



SCARY ATHEISTS!

For some, atheists are scary monsters to be feared and hated. After all, “everyone knows” that “atheists have no morals.” Like many beliefs rooted in long tradition, this idea that atheists are evil monsters is seldom questioned. When it is, it falls apart. Magician/Entertainer Penn Jillette puts it this way:

“I get asked by religious people all the time ... without God, what’s to stop me from raping all I want? And my answer is: I do rape all I want. And the amount I want is zero. And I do murder all I want, and the amount I want is zero. The fact that these people think that if they didn’t have this person watching over them that they would go on killing, raping rampages is the most self-damning thing I can imagine.”

Jillette states the obvious: people without a belief in a deity are no more inclined to hurt others than anyone else. Why would they be? Are the people who claim that they need their deity to keep from behaving badly inclined otherwise? Is it really only the threat of hell and the promise of heaven that motivates believers to behave themselves?

At Biola University in 2009, there was this exchange between Christian apologist/debater William Lane Craig and the late atheist author/journalist Christopher Hitchens, Craig saying:

“We’re looking for an objective foundation for the moral values and duties that we want to affirm. It’s not a matter of whether we can know what is right and wrong or that we need God to tell us what is right and wrong, it’s rather that we need some sort of objective foundation for right and wrong. Wouldn’t you agree on your view it’s simply the socio-biological spinoffs of the evolutionary process and that therefore these do not provide any sort of objective foundation for moral values and duties?”

Hitchens replied:

“It’s entirely possible that it is purely evolution-

ary and functional.” And he added “One wants to think that there’s a bit more to one’s love for the fellow creature than that.”

So Hitchens is perfectly content to suppose that “the moral law within” that German philosopher Immanuel Kant referred to – and that Paul mentions in Romans 2:15 – is a result of natural selection. This is the sense of many unbelievers, that our propensity to care about others, beginning with an aversion not to hurt others, serves the purpose of pro-sociality that is a vital part of our species’ mode of existence. Craig, on the other hand, wants an “objective foundation” for morality. This would seem to be something outside of human subjectivity. Yet at the same encounter with Hitchens he said:

“I think the fundamental way in which we know Christianity is true is through the objective inner witness of God’s Holy Spirit.”

But if something is an inner experience not accessible to others then it is clearly subjective. For something to be objective it must be “inter-subjective” or independent of who is perceiving or observing. Biological evolution certainly fits that requirement. But “God” and “God’s Holy Spirit” are simply not objective phenomena or concepts that are useful in making sense of such phenomena. This is shown by the very fact that Craig travels about debating “God’s” existence. Moreover, even if it could be proven – and even if all agreed – that some superhuman entity existing outside of time and space created the universe and humanity, which is how Craig describes his deity – which he then connects to Christianity’s “God” – how would that solve the problem of morality? It could no more provide such meaning than ranchers provide such meaning for their livestock, if the livestock were sentient.

Now an honest person could look for some principle that might support morality in the same way that, say, Bernoulli’s Principle is the basis for aeronautics or Newton’s Third Law is the basis for

rocketry. But it would have to be recognized that things like Bernoulli's Principle and Newton's Laws are, in fact, not objective things either but, rather, terms used to describe certain objective phenomena and how we think of such phenomena. Now there are a great number of facts relating to what we call morality. But none that relate to deities. All the efforts to organize and make sense of these objective facts have only ever produced, with some variations, two basic principles: The Law of the Jungle – Might Makes Right – and the Law of Reciprocity – Do Not Do to others What You Find Objectionable.

The trend historically has clearly been a move away from The Law of the Jungle and towards the Law of Reciprocity. And this has been playing out most dramatically in law and politics. Yes, there are many inconsistencies and ambiguities. But this is the case in the sciences also. With respect to Bernoulli's Principle being the basis of aeronautics, for example, one aviation professional observed: "Of course, anything can 'fly' with propulsion: a rocket, a barn door, an upside down airplane, a cannonball, a balsa wood airplane, etc."* Yet this hardly invalidates the principle of an airfoil that can produce "lift."

There are many "little wrongs" that are sadly commonplace, everything from bribery and cheating in politics, business, academia, sports and personal relationships to email scams and other activities. There should be greater efforts to steer the culture in a direction that will be less tolerant of these. And better measures to protect against them should be instituted. But with respect to "big wrongs," almost everyone is like Penn Jillette in having little inclination to go on robbing, raping or murderous rampages. Importantly, in the rare exceptions to this there is often some supernatural belief - of the kind Craig supports! - that is a motivating factor. Most happily, there seems no reason to fear that our fellow humans will attack us to suck our blood, shamble after us wanting to eat our brains, or transform into aggressive wild animals.

* UAL 747 pilot Captain Richard Gorski, personal communication.

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**All NTCOF events can be found through our website calendar , or our meetup page, from which you can RSVP, at:
- www.meetup.com/church-of-freethought -
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Social Luncheon: Today, immediately after our Service, join us for lunch and discussion at the Jason's Deli on MacArthur Blvd just south of 635, at 7707 N MacArthur Blvd, phone (972) 432-0555.

Freethought Salon: Discuss today's service topic or other conundrums of interest. It happens most non-first Sundays of the month, over breakfast, at the Hilton DFW Lakes Hotel restaurant "The Vineyard" - inside the hotel - in Grapevine beginning 10:30 AM.

Game Night: Nearly every Friday night at the IHOP on 2310 Stemmons Trail (I-35), near Northwest Highway (Loop 12). Plan to arrive at about 7:30 PM, and stay late playing Le Havre, Carcassonne, and other fun games!

Freethought Book Club January 14, 2017 5:30 pm, THE BOOK: Good without God by Greg Epstein, Humanist Chaplain at Harvard University Location: Farina's Winery on Main Street in Grapevine

Communitas Dinner Group: (To be Announced)
Have Another Idea? Email or call! Read bulletins & presentations and post on the FORUM at www.churchoffreethought.org LIKE US at www.facebook.com/northtexaschurchoffreethought/ and sign up for our Twitter feed at twitter.com/ntcof !

**PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH:
"THANK YOU TURKEYS!"
Things To Be Thankful For
> Sunday, November 6, 2016 <
COMFORT INN DFW AIRPORT NORTH
(Take the Freeport Parkway exit, then the frontage road east just past Best Western;
starts at 10:30 but come early for coffee,
snacks - you can bring! - and conversation)**

The North Texas Church of Freethought
The Fellowship of Unbelievers

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