanLight, started in 2001 and celebrated every December 23rd. They list information about HumanLight gatherings in various communities, and show pictures of prior events.

Human Rights Day (UN)

www.un.org/events/humanrights

This UN site has information about events and observances for Human Rights Day, plus other useful information on the topic of human rights efforts around the world.

National Day of Reason

www.nationaldayofreason.org

In response to the National Day of Prayer proclamation of 2002, this site supports and promotes National Day of Reason events, proclamations and protests. The site has a list of endorsers, including many dozens of organizations and hundreds of individuals.

Secular Seasons

www.secularseasons.org

Secular Seasons is a site that lists information about the various secular holidays, along with celebration ideas for holidays and other events such as namings and weddings. The project is dedicated to site co-founder (along with Amanda Chesworth) Deidre Conn. Conn, who was also one of the early pioneers in the student freethought movement and a frequent visitor to Camp Quest, suffered a coronary attack due to a genetic disorder, and now is mostly brain dead without hope for recovery. But her work lives on in the Secular Seasons Project, and in this book in the Book of Celebrations, which would not be possible without her efforts.

Large Active Atheism Internet Forums (sorted by traffic level)

⁸³**Internet Infidels Discussion Board** (part of the Secular Web) – www.iidb.org/vbb/index.php

IIDB, geared toward both Atheists and Freethinkers, is the single most-heavily traveled Atheist forum. As of mid-February 2006—the date of all of the statistics on this page—it had over 3,900 “regulars” (members with 50 posts or more), and over 3.1 million posts. Moderators can be somewhat strict, so follow the rules!

JREF Forum (part of the James Randi Educational Foundation) – forums.randi.org/forumindex.php

The skeptic-oriented JREF Forum has over 1500 regulars with 50-plus posts, and a total of over 1.4 million posts.

The Infidel Guy Forum – www.infidelguy.com/forums.html

Reggie Finley’s radio show forum counts more than 600 regulars with over 50 posts, and nearly 300,000 total posts.

Atheist Network Forum – www.atheistnetwork.com/index.php

Online radio’s Atheist Network has a well-traveled forum with over 340 regulars, and almost 200,000 posts total.

ExChristian.Net – ex-christian.net

This ex-Christian forum has over 280 regulars, and total posts of over 140,000.

Objectivism Online Forum – forum.objectivismonline.net

This forum related to the conservative atheism of Ayn Rand has 230 regulars, and totals over 76,000 posts.

Skepticalcommunity.com – www.skepticalcommunity.mu.nu/phpbb2

This skepticism forum is very active and has over 220 regulars, and total posts exceeding 185,000.

Raving Atheist Forums – www.ravingatheist.com/forum

This forum, related to a libertarian/conservative, pro-Atheist blog, has over 210 regulars, and over 72,000 posts.

Freethought Forum – www.freethought-forum.com/forum

This renaissance-feel, jovial adult forum boasts over 180 regulars, and has to date more than 170,000 posts.

AtheistParents.org – www.atheistparents.org/forum

AtheistParents’ site has some great parenting articles, and their forum has 170-plus regulars and over 110,000 posts.

Mid-sized Active Atheism Internet Forums

The Brights’ Movement Forums – www.the-brights.net/forums – 140 regulars, 66,000 posts, the Brights’ Movement.

The Skeptics Society Forum – www.skepticforum.com – 110 regulars, 32,000 posts, Michael Shermer’s Skeptics Society.

Atheists.com – atheists.com/modules.php?name=Forums – 100 regulars, 65,000 posts, has a singles listing feature.

Skeptic Friends Network Forum – www.skepticfriends.org/forum – 100 regulars, 47,000 posts, skepticism-oriented.

Apostates of Islam – www.apostatesofislam.com/forum – 85 regulars, 16,000 posts, ex-Muslims (Atheist and other).

Graveyard of the gods – www.graveyardofthegods.com/forum – 80 regulars, 32,000 posts, libertarian/anarchist, sarcastic.

Ethical Atheist Forum – www.ethicalatheist.com/forum – 60 regulars, 21,000 posts, the related site is informative.

Smaller Active Atheism Internet Forums

Atheists Anonymous – atheistanon.proboards18.com – 40 regulars, 11,000 posts, has a related information site.

Skepchick Forum – www.skepchick.mu.nu/forum – 40 regulars (just started 9/2005!), 8,000 posts, women-oriented.

No-god.com Forum – bb.bbboy.net/nogodforum – 40 regulars, 11,000 posts, anti-Christian focus.

Freethinkers Pub – p207.ezboard.com/bfreethinkerspub – 30 regulars, 37,000 posts, friendly and fun atmosphere.

Booktalk.org – pub141.ezboard.com/bbooktalk – 20 regulars, 24,000 posts, book & philosophy-oriented.

Modern Atheist – www.modernatheist.com/phpbb2 – 20 regulars, 2,900 posts, related to Godless Heathen podcast.

Atheist Coalition Forums – www.atheistcoalition.com/forums – 10 regulars, 3,400 posts, somewhat adult.

Center For Inquiry Forum – www.cfi-forums.org – 10 regulars, 3,000 posts, related to skeptical Center For Inquiry.

AtheistDebate.com – www.atheistdebate.com – 10 regulars, 2,800 posts, debate-oriented.

The Freethought Media Community – www.freethoughtmedia.com/forum – Brand new (started 2/2006), internet radio.

The Freethought Fellowship – blazergrad.org/smf/index.php – Brand new (started 4/2006), has an adult section.

International English-Language Organizations

⁹⁵International Humanist and Ethical Union

www.iheu.org

One Gower Street, London, WC1E 6HD, England, UK

Humanist Association of Canada

hac.humanists.net

PO Box 8752, Station T, Ottawa, ON, K1G 3J1, Canada

Humanist Association of Ireland

www.irish-humanists.org

47 Sugarloaf Crescent, Bray, County Wicklow, Ireland

Humanist Association of Northern Ireland (Humani)

www.nireland.humanists.net

Humanist Society of Scotland

www.humanism-scotland.org.uk

Welsh Humanists

www.humanistweb.welshnet.co.uk

British Humanist Association

www.humanism.org.uk

One Gower Street, London, WC1E 6HD, England, UK

National Secular Society [UK]

www.secularism.org.uk

25 Red Lion Square, London, WC1R 4RL, England, UK

Rationalist International [India]

www.rationalistinternational.net

P.O. Box 9110, New Delhi 110091, India

Indian Humanist Union

india.humanists.net

P.O. Box 448, New Delhi 110001, India

Atheist Foundation of Australia

www.atheistfoundation.org.au

Private Mail Bag 6, Maitland, SA 5573, Australia

Council of Australian Humanist Societies

home.vicnet.net.au/~humanist/resources/cahs.html

GPO Box 1555, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia

This page includes links to the various state-level Humanist societies in Australia.

Humanist Society of New Zealand

www.humanist.org.nz

PO Box 3372, Wellington, New Zealand

New Zealand Association of Rationalists & Humanists

www.nzarh.org.nz

Rationalist House, 64 Symonds Street, Auckland 1001, New Zealand

Future

1So what should the aspiring Atheist do now? We each choose our own path. We may call ourselves Humanists, Brights, Objectivists, Rationalists, Naturalists, Freethinkers, Skeptics, Infidels, Heretics, Non-believers, or merely Atheists. We may join a Humanist congregation or an Ethical Society or an Objectivist Salon or an Atheist Meetup Group or post at Internet Infidels. We might become politically active or not. But whatever we choose to call ourselves, whoever we choose to associate with, whatever we choose to do, we all remain committed to the ideals of goodness and morality and rational thought.

What will the future hold for Good and Moral Atheists, for all Freethinkers, indeed for all mankind? No one yet knows. We don't know the fate of humanity, or the fate of the universe. But it is in the power of each and every one of us to make changes to the world around us, and with such efforts ultimately change the final outcome. Our choices define our legacy in life.

Once more, we reflect upon The Five Tenets of the Good and Moral Atheist:

I. Morality

We commit to be Good and Moral, strive to be Virtuous and Ethical, and trust in the Goodness of Humanity.

II. Purpose

We each strive to better the world in the time we have.

III. Life

We seek to love and be loved, to reach our own potential and help others reach theirs, and to enjoy life.

IV. Freedom

We promote and guard freedoms and civil rights among all peoples.

V. Reason

We use only reason to solve problems, and encourage others to shun the falsehoods of the supernatural.

These five principles, Morality, Purpose, Life, Freedom, and Reason, will serve to guide us into the future. With them, we will make the world a better place, and take pleasure from the lives we are fortunate enough to experience. Humanity, and the human spirit, will prosper and bloom throughout our world and beyond. We take the time for one final reflection:

Let us reflect.

May we use our time wisely,
for this time upon this earth
is all the life we have.

¹²May we take pleasure from it,
and leave a positive impact
on the lives of others.

When we at last
reach the end of our journey,
may we be able to look back and say,

“Yes. I enjoyed life.
I loved my family and friends.
I made a difference.”

May our efforts add
to the goodness that is humanity,
and help it endure.
Amen.

Appendix A: Comments & Responses

¹Here we list some of the more pertinent comments received that pertain to The Bible of the Good and Moral Atheist and responses to them, in a question and answer format, organized by the related book.

Book of Morality

Q. Why do you argue for an underlying base morality? Morals are a human construct, and vary by society. How do you reconcile your position with the fact that seeing a woman's leg uncovered is immoral in many parts of the world, while it is acceptable in the United States; and that seeing a woman without a shirt is immoral in the United States, but it is acceptable in parts of Europe? Doesn't this prove that morals are all relative?

A. What we have is a difference in definition. Although we commonly use the word "moral" to describe things such as community standards of decency, I would define those as "cultural norms" instead. Cultural norms such as standards of acceptable clothing are indeed relative, and vary widely. But morals do not. Many people confuse the two because we sometimes see people who are willing to cross the boundaries of both cultural norms and morality, and wrongly paint any people who break cultural norms as immoral. Also, sometimes cultural norms intrude where we run into the gray area at the edge of morality. How much harm do things like drugs inflict on a society, is it better to ban them and jail users, or to legalize them? There are completely moral reasons for both solutions, so cultural norms come into play. How accepting is the culture of the use of such drugs?

Sometimes cultural norms themselves fall afoul of basic morality without there being two moral sides to the issue, such as slavery and racism in the past in the U.S., or currently with bride burnings in India and honor rapes and killings in Muslim societies. But as societies mature, such acts begin to earn condemnation, and eventually are removed from the list of cultural norms. Slavery has been removed from the United States as a cultural norm. Racism in the U.S. and bride burnings in India are strongly condemned, although they occur occasionally. Honor rapes and killings in Muslim societies still occur, although there is now increased awareness of the problem. Human societies are in various stages of moving their cultural norms to conform with the true morality of sympathy for others. Yes, at times we take steps backwards, such as in Nazi Germany. But as a species, overall we continue to move forwards.

Book of Quotes

Q. When you quote President Taft, you selectively clipped from his quote the preceding sentence, where he said, "I believe in God." Why?

A. A more complete quote is as follows: "I believe in God. I do not believe in the divinity of Christ and there are many other of the postulates of the orthodox creed to which I cannot subscribe." But the point of the sections on quotes from American political icons was not to show that they were Atheists, it was to show that they did not follow the dogma of the Religious Right in America, contrary to popular belief and the common misconception that this country was founded on "Christian principles." That most presidents since the first six—excluding Lincoln—were definitely theists is not news to the average American, and there was no need to add it there. But the fact that the early presidents and Lincoln were not Christians as we now know it, and that Taft, a 20th century president, could have made a statement that is outright blasphemy to most American Christians, is indeed news.

Book of Celebrations

Q. Why wasn't Thomas Paine's birthday listed in the Book of Celebrations?

A. Although as a Deist, as an American revolutionary icon, and as an author Paine was very important in the history of Freethought, Paine himself was also very much against the concept of Atheism. As Atheists, we recognize his contributions, and read the *Age of Reason*. But listing as a holiday the birthday (January 29th) of a man who was so definitely opposed to Atheism is not appropriate.

Book of Biogenesis / Book of Human Evolution

Q. One major argument I see often (which you did not cover) is that most mutations are harmful, and very few are neutral or beneficial. It's clear that most humans do not have mutations. How could mutated DNA give viable offspring, much less ones that could reproduce? Given that, it would seem that evolution has a significant flaw.

A. The following explanation could be called the “Failure of the Most Mutations Are Harmful Hypothesis.” You make two very large and incorrect assumptions here, that “most mutations are harmful” and that “most humans do not have mutations.” According to a study by F. Giannelli, T. Anagnostopoulos, and P.M. Green published in the *American Journal of Human Genetics* in 1999, the authors estimated that the average human zygote has 128 mutations, and that only 1.05% of all mutations are detrimental. This result was based on studies in other organisms, so the actual numbers for humans will vary somewhat, but it gives you a good overall feel as to how common mutations are in humans and other mammals, and the relative level of harm caused by most mutations.

Book of Resources

Q. Why weren't blogs listed in the Book of Resources?

A. Blogs are, by nature, a more transitory medium anchored by a single person. Without that one person, that personality, the resource is gone. If you are interested in blogs about Atheism, there is an absolutely superb list available at **AtheismOnline** (atheismonline.com, click on “Directory”). There are also much smaller lists at **WebRing** (l.webring.com/hub?ring=athjournal) and **Atheism.About.com** (atheism.about.com/cs/atheismblogs).

Q. **The Objectivist Center** (www.objectivistcenter.org) does not truly represent strict Objectivism, they preach tolerance for other viewpoints. Why in the first version of the book did you only list the website for the modified philosophy of The Objectivist Center, but not the more accurately Objectivist group, **The Ayn Rand Institute** (www.aynrand.org), the true heir of the philosophies of Ayn Rand?

A. Part of the difficulty in classifying sites and organizations related to Objectivism is that there is a tight link in Objectivism between metaphysics (Atheism), politics (laissez faire capitalism), philosophy (rational self-interest), and even the life and works of Rand herself. This makes it exceedingly difficult to separately identify groups that maintain a primary interest in Atheism from those that treat it only secondarily and are more interested in the politics and life of Rand and the anthology of her work. The sites in the Book of Resources were initially chosen to avoid those that were primarily political or biographical in nature, so you can see how this makes such choosing difficult.

Beyond that, there has been a schism in the Objectivism Movement. The Objectivist Center considers the philosophy of Objectivism to be open to refinement, and that dialogue with groups who share some similar goals (such as Libertarians) is a productive venture. The Ayn Rand Institute, however, follows the philosophies of Rand without modification or refinement. They do not support dialogue with groups such as Libertarians, considering other philosophical views to be flawed and therefore immoral—as Rand herself stated—and that collaboration with those holding such views is a compromise of basic principles. The intricacies of the schism are difficult for those not well-acquainted with Objectivism.

Both of the above groups are well-organized. The Objectivist Center (TOC) claims about 50 affiliated groups in the United States, plus several in Canada and abroad. Most of these are adult groups, although they have a few college and high-school affiliates. They focus primarily on the philosophy, and are more open to working with other groups as necessary to promote their goals. (Note that none of their groups affiliate with the ARI.)

The Ayn Rand Institute (ARI), on the other hand, focuses much more on education, and has around 70 affiliates in the United States (all of them college and high-school groups) plus 7 in Canada and 9 abroad. Again, the organization serves as a more “orthodox” promoter of the philosophy. They are the legal heirs to Rand's legacy, as they own the copyrights to Rand's work. Also note that the **Objectivism Online Forum**, mentioned in the Book of Resources, follows ARI's stricter Objectivism, not that of the TOC.

¹⁸In an attempt to split hairs, initially this book just listed the site for TOC due to its adult meeting groups and its willingness to work with other groups to achieve promotion of common goals, something The Bible of the Good and Moral Atheist also encourages. ARI's site was seen as more of a political and biographical site, focusing more on Rand herself. But in retrospect, even though there is a philosophical schism, the content level of the two sites and the organizational level of the two groups are similar enough that both should be listed. So, we have added the information on the ARI to the Book of Resources, in the first revision to The Bible of the Good and Moral Atheist.

Q. You included meetup groups for **Atheists** (*atheists.meetup.com*) in general, why didn't you include meetup groups related to other Freethinker organizations?

A. Other categories do exist, but are not as large or established, and in some cases the groups use other mediums to organize besides Meetup.com. There are 58 larger (more than 25 members) meetup groups—out of 71 total groups—listed under “Atheists,” but a far smaller number under other categories. The other ones include 9 larger groups for **Brights** (*brights.meetup.com*), 4 for **Humanists** (*humanism.meetup.com*), and 1 for **Skeptics** (*skeptics.meetup.com*). The Atheists Meetup pages give links to these other groups as well.

Q. Why didn't you include any Yahoo groups or MSN groups in your list of discussion forums?

A. Unlike Yahoo or MSN, most of the discussion forums mentioned in the Book of Resources do not require the “global” type registration they offer, you can simply register for the individual board itself by being online and having a valid email address. Also, as of early 2006 the MSN groups are for the most part only lightly traveled, and the Yahoo Groups are unfortunately hampered by the older “message list” format that are much less user-friendly than the newer “discussion forum” format that most boards use. But for informational purposes, we will list here some of the more-traveled of those groups here:

Atheists Connected – *groups.yahoo.com/group/AtheistsConnected* – 17,000 posts in the last 12 months.
Atheist Empire – *groups.yahoo.com/group/atheistempire* – website mentioned earlier this chapter, 12,000 posts last year.
Atheist Moms – *groups.yahoo.com/group/atheistmoms* – for mothers, 10,000 posts last year.
Human_ism – *groups.yahoo.com/group/Human_ism* – Secular Humanist, over 6,000 posts last year.
Ask an Atheist – *groups.msn.com/AskAnAtheist* – debate/discussion with theists (MSN), 6,000 posts last year.
Real World Atheism – *groups.yahoo.com/group/realworldatheism* – no proselytizing, over 3,800 posts last year.
The Atheism Mailing List – *groups.yahoo.com/group/atheism* – over 3,200 posts last year.
Young Atheists Freethinkers – *groups.yahoo.com/group/Young_Atheists_Freethinkers* – teen/college, 3,200 recent posts.
Atheist Only – *groups.yahoo.com/group/atheist_only* – over 2,000 posts last year.
Atheists Against Superstition – *groups.yahoo.com/group/atheists* – 1,800 posts last year.
Theism Free Zone – *groups.yahoo.com/group/TheismFreeZone* – totally secular, no theism, about 1,700 posts last year.
Atheists Area – *groups.yahoo.com/group/atheistsarea* – chat only, no ads, over 1,200 posts last year.
GALHA – *groups.yahoo.com/group/galha* – Gay/Lesbian, members of galha.org only, over 1,200 posts last year.
Atheist Libertarians – *groups.yahoo.com/group/atheist_libertarians* – libertarian, about 1,000 posts last year.
The Skeptics Forum – *groups.yahoo.com/group/skeptics-forum* – skepticism, over 800 posts last year.
The Canadian Atheist Forum – *groups.yahoo.com/group/CanadianAtheist* – Canadians, over 600 posts last year.
Atheist Teens – *groups.yahoo.com/group/Atheist_Teens* – moderated teen group, nearly 600 posts last year.

*Dedicated to Allan:
Regardless of how the battle ended,
in our hearts, you won, Ace.*

