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ATHEIST | AGNOSTIC | HUMANIST | FREE THINKER

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# REASONABLE DOUBT

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NON-BELIEVER | RATIONALIST | SECULARIST | SKEPTIC

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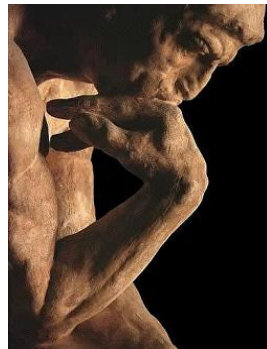


come now and let us reason together

## ARTICLES & COMMENTARY

### The Thinking Atheist

Humans do not require a god to be moral. Religion divides more than it unites. It is untrue that atheists believe in nothing. It does not take more faith to be an atheist. Atheists do not deny god because they wish to be god. Religion and science are incompatible. Complexity does not equal design. The scientific method trumps primitive anonymous texts. The scriptures are ridiculous, offensive and demonstrably false. One does not require an afterlife to have a meaningful life. Threats of an eternal hellfire betray a weak argument. Schools should be filled with facts, not fanatics. Your personal experience does not prove god. An inability to disprove god does not prove god. Not knowing what caused the Big Bang does not prove god. And if you believe in any gods, the burden of proof is on you.



### Commentary By Bertrand Russell

Religion is based primarily upon fear. It is partly the terror of the unknown and partly as the wish to feel that you have a kind of elder brother who will stand by you in all your troubles and disputes. Fear of the mysterious, fear of defeat, fear of death. Fear is the parent of cruelty, and therefore it is no wonder if cruelty and religion have gone hand in hand.

It is because fear is at the basis of those two things. In this world we can now begin a little to understand things, and a little to master them by help of science, which has forced its way step by step against the opposition of all

the old precepts. Science can help us to get over this craven fear in which mankind has lived for so many generations. Science can teach us, and I think our own hearts can teach us, no longer to look around for imaginary supports, no longer to invent allies in the sky, but rather to look to our own efforts here below to make this world a fit place to live in, instead of the place that the churches in all these centuries have made it.

And if there were a god, I think it very unlikely that He would have such an uneasy vanity as to be offended by those who doubt his existence.

There is no reason why the world could not have come into being without a cause; nor, on the other hand, is there any reason why it should not have always existed. There is no reason to suppose that the world had a beginning at all. The idea that things must have a beginning is really due to the poverty of our imagination.

Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind.

So far as I can remember, there is not one word in the gospels in praise of intelligence.

We want to stand upon our own feet and look fair and square at the world -- its good facts, its bad facts, its beauties, and its ugliness; see the world as it is and be not afraid of it. Conquer the world by intelligence and not merely by being slavishly subdued by the terror that comes from it. The whole conception of god is a conception derived from the ancient Oriental despotisms. It is a conception quite unworthy of free men.

When you hear people in church debasing themselves and saying that they are miserable sinners, and all the rest of it, it seems contemptible and not worthy of self-respecting human beings. We ought to stand up and look the world frankly in the face. We ought to make the best we can of the world, and if it is not so

good as we wish, after all it will still be better than what these others have made of it in all these ages.

A good world needs knowledge, kindness, and courage; it does not need a regretful hankering after the past or a fettering of the free intelligence by the words uttered long ago by ignorant men. It needs a fearless outlook and a free intelligence. It needs hope for the future, not looking back all the time toward a past that is dead, which we trust will be far surpassed by the future that our intelligence can create.

### **The Christian Agnostic By Leslie Weatherhead**

Men glibly turn to an infallible bible, or an infallible church, or an infallible pope, or an infallible conscience, or an infallible christ, and say that that authority is sufficient for them and enables them to accept truth. I believe all that kind of talk is false. It is false psychology or a failure of insight, it is the fruit of mental laziness, and refusal to think things through.

Draw a long breath and shut your eyes. Only by such a method can many a Christian accept the improbabilities of his religion. You can assent, because you are afraid, or want to please, or haven't the energy or the skill to think a thing out, but belief is a triumph in one's own mind.

We should not try by repetition to make our minds accept words which other people have written down and about which a sincere person must continually make private reservations and secret mental interpretations of his own. Such reservations play havoc with our intellectual honesty.

We must always remember that the bible is not one book, but a library of books written or edited over a period of a thousand years by a hundred fallible men whose inspiration did not exclude their looking through colored spectacles, of the limitations of the knowledge and outlook of the day in which they lived, or the party to which they belonged. It is made up of myth, poetry, legend, history, prophecy, biography, mystical writing, allegory, parable, and drama. Indeed it contains almost every

way of writing that exists except that of the scientific text book.

For me, as I grow older, the area of dogmatic certainty grows smaller while the area of doubt and agnosticism (and my willingness to say *I don't know*) grows larger. But this, I think is gain and, in a growing mind, inevitable. The speculations of men centuries ago have too often been paraded as certainties because *divine revelation* has been claimed for them. I want to keep my mind ever open to new truth from wherever it may come, and I want to claim freedom to reject old ideas, however venerable and allegedly part of *revealed truth* they may be, if I cannot still hold them without breaking the integrity of my mental processes.



### **The God Idea By Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda**

The reality or validity of belief in god is based on man's understanding capacity and the maturity of the mind.

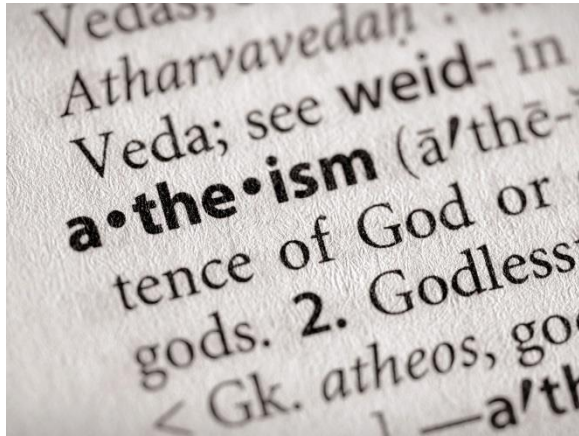
To trace the origin and development of the god-idea, one must go back to the time when civilization was still in its infancy and science was still unknown. Primitive people, out of fear and admiration towards the natural phenomena, had believed in different spirits and gods. They used their spirits and gods to form religions of their own. According to their respective circumstances and understanding capacity, different people founded different gods and different faiths.

In the beginning of the god-idea, people worshipped many gods -- gods of trees, streams,



lightning, storm, winds, the sun, and all other terrestrial phenomena. These gods were related to each and every act of nature.

Then gradually man began to transfer to these gods, sex and form as well as the physical and mental characteristics of human beings. Human attributes were given to the gods: love, hate, jealousy, fear, pride, envy and other emotions found among human beings.



## **Humanist Manifesto 1933**

The time has come for widespread recognition of the radical changes in religious beliefs throughout the modern world. The time is past for mere revision of traditional attitudes. Science and economic change have disrupted the old beliefs. Religions the world over are under the necessity of coming to terms with new conditions created by a vastly increased knowledge and experience. In every field of human activity, the vital movement is now in the direction of a candid and explicit humanism. In order that religious humanism may be better understood we, the undersigned, desire to make certain affirmations which we believe the facts of our contemporary life demonstrate.

There is great danger of a final, and we believe fatal, identification of the word religion with doctrines and methods which have lost their significance and which are powerless to solve the problem of human living in the Twentieth Century. Religions have always been means for realizing the highest values of life. Their end has been accomplished through the

interpretation of the total environing situation (theology or world view), the sense of values resulting therefrom (goal or ideal), and the technique (cult), established for realizing the satisfactory life. A change in any of these factors results in alteration of the outward forms of religion. This fact explains the changefulness of religions through the centuries. But through all changes religion itself remains constant in its quest for abiding values, an inseparable feature of human life.

Today man's larger understanding of the universe, his scientific achievements, and deeper appreciation of brotherhood, have created a situation which requires a new statement of the means and purposes of religion. Such a vital, fearless, and frank religion capable of furnishing adequate social goals and personal satisfactions may appear to many people as a complete break with the past. While this age does owe a vast debt to the traditional religions, it is none the less obvious that any religion that can hope to be a synthesizing and dynamic force for today must be shaped for the needs of this age. To establish such a religion is a major necessity of the present. It is a responsibility which rests upon this generation. We therefore affirm the following:

- 1: Religious humanists regard the universe as self-existing and not created.
- 2: Humanism believes that man is a part of nature and that he has emerged as a result of a continuous process.
- 3: Holding an organic view of life, humanists find that the traditional dualism of mind and body must be rejected.
- 4: Humanism recognizes that man's religious culture and civilization, as clearly depicted by anthropology and history, are the product of a gradual development due to his interaction with his natural environment and with his social heritage. The individual born into a particular culture is largely molded by that culture.
- 5: Humanism asserts that the nature of the universe depicted by modern science makes

unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human values. Obviously humanism does not deny the possibility of realities as yet undiscovered, but it does insist that the way to determine the existence and value of any and all realities is by means of intelligent inquiry and by the assessment of their relations to human needs. Religion must formulate its hopes and plans in the light of the scientific spirit and method.

6: We are convinced that the time has passed for theism, deism, modernism, and the several varieties of "new thought".

7: Religion consists of those actions, purposes, and experiences which are humanly significant. Nothing human is alien to the religious. It includes labor, art, science, philosophy, love, friendship, recreation -- all that is in its degree expressive of intelligently satisfying human living. The distinction between the sacred and the secular can no longer be maintained.

8: Religious Humanism considers the complete realization of human personality to be the end of man's life and seeks its development and fulfillment in the here and now. This is the explanation of the humanist's social passion.

9: In the place of the old attitudes involved in worship and prayer the humanist finds his religious emotions expressed in a heightened sense of personal life and in a cooperative effort to promote social well-being.

10: It follows that there will be no uniquely religious emotions and attitudes of the kind hitherto associated with belief in the supernatural.

11: Man will learn to face the crises of life in terms of his knowledge of their naturalness and probability. Reasonable and manly attitudes will be fostered by education and supported by custom. We assume that humanism will take the path of social and mental hygiene and discourage sentimental and unreal hopes and wishful thinking.

12: Believing that religion must work increasingly for joy in living, religious

humanists aim to foster the creative in man and to encourage achievements that add to the satisfactions of life.

13: Religious humanism maintains that all associations and institutions exist for the fulfillment of human life. The intelligent evaluation, transformation, control, and direction of such associations and institutions with a view to the enhancement of human life is the purpose and program of humanism. Certainly religious institutions, their ritualistic forms, ecclesiastical methods, and communal activities must be reconstituted as rapidly as experience allows, in order to function effectively in the modern world.



14: The humanists are firmly convinced that existing acquisitive and profit-motivated society has shown itself to be inadequate and that a radical change in methods, controls, and motives must be instituted. A socialized and cooperative economic order must be established to the end that the equitable distribution of the means of life be possible. The goal of humanism is a free and universal society in which people voluntarily and intelligently cooperate for the common good. Humanists demand a shared life in a shared world.

15: We assert that humanism will: (a) affirm life rather than deny it; (b) seek to elicit the possibilities of life, not flee from them; and (c) endeavor to establish the conditions of a satisfactory life for all, not merely for the few. By this positive morale and intention humanism will be guided, and from this perspective and alignment the techniques and efforts of humanism will flow.



## **The Concept of Faith** **By Guy P. Harrison**

Probably nothing frustrates nonbelievers more than the concept of faith. To many atheists, the believer's reliance on faith seems like a complete surrender of the mind or at least a stubborn reluctance to think.

Faith can be like an impenetrable wall that stands firm against any and all challenges from skeptics. No matter how thoroughly devastating arguments against belief may be, faith usually prevails.

Arguments based on reason and reality are not likely to have much impact on a concept that has nothing to do with reason and reality. Atheists who hope to encourage critical thinking about belief should probably forget arguing directly against faith. Faith doesn't lose debates because it doesn't play by the rules.

Believers might also consider that retreating to the faith defense looks a lot like admitting that they can't make a good case for believing in their god. Isn't this what believers who stress faith above reason and evidence are really saying? Isn't it a sort of confession that their belief is based on nothing substantial?

Faith sounds a lot like cheating. It's jumping ahead to the conclusion before you have a right to, before it has been earned by discovery and thinking.

## **Fading Faith** **By James A. Haught**

Philosopher-historian Will Durant called it "the basic event of modern times." He didn't mean the world wars, or the end of colonialism, or the rise of electronics. He was talking about the decline of religion in Western democracies.

The great mentor saw subsiding faith as the most profound occurrence of the past century — a shift of Western civilization, rather like former transitions away from the age of kings, the era of slavery and such epochs.

Since World War II, worship has dwindled starkly in Europe, Canada, Australia, Japan and other advanced democracies. In those busy places, only 5 or 10 percent of adults now attend church. Secular society scurries along heedlessly.

Pope Benedict XVI protested: "Europe has developed a culture that, in a manner unknown before now to humanity, excludes god from the public conscience." Columnist George Will called the Vatican "109 acres of faith in a European sea of unbelief."

America seems an exception. This country has 350,000 churches whose members donate \$100 billion per year. The United States teems with booming megachurches, gigantic sales of "rapture" books, fundamentalist attacks on evolution, hundred-million-dollar TV ministries, talking-in-tongues Pentecostals, the white evangelical "religious right" attached to the Republican Party, and the like.

But quietly, under the radar, much of America slowly is following the path previously taken by Europe. Little noticed, secularism keeps climbing in the United States. Here's the evidence:

*Rising "Nones"* - Various polls find a strong increase in the number of Americans — especially the young — who answer "none" when asked their religion. In 1990, this group had climbed to 8 percent, and by 2008, it had doubled to 15 percent — plus another 5 percent who answer "don't know." This implies that around 45 million U.S. adults today lack

church affiliation. In Hawaii, more than half say they have no church connection.

*Mainline Losses* - America's traditional Protestant churches ("tall steeple" denominations with seminary-trained clergy) once dominated U.S. culture. They were the essence of America. But their membership is collapsing. Over the past half-century, while the U.S. population doubled, United Methodists fell from 11 million to 7.9 million, Episcopalians dropped from 3.4 million to 2 million, the Presbyterian Church USA sank from 4.1 million to 2.2 million, etc. The religious journal *First Things* — noting that mainline faiths dwindled from 50 percent of the adult U.S. population to a mere 8 percent — lamented that "the Great Church of America has come to an end." A researcher at the Ashbrook think-tank dubbed it "Flatline Protestantism."



*Catholic Losses* - Although Hispanic immigration resupplies U.S. Catholicism with replacements, many former adherents have drifted from the giant church. The 2008 American Religious Identification Survey found that 20 million Americans have quit Catholicism — thus one-tenth of U.S. adults now are ex-Catholics.

*Fading Taboos* - A half-century ago, church-backed laws had power in America. In the 1950s, it was a crime to look at the equivalent of a *Playboy* magazine or R-rated movie — or for stores to open on the Sabbath — or to buy a cocktail or lottery ticket — or to sell birth-control devices in some states — or to be homosexual — or to terminate a pregnancy — or to read a sexy novel — or for an unwed couple to share a bedroom. Now all those morality laws have fallen, one after another.

Currently, state after state is legalizing gay marriage, despite church outrage.

Sociologists are fascinated by America's secular shift. Dr. Robert Putnam of Harvard, author of "Bowling Alone," found as many as 40 percent of young Americans answering "none" to faith surveys. "It's a huge change, a stunning development," he said. "That is the future of America." He joined Dr. David Campbell of Notre Dame in writing a new book, "American Grace," that outlines the trend. Putnam's Social Capital site sums up: "Young Americans are dropping out of religion at an alarming rate of five to six times the historic rate."

Oddly, males outnumber females among the churchless. "The ratio of 60 males to 40 females is a remarkable result," the 2008 ARIS poll reported. "These gender patterns correspond with many earlier findings that show women to be more religious than men."

Growing secularism has political implications. The Republican Party may suffer as the white evangelical "religious right" shrinks. In contrast, burgeoning "nones" tend to vote Democratic. Sociologist Ruy Teixeira says the steady rise of the unaffiliated, plus swelling minorities, means that "by the 2016 election (or 2020 at the outside) the United States will have ceased to be a white Christian nation. Looking even farther down the road, white Christians will be only around 35 percent of the population by 2040, and conservative white Christians, who have been such a critical part of the Republican base, will be only about a third of that — a minority within a minority."

Gradually, decade by decade, religion is moving from the advanced First World to the less-developed Third World. Faith retains enormous power in Muslim lands. Pentecostalism is booming in Africa and South America. Yet the West steadily turns more secular.

Arguably, it's one of the biggest news stories during our lives — although most of us are too busy to notice. Durant may have been correct when he wrote that it is the basic event of modern times.



## **Belief in Gods**

**By Guy P. Harrison**

Obvious or not, belief in gods deserves to be challenged. Believers owe it to the world and our collective future to at least hear and consider basic questions about gods. These claims cannot be given a pass because they are connected to some of humankind's most divisive and dangerous behavior. If a significant portion of our species insists on discriminating, hating, killing, and slowing scientific progress in the name of gods, then don't we owe it to ourselves to at least try and confirm whether or not these gods are even real in the first place?

Religious beliefs are learned not discovered.

The Torah, Bible, and Koran suggest that slavery is okay, women are inferior to men, and critical thinking is a bad thing. After years of hearing about the peace and love that is supposed to be at the core of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, I had not expected to find so much violence, cruelty, and hatred within the books that are the foundations of those religions. Overall, the Torah, Bible, and Koran read like instruction manuals for achieving a divided, angry, and violent world.

Most of the belief systems that humankind has come up with have included outrageous injustice to women. Many religions have this injustice boldly written into their sacred texts for all to see. They don't just condone it, they demand it. Many people today continue to mistreat girls and women based on religious beliefs.

Over the last few thousand years religion has directly motivated far more hatred and violence than atheism. Given its record, religion certainly cannot be counted on to always bring out the best in people.

## **On Religion**

**By Bill Maher**

These are in troubled times. We have to think our way out. We can't "faith" our way out. Religion stops people from thinking. Religious people think that all the answers are in that

one book. It impedes progress. It justifies crazy people. Flying planes into a building was a faith-based initiative.

Matters of otherwise common sense become points of debate. Like gay marriage. Would we even be having this discussion about whether gay people can marry except for religion? It's because it says in the bible, *no queers*. That's where the whole thing comes from. The bible. The same book that says slavery is okay. And that you can stone somebody to death for working on Sunday. That book. The one with the snake and apple and the virgin birth. That infallible work of genius.

I'm sorry religion is so retarded. But it is. The problem is that the people with the most ridiculous ideas are always the people who are most certain of them.



## **Religion is Bullshit**

**By George Carlin**

When it comes to bullshit you have to stand in awe of the all-time champion of false promises and exaggerated claims, religion. Religion easily has the greatest bullshit story ever told. Religion has actually convinced people that there is an invisible man living in the sky who watches everything you do every minute of every day. And the invisible man has a special list of ten things he does not want you to do. And if you do any these ten things he has a special place full of fire and burning and torture and anguish where he will send you to suffer and burn and choke and scream and cry forever and ever until the end of time. But he loves you.



And he needs money. He always needs money. He's all powerful, all perfect, all knowing, all wise, but somehow he just can't handle money. Religion takes in billions of dollars. They pay no taxes. And they always need a little more. Now, you talk about a good bullshit story. Holy shit!

Something is fucked up. War, disease, death, destruction, hunger, filth, poverty, torture, crime, corruption. Something is definitely wrong. This is not good work. If this is the best god can do, I am not impressed. Results like these do not belong on the resume of a supreme being. This is the kind of shit you'd expect from an office temp with a bad attitude. In any decently run universe, this guy would have been out on his all-powerful ass a long time ago.

So, if there is a god, most reasonable people might agree that he is at least incompetent and maybe doesn't give a shit.

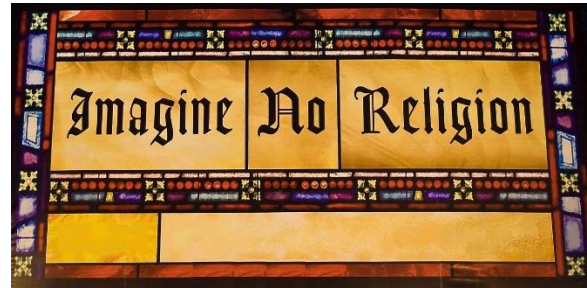


## Why I'm an Atheist By Ricky Gervais

As an atheist, I see nothing "wrong" in believing in a god. I don't think there is a god, but belief in him does no harm. If it helps you in any way, then that's fine with me. It's when belief starts infringing on other people's rights when it worries me. I would never deny your right to believe in a god. I would just rather you didn't kill people who believe in a different god, say. Or stone someone to death because your rulebook says their sexuality is immoral. It's strange that anyone who believes that an all-powerful all-knowing, omniscient power responsible for everything that happens, would also want to judge and punish people for what they are.

The dictionary definition of god is "a supernatural creator and overseer of the

universe." Included in this definition are all deities, goddesses and supernatural beings. Since the beginning of recorded history, which is defined by the invention of writing by the Sumerians around 6,000 years ago, historians have cataloged over 3700 supernatural beings, of which 2870 can be considered deities.



So next time someone tells me they believe in god, I'll say "Oh which one? Zeus? Hades? Jupiter? Mars? Odin? Thor? Krishna? Vishnu? Ra?..." If they say "Just god. I only believe in the one god," I'll point out that they are nearly as atheistic as me. I don't believe in 2,870 gods, and they don't believe in 2,869.

75 percent of Americans are god-fearing Christians. 75 percent of prisoners are god-fearing Christians. 10 percent of Americans are atheists. 0.2 percent of prisoners are atheists.

What are the gifts of atheism? The gifts of truth, science, nature. The real beauty of this world. I learned of evolution, a theory so simple that only England's greatest genius could have come up with it. Evolution of plants, animals and us, with imagination, free will, love, humor. I no longer needed a reason for my existence, just a reason to live. And imagination, free will, love, humor, fun, music, sports, beer and pizza are all good enough reasons for living.

But living an honest life, for that you need the truth. That's the other thing I learned, that the truth, however shocking or uncomfortable, in the end leads to liberation and dignity.

## **Non-Believing American Scientists By Larson & Whitham**

The following research findings were reported by American Atheists in 1999:

Despite the fact that the United States is a highly religious society, almost all elite American scientists are non-believers. Researchers Edward J. Larson and Larry Whitham revealed this with a study of members of the National Academy of Sciences in 1998. They found that only 7 percent of these accomplished scientists believed in a god. A full 93 percent indicated that no god is obvious to them.

## **Atheist Spirituality in America By Eric Brown**

There are plenty of self-identified atheists who consider themselves to be spiritual people. Not only that, but there are more American atheists than ever.

Pew Research found that nonbelievers are the fastest-growing religious group in America. From 2007 to 2012, the percentage of Americans identifying as Christians fell 5 percent, while atheists, agnostics, and otherwise religiously unaffiliated Americans grew by 4.3 percent. Atheists alone grew 0.8 percent, making up 2.4 percent of all Americans in 2012.

Atheism is on the rise in America, but many atheists have more varied opinions than some might think. Though the formal definition of atheism refers to a person who does not believe that God exists, Pew found that 14 percent of self-identified atheists claim they believe in a God or universal spirit, including 5 percent who are "absolutely certain" of the existence of God.

Even more atheists say that they are spiritual people. Another 26 percent of atheists say they consider themselves spiritual people, while 3 percent go as far as claiming that they are religious. If these atheists see spirituality as a connection with nature and their fellow humans, it makes sense that they would consider themselves spiritual.

No matter how they define their beliefs, the vast majority of atheists feel a deep connection to nature. According to Pew, 82 percent of atheists say that they often or sometimes feel a connection to nature and the world around them.



## **Commentary By Neil DeGrasse Tyson**

The good thing about science is that it's true whether or not you believe in it.

Recognize that the very molecules that make up your body, the atoms that construct the molecules, are traceable to the crucibles that were once the centers of high mass stars that exploded their chemically rich guts into the galaxy, enriching pristine gas clouds with the chemistry of life. So that we are all connected to each other biologically, to the earth chemically and to the rest of the universe atomically. That's kinda cool! That makes me smile and I actually feel quite large at the end of that. It's not that we are better than the universe, we are part of the universe. We are in the universe and the universe is in us.

For me, I am driven by two main philosophies: know more today about the world than I knew yesterday and lessen the suffering of others. You'd be surprised how far that gets you.

The more I learn about the universe, the less convinced I am that there's any sort of benevolent force that has anything to do with it, at all.

I want to put on the table, not why 85% of the members of the National Academy of Sciences reject god, I want to know why 15% of the National Academy don't.

My view is that if your philosophy is not unsettled daily then you are blind to all the universe has to offer.

People cited violation of the First Amendment when a New Jersey schoolteacher asserted that evolution and the Big Bang are not scientific and that Noah's ark carried dinosaurs. This case is not about the need to separate church and state; it's about the need to separate ignorant, scientifically illiterate people from the ranks of teachers.

One of the biggest problems with the world today is that we have large groups of people who will accept whatever they hear on the grapevine, just because it suits their worldview—not because it is actually true or because they have evidence to support it. The really striking thing is that it would not take much effort to establish validity in most of these cases... but people prefer reassurance to research.

Where ignorance lurks, so too do the frontiers of discovery and imagination

The atoms of our bodies are traceable to stars that manufactured them in their cores and exploded these enriched ingredients across our galaxy, billions of years ago. For this reason, we are biologically connected to every other living thing in the world. We are chemically connected to all molecules on Earth. And we are atomically connected to all atoms in the universe. We are not figuratively, but literally stardust.

When scientifically investigating the natural world, the only thing worse than a blind believer is a seeing denier.

I would teach how science works as much as I would teach what science knows. I would assert (given that essentially, everyone will learn to read) that science literacy is the most important kind of literacy they can take into the 21st century. I would undervalue grades based on knowing things and find ways to reward curiosity. In the end, it's the people who are curious who change the world.

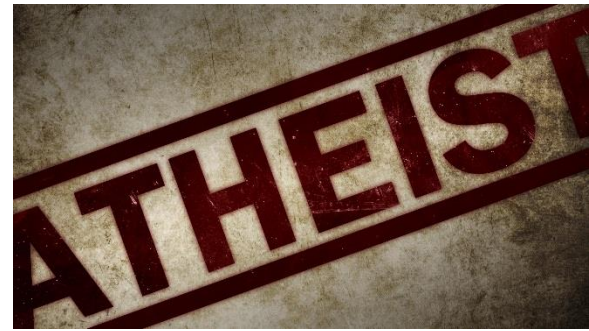
I know of no time in human history where ignorance was better than knowledge.

No one is dumb who is curious. The people who don't ask questions remain clueless throughout their lives.

I simply go with what works. And what works is the healthy skepticism embodied in the scientific method. Believe me, if the bible had ever been shown to be a rich source of scientific answers and enlightenment, we would be mining it daily for cosmic discovery.

If all that you see, do, measure and discover is the will of a deity, then ideas can never be proven wrong, you have no predictive power, and you are at a loss to understand the principles behind most of the fundamental interconnections of nature.

Not only are we in the universe, the universe is in us. I don't know of any deeper spiritual feeling than what that brings upon me.



### **Bill Nye The Science Guy**

There's nothing I believe in more strongly than getting young people interested in science and engineering, for a better tomorrow, for all humankind.

Climate change is happening, humans are causing it, and I think this is perhaps the most serious environmental issue facing us.

The more you find out about the world, the more opportunities there are to laugh at it.

We talk about the Internet. That comes from science. Weather forecasting. That comes from



science. The main idea in all of biology is evolution. To not teach it to our young people is wrong.

Science is the key to our future, and if you don't believe in science, then you're holding everybody back.

If you're an adult and you choose not to believe in science, fine, but please don't prevent your children from learning about it and letting them draw their own conclusions.

Evolution is the fundamental idea in all of life science - in all of biology.

Evolution is a theory, and it's a theory that you can test. We've tested evolution in many ways. You can't present good evidence that says evolution is not a fact.



Science is the best idea humans have ever had. The more people who embrace that idea, the better.

I've got no problem with anybody's religion. But if you go claiming the Earth is only 10,000 years old, that's just wrong.

Teaching creationism in science class as an alternative to evolution is inappropriate.

If you have this idea that the earth is only 6,000 years old, you are denying, if you will, everything that you can touch and see. You're not paying attention to what's happening in the universe around you.

You can believe what you want religiously. Religion is one thing, but science, provable science, is something else.

But investment in space stimulates society, it stimulates it economically, it stimulates it intellectually, and it gives us all passion.

Tax dollars intended for science education must not be used to teach creationism as any sort of real explanation of nature, because any observation or process of inference about our origin and the nature of the universe disproves creationism in every respect.

It's important that our children are raised to be educated, well-rounded tax-paying citizens that understand the importance of technology and science.

Unlike science, creationism cannot predict anything, and it cannot provide satisfactory answers about the past.

I like to regard myself as someone who's capable of critical thought, that is to say, who can evaluate claims.

I really believe in science. It is a faith. It is a reverence akin to religion. But as we always say, it's different from religion in that, as near as we can tell, it exists outside of us. It has an objective quality, the process of science.

If you want to deny evolution and live in your world — in your world that's completely inconsistent with everything we observe in the universe — that's fine. But don't make your kids do it, because we need them. We need scientifically literate voters and taxpayers for the future.

## Letting Go of God By Julia Sweeney

The question they [the missionaries] asked me when they first arrived at my door really stuck in my head: *Did I believe that God loved me with all his heart?* I wasn't exactly sure how I felt about that question. If they'd asked me, *Do you feel that God loves you with all his heart?* Well, that would have been much different, I think I would have instantly answered, "Yes, I feel it all the time. I feel God's love when I'm hurt and confused, and I feel consoled and cared for. I take shelter in God's love when I don't understand why tragedy hits, and I feel God's love when I look with gratitude at all the beauty I see." But since they asked me that question with the word *believe* in it, somehow it was all different, because I wasn't exactly sure if I believed what I so clearly felt.

So here's the ten things that have really come to the forefront for me, talking to so many people about religion.

Number one: People want to be good. People want to sacrifice for the common good. This is just part of our heritage as human beings. I believe we have evolved to have this feeling. We all know how good it feels to help your neighbor do something or contribute, or make some self-sacrifice to do something. Everybody wants that feeling. This is where religion can sneak right in and hand this feeling over to people. All this good will that we've evolved to have can be just sucked up by an organization that is really doing things that are probably not for the greater common good. Yet they can deliver that hit to people of feeling like they're doing something good. I just observe that over and over again. That wish to do good seems to be such a universal human trait and I think that religion does ill will with that.

Number two: a code of behavior is often necessary. People need 12-step programs. They need structure. Religion certainly provides that.

Number three: People want to be in a club. People need to be in a club. We evolved in groups of small tribes. We like to feel affiliated. Obviously, there was an evolutionary

advantage to us to have this feeling. I think religion, once again, in the absence of anything else, just swoops in. But I also think that religion delivers those basic needs for people who don't want to think too deeply about it.

Number four: People love to hate. People feel closer to other people if they have a common person they don't like. Religion delivers on that, too! It gives people an instant common enemy, whether it's Islamic fundamentalists or secularists, that's immediately there and provided. Religion provides that.



Number five: The market does not like informed or skeptical citizens. Advertisers and big companies that are short-term profit driven align themselves, consciously or unconsciously, with religion, because they both have common interests: keeping people needing things and not quite giving them what they need. I really notice that over and over. To me, one of the creepiest things is this alignment between big business and conservative religion.

Number six: I feel that bashing religion is more popular than understanding it, or even standing firm about your point of view without bashing. I think in the long term, understanding it is really the way to win.

Number seven: Mostly, people are not introspective. This has been a really profound realization for me. I thought while everyone was praying they were thinking deeply about the hardest questions. Turns out that's not true. I don't think they are really thinking about anything. This is sad and maybe cynical, but I don't think most people are very interested in why they do the things they do, and why they believe the things they believe. I know that makes me sort of a pessimist, but I came to this conclusion through thousands of interactions, letters, and conversations.

Number eight: Mostly people feel uncomfortable not knowing an answer. Uncertainty is highly stressful. It's undesirable. And religion provides answers. Science provides some answers, and those are often deeply unsettling and deeply humbling in a way that is very unnerving.

Number nine: We've evolved our consciousness to have a great capacity to live in denial about things that make us feel uncomfortable. I think we all have to admit that we do this about a lot of things, just not about religion. I stopped and looked at the uncomfortable answers with religion and I decided to go with the evidence. But there is some adaptive advantage to being ridiculously optimistic about things or not really knowing, just going on faith. I think it's not good, but we have to admit that we all do live in denial to some degree.

Number ten: Life is meaningless. But life is meaningful to me! And I have my meaningful life. Just being aware is so meaningful. And it's true. I do feel that way. But that is a bitter pill to swallow. I don't think everyone can swallow that pill. That maybe the universe isn't so excited about these homo sapiens and has not been looking forward to our appearance all this time! That's hard to admit.



Other thoughts:

The biggest, the greatest harm that religion did for me is that it quelled my natural wonder about the world. I didn't really wonder about science. I felt that there was this answer to everything. Everyone knows the real answer: It's god! I feel so cheated by that. That's why I wish I could sue the church. Because I didn't let my natural wondering continue, the thing that makes me the most human, the thing that makes me the most different from other species—my natural desire to know the answer. It cut that off for me. And I just think that is the most heinous thing that religion does.

I was telling my seven year old daughter recently about Adam and Eve. I thought, okay, let's just start with the basic stuff. So I was telling her, oh, there's this story, and it's about how the world began. It's not really how the world began, but it's a story. There's Adam and Eve and then there was this tree of knowledge and God said, "Don't eat from the tree of knowledge." Then the snake came to Eve and Eve went to Adam and before you knew it everyone was having apple pie. Then God came and was so mad about it and they had to leave the garden.

So my daughter says, "Well, how did God know they were eating the fruit?" I said, "Oh, that's a good question! I can't remember." So I looked it up. Actually, it's very interesting because God comes in and says, "Who was eating the fruit?" Then my daughter says said, "But God knows everything and there're only two people." I love her questions.

So, I read it again, and it is so beautiful. That story is so obviously about enlightenment. It is so obviously about human beings becoming aware that they're conscious and they are going to die and that they are naked and that they can do good and bad to each other. Even when God says, "From now on, Adam, you have to eat from the soil, from your crops," it's such a beautiful story about us learning how to till the land and farming.

How did that beautiful story get so fucked up!



It's such a great enlightenment story. It's about saying goodbye to God. It's about saying, "I'm eating the apple. And now I take the consequences of eating the apple. I know I'm going to die. And I know that I can do right and wrong. And I know I have to cooperate and have pain in childbirth. I'm aware of it. I'm not an animal that isn't aware of those things."

I didn't know what to do about the Santa Claus thing. I start my show all about how I found out there was no Santa Claus, and how one thing just led to another. So then I became a mother and I really felt uncomfortable about lying to my daughter. I was very in conflict about how to handle Santa Claus because, of course, it's fun and fantastic and great. I really do believe it's a secular celebration and it's part of our culture and I want to participate in that. On the other hand, it involves all this lying, and I really want my daughter to know that I would not lie to her.

I was very uncomfortable so I didn't tell her about Santa Claus for a really long time. Somehow she got to be three and a half without hearing about Santa, and then it was almost like she was too smart. I said to her, "Well, there's this guy. He's going to come over when we're asleep."

She said, "What?!" And I did not sell it. I was so half-assed: "Yes, he comes when we're sleeping." She says, "Well, I'm not going to sleep in my bed by myself when there's somebody coming in the house!" Then I say, "He leaves presents." And she says, "How does he get in?" And I say, "He comes down the chimney." And she says, "What?"

So we put out carrots for the reindeer and cookies. And I went and ate them. Then I went in her room and I say, "Santa Claus was here." She says, "I'm not going out there!" It was horrifying.

So now she's older. Finally she started picking up on stuff, like the tooth fairy. And she realizes, "Are you the tooth fairy? I said, "Yes, I am." And then she asks, "And who is Santa Claus?" So I said, "Okay. I'm Santa Claus." So it's out. But then I say, "But don't tell sister and don't start telling kids at school."

I could see her little head working. She says, "Well, all those letters I wrote to Santa Claus? So I was just writing them to you?" And I answer, "Yeah, that's right." She says, "So I don't need to write a letter, I can just tell you what I want?" And I said, "That's right. And I can just tell you what I want." Then she says, "Well, what if I still want to believe in Santa Claus?" And I say, "Yeah, you can go ahead and believe in Santa Claus if you want to." And she says, "Well, I think there is a Santa Claus."

So it was this whole hilarious thing. But now it's triply awkward, because it's already out there, but now we're kind of half-pretending it's true. And she's still asking lots of questions about Santa Claus.

So my husband joins the conversation and says, "I think believing in Santa Claus is sort of like believing in God. If you want to do it, that's fine. Just don't ask too many questions." Which I thought was the greatest answer.



### **Origins of the Concept of God: The Problems of Being Fully Human By B.A. Robinson**

Paul Tillich, one of the most remarkable theologians of the 20th century called this realization of impending death "the shock of nonbeing." Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis called it "the trauma of self-consciousness." Once we started to anticipate our personal death, humanity was never the same. By picking up awareness and knowledge, we lost ignorance and a sense of innocence.

Bishop John Selby Spong wrote:

"It is that human capacity to be fully self-conscious that marks Homo sapiens as different from any other form of life in the natural world. That separating difference is what fills human beings with a sense of dread. Anxiety, says Paul Tillich, is born in the human recognition of finitude. It is therefore as omnipresent as humanity itself. To be human is to experience self-consciousness, to know separation, to be made aware of limits and to contemplate ends. One cannot be human, therefore, without being filled with chronic anxiety. It sounds depressing, but surely it is true."

Self-consciousness was a remarkable development. All earlier animals lacked this ability. They were born with a set of instinctive responses that enabled them to function independently at an early age. They matured, met their needs for food and water, mated, struggled against the elements, and eventually died -- often violently. Bishop Spong continues:

"They had no conscious awareness of who they were or what they were doing...when the time came to die, they did so without anticipatory fear or grief. Having no conscious sense that they actually existed or 'were,' and thus lacking a conscious memory of the past or anticipation of the future, they had no sense that they were destined 'not to be.' "

But humans became different. They were born with advanced reasoning abilities and few instincts. They remained helpless for many years as their parents taught them the accumulated knowledge of the tribe. Each generation was able to build upon their parent's knowledge base to generate new techniques of coping, planning methods, tools, more cooperative social structures, etc. We advanced as a species by leaps and bounds. But our distant ancestors suffered great anxiety, because they felt helpless, insignificant, and insecure in the face of natural forces and their own finite life span. People do not like chronic anxiety. Some coping mechanism had to be developed.



## Godless By Dan Barker

I think it was at this point that I made a leap, not to atheism, but to the commitment to follow reason and evidence wherever they might lead, even if it meant taking me away from my cherished beliefs.

I read the works of various authors who were intelligent and caring human beings who were using their minds and doing their best to come to an understanding of the truth.

Paul wrote that "god is not the author of confusion." But can you think of a book that has caused more confusion than the bible?

Where did we get the idea that words on a page speak truth? Shouldn't truth be the result of investigation and analysis?

If the Prodigal Son is a parable and Adam and Eve are a metaphor, then why is god himself not one huge figure of speech?

I finally realized that faith is a cop-out, a defeat, an admission that the truths of religion are unknowable through evidence and reason. Faith is intellectual bankruptcy. With faith, you don't have to put any work into proving your case. You can *just believe*.

I did not lose my faith. I gave it up purposely.

I was forced to admit that the bible is not a reliable source of truth, that it is unscientific, irrational, contradictory, absurd, unhistorical, uninspiring, and morally unsatisfying.

Opening my eyes to the real world, stripped of dogma, faith, and loyalty to tradition, I could

finally see clearly that there was no evidence for a god, no coherent definition of a god, no compelling argument for the existence of a god, no agreement among believers as to the nature or moral principles of "God," and no good answers to the positive arguments against the existence of a god, such as the problem of evil. And beyond all that, there is no need for a god. Millions of good people live happy, productive, moral lives without believing in a god.

My problem was not with the people who professed Christianity, it was with the truth of the claims of Christianity.

I have to say that life has been much richer and happier since I was healed of religious delusion.

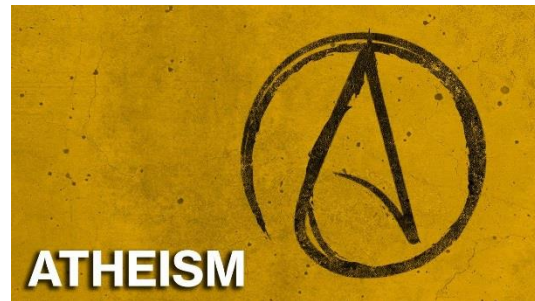
Jesus has still not returned, and never will. But who needs him?



## **The Bible** **By Penn Jillette**

Take some time and put the bible on your summer reading list. Try to stick with it cover to cover. Not because it teaches history, we know it doesn't. Read it because you'll see for yourself what the bible is all about. It sure isn't great literature. If it were published as fiction, no reviewer would give it a passing grade. There are some vivid scenes and some quotable phrases, but there's no plot, no structure, there's a tremendous amount of filler, and the characters are painfully one-dimensional. Whatever you do, don't read the bible for a moral code. It advocates prejudice, cruelty, superstition, and

murder. Read it because we need more atheists. And nothing will get you there faster than reading the damn bible.



## **Heretical Thoughts on Patriotism**

"Patriotism is the last refuge of scoundrels."  
-Samuel Johnson

"Nationalism is an infantile disease. It is the measles of mankind."  
-Albert Einstein

"Patriotism is a kind of religion. It is the egg from which wars are hatched."  
-Guy de Maupassant

"Patriotism is the great nursery of scoundrels, and its annual output is probably greater than even that of religion. Its chief glories are the demagogue, the bully, and the spreaders of libels and false history. Its philosophy rests firmly on the doctrine that the ends justifies the means and that any blow, whether above or below the belt, is fair against dissenters of its wholesale denial of plain facts."  
-H.L. Menken

"Can anything be stupider than that a man has the right to kill me because he lives on the other side of a river and his ruler has a quarrel with mine, though I have not quarrelled with him?"  
-Blaise Pascal

"To rejoice over conquest is to rejoice over murder."  
-Lao Tse

"Patriotism is a pernicious, psychopathic form of idiocy."  
-George Bernard Shaw



“Patriotism assumes that our globe is divided into little spots, each one surrounded by an iron gate. Those who have had the fortune of being born on some particular spot, consider themselves better, nobler, grander, more intelligent than the beings inhabiting any other spot. It is, therefore, the duty of everyone living on that chosen spot to fight, kill, and die in an attempt to impose his superiority upon all others. The inhabitants of the other spots reason in like manner, of course.”

-Emma Goldman

“It is lamentable, that to be a good patriot one must become the enemy of the rest of mankind.”

-Voltaire

“I bring you the stately matron named Christendom, returning bedraggled, besmirched, and dishonored from pirate raids across the globe, with her soul full of meanness, her pocket full of booty, and her mouth full of pious hypocrisies.”

-Mark Twain

“Patriotism is the virtue of the vicious.”

Oscar Wilde

“I have no country to fight for. My country is the earth, and I am a citizen of the world.”

-Eugene Debs

## Random Atheist Quotes

You don't need religion to have morals. If you can't determine right from wrong, then you lack empathy, not religion.

I'm sorry if my atheism offends you. But, guess what? Religious wars, jihads, crusades, inquisitions, slavery, censoring of free speech, brainwashing of children, subjugation of women, genital mutilation, stoning, homophobia, and rejection of science offend me. Man does not require a god to be moral. Religion divides more than it unites. It is untrue that atheists believe in nothing. It does not take more faith to be an atheist. Religion is incompatible with science. Scripture is man-made and false. God did not create man in his own image. Man created god in his own flawed image.

Scientists read many books and still feel they have a lot to learn. A religious person barely reads one book and thinks he knows everything.

Religion is the practice of training your mind to ignore evidence, logic, and reason, while being able to believe in fairytales based on faith alone. And being proud of it rather than ashamed.

Atheism? You mean having the balls to deal with the harsh realities of life without the need to believe in magic.

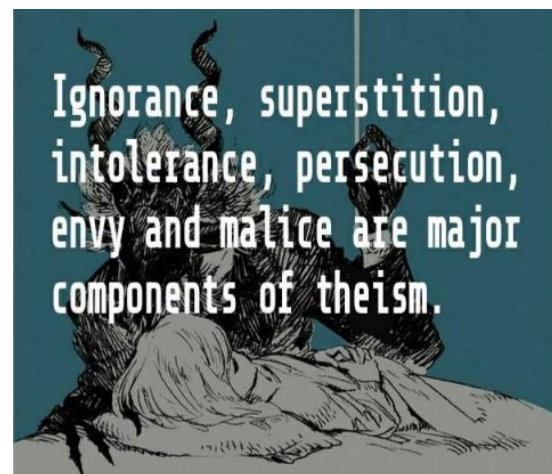
Atheism is not a religion. It's a relationship with reality.

## Beware of Dogma Song by Dan Barker

Beware of dogma, it has a bite  
Beware of dogma, it wants to fight  
Beware of dogma, it will ignite  
A holy war by itself

Beware of dogma, it will entrap your mind  
Religious dogma, it will make you blind  
Beware of dogma, it's not designed  
To let you think for yourself

Beware of dogma, don't let it loose  
That unchained dogma, it will reproduce  
Tie up your dogma, there's no excuse  
For ignorance anymore



## **Nothing Fails Like Prayer** **Song by Dan Barker**

The farmers pray for precipitation  
And they say *in god we trust*  
Along comes a drought  
And drives their crops out  
And turns their prayers into dust  
The next time they need some assistance  
They should take the advice of Mark Twain  
Who said *it's better to check the weather report*  
*before you pray for rain*

Nothing fails like prayer  
Use your mind and you will find  
Nothing fails like prayer

It's the final week of the school year  
But you haven't studied your best  
So you stay up and cram  
For the final exam  
And pray for god's help on the test

So you answer the questions with assurance  
That the lord will help you sail through  
When the results are returned  
What have you learned?  
God is no smarter than you

Nothing fails like prayer  
Use your mind and you will find  
Nothing fails like prayer

## **This Will Offend** **Poem by Afzal Moolla**

The prejudice lurks, a gestating beast. Hate  
masquerading as faith, intolerance as belief,  
while righteous tongues mouth prayers,  
beseeching him for tax-relief.

I tire of the sermons, spewed forth each day,  
threatening damnation, promising paradise,  
while blanketed in the cozy comfort of carefully  
crafted lies.

Do not waste your breath here. I refuse to  
succumb to your wiles. Take your god  
elsewhere. He is not welcome now. So, leave me  
to my fate, for I refuse to bow.

## **Finally Resolved** **Poem by Chris**

Perhaps the question of heaven and purgatory  
lies shrouded around our sight and wrought  
within our being. Perhaps heaven and  
purgatory coincide with our life on this soil on  
which we stand. Perhaps its ideas and ideals  
can lie secretly on our backs bare and just out  
of sight. Perhaps this life we own can be our  
heaven or purgatory. Perhaps this life is made  
into a heaven or purgatory according to how we  
mold it. Perhaps we take the life as clay and, as  
the sculptor, we sculpt it into a heaven or  
purgatory. Perhaps the self of afterlife is given  
to us right now. Perhaps you're depressed  
because you've allowed your sculpture, your  
life, to be molded into a purgatory for you. Or  
perhaps you frolic gaily because your heaven is  
enfolding you right now. Perhaps we should  
cease this dwelling on our entrance to heaven  
or purgatory. For we should endeavor in  
making this life the greatest heaven we may  
experience.

## **Fundamentalist** **(Definition)**

One in whom something is fundamentally  
wrong, most commonly a lack of reasoning  
ability and vicious intolerance towards those  
not sharing the fundamentalist's delusions.  
Thus, fundamentalists are especially  
intolerant of those able to draw obvious  
conclusions from observed facts, those who  
refuse to seek shelter in comforting  
falsehoods, and those who wish to lead their  
own lives.

## **Gods in a Nutshell** **By Robert T. Carroll**

Gods are beings with unnatural powers who  
never die. Some are believed to be the  
controllers or creators of various parts of  
nature. Many are thought to require worship  
and obedience from humans. These gods  
reward or punish us depending on whether we  
please them.

Stories of gods have been told in most societies  
that we know of going back at least 10,000  
years. Gods are portrayed as beings who never

die, with mighty powers, able to make nature do what they want. Most gods are pictured as being born and having parents. Some stories show gods as being able to change the weather and cause mighty storms, floods, earthquakes, or volcanic eruptions. For the most part, scientists have replaced stories about gods with scientific explanations of how the universe was formed and how humans and other living creatures evolved.

In stories, gods may be invisible or visible. They may take on the form of humans or other animals. They may require humans to make sacrifices to them and worship them. Many stories show gods as rewarding or punishing people depending on how well we have obeyed their orders.

Some people believe in many gods (polytheists). Some believe in one god (monotheists). Some do not believe in any gods (atheists). Some believe that we cannot know whether any gods exist (agnostics).

Some people believe that we wouldn't know the difference between right and wrong unless some god told us. Others believe that most of us can figure out the difference between right and wrong on our own.

Many people ask, if there are no gods, then how did the universe come to be? Others ask, How did any gods come to be? The answer to the first question is that the universe came to be by natural laws acting on matter and energy. The answer to the second question is that humans created gods in stories as a way of explaining things we didn't understand.

### **Thanksgiving Poem by Philip Appleman**

O let us give thanks for the glorious spasm that spurted atoms on an endless quest for the far edge of everything.

Let's praise the ancient heave and buckle, the burn, blister, and boil that birthed our blue-green planet.

Be grateful for the lucky spark that seasoned our primal soup, and honor the ultimate

sacrifice of the creeping pioneers who dragged us up onto dry land.

Let's be thankful for the heroism of all those fallen fathers who bequeathed to us these novelties, our clever arms and legs.

We are thankful too for the company of moles and manatees, sloths and seals, horses and hedgehogs. And thankful for the monkeys, gibbons, and gorillas who once upon a time set off on gambles of their own, aping our long, long hunger, vines choking trees to reach the sun, predators lurking at water holes.

Now, somewhere out there, the atoms race on, still searching for the edge of everything, but here, snug in our tundra and grassland, our forest and savanna, let us thank the furry ancestors who brought us along this way, and now stay at our side as we press on to some great adventure just beyond our dreams.

### **Imagine Song by John Lennon**

Imagine there is no heaven  
It's easy if you try  
No hell below us  
Above us only sky  
Imagine all the people  
Living for today  
Imagine there's no countries  
It isn't hard to do  
Nothing to kill or die for  
And no religion, too  
Imagine all the people  
Living life in peace  
You may say I'm a dreamer  
But I'm not the only one  
I hope someday you will join us  
And the world will be as one  
Imagine no possessions  
I wonder if you can  
No need for greed or hunger  
A brotherhood of man  
Imagine all the people  
Sharing all the world  
You, you may say I'm a dreamer  
But I'm not the only one  
I hope someday you will join us  
And the world will live as one



# REASONABLE DOUBT

**“Ubi dubium ibi libertas”**

