

RELIGION AND ATHEISM

A RATIONAL CHOICE

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Preface

This essay is first and foremost my own thoughts, opinions, and beliefs. It is not a scholarly treatise founded upon years of research and supported by extensive references to support my thesis. I do not have the time, inclination, or energy to perform such academic research. I have intentionally not read extensively what others have written on the subject of this essay, because in doing so, others' thoughts and words would naturally influence what I, myself have to say. This, I did not want. Nevertheless, I have provided online sources for much of the material that I discuss.

I was brought up in a Christian household. My mother was a regular church goer. My father not so much. He was a "weddings and funerals" kind of guy. I was christened in Heslington Church near our home, and as was the tradition, had two godfathers and one godmother. In my younger years, I went to church every Sunday with my mother at her urging. At the age of thirteen, I attended a private church school, St. Peter's School, York. For the next five years, I and all other students attended chapel for twenty minutes at the start of each school day, had regular divinity classes and attended a one-hour service every Sunday evening in the school chapel.

One Sunday, I decided not to attend the evening service. The next day, my House Master called me to his office and asked me why I had been absent. I could have said I was sick or had a family obligation. I chose to give an honest answer and said I did not want to attend. For my honesty, I was rewarded with a caning. Three whacks on the rear end with a thin bamboo cane. It stung. I learnt then that truth and honesty (Chapter 18) were not as important as blind obedience to the worship of God (Chapter 10). Corporal punishment was banned in UK schools in 1986, too late for me.

At the age of fifteen, I was confirmed into the Church of England¹ by the Bishop of Selby, after which I was permitted to celebrate Communion each week, in which we symbolically consumed

¹ The Church of England is a protestant Christian religion.

the blood and body of Christ.² I still have the little red book, “Do This in Remembrance of Me - A Guide to the Service of Holy Communion”, signed by John Dronfield, Headmaster and Noel Kemp-Welch, Chaplain. I also have another little red book, “Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse Tung.”

I do not remember, at which point in my high school career, that I became disenchanted with Christianity. Suffice to say, that by the time I went to college, I was well and truly a born-again atheist.

I do not write this to convert my religious friends or others to atheism. People have a choice and those who have chosen to believe in God and everlasting life should continue to do so. Their belief and faith are important parts of their lives and I would not want to upset that. However, I do hope that they will use this writing to understand why atheism is also a valid belief system (although not a religion in itself³). Atheists are not evil or less valuable members of society. We have the same values and morality as believers.⁴ We just do not believe in a supernatural God. That is all.

A Catholic friend once said to me, *“I don’t think that there are any REAL atheists.”* I think he meant that atheists tell themselves and others that they do not believe in God, but they are fooling themselves and that secretly, deep down, they do believe. I thought that was more than a little arrogant and very belittling. I could have replied, *“I don’t think that there are any REAL theists.”* But I did not.

I first started writing this in 2007, then shelved it after a couple of days work. I revisited it during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, looking for something to pass the time. I significantly expanded it during those days of staying at home. In recent years, I had also written several

² The Church of England still retains some of the trappings and ceremonies of Catholicism including the celebration of Mass, the blood and body of Christ. The Church of England calls this Communion.

³ Atheism is not a religion. A-theism means anti-theism or anti belief in God.

⁴ Many believers do equate belief in God with morality.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2014/03/13/worldwide-many-see-belief-in-god-as-essential-to-morality/>

small articles on the Catholic Church child abuse, the separation of Church and State in the US, religious tests for public office, and the influence of religion on the US Supreme Court. These are also included in the following chapters.

The topics of this article range from cosmological, evolutionary and creationist histories (Chapters 1 to 5), everlasting life (Chapter 6), religion as a political process (Chapters 8 and 9), impact of religion on morality (Chapter 10), impact of religion on US/UK governments (Chapters 11 to 13), gender inequality (Chapter 14), Catholicism (Chapter 15), science (Chapter 16), philosophy (Chapter 17), fear (Chapter 18), truth (Chapter 19) and diversity and inclusion (Chapter 20). Hopefully, readers will find at least some of these subjects to their interest.

I have chosen to provide the reader with numerous online sources in footnotes for several reasons. (1) It was easy and convenient. (2) Most people will read this essay on digital devices therefore, if they choose, they can easily click on a URL link to learn more. (3) Footnotes are more convenient than endnotes that would require the reader to continually page (or scroll) to the back of the book, which is annoying. (4) I have intentionally not provided an extensive bibliography, because that would require that I had read a lot of books on religion and atheism, which I have not. Some may scoff at the use of internet sources especially Wikipedia, arguing that the internet and Wikipedia are not peer-reviewed. I would agree that one should use internet sources with caution. However, the veracity of the content of many printed books are also not peer-reviewed in the same way that a paper submitted to a professional scientific journal is peer-reviewed. Therefore, any information source should be used with caution, the Bible being a prime example. More about that in Chapter 19.

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September 2020

1. Introduction

If we Google religion, we get the definition, *“the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God or gods.”*⁵

If we Google God, we get the definition, *“in monotheistic religions, the creator and ruler of the universe and source of all moral authority; the supreme being.”*⁶

Wikipedia describes religion as *“a social-cultural system of designated behaviors and practices, morals, worldviews, texts, sanctified places, prophecies, ethics, or organizations, that relates humanity to supernatural, transcendental, or spiritual elements. However, there is no scholarly consensus over what precisely constitutes a religion.”*⁷

Wikipedia describes God as *“conceived of as the supreme being, creator deity, and principal object of faith. God is usually conceived as being omniscient (all-knowing), omnipotent (all-powerful), omnipresent (all-present) and as having an eternal and necessary existence. These attributes are used either in way of analogy or are taken literally. God is most often held to be incorporeal (immaterial). Incorporeality and corporeality of God are related to conceptions of transcendence (being outside nature) and immanence (being in nature) of God, with positions of synthesis such as the “immanent transcendence.”*⁸

Wow ... that is a mouthful. Lots of use of the words, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, superhuman, supernatural and supreme being. Plus, several words and concepts that few of us use in everyday life. I promise that I will try to avoid these in the proceeding pages.

What is God? Does God exist? Or perhaps why does God exist in the human psyche? Many believers will take affront at the distinction between those last two questions?

⁵ <https://www.google.com/search?q=religion>

⁶ <https://www.google.com/search?q=god>

⁷ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion>

⁸ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God>

To answer these questions, we need to go back in history. Even that simple intent is not easy. Should we go back into cosmological history of the universe and the evolutionary history of life on earth, or should we go back in “creationist history”? The next chapters illustrate the wide disparity between both and the overlay of different religious paradigms.

2. Cosmological History and Evolutionary History of Life on Earth

Cosmological and evolutionary milestones are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Cosmological and Evolutionary Timeline

Historic Timeline (years ago)	Milestone
13.8 billion	Creation of the universe ⁹
13.6 billion	Creation of our galaxy ¹⁰
4.6 billion	Creation of the solar system and Earth ¹¹
4.4 billion	Oceans formed on Earth ¹²
3.8 billion	Primitive microbial single-cell life ¹³
2.1 billion	Multi-cellular micro-organisms (eukaryotes) ¹⁴
525 million	Multi-cellular vertebrates (fishes, amphibians, reptiles) ¹⁵
235 million	Origin of dinosaurs ¹⁶
160 million	Origin mammals ¹⁷
65 million	Origin of Primates ¹⁸

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Age_of_the_universe

¹⁰ <https://spaceplace.nasa.gov/galaxies-age/en/>

¹¹ http://earthguide.ucsd.edu/virtualmuseum/ita/05_3.shtml

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Origin_of_water_on_Earth#Water_in_the_development_of_Earth

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earliest_known_life_forms

¹⁴ <https://www.nature.com/articles/nature09166>

¹⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vertebrate#First vertebrates>

¹⁶ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dinosaur>

¹⁷ <https://www.livescience.com/15734-oldest-placental-mammal.html>

¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evolution_of_primates

Historic Timeline (years ago)	Milestone
1.9 million	Origin of Homo Erectus ^{19,20}
430,000	Oldest Neanderthal Bones ²¹
315,000	Emergence of Homo Sapiens ²²

If the age of the universe was represented by a 24-hour day, then humankind's ancestors, homo sapiens, only appeared on Earth in the last 2 seconds.

¹⁹ <http://humanorigins.si.edu/evidence/human-fossils/species/homo-erectus>

²⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homo_erectus

²¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neanderthal>

²² <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Homo-sapiens>

3. Timeline of Religions

The timeline for the origin of religions is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Religion Timeline

Historic Timeline (years ago)	Milestone
~100,000	Animism, the worship of natural entities (sun, moon, animals) ^{23,24,25}
7,000 – 1,000	Personification of multiple polytheistic gods (Romans ²⁶ , Greeks ²⁷ , Vikings ²⁸ , Egyptians ²⁹ , Persians ³⁰ , Chinese ³¹)
4,000	Origins of henotheistic Hinduism ³²
3,500 – 2,600	Origins of Zoroastrianism ³³
3,400	Origins of monotheistic Judaism ³⁴
2,500	Origins of atheistic Buddhism ³⁵
2,000	Origins of monotheistic Christianity ³⁶
1,350	Origins of monotheistic Islam ³⁷

²³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solar_deity

²⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_lunar_deities

²⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prehistoric_religion

²⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Roman-religion/Beliefs-practices-and-institutions>

²⁷ https://www.ancient.eu/Greek_Religion/

²⁸ <http://www.legendsandchronicles.com/ancient-civilizations/the-vikings/viking-religion-and-beliefs/>

²⁹ <https://www.ancient.eu/article/885/egyptian-gods---the-complete-list/>

³⁰ <https://www.ancient.eu/article/1486/twelve-gods-of-persian-mythology/>

³¹ <https://www.ancient.eu/article/891/religion-in-ancient-china/>

³² <https://www.history.com/topics/religion/hinduism>

³³ <https://www.ancient.eu/zoroastrianism/>

³⁴ <https://www.orthodox-jews.com/origin-of-judaism.html>

³⁵ <https://www.history.com/topics/religion/buddhism>

³⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Christianity

³⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Islam>

At the dawn of the age of homo sapiens on Earth, perhaps 300,000 years ago, survival was a struggle. It is natural to speculate that, at some undefined time, early man began worshipping gods. He did not however worship a monotheistic, man-like deity. He worshipped those things that enabled him to survive. Likely deities included,

- The sun, which gave light and warmth during the day
- The moon, which gave light that enabled vision at night
- Rain that provided drinking water and enabled edible berries and roots to grow
- Animals, such as the woolly mammoth that provided most of the meat eaten
- Fire that provided warmth at night and during winter

Anything that enabled survival in those days was worthy of worship. Man did not need to worship a jealous God. This worship of natural entities is generally referred to as animism³⁸ and continues to be widespread even today by indigenous peoples.

Little specifics are known about such religions in pre-history before writing was invented, however personifications of these natural entities continued to be worshipped in later ancient civilizations, of which more is known. See citations for personified polytheistic³⁹ gods in Table 2.

Hinduism is identified in Table 2 as a henotheistic⁴⁰ religion rather the more commonly known term, polytheistic. Most forms of Hinduism are henotheistic, which means they worship a single supreme deity, known as “Brahman”, but still recognize other lower level gods and goddesses. In contrast, polytheistic religions generally worship multiple gods equally without any hierarchy.

True monotheistic⁴¹ religions have only existed for the last 3,400 years with the advent of Judaism. Christianity has only existed for the last 2,000 years, while Islam appeared only 1,350 years ago.

³⁸ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Animism>

³⁹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polytheism>

⁴⁰ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henotheism>

⁴¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monotheism>

Zoroastrianism was arguably the first monotheistic religion however some argue that it is really a henotheistic religion. Zoroastrianism was a unification of the prior polytheistic religions of the ancient Persian empire. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that remnants of henotheism continued to exist in some branches of the religion (as indeed also existed in early Judaism⁴²). The timing of the origins of Zoroastrianism also appear a little uncertain. Sources identify it as developing at various times including 2,000 BCE⁴³ (4,000 years ago)⁴⁴, 1,500 to 1,200 BCE (3,500 to 3,200 years ago)^{45,46}, and 600 BCE (2,600 years ago)^{47,48}. Depending on which dates are more credible, Zoroastrianism could arguably be claimed as the first monotheistic religion or coincident with Judaism. Certainly, it predates both Christianity and Islam.

Buddhism is identified in Table 2 as an atheistic religion. That may appear to be an oxymoron. Buddhism is one of the world's major religions, yet atheism is not a religion. Some religious scholars do not regard Buddhism as a true religion. Buddha was a spiritual teacher around 500 BCE, who taught spiritual enlightenment, inner peace, meditation, and wisdom. Buddhists do not regard Buddha as a god and do not acknowledge a supreme god or deity.

If the age of the universe was represented by a 24-hour day, then monotheistic Judaism only appeared on Earth in the last 0.02 seconds. Christianity only appeared in the last 0.012 seconds and Islam only appeared in the last 0.0085 seconds.

Compared to the age of the universe 3,400 years is only the last 0.000025% of time. Why would God wait 99.999975% of the age of the universe before emerging on the world stage to be worshipped by humans? To be more generous, why wait until the last 3,400 years (1%) of the 315,000-year existence of homo sapiens before making himself known. Of course, this is the reason the creationist version of the universe (see Chapter 4) pegs the week of creation to be

⁴² <https://www.haaretz.com/archaeology/.premium.MAGAZINE-when-the-jews-believed-in-other-gods-1.6315810>

⁴³ BCE = Before Common Era

⁴⁴ <https://www.history.com/topics/religion/zoroastrianism>

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ <https://www.ancient.eu/zoroastrianism/>

⁴⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Zoroastrianism>

⁴⁸ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zoroastrianism>

approximately 6,000 years ago. In this way, the vast expanse of cosmological history of the universe and evolutionary history on Earth is swept under the carpet. It also minimizes the “wasted” time before monotheistic religions were invented by man.

Of course, those more progressive believers in God who accept cosmological history will say God is patient and was willing to wait for an audience. They will say that God’s existence is not dependent on the existence of believers. On the contrary, God’s presumed existence very definitely depends on, and indeed requires, the existence of believers. God only exists in the minds of men. Prior to the Israelites belief in one God, the concept of a one God did not exist. Therefore, one God did not exist then ... or now.

God needs believers and needs to be worshipped as is evident from the numerous references to God as a jealous God craving worship above all others.

- *“You shall have no other gods before me.”* [Exodus 20:3](#)
- *“For you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.”* [Exodus 34:14](#)
- *“It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear.”* [Deuteronomy 6:13](#)
- *“And Jesus answered him, “It is written. You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.””* [Luke 4:8](#)

Of course, “thou shalt have no other gods before me” is the first of the Ten Commandments. It was appropriate at the time since worship of other pagan gods was common practice in Egypt and other nations, including the early Hebrews. These days, its meaning has been interpreted and expanded to include love and worship of self, money, possessions, power, influence, etc. (i.e. idolatry). Either way, God wants to be number one on our appreciation list.

4. Creationist History of The Universe and Life on Earth

The Creationist timeline⁴⁹ as outlined in [Genesis 1:1-27](#) is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Creationist Timeline

Historic Timeline (years ago)		Milestone
6,000	Day 1	Creation of the heavens and the earth and day and night ⁵⁰
6,000	Day 2	Creation of the sky ⁵¹
6,000	Day 3	Creation of land and oceans; and vegetation, trees, and plants ⁵²
6,000	Day 4	Creation of the sun, moon, and stars ⁵³
6,000	Day 5	Creation of fish in the oceans and birds in the sky ⁵⁴
6,000	Day 6	Creation of animals on the land and Adam and Eve ⁵⁵

Young-earth proponents claim the Earth is approximately 6,000 years old.⁵⁶ Genealogical tracing of Adam to Abraham using the Masoretic Hebrew text of Genesis 5 and 11 gives 2,000 years.⁵⁷ Most Christian and secular scholars agree that Abraham lived about 2,000 BCE.⁵⁸ That means the Earth is 6,000 years old.

⁴⁹ <http://danielke.sites.simpleupdates.com/timelines/creation-timeline>

⁵⁰ <https://www.bible.com/bible/1/GEN.1.KJV> Genesis 1:1-5

⁵¹ Ibid. Genesis 1:6-8

⁵² Ibid. Genesis 1:9-13

⁵³ Ibid. Genesis 1:14-19

⁵⁴ Ibid. Genesis 1:20-23

⁵⁵ Ibid. Genesis 1:24-27

⁵⁶ <https://answersingenesis.org/age-of-the-earth/how-old-is-the-earth/>

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Allegedly, the 12th century Jewish philosopher, Maimonides was able to establish the date of the creation more precisely to October 7, 3761 BCE.^{59,60} I'm not sure whether October 7th is considered the start of creation or the completion of creation. Years in the Jewish calendar are designated AM to identify them as part of the Anno Mundi epoch, indicating the age of the world (and universe) according to the Bible. Therefore, the beginning of the year 2020 in the Gregorian calendar converts to year AM 5780 in the Jewish calendar.

Most (though not all) believers recognize that the first twenty-seven verses of Genesis are apocryphal. Indeed, Biologos,⁶¹ an organization of Christian scientists, acknowledges evolutionary creation but recognizes God as Creator of all life over billions of years.⁶² Biologos argues that *"God did not choose to reveal modern scientific information to the ancient Hebrews."*⁶³

⁵⁹ <https://www.timeanddate.com/calendar/jewish-calendar.html>

⁶⁰ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/anno-mundi>

⁶¹ <https://biologos.org/>

⁶² <https://biologos.org/about-us#our-mission>

⁶³ <https://biologos.org/common-questions/how-long-are-the-days-of-genesis-1/>

5. The Universe

Those who believe in an almighty deity also believe they are “made in his image” or that they are “his chosen people” or that they are “God’s children.” The implication is that earth-bound, humankind is the extent of God’s interest. There are a couple of things wrong with that.

Earth is 8,000 miles in diameter,⁶⁴ with a surface area of 200 million square miles and a volume of 2.7×10^{11} cubic miles. Table 4 gives estimates of the size of the universe.

Table 4. Parameters of the Universe

Universe Parameters	Value
Diameter ⁶⁵	9.3×10^{10} light years = 5.5×10^{23} miles
Volume	8.5×10^{70} cubic miles
No. of Galaxies ⁶⁶	2×10^{12}
No. of Stars ⁶⁷	1×10^{24}
No. of Planets	$> 1 \times 10^{24}$

1×10^{24} is 1 with 24 zeros after it or 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000

If Earth is the only planet with intelligent, god-fearing life in the universe then why would God make 1×10^{24} star systems when only one star system is needed to support life on Earth? It seems like an awful waste of effort and resources. Conversely, if there are untold number of other planets with life, then is God also their God? Are they too made in God’s image and are they too God’s chosen aliens? If there are indeed many more life-forms in the universe, does this somehow dilute Earth’s religious masses claim to be his chosen people? Or would Earth’s religions claim that God only loves them but does not love the countless other life-forms in the

⁶⁴ <https://www.universetoday.com/15055/diameter-of-earth/>

⁶⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Observable_universe

⁶⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Observable_universe

⁶⁷ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star>

universe? Clearly, Earth's monotheistic religions are somewhat arrogant and isolationist in a universal sense.

6. Heaven and Everlasting Life

Why do people believe in God? Table 5 gives a short question and answer session that illustrates the connection between belief in God and the desire for everlasting life.

Table 5. Believer Questionnaire

Skeptic	True Believer
Do you believe in God?	Yes
Do you worship God?	Yes
Do you believe in everlasting life?	Yes
Why do you believe in everlasting life?	Because I am afraid of the “nothingness” of death
Do you believe you will have everlasting life?	Yes
Do you believe in heaven?	Yes
Do you believe in hell?	Um, I am not sure
Do you believe you will go to heaven (and not hell)?	Yes
Why do you believe you will go to heaven?	Because I believe in God and worship Him
Why do you believe in God?	Because I want to go to heaven

The basis for this correlation between everlasting life and belief in God is of course the often-quoted [John 3:16](#), King James Version, *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”* This is considered the central theme of Christianity and is the hook by which believers believe.

One of the paradoxes of the concept of heaven and an afterlife is that it is impossible to prove that it exists. Think about it. The moment that one dies and the moment one would become

aware of an afterlife is the moment that communication with the real world ceases. The only group who could verify the existence of an afterlife is the dead. This of course is very convenient for religion since this same paradox can be used by believers to say that one cannot disprove an afterlife.

If there is no afterlife, would believers be disappointed, angry, scared, betrayed? No ... of course not. They would not have any thought or emotion for they would not be conscious. Is one aware that one is no longer living? No.

Imagine falling asleep. We dream during REM⁶⁸ sleep. Some of us are aware at the time that activities during dreams are indeed dreams and not reality. This is especially true immediately before awakening when we are semi-conscious. The average person only dreams ~20% of the time during sleep. Therefore, what is our awareness or consciousness during the remaining 80% of non-REM sleep? We have no conscious thought. Not even a dream-state of consciousness. We have no awareness of our surroundings. For all we know we could be dead. Even that is a meaningless sentence because we cannot “know” anything when we are unconscious. There is no essential difference between non-REM sleep and death. At some level, the brain is still functioning during non-REM sleep. are still transmitting electrical charges. Chemical reactions are still occurring in the brain. But the activity does not reach the level of conscious thought. We are not aware of “being.” We have no awareness of anything. We have no consciousness. Would we be aware if we failed to re-awake? No. Those who die in their sleep are not aware that they have died. We can imagine this unconscious state of being as a pseudo-death. And we all experience it every time we sleep. We do not fear to sleep because we are conditioned by experience not to be afraid of this pseudo-death, because we know that we “usually” awake in the morning.

Why are so many people afraid of real death? Are they afraid of what they may find after death ... heaven, hell, no heaven, no hell, something different or nothing? It is reasonable to suppose that we are afraid of losing what we treasure in life ... family, friends, love, material pleasures,

⁶⁸ REM = Rapid Eye Movement

success, power. But that is fear of loss of the benefits and pleasures of life, it is not a fear of “nothingness” after death. I am not aware that monotheistic religions give a written guarantee of continuation of all the good things of life. Indeed, the many less fortunate members of mankind (suffering war, poverty, homelessness, disease, family abuse, political oppression) would not want a continuation of their earthly life.

We play Russian Roulette each time we sleep. Granted, the odds of not awakening are rather small⁶⁹ though increase significantly as we age. Nevertheless, they are certainly not zero and are significantly higher than the US EPA’s acceptable risk range of 10^{-6} to 10^{-4} or 0.000001 to 0.0001.^{70,71} We all voluntarily enter a state of pseudo-death each night without a second thought, with no guarantee that we will awake. So why are we afraid of the “nothingness” of death?

The probability of not awaking from the pseudo-death of sleep is relatively easy to calculate. Actuarial Life Tables⁷² give the probability of death and life expectancy as a function of age and gender. For a 70-year old male, the probability of dying during the current year is 0.023 or 2.3%. Assuming he sleeps 8 hours per night, then the probability of dying during sleep in that year is $0.023 / 3 = 0.007$ or 0.7%, still small but not insignificant.

The optimum age with the smallest annual probability of death is age 10 where the annual probability of death is approximately 0.0001. Using the same calculation as above, the probability of a 10-year old dying during sleep in that year is $0.0001 / 3 = 0.00003$ or 0.003%.

Are believers more afraid of death than non-believers, or vice versa? That is really a test of faith. True believers should not be afraid. They should welcome death. Uncertain believers are likely to be very afraid. What if there really is no God or life after death? However, this is a misplaced

⁶⁹ Average odds of approximately 1 in 27,000 based on sleeping 365 days/year x 75 years = 27,375.

⁷⁰ <https://www.epa.gov/risk/regional-removal-management-levels-rmls-frequently-asked-questions#FAQ5>

⁷¹ <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CFR-2011-title40-vol28/pdf/CFR-2011-title40-vol28-sec300-430.pdf>

⁷² <https://www.ssa.gov/oact/STATS/table4c6.html>

fear for reasons given in the previous paragraph. The non-believers have figured all this out and are not afraid. They willingly accept the “nothingness” of death. Uncertain non-believers are perhaps in the worst boat. They are afraid that God and an afterlife really do exist and that their non-belief may lead them to burn in hell.

7. Chicken and the Egg

One of the favorite axioms of religion is that the universe is so marvelous and complex that it could not possibly have occurred by chance. Someone or something must have created it.

Using that logic, would not the creator of such a wonderful and complex universe have been even more wonderful and complex than his creation. The analogy with computers is almost too obvious to mention. But here goes. The computer is an amazing machine. This has been even more evident since the advent of the personal computer with email, internet, GPS, ecommerce, collaboration, networking, etc. However, computers, and the software and hardware that drive them, have all been created by man.⁷³ Some would say that proves the creationist's point that complex entities need a creator. However, the opposite is true. No matter how complex computers may be, they were designed by entities orders of magnitude more complex, namely man. The point is that a creator and his creation obey a hierarchical law. The creation can never be more complex than its creator.

So hereby lies the paradox. Believers or creationists believe that an 8.5×10^{70} cubic mile universe containing 10^{24} star systems is too complex to have developed on its own, therefore God must have created it. However, the creator must be more complex than his creation. Therefore, God is too complex to have simply existed without he himself having been created by an even more complex being? One can imagine this argument going on forever. Perhaps assigning a life-form template on God is a little too simplistic, but did God have a mother and father? Even Jesus had a biological mother if not a biological father. Are we expected to accept the pre-existence of God, yet not accept the pre-existence of the Universe? Why is the pre-existence of a creator easier to accept by believers than the pre-existence of the Universe?

Certainly, modern cosmological theory of the universe is hard to comprehend even in its basic conceptual form, the Big Bang Theory. The Big Bang is thought to have occurred 13.8 billion years ago. Then, a pinpoint of matter exploded into what is now our known universe. So, what happened before the Big Bang? What made the Big Bang ... bang? We are told that time itself

⁷³ I am using the collective definition of "man" that includes women.

did not exist before the Big Bang. Therefore, asking the question what happened before is a meaningless question. But the concept of time not existing is as hard to comprehend as the concept of the Big Bang itself. We are told that the laws of physics themselves did not exist before the Big Bang. I will freely admit that the Big Bang theory has the obvious “creation” aspect, however cosmological history of 13.8 billion years is a slightly different scale from the 6-day creation six thousand years ago in the Old Testament.

I will also freely admit that some of the more esoteric cosmological theories of the universe including the Big Bang itself, string theory, dark matter, dark energy, multi-universes and imaginary time are even harder for the layman to understand (or believe) than belief in the existence of God. However, only cosmologists need to worry about these esoteric concepts. The average layman does not need to worry about these concepts since they do not impact his every-day life. The belief in a God however impacts a large fraction of the planet’s inhabitants, therefore the debate over the existence of God is of supreme importance to mankind.

As to the title of this section ... the chicken and the egg ... which came first? Of course, we now know that evolution provides the answer. Neither the chicken nor the egg has existed forever. Both parent and child gradually change and evolve over the years to adapt to their environment. The question only appears nonsensical when viewed in a non-changing snapshot in the evolutionary timeframe.

8. Religion as a Political Process

Politics is the method of exerting control, power, and influence by the few over the many. Today, politics is an acceptable way of government on the federal, state, and local level. Today, the US and many developed western countries in the world are constitutional democracies where politicians and leaders are elected by the masses. Other forms of government are more dictatorial. Whatever form of government is chosen, a few people wield power over the many. In the initial faltering steps of homo sapiens, some 300,000 years ago, most groups of mankind were tribes of fewer than 100 people. Such small groups were relatively easy to control by one or several leaders. Communication was instant and face-to-face. Over the millennia, as tribes became larger and multiple tribes collaborated for common interests, control, and management of larger number of people became more difficult. A new way of controlling thousands and millions⁷⁴ of people was needed.

Thousands of years ago, Hebrew tribal leaders of what would become the Jewish people decided to try something different. The leaders told their people that an omnipotent being had spoken to them exclusively and said that the people should behave in a certain way. This had much more clout than just saying, "I want you to do this." Demands on the populous to obey laws are more likely to be obeyed if one can ascribe the source to a higher power than oneself. The Hebrew leaders were smart in figuring this out. Effectively, the leaders were formulating laws and regulations themselves, and promoting it as, "The Word of God."

This method of controlling large numbers of people using religion is discussed by Yoav Noah Harari in his book, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Moses led an estimated 2,000,000 Hebrews out of Egypt.

⁷⁵ <https://www.ynharari.com/book/sapiens/>

9. Biggest Hoax

Monotheistic religion is the biggest hoax perpetrated by a few men on mankind, in order to control and manage populations. That is not necessarily a bad thing. Control and order is a necessary bureaucracy that we must tolerate in order to survive in a civilized society. However, an unfortunate side effect is that in order to achieve this control, a sizable fraction of the planet's population has been brainwashed into believing in a jealous, omnipotent God, who demands worship in exchange for the promise of everlasting life.

Today, national leaders have the benefit of established laws and regulations and a federal bureaucracy to support their administration. Some 3,400 years ago, leaders of Hebrew tribes who would later become the Jewish people, had trouble controlling their people who worshipped pagan gods and led idolatry lives. Reading the first several books of the Old Testament tells us what happened next. A series of Hebrew leaders in the Old Testament (Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Moses, Joshua, etc.) told their people that the Lord God had spoken to them alone and He said what the people should do. These included,

- Demands to worship Him
- Design of temples to worship Him
- How to sacrifice to Him
- Rules or laws for civil society (Ten Commandments)
- Punishments and/or sacrifices for breaking laws

The leaders told their people that the Lord God had spoken to them exclusively and said that the people should behave in a certain way. Effectively, the leaders were formulating laws and regulations themselves, and promoting it as, "The Word of God." There is nothing inherently wrong with this subterfuge. Except that the people continued to believe the mythical God was real and continue to do so to this day.

In those days, communication was limited. There were no printing presses, newspapers, books, radio, TV, phones, or internet. Most all communication was by word-of-mouth (early social

media). These leaders are now called prophets. The Meriam-Webster Dictionary defines prophet⁷⁶ as “one who utters divinely inspired revelations” and “one regarded by a group of followers as the final authoritative revealer of God’s will.”

It is therefore little wonder that the prophets had so much influence over the common man at the time. It is also important to realize that with no microphones or loudspeakers, a single man could not speak to more than a couple hundred people at a time. Therefore, much of “God’s Word” would have been spread by word-of-mouth, by necessity. One can only imagine how the original message became changed and garbled as it passed from person to person.

This apparently worked so well that several thousand years later, a different religion, Islam, was formed. Islam’s bible is the Quran that features many of the same prophets as the Judeo-Christian Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments. The following description of the prophet Muhammad’s life illustrates a remarkable similarity to the Old Testament prophets and to the practice of hearing the “Word of God” and transmitting it to the people.

“Islam is a monotheistic faith centered around belief in the one God (Allah). In this regard, it shares some beliefs with Judaism and Christianity by tracing its history back to the patriarch Abraham, and ultimately to the first prophet, Adam. All the prophets preached the same universal message of belief in one God and kindness to humanity. The last in the series of prophets, according to Muslims, was Muhammad. Muhammad was born in Mecca, Saudi Arabia around 570 CE.⁷⁷ He worked first as a shepherd and then as merchant. He was not happy with people around him because of superstitions and social and economic injustice. The people were worshipping many gods and had forgotten the message of prophet Abraham to worship one God. Muhammad loved to pray and meditate in the mountains. On one of these occasions, in the year 610 CE, when he was about 40 years old, he received a revelation from God through the angel Jibril (Gabriel). He continued to receive messages from God throughout his life and he began preaching to others what he had learned. His main message is that there was no other

⁷⁶ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/prophet>

⁷⁷ CE = Common Era

God, but Allah, and that people should lead their lives in a way that was pleasing to Allah.”⁷⁸

Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are based on the same subterfuge.

⁷⁸ <https://uri.org/kids/world-religions/muslim-beliefs>

10. Ten Commandments

Those who are members of the Judeo-Christian religion love to point to the Ten Commandments in the Bible as the basis of our modern form of (western) laws, and our system of moral and ethical values. Their next “logical” step in this false premise is that if one does not subscribe to a belief in the Abrahamic God, then you are evil, immoral, and not to be trusted. A close inspection of the Ten Commandments, in Table 6 however, shows that they are a mixed bag, with only a small number that relate to current laws and morality.

No.	Book Chapter: Verse	King James Version (KJV)	Contemporary English Version (CEV)	Comment
1	Exodus 20:3	Thou shalt have no other gods before me	Do not worship any god except me	The first four commandments have nothing to do with either morality or current laws. Other verbiage (not shown) threatens punishment for those who do not obey.
2	Exodus 20:4,5	Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image ... Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them	Do not make idols ... Do not bow down and worship idols	
3	Exodus 20:7	Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain	Do not misuse my name	
4	Exodus 20:8	Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy	Remember that the Sabbath Day belongs to me	
5	Exodus 20:12	Honor thy father and thy mother	Respect your father and your mother	
				Makes sense except for abusive parents. Relates to morality, but not current laws.

Table 6. Biblical Ten Commandments				
No.	Book Chapter: Verse	King James Version (KJV)	Contemporary English Version (CEV)	Comment
6	Exodus 20:13	Thou shalt not kill	Do not murder	Relates to morality and current laws
7	Exodus 20:14	Thou shalt not commit adultery	Be faithful in marriage	Relates to morality but not current laws. The Old Testament is replete with examples of polygamy
8	Exodus 20:15	Thou shalt not steal	Do not steal	Relates to morality and current laws
9	Exodus 20:16	Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor	Do not tell lies about others	Relates to morality and current laws on perjury
10	Exodus 20:17	Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor's	Do not desire to possess anything that belongs to another person – not a house, a wife, a husband, a slave, an ox, a donkey, or anything else	Attempts to control thoughts and jealousy. Marginally relates to morality but does not relate to current laws.

The first four, and presumably those judged to be the most important, are all about worshipping the one God and no other gods. They have no relation to either morality or current laws. They are all about me, me, me. A not too surprising parallel to President Trump. Indeed, much of the other verbiage surrounding these initial four commandments threaten punishment to those who fail to obey Him, and to their descendants.

- [Exodus 20:5](#) (Contemporary English Version (CEV) states, *“Don’t bow down and worship idols. I am the LORD your God, and I demand all your love. If you reject me, I will punish your families for three or four generations.”*
- [Exodus 20:7](#) (Contemporary English Version (CEV) states, *“Do not misuse my name. I am the LORD your God, and I will punish anyone who misuses my name.”*

Three commandments (#5, #7 and #10) relate to honoring your father and mother, forbidding adultery and forbidding jealousy of your neighbor and his possessions. These relate to a varying degree to morality but do not relate to any current laws.

Only three commandments inarguably relate to morality and current laws. These are #6, #8 and #9, forbidding murder, stealing and perjury.

It is also worth observing that two commandments, #4 and #10, mention slaves as possessions. Reference to slaves here and numerous other places in the Old Testament (e.g. [Exodus 21](#)), as the “word of God” shows that slavery was acceptable to the Judeo-Christian God.

A further reading of [Exodus 21](#) and [Exodus 22](#) includes many other laws claimed to be the “word of God.” Not only laws but also punishments for breaking those laws. A review of what some of God’s punishments lead one to think that God was both arbitrary and capricious.

- [Exodus 21:17](#) (CEV). *“Death is the punishment for cursing your father or mother.”*
- [Exodus 21:20-21](#) (CEV). *“Death is the punishment for beating to death any of your slaves. However, if the slave lives a few days after the beating, you are not to be punished. After all, you have already lost the services of that slave who was your property.”*
- [Exodus 21:26-27](#) (CEV). *“If you hit one of your slaves and cause the loss of an eye, the slave must be set free. The same law applies if you knock out a slave's tooth - the slave goes free.”*

- [Exodus 22:2-3](#) (CEV). *“If you happen to kill a burglar who breaks into your home after dark, you are not guilty. But if you kill someone who breaks in during the day, you are guilty of murder.”*
- [Exodus 22:20](#) (CEV). *“Death is the punishment for offering sacrifices to any god except me.”*

10.1 Moral Codes and Laws of Ancient Civilizations

The belief that the Judeo-Christian Commandments are the foundation of today’s laws of western civilizations is unfounded. Many ancient and older civilizations and cultures have similar codes of conduct or “rules to live by.”⁷⁹

The Hebrew Torah⁸⁰ is generally regarded to consist of the first five Books of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), namely, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Although the Ten Commandments⁸¹ are in [Exodus 20:3-17](#), Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy contain a plethora of rules and laws generally referred to as the “Law of Moses.”⁸² These include moral laws (murder, theft, honesty, adultery), social laws (property, inheritance, marriage, divorce), food laws, purity laws, feasts and holy days, sacrifices and offerings, instructions for the priesthood, instructions for the construction of tabernacles and temples of worship, and punishments for violating His laws.

Though the Ten Commandments and the Five Books are traditionally ascribed to Moses⁸³ during the 13th century BCE, the majority of Biblical scholars now believe the books were written during the Babylonian captivity⁸⁴ in the 6th century BCE.

Earlier legal/moral codes were developed earlier. See Table 7. It should be noted that most codes are ascribed to the king or ruler of the period. No code was ascribed to an almighty being or referred to as the “Word of God.”

⁷⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_ancient_legal_codes

⁸⁰ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torah>

⁸¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ten_Commandments

⁸² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_of_Moses

⁸³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moses>

⁸⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylonian_captivity

Date	Code	Comment
2,380 - 2,360 BCE	Code of Urukagina ⁸⁵	Urukagina was King of Lagash in Mesopotamia. First recorded example of government reform, seeking to achieve a higher level of freedom and equality. It limited the power of the priesthood and large property owners, and took measures against usury, burdensome controls, hunger, theft, murder, and seizure (of people's property and persons).
2,350 - 1,400 BCE	Cuneiform Law ⁸⁶	Cuneiform law refers to any of the legal codes written in cuneiform script, that were developed and used throughout the ancient Middle East among the Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Elamites, Hurrians, Kassites, and Hittites. The Code of Hammurabi is the most well-known of the cuneiform laws, but there were a number of precursor laws. Viewed as a predecessor of Biblical and Jewish law.
c 2,500 BCE	Code of Ur-Nammu ⁸⁷	Ur-Nammu was a Sumerian king in Mesopotamia. The laws are arranged in casuistic form of IF (crime) THEN (punishment)—a pattern followed in nearly all later codes. For the oldest extant law-code known to history, it is considered remarkably advanced because it institutes fines of monetary compensation for bodily damage as opposed to the later 'eye for an eye' principle of Babylonian law. However, murder, robbery, adultery, and rape were capital offenses.
c 1,930 BCE	Laws of Eshnunna ⁸⁸	Named after the city where it originated rather than a ruler or king. Laws clearly show evidence of social stratification, class structure, gender inequality and slavery.

⁸⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urukagina>

⁸⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuneiform_law

⁸⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Code_of_Ur-Nammu

⁸⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laws_of_Eshnunna

Table 7. Legal/Moral Codes of Ancient Civilizations		
Date	Code	Comment
c 1,870 BCE	Codex of Lipit-Ishtar of Isin ⁸⁹	Lipit-Ishtar was a Sumerian king. Sample Law #27. "If a man's wife has not borne him children but a harlot from the public square has borne him children, he shall provide grain, oil and clothing for that harlot. The children which the harlot has borne him shall be his heirs, and as long as his wife lives the harlot shall not live in the house with the wife."
c 1,790 BCE	Babylonian Laws ⁹⁰ Code of Hammurabi ⁹¹	Babylonian law is a subset of cuneiform law that has received extensive study owing to the wide extent of the associated archaeological material that has usually been found for it. So-called "contracts" exist in the thousands, including a great variety of deeds, conveyances, bonds, receipts, accounts, and most important of all, actual legal decisions given by the judges in the law courts. The Code of Hammurabi is a well-preserved Babylonian code of law of ancient Mesopotamia. It is one of the oldest deciphered writings of significant length in the world. The sixth Babylonian king, Hammurabi, enacted the code. It consists of 282 laws, with scaled punishments, adjusting "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" as graded based on social stratification depending on social status, of slave versus free, of man versus woman.

⁸⁹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lipit-Ishtar>

⁹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylonian_law

⁹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Code_of_Hammurabi

Table 7. Legal/Moral Codes of Ancient Civilizations		
Date	Code	Comment
c 1,650 - 1,100 BCE	Hittite Laws ⁹²	Hittite Laws remained essentially unchanged for over 500 years. The author is unknown. The laws show an aversion to the death penalty. The usual penalty for serious offenses being enslavement to forced labor. The laws are classified into eight categories, aggression and assault, marital relationships, obligations and service, assaults on property and heft, contracts and process, sacred matters, contracts and tariffs, and sexual relationships.
c 1,650 - 1,500 BCE	Code of Nesilim ⁹³	The Code of Nesilim is an ancient Hittite legal code. This contained the laws that reflected the Hittite empire's social structure, sense of justice, and morality, addressing common outlawed actions such as assault, theft, murder, witchcraft, and divorce, among others. It is particularly notable due to numerous its provisions, covering social issues that included the humane treatment of slaves. Although they were considered lesser than free men, the slaves under the code were allowed to choose whomever they wanted to marry, buy property, open businesses, and purchase their freedom. In comparison with The Code of Assura or the Code of Hammurabi, the Code of Nesilim also provided less-severe punishments for the code's violations.
C 1,075 BCE	Assyrian Laws ⁹⁴ Code of the Assura	Assyrian law was very similar to Sumerian and Babylonian law, although the penalties for offenses were generally more brutal.

⁹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hittite_laws

⁹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Code_of_the_Nesilim

⁹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assyrian_law

Table 7. Legal/Moral Codes of Ancient Civilizations		
Date	Code	Comment
c 10 th - 6 th century BCE	Law of Moses ⁹⁵	The "Law of Moses" in ancient Israel was different from other legal codes in the ancient Near East because transgressions were viewed as offenses against God rather than solely as offenses against fellow man or society at large. The Law of Moses was also the first to demand worship of God with threat of punishment of death for those would did not comply.

10.2 Six Commandments for Today

It takes no great thinking to compile a small number of common-sense commandments or moral codes that are appropriate today, none of which appear in the Judeo-Christian Commandments.

1. Treat others as you would have them treat you.
2. Treat others with respect, dignity, and equality, irrespective of color, race, gender, creed, sexual preference or gender identity.
3. Allow all to worship their various gods, and practice their chosen religions, but do not allow these practices to infringe upon the human rights of others who do not share those beliefs.
4. Separate church from state.
5. Never allow religious rights to infringe on human rights.
6. Ensure our chosen representatives, and our written laws reflect these human values and human rights.

⁹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_of_Moses

11. Separation of Church and State in the US

An example of the schizophrenic attitude of the US to organized religion is the concept of “separation of church and state.” To those non-US readers, this deserves a little introduction.

The following is taken directly from the Cornell Law School article on “Religion and the Constitution”,

*“Because of their belief in a separation of church and state, the framers of the Constitution favored a neutral posture toward religion. The members of the Constitutional Convention, the group charged with authoring the Constitution, believed that the government should have no power to influence its citizens toward or away from a religion. The principle of separating church from state was integral to the framers’ understanding of religious freedom. They believed that any governmental intervention in the religious affairs of citizens would necessarily infringe on their religious freedom. Thus, the Constitution maintains a general silence on the subject save for two instances. The first instance, in Article VI, is a proscription (prohibition) of any religious tests as a requisite qualification for public service. The second instance is in the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights.”*⁹⁶

The opening words of the First Amendment to the US Constitution is, *“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof ...”*⁹⁷

The First Amendment not only allows citizens the freedom to practice any religion of their choice, but also prevents the government from officially recognizing or favoring any religion.⁹⁸

The Establishment Clause prohibits the government from making any law *“respecting an establishment of religion.”* This clause not only forbids the government from establishing an official religion, but also prohibits government actions that unduly favor one religion over

⁹⁶ https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/religion_and_the_constitution

⁹⁷ https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/first_amendment

⁹⁸ Ibid.

another. It also prohibits the government from unduly preferring religion over non-religion, or non-religion over religion.⁹⁹

The Free Exercise Clause reserves the right of American citizens to accept any religious belief and engage in religious rituals. The Clause protects not just religious beliefs, but actions made on behalf of those beliefs.¹⁰⁰

11.1 Conflict Between Religious Rights and Human Rights

The Establishment Clause and Free Exercise Clause are in conflict. This has led to controversial decisions by the Supreme Court that threaten basic human rights (e.g. women’s rights, LGBTQ rights) while supporting religious rights.

The Free Exercise Clause protects not just religious beliefs, but actions made on behalf of those beliefs. More importantly, the wording of state constitutions suggests that *“free exercise envisions religiously compelled exemptions from at least some generally applicable laws.”* The Free Exercise Clause not only protects religious belief and expression; it also seems to allow for violation of laws if that violation is made for religious reasons.¹⁰¹

Constitutional scholars and even Supreme Court opinions have contended that the two religion clauses are in conflict. *e.g., Thomas v. Review Board*, 450 US 707 (1981). As mentioned previously, the Free Exercise Clause implies special accommodation of religious ideas and actions, even to the point of exemptions to generally applicable laws. Such a special benefit seems to violate the neutrality between “religion and non-religion” mandated by the Establishment Clause.¹⁰² McConnell explains:

“If there is a constitutional requirement for accommodation of religious conduct, it will most likely be found in the Free Exercise Clause. Some say, though, that it is a violation of the Establishment Clause for the government to give any special benefit or recognition of

⁹⁹ https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/establishment_clause

¹⁰⁰ https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/free_exercise_clause

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

religion. In that case, we have a First Amendment in conflict with itself - the Establishment Clause forbidding what the Free Exercise Clause requires.”¹⁰³

11.2 Religion in US Institutions

Notwithstanding the First Amendment and the policy of separation of church and state, many entrenched US institutions support the belief in a supreme being, which is the cornerstone of most religious faiths.

11.3 Declaration of Independence

One of the most revered sentences in the founding documents of the United States is the opening preamble to the Declaration of Independence¹⁰⁴ that reads, “*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.*” Reference to a “creator” presaged the US government’s intractable and unbreakable link to a supernatural being, a monotheistic God. This undermined the framers of the Constitution who attempted to write a religion-neutral constitution. Furthermore, this high moral-toned statement was not as good as it sounded. The statement that “*all men are created equal*” was implicitly specific. It does not say “*all people are created equal*” or “*all humans are created equal.*” It was worded to refer to white, male landowners and to specifically exclude,

- all black men and black women who were still enslaved in 1776 would have to wait another 87-89 years to gain their freedom^{105,106}
- black men who would have to wait another 94 years before given the right to vote¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>

¹⁰⁵ The Emancipation Proclamation, January 1, 1863,
<https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured-documents/emancipation-proclamation>

¹⁰⁶ 13th Amendment to the US Constitution, Abolition of Slavery, January 11, 1865,
<https://www.archives.gov/historical-docs/13th-amendment>

- all women (white or black), who would have to wait another 144 years before given the right to vote¹⁰⁸
- all remaining indigenous peoples (Native Americans) who had survived genocide by wars and disease, would have to wait another 148 years before being granted US citizenship and voting rights¹⁰⁹

11.4 Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance is one of the first things that preschoolers memorize and continue to repeat at the start of each school day. The pledge ends with the words “... one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” The pledge is also said at the beginning of every major sporting event in the US. The recitation of the pledge is a stirring and rousing expression of patriotic sentiment that would be no less effective and inspirational without the words “under God.” Indeed, the original pledge, written in 1892, did not include the words “under God.” In 1954, in response to the Communist threat of the times, President Eisenhower encouraged Congress to add the words "under God," creating the 31-word pledge we say today.¹¹⁰ Allegedly, this was done in order to distinguish the US from the godless Soviets.

11.5 National Motto and US Currency

A law passed in a Joint Resolution by the 84th Congress (P.L. 84-140) and approved by President Eisenhower on July 30, 1956 declared “In God We Trust” the national motto of the United States. This motto was first used on paper money in 1957 though had been used on US coins since 1864.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ 15th Amendment to the US Constitution, February 3, 1870,
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Fifteenth-Amendment>

¹⁰⁸ 19th Amendment to the US Constitution, Women’s Right to Vote, August 26, 1920,
<https://www.archives.gov/historical-docs/19th-amendment>

¹⁰⁹ Indian Citizenship Act, 1924,
<https://www.nps.gov/iame/learn/historyculture/upload/Native-American-Citizenship-2.pdf>

¹¹⁰ <https://www.ushistory.org/documents/pledge.htm>

¹¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/In_God_We_Trust

11.6 Controversy

The use of “In God We Trust” in the National Motto and on currency, and “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance has been the subject of numerous unsuccessful lawsuits. Court decisions striking down these lawsuits have been arguable flimsy

- “The nation's institutions presuppose a Supreme Being and government recognition of God does not constitute the establishment of a state church as the Constitution's authors intended to prohibit.” US Supreme Court. 1952.
- “It is quite obvious that the national motto and the slogan on coinage and currency 'In God We Trust' has nothing whatsoever to do with the establishment of religion. Its use is of patriotic or ceremonial character and bears no true resemblance to a governmental sponsorship of a religious exercise.” US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. 1970.
- “These acts of ceremonial deism are protected from Establishment Clause scrutiny chiefly because they have lost through rote repetition any significant religious content.” US Supreme Court. 1984

11.7 Prayer in US Public Schools

Remembering the time at my church high school (see Preface), US public schools do a relatively good job of not promoting religion. However, some school districts include a “moment of prayer” or “moment of silence” for students. As much as they may couch this practice as private reflection, the overtones of prayer are always implicit and often explicit. Bowing of heads and folding of hands cannot be mistaken for anything other than prayer.

11.8 Prayer in the US Congress

The beginning of the day in both houses of Congress and probably most state government legislatures begins with an explicitly sanctioned prayer. To the credit of Congress, it strives for diversity in that the clerics giving the prayer are of different religions. This gives lip service to religious diversity but nevertheless gives explicit federal and state countenance for the existence of a God.

The prayer in the US House of Representatives on April 23, 2015 read,

“Our gracious Heavenly Father, we come into Your presence today acknowledging that You alone are God and worthy of all worship. We declare that You are the Creator and Sustainer of all things and the one who provides the means of forgiveness to all mankind. We recognize Your sovereign rule over Heaven and Earth and that we, Your created beings, are Your stewards. Father, we thank You that You allow us to live in a nation where everyone has freedom to worship You according to the dictates of their own hearts. We pray for wisdom for our elected officials. Give them the ability to discern the times in which we live and to see the consequences of their actions. Guide them in making decisions that will serve our Nation best. May Your spirit move across our land, bringing a new spiritual awakening. Father, cause Your face to shine upon our Nation and give us peace. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.”¹¹²

Government does a credible job at maintaining a tolerance for different types of religions and faiths, thereby meeting the intent of the founding fathers to avoid religious persecution. However, separation of church and state means that the State should not extol, solicit, advertise, proselytize, spread, facilitate, or otherwise encourage religion. This is obviously not how the State is interpreting separation of church and state. In fact, the State actively promotes generic Judeo-Christian religious faith and actively promotes a belief in God. In doing so it violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the US Constitution.

Finally, to repeat the traditional ending to all presidential speeches, “God bless the United States of America.”

11.9 Religious Tests for the US Senate

The following article was written on January 16, 2019, in response to an opinion piece in the Los Angeles Times.

¹¹² <https://chaplain.house.gov/archive/index.html?id=2231>

I agree with the argument of Rabbi Rocklin and Article VI of the Constitution that “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.” However, the intent of the founding fathers in the First Amendment was to allow “the people” not only freedom of religion, but also the freedom to not believe. Therefore, we should broaden this philosophy to say, “belief in an omniscient entity and life after death shall not be a requirement to serve in public office.”

Let’s face it, “separation of church and state” is a myth. Any candidate for public office is obliged to express their belief in a “God”, whatever their style of religion. Does anyone seriously believe that an atheist could be elected President of the United States?

Monotheist religion was invented by man to subjugate and control humankind long before more democratic governments existed. It is sad that religion continues to be so successful in creating chaos and dissent around the world. To imply that a person’s religious beliefs and prejudices can be set aside when making difficult political and legal decisions is naive.

The Constitution does not, and should not, allow religious beliefs to trump basic human rights.

11.10 Two-Party Politics, Religion and the US Supreme Court

The following article was written on October 9, 2018, during the Senate Committee hearings on the nomination of Judge Kavanaugh to the US Supreme Court.

The recent Kavanaugh hearings are one more example that the two-party political system in the US is broken. Justice Kavanaugh’s promise to hear future Supreme Court cases in a fair, un-biased and non-partisan way is admirable. Hopefully, he can fulfill that promise. However, all Supreme Court nominees are nominated by either Democratic or Republican presidents and, by definition, will hold similar values as their sponsors. Each of the Supreme Court justices are labelled either right or left leaning, to a greater or lesser extent.

Almost exclusively, the most important and controversial Supreme Court cases that make the headlines are a five to four decision. A five to four vote is usually due to partisan leanings and, to my mind, is no decision at all. Criminal cases require a unanimous jury verdict. Civil cases usually require a $\frac{3}{4}$ majority verdict or nine out of twelve jurors.

So how do we solve this problem? Eliminate the party system. Yes, eliminate the party system. When I vote, I vote for the person that I believe will do the best job. This should not depend on which political party the person belongs. The existence of political parties requires that the party has an artificial set of “values” or “planks” called a “platform”, with the unrealistic expectation that all politicians and voters within a party will buy into all the “platform.” Of course, not all Democrats are pro-choice, not all Republicans are pro-life, not all Republicans believe in God, not all Republicans are anti-gay or against same sex marriage, and not all believers are anti-gay.

No company, no government agency, and no division of the armed forces is run using two sets of Republican and Democratic management and staff. Why does Congress?

Once two-party politics is eliminated, maybe Congress will start working again. Once two-party politics is eliminated, the Supreme Court justices can be truly “fair, un-biased and non-partisan.”

In recognition that elimination of two-party politics may be beyond the ability of our leaders, there are several easier ways that the impartiality of the Supreme Court can be achieved.

- Increase the number of Justices to say, twenty-one. This achieves two objectives. It ensures a more diverse Court and limits the ability of one or several Justices to dominate the Court.
- Remove the selection process from the political arena, i.e. cease nomination by the President and confirmation by the Senate. The Constitution requires election

of members of Congress by vote of the people. The Supreme Court deserves no less.

- Decisions should require a significant 2/3 majority, for instance fourteen to seven in a twenty-one-member Court. Note also that it should be no longer necessary to have an odd number of Justices because of the required majority.
- Impose a term limit of ten years. This further eliminates the concern that one Justice can impact the Court for a generation.
- The first amendment of the Constitution states in part, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof ...” This is the only use of the word “religion” in the Constitution and protects the rights of the people to worship in their chosen faith ... without abridging the rights of others. Accordingly, no other constitutional rights of the people and no rights of the people governed by federal, State or local laws or regulations should be abridged or trumped by religious dogma or ideology.

12. Religion of US Political Leaders

Name a US politician who does not profess his/her faith and belief in God? That is a tough question. The media expects it. The US public expects it. Politicians know it. Therefore, politicians give the media and public what they want ... whether they really believe or not.

During the 1960 presidential election, many seriously questioned whether a “Catholic” could or should be elected president. He was.

During the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections, some questioned whether a “Mormon” could be elected president. He was not.

The allegation that President Obama was a closet “Muslim” was debated endlessly on TV talk shows and social media. It should not have been important?

Clearly, belief in God is an important requisite for any budding politician in the US.

- Is the US ready to elect a Jewish president? Yes.
- Is the US ready to elect a Muslim president? No.
- Is the US ready to elect a “religiously unaffiliated” president? Probably not.
- Is the US ready to elect an atheist president? Definitely not.

Until the US is truly able to separate religion from politics, then the US will never be religiously diverse, inclusive or, as it should be, religiously disinterested.

The Pew Research Center¹¹³ conducted a survey of religious faiths in the US Congress in 2017.¹¹⁴ Only one member (or 0.2%) identified themselves as “religiously unaffiliated.” That compares with a 2014 Pew Research Center Study of Religion in America¹¹⁵ where 23% of the

¹¹³ <https://www.pewresearch.org/>

¹¹⁴ <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/01/03/faith-on-the-hill-115/>

¹¹⁵ Pew Research Center. 2014 Religious Landscape Study.
<https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>
<https://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>
<https://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious/>

US public identified themselves as “religiously unaffiliated.” Note that of the religiously unaffiliated, only 3% of the US public identify themselves as atheist.

13. Religion of UK Political Leaders

Religion has certainly had a major historical impact on European society and culture. The Reformation¹¹⁶ was a protestant challenge to the Roman Catholic Church and papal authority. In England, Henry VIII's broke with Rome because he wanted to divorce Catherine of Aragon. Ultimately, what became known as the Church of England,¹¹⁷ was protestant, though it kept certain Catholic ceremonies including the celebration of the "body and blood of Christ" in Mass or Communion.

In modern times, given the close historical and cultural relationship of the US and UK, the impact of religion in politics in the UK could not be more different than in the US.

The Queen is the ceremonial head of the Church of England, though the British Government is much more secular than the US Government. There is no "God save the UK" at the end of political speeches, although the national anthem is entitled, "God save the Queen."¹¹⁸ UK politicians do not need to affirm a belief in God as do US politicians. Many leading UK politicians in recent years have been open atheists, and that appears to have been perfectly acceptable to the British public.

- James Callaghan was Prime Minister from 1976 to 1979
- Nick Glegg was Deputy Prime Minister from 2010 to 2015 and Leader of the Liberal Democratic Party from 2007 to 2015
- Ed Miliband was Leader of the Labour Party from 2010 to 2015
- David Miliband was Foreign Secretary from 2007 to 2010

Across the English Channel, Francois Hollande was President of France from 2012 to 2017 and was also an atheist.

¹¹⁶ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reformation>

¹¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_England

¹¹⁸ "God save the King" whenever a male is monarch

14. Gender Inequality in Religion

Much has been accomplished in recent years in women's rights. Yet much inequality remains.

Firstly, common English words assign a subservient or no role to women. Consider the following,

- Woman is derived from man
- Women is derived from men
- Female is derived from male
- History is derived from his story
- Mankind is derived from man
- Human is derived from man
- Humanity is derived from man
- Humankind is derived from man
- Hero is derived from he
- Person is derived from son

Interestingly, this disparate treatment of gender appears to be unique to the English language. The Latin for woman is "femina", while the Latin for man is "vir", two different and distinct words.

14.1 Women in Christianity and Judaism

The first twenty-six verses of [Genesis 1:1-26](#) (King James Version (KJV)), God is mentioned twenty-six times without reference to gender. I began to think that Genesis was very cool! Then the next verse twenty-seven of KJV says, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." God is male ... right? Of course, he is! Interestingly, the Contemporary English Version (CEV) of the Bible, written in 1995, is not so gender neutral. In the same first twenty-six verses of [Genesis 1:1-26](#), the word "he" or "his" is used twelve times.

The Bible starts early in assigning a subservient role to women. Adam was created first. Eve was made from Adam's rib. Eve ate the forbidden fruit first, leading Adam astray.

Reading the first several books of the Old Testament, one finds that all those in leading roles are men. God himself, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, etc. And, of course, in the New Testament, Jesus and his twelve apostles were all male.

All the books of the Judeo-Christian Bible, including the Old and New Testaments were written by men ... not women ... and not by God.¹¹⁹

There are some interesting gender inequality messages in the Bible (English Standard Version (ESV) 2016).

- As punishment for eating the forbidden fruit, the Lord God said to Eve, *"I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you."* [Genesis 3:16](#)
- *"Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet."* [1 Timothy 2:11-12](#)
- *"Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands."* [Ephesians 5:24](#)
- *"The women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church."* [1 Corinthians 14:34-35](#)

The story of the Virgin Mary, impregnated by the Holy Spirit, giving birth to Jesus Christ, son of God is an interesting story. The details of Catholic belief are even more bizarre. Mary is purported to have been a virgin after being married to Joseph for an undefined period. She was also purported to have given birth without breaking of her hymen ... maybe by cesarean section in a manger? She also allegedly died eleven years after the death of Jesus, still a virgin, with no

¹¹⁹ <https://overviewbible.com/authors-who-wrote-bible/>

further sexual relations and no further offspring. She is known to Catholics as the “Perpetual Virgin.”^{120,121} This maintenance of Mary’s virginity by the Catholics (and other Orthodox Christian sects and Lutherans and Anglicans), appears to perpetuate the absurd belief that women (but not men) having sexual relations is evil and dirty.

As a side story, Mary is also a key player in the Islamic Quran. Mary is the only woman mentioned in the Quran. Mary is mentioned a similar number of times (50) in the Quran as in the Christian New Testament, King James Version (46).

The foregoing beliefs by the Catholic Church about the Virgin Mary clarifies why the Catholic dogma perpetuated by the Vatican is so anti-woman and anti-sex. Given the Catholic dogma on sex and its sexual restrictions for priests, makes the reasons for the Catholic clergy child abuse scandal easy to understand.

14.2 Women in Islam¹²²

Chapter 14.1 discussed the second-class role that the Judeo-Christian Bible bestows on women. However, that pales in comparison to the treatment of women in many predominantly Islamic countries. These range from the dress codes to denial of education to restrictions of liberties to child marriage to genital mutilation.

Although women held equitable status in the first 1,000 years of Islam, recent Islamic practice has regressed to more patriarchal practices.

14.2.1 Dress Code for Muslim Women

Women in most Islamic countries are required to wear various forms of clothing, covering various parts of the body, including the hijab, chador, niqab or burqa.

¹²⁰ <https://www.catholic.com/tract/mary-ever-virgin>

¹²¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perpetual_virginity_of_Mary

¹²² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_Islam

Hijab

Women in some Islamic countries are required to wear the hijab, a headscarf covering the head, hair, and upper chest. The hijab symbolizes maintenance of modesty and privacy (from the stares of unrelated males). Though it is true that many Muslim women will say they choose to wear head covering, they do not have a choice. They should have the choice to wear or not wear. In reality, fashionable young women in Iran, will wear headscarves loosely, showing as much hair as possible without attracting the attention of Iran's fashion/morality police.¹²³

Many Muslim women in western countries wear head scarves or turbans that are definite fashion accessories. US Congressperson Ilhan Omar is a prime example. Although continued wearing is doubtless for religious/cultural reasons, the alleged modesty symbolism begins to lose some credibility.

Many Iranian women have emigrated to the US since the early 1970s prior to, and after, the revolution in 1978. Although the hijab is mandatory in Iran today, I do not know any Persian woman in the US who has chosen to continue to wear the hijab. The choice is theirs, but they choose not to bow to religious/political mandates from their country of birth and feel no obligation to wear a hijab for any possible remaining religious beliefs.

Head covering for women is not limited to Muslims. I remember when my Mom took me to Church in the UK as a child, she would always wear a hat. This practice died out toward the end of the twentieth century. In the 1950s, headscarves were also common daytime apparel for women in the UK (to keep off the rain). And of course, exotic hats are still de rigueur for women at Royal Ascot.

Head covering has religious origins in both Christian and Islamic cultures. [1 Corinthians 11:4-6](#) requires that a man praying should have an uncovered head while a woman praying should have a covered head. Go figure. Quranic guidance is a little more vague. [Quran 24:31](#) states, *"Tell the believing women to...wrap their headscarves over their chests..."* The explicit

¹²³ <https://latimesblogs.latimes.com/babylonbeyond/2010/05/iran-fashion-crackdown.html>

admonishment is to cover their chests (breasts?) with their headscarf, with the implicit assumption that they are already wearing a headscarf.

Chador

The chador is a full body cloak and head covering, but with the whole face uncovered. It is often worn by older Iranian women (in Iran) when outside the house. An alternative is a long overcoat worn along with a hijab.

Burqa¹²⁴

Although hijabs have some commonality with western head gear, burqas definitely do not have a western equivalent. A burqa is a full head and body covering clothing with only a narrow eye slit (or mesh screen) so the wearer can see. Burqas are worn in Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan (during Taliban rule). Burqas originate from pre-Islamic times. Many countries have banned burqas though not all. The US and UK still allow wearing of burqas. Although burqas can be monotone color, they are usually plain black. They are designed to cover all skin¹²⁵ and all curves. Indeed, the gender of the wearer could be indistinguishable. The burqa without a doubt maintains modesty and privacy from male prying eyes. The niqab shows a little more of the eyes, eyebrows, and lower forehead. Interestingly, there is no limitation on the extent of eye makeup that a burqa or niqab wearer can use.

14.2.2 Women's Rights in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia's male guardianship laws restrict women's rights, limiting an adult woman's ability to conduct any legal, fiscal, employment, travel, or retail transactions or activities, without the approval of a family male relative, such as a father, uncle, brother or even son. Human Rights Watch documented these Islamic based restrictions in a 2016 report entitled, *"Boxed In: Women and Saudi Arabia's Male Guardianship System."*¹²⁶

¹²⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burqa>

¹²⁵ Hands are permitted to be seen by the opposite sex as gloves are not required.

¹²⁶ <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/07/16/boxed/women-and-saudi-arabias-male-guardianship-system>

14.2.3 Denial of Education to Girls and Women

The idea that education is more important to sons than to daughters has been an all too common philosophy in many cultures, eastern, western, and middle eastern. These days it is less common, but still persists in poor, less developed countries. and countries with wars and oppressive religious cultures.

Jaclynn McDonnell provides a history a current status of Islam practice in her thesis, *“Islam and Educational Equality for Muslim Women.”*¹²⁷ The views of the Taliban in Afghanistan toward education for girls is well known.¹²⁸ The right of girls’ education in has been championed by Malala Yousafzai who survived an assassination attempt by the Taliban at the age of 15, and later shared the Nobel Peace Prize at the age of 17.¹²⁹

14.2.4 Child Marriage¹³⁰

Child or early marriage is one important contributing cause of lack of high school and college education for girls. Once a girl is married what is the need to be educated? This topic includes arranged and forced marriages, selling of daughters to repay the debts of the fathers or as punishment for the crimes of the fathers or male relatives, and forced marriage to a child rapist with the rationale that the marriage removes the stigma and shame of the rape. Many of these situations occur in Islamic countries^{131,132,133} and are the subject of numerous United Nations studies.^{134,135,136}

¹²⁷ https://scholarship.shu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1908&context=student_scholarship

¹²⁸ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/10/17/afghanistan-girls-struggle-education>

¹²⁹ <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2014/yousafzai/facts/>

¹³⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_marriage

¹³¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/apr/25/middle-east-child-abuse-pederasty>

¹³² <http://rawa.org/temp/runews/2011/10/02/sharia-law-has-led-to-the-legislation-of-child-marriage-in-6-countries.html>

¹³³ <https://backtojerusalem.com/child-marriage-and-islam/>

¹³⁴ <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/consequences-child-marriage-sexual-reproductive-health-english.pdf>

14.2.5 Shariah Law

Traditional Islamic jurisprudence¹³⁷ divides crimes into offenses against God and those against man. The former are offenses against God's "hudud"¹³⁸ or boundaries. Hudud punishments range from public lashing to public stoning to death, amputation of hands and crucifixion and are specified in the Quran and in some instances in the Sunnah.¹³⁹ These punishments are rarely applied in modern Islam except in some conservative regions such as the Arabian peninsula.

"An Outline of Crime and Punishment in Islamic Law" was prepared by the American Embassy in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in 1991.¹⁴⁰ An extensive discussion of Shariah Law is given by Dr. Jonathan Brown in 2017 in *"Stoning and Hand Cutting - Understanding the Hudud and the Shariah in Islam."*¹⁴¹

Islamic law has been criticized as favoring men over women. The 2018 Human Rights Now report, *"Discrimination in the Punishment of Women"*¹⁴² details discriminatory practices in Afghanistan, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia and Yemen, all Islamic countries. As with any issue, this is refuted in, *"Women in Islamic Law: Examining Five Prevalent Myths."*¹⁴³

In modern-day Iran, inheritance laws mandate that male offspring inherit twice the amount as female offspring. Therefore, in a family with two sons and four daughters, the sons will each

¹³⁵ <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/child-marriage-humanitarian-settings-arab-region.pdf>

¹³⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WRGS/Pages/ChildMarriage.aspx>

¹³⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_criminal_jurisprudence

¹³⁸ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hudud>

¹³⁹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunnah>

¹⁴⁰ <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP09T00207R001000100018-5.pdf>

¹⁴¹ <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/jonathan-brown/stoning-and-hand-cutting-understanding-the-hudud-and-the-shariah-in-islam/>

¹⁴² <http://hrn.or.jp/eng/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Discrimination-in-the-Punishment-of-Women-Report-HRN-July-2018.pdf>

¹⁴³ <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/nazir-khan/women-in-islamic-law-examining-five-prevalent-myths/>

receive 25% of the inheritance, while the daughters will each receive 12.5% of the inheritance.¹⁴⁴

14.2.6 Female Genital Mutilation

In 2017, the Council of Europe Steering Committee for Human Rights published a report on *“Guide to Good and Promising Practices Aimed at Preventing and Combating Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Forced Marriage (FM).”*¹⁴⁵ It is estimated that up to 200 million women and girls world-wide have undergone female genital mutilation.¹⁴⁶ Though FGM exists in many cultures and predates Judaism, Christianity and Islam, today FGM is practiced mostly in Muslim communities in Africa and the Middle East.^{147,148} Muslim religious authorities agree that FGM is neither required nor prohibited by Islam.¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, religion is more than theology. It shapes culture and normal everyday practice, especially in poorer and less developed communities. Therefore, many women in these communities believe that the practice is rooted in religion.

Female genital mutilation is sometimes mistakenly referred to as female circumcision. This is not correct. Male circumcision was ordered by the Lord God to Abraham and his descendants ([Genesis 17:9-14](#)). Consequently, it is still common practice in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic cultures. The medical reason for male circumcision is that it reduces the risk of bacteria under the foreskin that could lead to urinary infections.¹⁵⁰ However, good genital hygiene and daily showers is just as effective a preventative measure. Therefore, today there is no good reason for male circumcision. FGM, in contrast, is not ordained by God, and involves removal of the

¹⁴⁴ https://www.law.cornell.edu/women-and-justice/resource/civil_code_of_iran_%28inheritance%29

¹⁴⁵ <https://rm.coe.int/r86-abridged-report/168073418d>

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.* page 9

¹⁴⁷ <https://www.meforum.org/1629/is-female-genital-mutilation-an-islamic-problem>

¹⁴⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_views_on_female_genital_mutilation#Islam

¹⁴⁹ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.3109/13625187.2012.749982?journalCode=iejc20>

¹⁵⁰ <https://www.webmd.com/sexual-conditions/guide/circumcision#1>

clitoris or labia or both and in some cases partially sealing the vaginal opening.¹⁵¹ Reasons for this mutilation are rooted in gender inequality and include eliminating the girl's sexuality or libido, social acceptance, ensuring her virginity before marriage and the mistaken belief that religion requires it.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ <https://www.webmd.com/women/news/20190308/in-us-female-genital-mutilations-lasting-scars>

¹⁵² <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-47131052>

15. Catholic Clergy Child Abuse and Coverup

The following article was written in August 2018 following renewed media reports of child sexual abuse by Catholic priests and subsequent cover-up by church leadership. It is a commentary on Pope Francis' letter to Catholics. It was sent to the Vatican, but of course was neither acknowledged nor replied to.

Child sexual abuse and rape by Catholic priests and subsequent cover-up by the Church hierarchy has once more hit the media headlines. What is more sickening than this deviant behavior is the response of the Pope in his August 20, 2018, *“Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to the People of God.”*¹⁵³

One would hope that the Pope would outline how the church hierarchy (including he himself) will root out all past and present church pedophiles and enablers, turn them over to authorities for prosecution and incarceration, and compensate all victims.

Instead, he attempts to lay the blame at the feet of all lay Catholics, criticizing “clericalism.” Clericalism is defined as clerical power or influence in government, politics and public life, and the support of such power or influence. He blames Catholics for putting their priests on a pedestal and beyond reproach. I guess he is trying to say, priests are not God!!!

Pope Francis says, *“Clericalism, whether fostered by priests themselves or by lay persons, leads to an excision in the ecclesial body that supports and helps to perpetuate many of the evils that we are condemning today.”* In short, he believes child sexual abuse by priests and cover-up is partly the fault of lay Catholics. That is an amazing indictment!!!

Pope Francis further says,

“I invite the entire holy faithful People of God to a penitential exercise of prayer and fasting, following the Lord’s command.”

¹⁵³ <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2018-08/pope-francis-letter-people-of-god-sexual-abuse.html>

“Without the active participation of all the Church members, everything being done to uproot the culture of abuse in our communities will not be successful ...”

“The penitential dimension of fasting and prayer will help us as God’s People to come before the Lord and our wounded brothers and sisters as sinners imploring forgiveness ...”

“Let us beg forgiveness for our own sins and the sins of others.”

He appears to believe that prayer and fasting will make this problem go away, and he is trying to distract the attention away from the sins of pedophile priests to our own sins. There is more ecclesiastical justification for “penance and prayer”, but I think you get the message by now.

The solutions to clergy child abuse are simple. Instead of talking of fasting, penance, prayer and forgiveness, the Pope’s letter should focus on prosecution and punishment, and give concrete actions and sanctions. His letter to the People of God should have read ...

1. The church will turn over to the relevant authorities, all internal church records relating to child sexual abuse and rape by priests and cover-up by church hierarchy.
2. All deviant priests and those involved in cover-up will be prosecuted by public trial. The church will not hide or protect these individuals.
3. If found guilty, these individuals should be incarcerated in the general prison population, where they may suffer like their victims. They will be excommunicated with loss of all pensions.
4. All victims will be compensated by an appropriate amount (\$50M each?).
5. In response to my call to renounce “clericalism”, the remaining priests, who have survived the purge in step 2, should every week swear, by almighty God, in front of their parishioners, that they have not, and will not, abuse and rape children. Those priests refusing to make this weekly pledge shall be removed from their positions.

6. I, Pope Francis, immediately rescind the celibacy requirement for priests. It is counter to one of the primal urges of humanity. Celibacy has no rational reason. Perhaps when priests can have healthy adult sexual relationships, will the prevalence for pedophilia decrease.
7. When the Catholic clergy can marry, then we may be allowed to express opinions on marital issues, such as birth control, abortion, and divorce. But until then, the Catholic Church will cease to command Catholics on these personal marital issues, about which we have no right to pontificate.

15.1 Catholic Clergy Celibacy

Catholic priests, bishops, cardinals, and the Pope are celibate. It is likely that celibacy is a major contributing reason for the Catholic clergy child abuse scandal. The Catholic Church is unique in requiring its clergy to be celibate. No other Christian denomination requires its clergy to be celibate, Judaism does not require its rabbis to be celibate, Islam does not require its imams to be celibate.

- Celibacy is defined as
 - Prohibition from heterosexual or same-sex marriage
 - Prohibition from all sexual relations with women or men
 - Prohibition from masturbation
- Women are not allowed to be Catholic priests
- Even though the Vatican is ruled by un-married celibate males, it has the affrontery to tell its Catholic flock (sheep) how to conduct their married lives and sexual relations, including,
 - Prohibition on birth control
 - Prohibition on abortion
 - Prohibition on divorce
 - Prohibition on masturbation
 - Prohibition on pre-marital sex

The Catholic Church is alleged to have originated with St. Peter. St. Peter was married. There is no evidence of required celibacy in the church until circa 400 CE with the Council of Carthage.¹⁵⁴ In the following 600 years, despite various rules of celibacy, many clergy of the Latin Church (Roman Catholic) openly married, lived with their wives, and raised children, like their counterparts in the Greek Church (Eastern Orthodox). The First Lateran Council¹⁵⁵ in 1123 CE and Second Lateran Council¹⁵⁶ in 1139 CE attempted to crack down on this misbehavior. Notwithstanding, the church today acknowledges that the celibacy policy is not always effectively enforced.¹⁵⁷ Numerous popes are known to have been married, fathered children, and engaged in sexual activity with women and men outside of marriage.¹⁵⁸

The rationale for Catholic clergy celibacy is that priests cannot be “married” to the church and devote themselves to God, while being distracted by a conventional marriage or sexual relationship ([1 Corinthians 7:32-33](#)). I guess the Pope and rest of the Catholic hierarchy are saying that the other religions are doing it wrong and that Catholicism is doing it right. Where have we heard that before?

¹⁵⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Councils_of_Carthage

¹⁵⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Council_of_the_Lateran

¹⁵⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Council_of_the_Lateran

¹⁵⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/19/vatican-reveals-secret-rules-for-priests-who-father-children>

¹⁵⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_sexually_active_popes

16. Science and Religion

Science and religion have been irrevocably intertwined and in conflict for many centuries. On the face of it, one either believes in science or one believes in God. Isn't it a simple choice? Yet to an atheist, it is incomprehensible, that billions of people, many of whom are otherwise smart, educated, and rational, still believe in a supernatural being and everlasting life. Indeed, many scientists are practicing and devout, Christians, Jewish and Moslems. Why is this? A simple answer is ... I do not know. But let us at least study the interplay between science and religion to understand the conflict.

16.1 Early Science

Science made its early beginnings in ancient civilizations ...

- **China:** Abacus, shadow clock, compass, gunpowder, papermaking, printing¹⁵⁹
- **Greece:** Mathematics, geometry, astronomy, astrolabe, Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, Pythagoras, Archimedes, Euclid.¹⁶⁰
- **Rome:** Pliny the Elder cataloged plants, animals, insects, inorganic matter, metals and minerals. Ptolemy related astronomical observations to astronomical theory. Romans excelled in construction technology including roads, dams, buildings, aqueducts, sanitation systems, bridges and weapons of war.¹⁶¹
- **Babylon:** Mathematical description of astronomical phenomena.¹⁶²
- **Egypt:** Astronomy, mathematics, medicine. Egyptian hieroglyphics was an early written alphabet/language that formed the basis for later, Hebrew, Greek, Latin Arabic, and Cyrillic alphabets. The Library of Alexandria was the repository of the largest quantity of written knowledge in the ancient world. This was lost in a fire in the 7th century BCE.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_science_and_technology_in_China

¹⁶⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_science_in_classical_antiquity

¹⁶¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_technology

¹⁶² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_science_in_early_cultures#Mesopotamia

¹⁶³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_science_in_early_cultures#Egypt

- **Persia:** Mathematics, astronomy.¹⁶⁴
- **India:** Mathematics, astronomy, dentistry, geometrical measurements, measurements of length, trigonometry, decimals, algebra.¹⁶⁵

There is little if any indication that these early scientists were or were not also believers in God. Certainly, there is no overt reference to science in the Bible itself.

16.2 History

A short history lesson provides a glimpse of the overt conflict between religion and science over the last two millennia.

The fall of the Roman Empire in 476 CE¹⁶⁶, was followed by the Dark Ages¹⁶⁷ from the 5th century to the 14th century. The Dark Ages saw a deterioration of demographic, cultural and economic life, together with a collective loss of scientific knowledge and disinterest in scientific progress and discovery. Much of the science developed by the ancient civilizations, certainly in the European and Middle Eastern realm was either lost or forgotten. The Roman Catholic Church became the dominant institution in Europe during the Dark Ages. Many believe the impact of Catholic Christian dogma, the corruption of the Church and later the continued wars between Christianity and the Moslem world (i.e. the Crusades¹⁶⁸) was the cause of the desertion of scientific curiosity and cultural progress.

The Renaissance¹⁶⁹ in Europe covering the 15th and 16th centuries saw a resurgence of both arts and science. The research and teachings of classical Greek scholars, such as Aristotle, were re-discovered and translated. Many of the period's giants, like Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo were hybrid scientists/artists or polymaths.

¹⁶⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_science_in_early_cultures#Persia

¹⁶⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_science_in_early_cultures#India

¹⁶⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire

¹⁶⁷ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dark_Ages_\(historiography\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dark_Ages_(historiography))

¹⁶⁸ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crusades>

¹⁶⁹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renaissance>

The Reformation¹⁷⁰ of the 16th and 17th centuries saw Protestants break away from the previously all-powerful Catholic Church.

The Age of Enlightenment¹⁷¹ covered the 17th and 18th centuries. Many critical thinkers of the time (Kant, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, Voltaire) were vocal in attacking the Middle Ages as a period of social regress dominated by religion. The period was also known as the Age of Reason, in contrast to the Age of Faith during the Middle Ages or Dark Ages.

The Scientific Revolution¹⁷² from the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries marked the emergence of modern science when developments in mathematics, physics, astronomy, biology, anatomy, and chemistry transformed the views of society about nature. The names of Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Bacon, and Descartes are known by all. It was during the Scientific Revolution that the Scientific Method¹⁷³ was developed (see below). Previously, Aristotelian science involved observation and theoretical (thinking) reasoning. Francis Bacon introduced empiricism, testing cause and effect, measuring the change of dependent variables when independent variables are changed, hypothesis testing (see below), gathering of data, data analysis and proving theory with experiment.

The 19th, 20th and 21st centuries have seen a series of further “revolutions” in science, mostly for the benefit of mankind, though admittedly some to the detriment. During these centuries, we saw the discoveries of the basic sciences of physics, chemistry and biology help develop the “new” fields of engineering, technology, and medicine. The industrial revolution, the steam engine, the railroads, electromagnetism and electricity, the telegraph, photography, the telephone, automobiles, radio, airplanes, nuclear physics, electronics, relativity, quantum mechanics, cosmology, elementary particles, pharmaceuticals, television, nuclear power, vaccines, space exploration, computers, the internet, smart phones, digital age and artificial intelligence are some of the innovations developed by mankind in the last two hundred years.

¹⁷⁰ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reformation>

¹⁷¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Age_of_Enlightenment

¹⁷² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_Revolution

¹⁷³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_method

Science has made astounding progress in understanding the world we live in, and in developing the technology that supports our lives. Religion, in contrast, has been relatively stagnant for the last two thousand years since the advent of Christianity.

16.3 The Scientific Method

Scientists develop theories about how things work. They perform observations and experiments to test those theories. If the experiments fail to prove the theory, they throw out the theory and brainstorm an alternate theory. Only when empirical evidence supports theory is the theory accepted ... until perhaps new experiments disprove the theory ... then the process starts over. Scientific discovery is an iterative process of trial and error ... hypothesis, test, measure and analyze.

16.4 Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing¹⁷⁴ is a statistical process used by scientists. This is illustrated by an example from environmental remediation.¹⁷⁵ A piece of land that has been contaminated has been remediated or cleaned up. The landowner must now prove to the regulatory agency that the cleanup has been successful and has met cleanup goals. A “null hypothesis” is chosen that is counter to the theory one would like to prove, that the “site is still contaminated.” Protocols are developed for soil sampling and analysis to compare soil contaminants to cleanup goals, and to ensure that experimental data has low false positives and low false negatives. If statistical data analysis supports rejecting the null hypothesis, then the site is proven to be no longer contaminated. If data supports accepting the null hypothesis, then the site is still contaminated and will need remediating again. This is the scientific approach to hypothesis testing.

¹⁷⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statistical_hypothesis_testing

¹⁷⁵ EPA 404-R-97-016 Rev. 1, NUREG-1575, Rev. 1, DOE/EH-0624, Rev. 1, Multi-Agency Radiation Survey and Site Investigation Manual (MARSSIM). August 2000.
https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2017-09/documents/marssim_manual_rev1.pdf

If the landowner is religious, he will tell the regulator ... trust me, have faith, I believe the land is clean, and I do not need to prove it to you. This is the religious approach to hypothesis testing.

16.5 Basis for Religious Belief

In contrast to science, religion has been relatively stagnant over the last two thousand years since the advent of Christianity.

Judeo-Christian religious belief is based on faith ... faith that a three-thousand-year-old text, originally passed on from generation to generation by word-of-mouth and later written, copied, re-written and translated by countless unknown men, is proof that ...

- There is a supernatural, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent being
- Who created the universe in 6 days, 6,000 years ago, and,
- Who demands worship in reward for the promise of everlasting life, otherwise,
- We and our descendants will burn in hell.

Religious belief is based on faith, but also fear ... and nothing else. Certainly not science. Certainly not data. Certainly not evidence in a scientific sense. Certainly not evidence in a legal sense. The Bible proves nothing, and the Bible is all that believers and faith leaders have. Other than fear from the threat of hell. In reality, the original Hebrew versions of the Old Testament did not have the threat of hell and the promise of everlasting life. The promise of everlasting life was an invention of the New Testament Gospels (the carrot) and the threat of hell was invented by the Christian Church during the early Dark Ages (the stick). See Chapter 17.

Judeo-Christian religion is based on text written by mostly unknown men in 1500 BCE (Old Testament) and 100-200 CE (New Testament). It has remained essentially “unchanged” over the millennia. We are told by today’s clergy that the Bible is the “word of God.” Therefore, there is an implicit assumption that the messages and meaning have not changed, substantially. This is the position of the Church hierarchy today even though the stories in the Bible have undoubtedly changed by being passed along by word-of-mouth many times and written, and copied, and translated thousands of times from the “original” Hebrew and Greek and Aramaic. I

have not seen the evidence that what we read today in the various versions of the English translations of the Bible actually is identical to the original stories handed down by word-of-mouth or the “first” written texts in Hebrew, Greek or Aramaic.¹⁷⁶

16.6 Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic by Faith Leaders

State and local leaders during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic told the populace that protections and re-opening phases will be data driven (based on science). Meanwhile, faith leaders complained that their congregations needed to be allowed to worship God.¹⁷⁷ Their congregations were told that the pandemic was God’s will¹⁷⁸ but that God would protect them from COVID-19.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ That would require that I become a Biblical scholar and be fluent in Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic, which I am not.

¹⁷⁷ <https://sojo.net/articles/dangerous-theology-dissecting-faith-arguments-against-social-distancing>

¹⁷⁸ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/04/02/coronavirus-god-christain-jewish-muslim-leaders-saying-deadly-plague/5101639002/>

¹⁷⁹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/some-await-god-to-save-them-from-covid-19-they-should-consider-the-helpers-he-sent/2020/05/08/500f8948-9098-11ea-a9c0-73b93422d691_story.html

17. Philosophy and Religion

The word, “philosophy” derives from the Greek words “philo” meaning love and “sophia” meaning wisdom.¹⁸⁰ Well known Greek philosophers included Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates. Philosophical methods include questioning, critical discussion, rational argument and systematic presentation of mankind, the natural world, and their interaction. Philosophy is the study of fundamental problems, such as those connected with reality, existence, knowledge, values, reason, mind, language, the nature of human thought and behavior, the nature of the universe, and the connections between them.¹⁸¹

Natural philosophy¹⁸² is the study of nature and the physical universe and is the precursor of modern science, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, physics, chemistry, biology, and psychology. The highest university degree conferred after a course of study in any subject is the Ph.D. In Latin that stands for “philosophiae doctor.” In English, it translates to “doctor of philosophy.” Therefore, in academic circles, philosophy, includes all knowledge.

There is a strong connection between philosophy and science. However, unlike the scientific method which relies on observation and experimentation to validate theory (see Chapter 16.3), the philosophical method¹⁸³ is largely based on thought, logic, and reason. To some degree therefore, philosophy may be thought to be a more amenable bedfellow for religion than science is for religion.

The demography of philosophers includes more atheists than most other groups. A 2014 survey by David Chalmers and David Bourget of nearly 1,000 professional philosophers from 99 leading academic departments of philosophy showed that 72.8% considered themselves atheist (or leaning toward), 14.6% considered themselves theist (or leaning toward), and 12.6% as agnostic or undecided.¹⁸⁴ This should not be surprising as philosophers are taught to reason, challenge,

¹⁸⁰ <https://www.etymonline.com/word/philosophy>

¹⁸¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy>

¹⁸² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_philosophy

¹⁸³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophical_methodology

¹⁸⁴ <https://philarchive.org/archive/BOUWDPv6>

think critically, debate, and use rational argument. Religion does not stand up well to any of these methods of thought.

17.1 The Meaning of Life

Questions like “what is the meaning of life?” or “what is the reason for my existence?” have being at the forefront of philosophical debate for centuries.¹⁸⁵ These questions likewise are raised by theists. William Lane Craig, in his paper, “*The Absurdity of Life without God*”, has argued that for life to be meaningful requires (1) the existence of God and (2) individual immortality.¹⁸⁶ Otherwise, our lives would be meaningless.

Belief in God and immortality has been discussed before in Chapter 6. “*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*” ([John 3:16](#)). This is considered the central tenet of Christianity and is the hook by which believers believe. God is saying believe in me and you will be immortal.

Craig is saying God and individual immortality must exist for our lives to be meaningful. He is saying that for humankind’s individual and collective, finite, earthbound lives to be meaningful we must have an infinite, heavenly life. And of course, the only way we can have an infinite, heavenly life is to believe in God. Clever. Of course, God only exists in the minds of men, which is probably philosophically sufficient for Craig’s argument. Craig is simply riding the coattails of God’s demand for worship and saying that we must believe in God and everlasting life for our earthly life to be meaningful. A circular argument. A house of cards. Several authors have also

¹⁸⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meaning_of_life

¹⁸⁶ <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/existence-nature-of-god/the-absurdity-of-life-without-god/>

challenged Craig's conclusions in a more verbose and philosophical fashion.^{187,188,189} Philosophers would not be satisfied with such a simplistic answer.¹⁹⁰

What is my answer to "what is the meaning of life?" What is the cliché? "Different strokes for different folks." Human, finite, earthbound lives are enriched by, friendship, love, raising a family, lifelong learning, service, charity, and achievement (great or small) in whatever excites us. If we fail to find meaning and satisfaction in our earthbound lives, why would we want to live for another infinite number of years. Do we think we would be satisfied with an infinite, undefined life? Let us not forget "the meaning of life" refers to humankind life and so, until we populate the planets and other star systems, the question has only relevance when confined to our planet. What is the answer to the question "what is the meaning of the universe's existence?" The infinitesimally small speck of the universe that is humankind is definitely meaningless.

In general, atheists believe that "the meaning of life" is endogenous, that is, it is self-generated or generated from within. Atheists believe that their life is a product of their own actions and the environment in which they live. Atheists do not in general subscribe to nihilism (the belief that life is meaningless). Neither do they subscribe to fatalism (the belief that all events are predetermined and therefore inevitable). Atheists believe in free will.

¹⁸⁷ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/15665399.2006.10819914?needAccess=true>

¹⁸⁸ <https://philosophicaldisquisitions.blogspot.com/2012/04/theism-and-meaning-of-life-part-one.html>

¹⁸⁹ <https://philosophicaldisquisitions.blogspot.com/2012/04/theism-and-meaning-of-life-part-two.html>

¹⁹⁰ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/life-meaning/>

18. Faith and Fear

Religious belief is based on faith but also on fear.

“You are afraid. You should be. Do you know why? Fear is the greatest weapon in God’s arsenal. It is why the Church created hell.” This is a statement by the Pope’s emissary, Cardinal Franklin, speaking to the Sheriff of Nottingham in the 2018 movie, Robin Hood. Although the movie itself scored a poor 15% on Rotten Tomatoes¹⁹¹ the representative of the Vatican spoke the truth. God and heaven are concoctions of the Bible. But do the concepts of the Devil and hell originate in the Bible or were they inventions of the Church itself?

The whole concept of “good and evil” that the Bible definitely espouses, necessitates that if one is asked to believe in God and heaven (the good part), then one must also believe in the Devil and hell (the evil part). Good is personified in God, evil is personified in Satan (the Devil). But is it that simple?

18.1 Devil

The Old Testament wastes no time in inventing the Devil. In [Genesis 3:1-6](#), the serpent (Devil) persuades Eve to eat from the “tree of knowledge.” In turn, Eve encourages Adam to eat from the same tree. The “knowledge” is the knowledge of “good and evil”, or what is “right and wrong.” This acquired knowledge resulted in God’s wrath. Apparently, God did not want Adam and Eve to know the difference between good and evil, or right and wrong. He wanted them to remain naïve and innocent. He later recognized the need to define right and wrong for the larger humanity in the Ten Commandments and the Law of Moses. The immediate result of this confrontation in the Garden of Eden was to add nakedness as the first on the list of “evil” things ([Genesis 3:7](#)). This has endured throughout the ages.

The Devil¹⁹² or Satan¹⁹³ features much more prominently in the New Testament and in Christian theology than the Old Testament and Judaism. Satan tempts Christ in the desert ([Mathew 4:1-](#)

¹⁹¹ https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/robin_hood_2018

¹⁹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devil_in_Christianity

11), promises to give Jesus all the kingdoms of the earth ([Mathew 4:8-9](#)), plays a role in many of Jesus' parables, is the cause of illnesses that Jesus miraculously cures ([Luke 4:40-41](#) and [Luke 13:11-16](#)) and was the cause of Judas betraying Jesus ([Luke 22:3-6](#)).

18.2 Hell

The role of hell in the Bible is more murky and obscure. The word hell is never mentioned once in the original written Hebrew version of the Bible (Old Testament)^{194,195,196}. The argument is that mistranslations from the Hebrew and Greek versions to many current English versions have resulted in numerous erroneous uses of the word "hell" in both the Old and New Testaments. The Hebrew Bible uses the word "sheol" meaning grave, or place of darkness, or where the dead go. Although hell was originally not a concept in the Old or New Testaments, the fact is that "burning in hell" has been used for centuries, but beginning well after the death of Jesus, by the Christian Church as a threat of punishment for non-belief. The promise of everlasting life in heaven for believers in the New Testament ([John 3:16](#)) certainly encouraged the counter concept of hell. Bart D. Ehrman, author of *Heaven and Hell: A History of the Afterlife*, stated in *Time Magazine*,

*"Jesus stood in a very long line of serious thinkers who have refused to believe that a good God would torture his creatures for eternity. The idea of eternal hell was very much a late comer on the Christian scene, developed decades after Jesus' death and honed to a fine pitch in the preaching of fire and brimstone that later followers sometimes attributed to Jesus himself. But the torments of hell were not preached by either Jesus or his original Jewish followers."*¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satan>

¹⁹⁴ <https://medium.com/@BrazenChurch/hell-a-biblical-staple-the-bible-never-actually-mentions-c28b18b1aaaa>

¹⁹⁵ [http://www.thehypertexts.com/Was%20Hell%20in%20the%20Original%20Bible.htm#:~:text=No%2C%20the%20word%20%22hell%22,the%20New%20Testament%20\(NT\).](http://www.thehypertexts.com/Was%20Hell%20in%20the%20Original%20Bible.htm#:~:text=No%2C%20the%20word%20%22hell%22,the%20New%20Testament%20(NT).)

¹⁹⁶ <http://www.thehypertexts.com/No%20Hell%20in%20the%20Bible.htm>

¹⁹⁷ <https://time.com/5822598/jesus-really-said-heaven-hell/>

19. Truth and the Bible

Opinions on the veracity of the Bible fall into four main camps.

1. There are those who believe that the Bible is absolutely the “word of God”, passed down by prophets and, to take the Lord God’s name in vain, is the “God’s Honest Truth.”
2. There are those who recognize that some of the stories in the Bible are allegorical and metaphorical and are used to illustrate a complex issue in more simple, understandable terms. If you ask members of this group, which stories they are willing to question, you will get a multitude of answers depending the strength of their faith.
3. There are those who view the whole Bible as apocryphal, meaning “of doubtful authorship and authenticity.” The word apocrypha, derives from ancient Greek, meaning to “hide away.” As a side-note, the Apocrypha¹⁹⁸ (capital A) is the name given to a set of approximately fourteen books thought to have been written sometime between 200 BCE and 400 CE, that at times have been included in various translations of the Bible (Old Testament). There was (and is) disagreement among different Christian sects and denominations on the veracity, authenticity, authorship, and divine inspiration of the Apocryphal books. Apparently, in some minds, they did not meet the same exacting, peer-reviewed standards of the other books in the Bible. Generally, today, most English translations of the Bible still do not include the Apocryphal books.
4. Finally, there are those who view the Bible in its entirety as completely bogus. One could reach this conclusion based on the numerous other reasons that an atheist chooses to be an atheist. But one reason that has received much attention is the question ... does the Bible tell the truth?
 - Does it make sense?
 - Is it logically correct?
 - Is it scientifically correct?
 - Is it historically correct?

¹⁹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical_apocrypha

- Is it chronologically correct?
- Is it geographically correct?
- Does it contain absurdities?
- Are there contradictions and internal inconsistencies?
- Is it relevant to, and consistent with, today's human values?

Many Bible skeptics have compiled voluminous lists of absurdities, contradictions, inconsistencies, and factual scientific, historical, and geographical errors in the Bible. Just as many Bible supporters have attempted to justify these, usually by arguing that these were different books, written by different authors, in simpler times when consistency of message, precision in speech and factual accuracy were not as valued as they are today.¹⁹⁹ Nevertheless, when Bible supporters give these excuses for the lack of quality control in the Bible, it is exactly why Bible skeptics are at a loss why the Bible should be believed by two billion people, many of whom are highly educated and otherwise intelligent and rational.

One of the better, certainly the most comprehensive online database of Bible faux pas is "The Skeptics Annotated Bible" by Steve Wells.²⁰⁰ One can search the entire Bible, or by book, for examples of absurdities, contradictions, and scientific, chronological and historical errors and falsehoods. One can also search for examples of commandments, injustice, cruelty and violence, intolerance, good stuff, family values, interpretation, women, sex, prophecy, language, boring stuff, homosexuality, and politics.

Some interesting examples include ...

- **Absurdity/Science/Chronology:** One the first day God created light (day) and darkness (night) ([Genesis 1:3-5](#)). But God waited until the fourth day to create all the light giving objects like the sun and the moon and the stars ([Genesis 1:14-19](#)).
- **Contradiction:** Since God gave Adam only one wife, Eve, it seems that God believed, at least implicitly, in monogamy ([Genesis 2:21-24](#)). However, the Bible (the word of God) is replete with examples of **polygamy** by some of God' favorite people, including,

¹⁹⁹ I cannot believe I really said that!!!

²⁰⁰ <http://skepticsannotatedbible.com/index.htm>

- Abram's (Abraham's) wife Sarai (Sarah) was barren so Abram took their maid Hagar as his second wife, and she bore him a son. The Lord God blessed the union ([Genesis 16:1-4](#))
 - Jacob had two wives and two women-servants ([Genesis 32:22](#))
 - Gideon had many wives ([Judges 8:30](#))
 - Solomon had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines ([1 Kings 11:2-3](#)), though admittedly *"The Lord was angry with Solomon"* ([1 Kings 11:9](#)).
 - Rehoboam took eighteen wives and threescore concubines ([2 Chronicles 11:21](#))
- **Contradiction:** God forbids **incest** as in *"None of you shall approach to any that is near to kin to him, to uncover their nakedness: I am the LORD"* ([Leviticus 18:6-14](#) and [Leviticus 20:17,19](#)). *"Cursed be he that lieth with his sister, the daughter of his father, or the daughter of his mother"* ([Deuteronomy 27:22](#)). However, incest occurs frequently among some of the Bible's key figures.
 - Adam's son, Cain married and procreated ([Genesis 4:17](#)). Who to? Adam lived for 930 years ([Genesis 5:5](#)) so presumably he had plenty of time for many other sons (including Seth) and daughters ([Genesis 5:4](#)). Therefore, Cain and Seth presumably had to marry and have sex with their sisters.
 - Abraham married his half-sister Sarah ([Genesis 20:12](#)). God blessed their union.
 - Moses' parents had an incestuous marriage. His father Amram married his aunt Jochebed ([Exodus 6:20](#))
 - Both Lot's daughters slept with their drunken father ([Genesis 19:30-36](#)), after he had offered them as virgins to a sex-crazed mob ([Genesis 19:8](#)).
- **Injustice/Cruelty:** God orders or countenances the slaughter and genocide of countless millions of men, women and children in the Bible. None is more unjust than the story of Noah and the flood. Because God was unhappy with the misdeeds of man, *"The Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air"* ([Genesis 6:7](#)). As a result, except

for the contents of Noah's Ark, all mankind perished, including millions of innocent children, and all innocent animals and birds. I guess the fish of the rivers and oceans got a lucky break. They were inadvertently spared. Just as well because God had omitted to tell Noah to put all the species of fish, male and female, onto the Ark.

- **Science/Absurdities:** The age of many of the Biblical characters is truly remarkable, as indeed is their ability to father children at an advanced age. Adam himself lived to 930 ([Genesis 5:5](#)), Noah lived to 950 ([Genesis 9:29](#)), Methuselah lived to 969 (world record holder [Genesis 5:27](#)). Many others lived over 200, 300, 400, 500, 600, 700, 800 and 900 years. Noah had three sons at the age of 500 years ([Genesis 5:32](#)). Abraham was a relative youngster at 100 when he had his first son, Isaac ([Genesis 21:5](#)) and when he died at age 175 ([Genesis 25:7-8](#)). Some have tried to rationalize this medical phenomenon by saying that in Genesis years were shorter. Although the Hebrew Calendar is a little complicated (the length of years can be 353, 354 or 355 days except leap years that can be 383, 384 or 385 days)²⁰¹ the average is close enough to 365.24 days so that Biblical ages must be believable! In addition to flooding the planet because He was angry with mankind, God also tried to limit their ages ... *"his days shall be an hundred and twenty years"* ... so they would have less chance to sin ([Genesis 6:3](#)). In [Psalms 90:10](#) typical lifespan finally reached a reasonable *"threescore years and ten"* (70).
- **Historical Falsehoods:** Perhaps the most inspiring story of the Old Testament is the story of Moses starting with the Book of Exodus. It tells of the enslavement of the children of Israel in Egypt, the baby Moses, escaping the killing of the Israel's first born, found in a basket floating in the reeds, raised in Pharaoh's household, bringing 10 plagues upon Egypt, leading the Israelites out of Egypt, parting of the Red Sea, and wandering for 40 years in the Sinai Desert. Finally, under the leadership of Joshua, the Israelites conquering the land of Canaan to enter the land promised them by the Lord God. For

²⁰¹ <https://www.timeanddate.com/calendar/jewish-calendar.html>

many, the story is most memorable as the 1956 movie, “The Ten Commandments” starring Charlton Heston as Moses and Yul Brynner as Rameses II. I remember seeing that movie with my Dad when it first appeared. Unfortunately, it now appears that the sweeping epic never really happened.

In 2001, the Los Angeles Times ran a story.

“After a century of excavations trying to prove the ancient accounts true, archeologists say there is no conclusive evidence that the Israelites were ever in Egypt, were ever enslaved, ever wandered in the Sinai wilderness for 40 years or ever conquered the land of Canaan under Joshua’s leadership. To the contrary, the prevailing view is that most of Joshua’s fabled military campaigns never occurred--archeologists have uncovered ash layers and other signs of destruction at the relevant time at only one of the many battlegrounds mentioned in the Bible.”

“Today, the prevailing theory is that Israel probably emerged peacefully out of Canaan--modern-day Lebanon, southern Syria, Jordan and the West Bank of Israel--whose people are portrayed in the Bible as wicked idolators. Under this theory, the Canaanites who took on a new identity as Israelites were perhaps joined or led by a small group of Semites from Egypt--explaining a possible source of the Exodus story, scholars say. As they expanded their settlement, they may have begun to clash with neighbors, perhaps providing the historical nuggets for the conflicts recorded in Joshua and Judges.”²⁰²

Numerous other sources confirm the lack of historical and archaeological evidence that the events of the exodus from Egypt ever happened.^{203,204,205}

²⁰² <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2001-apr-13-mn-50481-story.html>

²⁰³ <https://reformjudaism.org/were-jews-slaves-egypt>

²⁰⁴ <https://www.haaretz.com/archaeology/.premium.MAGAZINE-for-you-were-not-slaves-in-egypt-the-memories-behind-the-exodus-myth-1.7138961>

- **Homosexuality:** *“If a man also lie with²⁰⁶ mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.”* ([Leviticus 20:13](#)). This “word of God” is just one of many homophobic statements in the Bible. There are no words in the Bible, even words of Jesus, that take a more tolerant attitude toward homosexuality, let alone gay rights. Today’s hard-fought rights won for the LGBTQ community would have been a perfect crusade for Jesus, yet he was silent, preferring to not question his father’s homophobic, bigoted words.

It is unfortunate that so many Christians, Christian Church hierarchies, and particularly Evangelicals use the bigoted words of the Bible to continue to oppose LGBTQ rights. This is yet another reason why the Bible has little relevance to today’s issues and should not be allowed to subvert important human rights or to influence decisions of the Supreme Court.

There is little if any mention of lesbianism in the Bible. That is perhaps another example of women’s dismissive and marginalized role in the Bible. Even their “transgressions” were ignored.

- **Women:** The Bible’s and God’s attitude toward women is totally inconsistent with today’s values. Bible supporters will argue that it only reflects the attitude of the times. However, should not God’s word on important social values be independent of time and history (herstory)? Should not God’s opinion guide his followers, not vice versa? Bible supporters and the Church hierarchy do not do enough to disassociate themselves from the Bible’s and God’s attitudes towards women. Chapter 14.1 discusses the many examples of gender inequality in the Bible.

²⁰⁵ <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/exodus-history-or-mythic-tale/>

²⁰⁶ In Biblical language, “lie with”, “know”, and “uncover their nakedness” were euphemisms for “have sex.”

- **Injustice/Slavery:** Slavery was common practice in Biblical times and so is referenced numerous times as a normal fact of life. The “word of God” acknowledged this and said nothing to oppose slavery, to oppose the degradation of owning another person as property. Although Jesus, in the New Testament, had the chance to oppose the degradation of slavery, he again remained silent, accepted the status quo.

Slavery has been common practice in many, if not most civilizations, both ancient and modern. Therefore, the Bible and its stars should not be overly criticized for this one injustice.²⁰⁷ Slavery in the US is recent history and has led to a long period of racial injustice that is still with us today.

Steve Wells is an equal opportunity skeptic and does a similar job on the Quran²⁰⁸ and the Book of Mormon.²⁰⁹ Perhaps his next project should be the US Constitution. For such a revered document, why does it generate so much discord and disagreement in the US (freedom of speech, right to bear arms, separation of church and state)? And if it is such a profound, relevant document, why does it need a Supreme Court to interpret what 230-year-old pontifications by a couple of dozen elite and privileged white men mean in today’s world? And why do most of the controversial constitutional issues before the Supreme Court end in a 5-4 decision? Well, I guess my questions answer themselves.

Bible supporters claim that it is unfair to question and poke fun at the strange personalities, behaviors, social mores, superstitions, sacrifices, and punishments that the Bible describes. They claim that it was a different time and a different culture and a different way of doing things. Maybe that is true. But that is yet another reason why the Bible should be read and enjoyed as a quaint mythology and social commentary on times long gone, that has little or no relevance to the twenty first century, or indeed most of the prior centuries. Certainly, the Bible is no reason to worship a supernatural being who demands worship for a reward of everlasting life.

²⁰⁷ <https://emergenceni.org/blog/2019/01/04/does-the-bible-condone-slavery>

²⁰⁸ <http://skepticsannotatedbible.com/quran/index.htm>

²⁰⁹ <http://skepticsannotatedbible.com/BOM/index.htm>

20. Religious Diversity and Inclusion

The old cliché says, do not talk about politics or religion at the dinner table. These two topics engender the most disagreement, prejudice, and, yes, hatred. This is true today more than ever. These days with the advent of social media and 24-hour cable news, we cannot escape politics. The distinction between news and opinion has become blurred.

“Diversity and inclusion” have become the latest management tools by which corporate America attempts to solve the problems associated with a workforce of mixed gender, color, ethnicity, sexual preference, gender identity and religious beliefs.

Our opinions of others’ religious beliefs provide a window on our true “religious diversity and inclusion.” Does your own religious faith allow you to accept others with different monotheistic beliefs? Does your own religious faith allow you to accept others who do not share your belief in a monotheistic God?

The PEW Research Group conducted a survey in 2014 of the American public’s attitude toward various religious faiths. This was known as the Religious Landscape Study.²¹⁰

Figure 1 shows that the American public views Evangelicals, Jews, and Catholics most favorably and views Muslims and Atheists most unfavorably. However, attitudes are relatively closely grouped within a 23-degree central range. That is encouraging.

Figure 2 shows a more detailed breakdown of each religious groups attitude toward each other. Again, Atheists and Muslims have the lowest favorability. These data show that between different religious groups, attitudes are more disparate, ranging from 25 to 70 (ignoring Jewish and Catholic attitudes towards themselves).

²¹⁰ Pew Research Center. 2014 Religious Landscape Study.
<https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>
<https://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>
<https://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious/>

Figure 3 shows attitudes of believers toward non-believers and non-believers toward believers. Evangelicals and Atheists view each other most unfavorably.

Figure 4 shows religious attitudes of Democrats and Republicans. Democrats attitudes are more clustered within a central range of 44 to 62, demonstrating that Democrats are more tolerant of differing religious beliefs. Republicans have a wider range of attitudes between 33 and 71, confirming that Republicans are more intolerant of Muslims and Atheists and love Evangelicals, followed closely by Jews and Catholics.

U.S. Public Has Warmest Feelings for Jews, Catholics and Evangelicals

Respondents in a Pew Research Center poll were asked:

"We'd like to get your feelings toward a number of groups on a 'feeling thermometer.' A rating of 0 degrees means you feel as cold and negative as possible. A rating of 100 degrees means you feel as warm and positive as possible. You would rate the group at 50 degrees if you don't feel particularly positive or negative toward the group."

Results at right show total mean ratings of each religious group



Source: American Trends Panel (wave 4). Survey conducted May 30-June 30, 2014.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

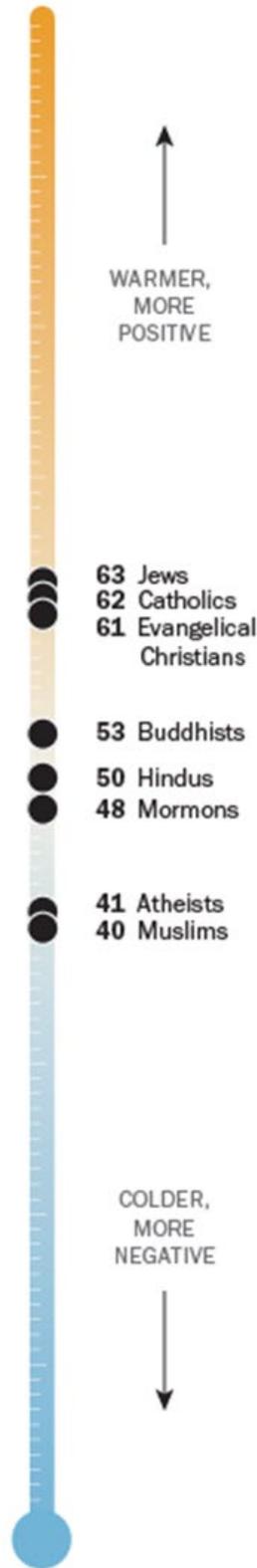


Figure 1. Attitudes of the American Public Towards Different Religions

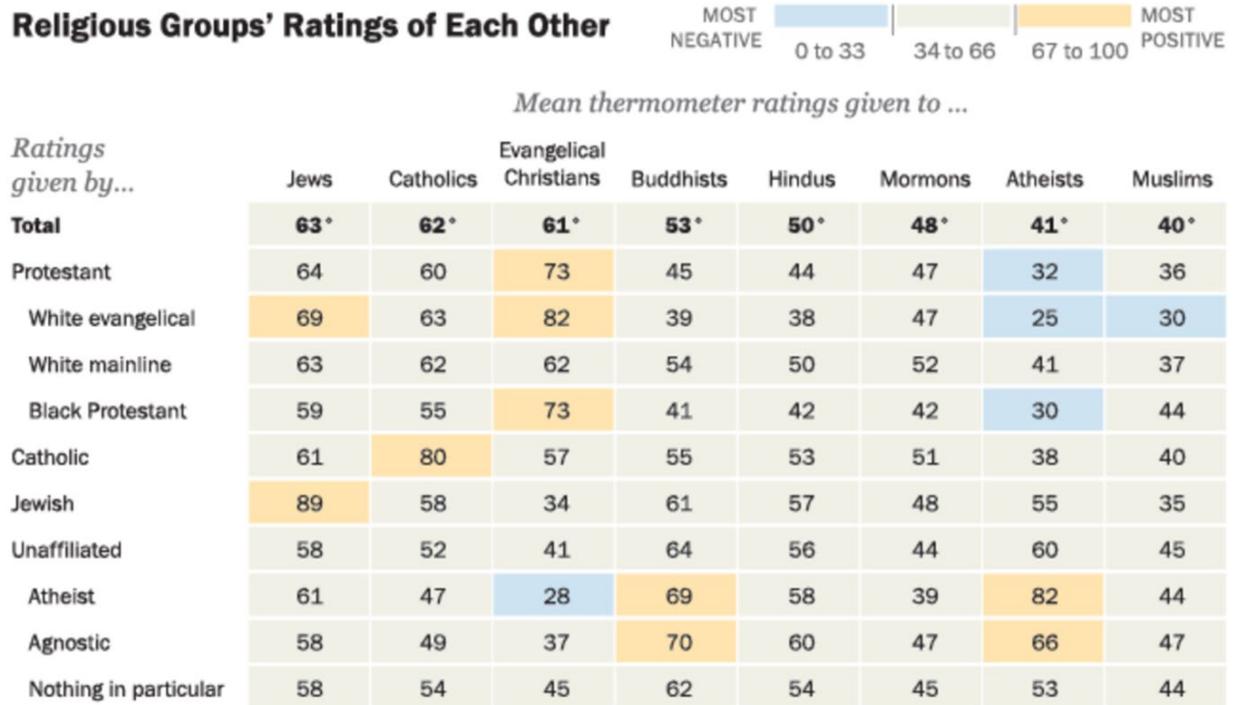


Figure 2. Attitudes of American Religious Groups Towards Each Other (Pew Research Center 2014)

On a "feeling thermometer" of zero to 100

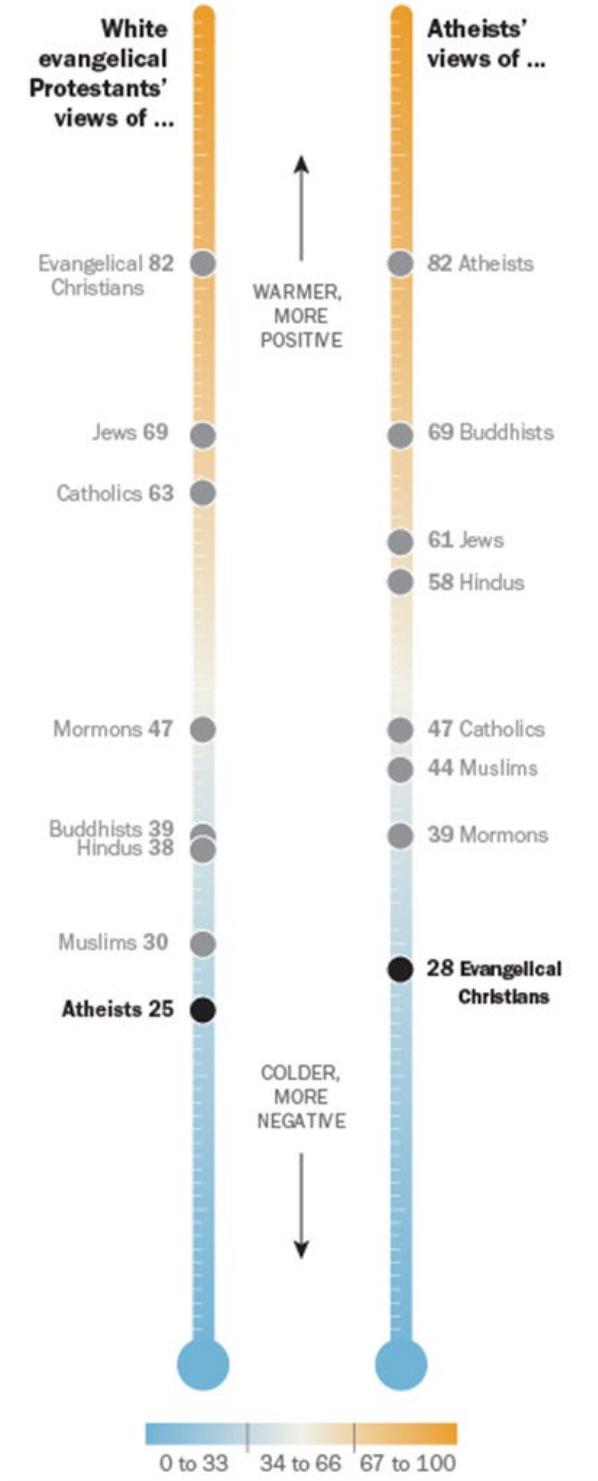
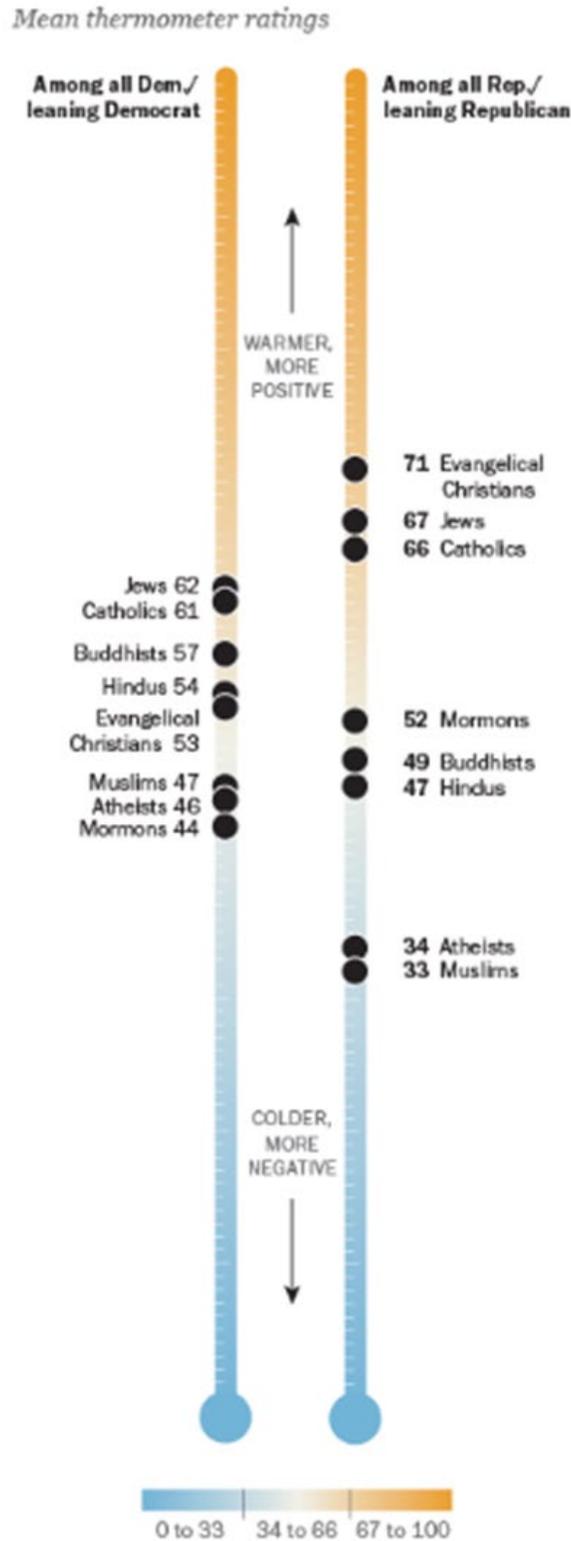


Figure 3. Religious Attitudes Between Believers and Non-believers
(Pew Research Center 2014)



**Figure 4. Religious Attitudes of Democrats and Republicans
(Pew Research Center 2014)**

21. Afterthoughts on the Afterlife

We have seen in Chapter 6 that belief in God is required if we desire everlasting life ([John 3:16](#)).

Instead of wishing for such an undefined and unbounded concept, we should strive to earn a happy memory in those that we have touched during our earthly life. Our family, loved ones, friends, colleagues at work and anyone with whom we interacted should remember us with happiness, love and/or respect. That of course, is what happens in obituaries and in funerals and memorial ceremonies (both spiritual and secular). For most of us, these memories live on for one or two generations, but will gradually fade after three or four generations ... as they should. That is the true afterlife ... earthbound, finite and in the minds of others.

We will have returned to the dust from whence we came.²¹¹ In billions of years the Sun will become a red giant²¹² swallowing the inner planets including the Earth. What remains of the dust of our bodies will again be stardust. And God's creation will be no more.

²¹¹ [Genesis 3:19](#). "... for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."

²¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sun#After_core_hydrogen_exhaustion

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- King James Version (KJV), originally published in England in 1611, under the sponsorship of King James I.
- Contemporary English Version (CEV), US Version, originally published by the American Bible Society in 1995.
- English Standard Version (ESV), originally published by the Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers in 2016.

The web site is searchable, and a useful feature is the ability to view two versions of the Bible in parallel, side-by-side.

Book, chapter, and verse citations are provided below.

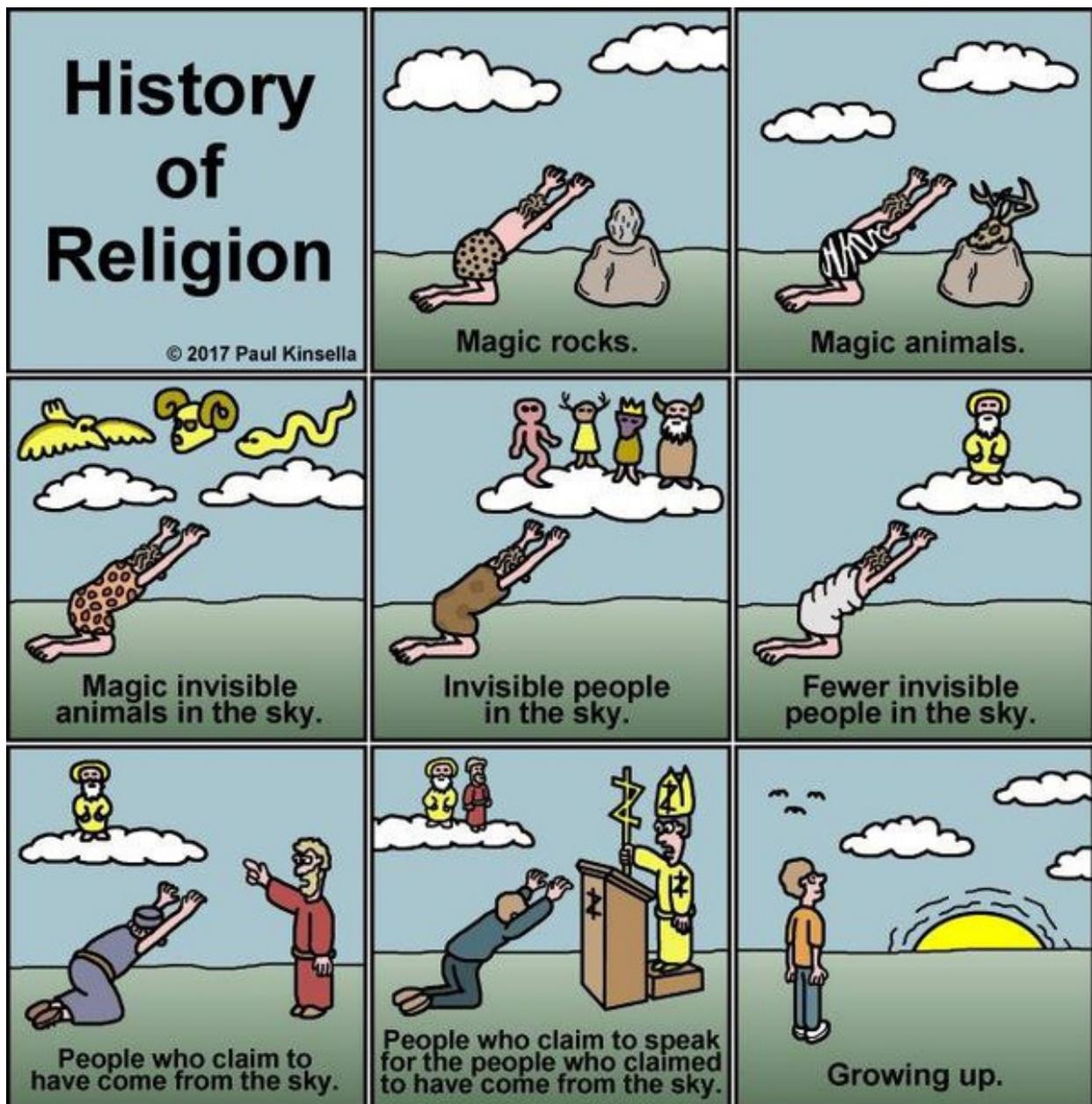
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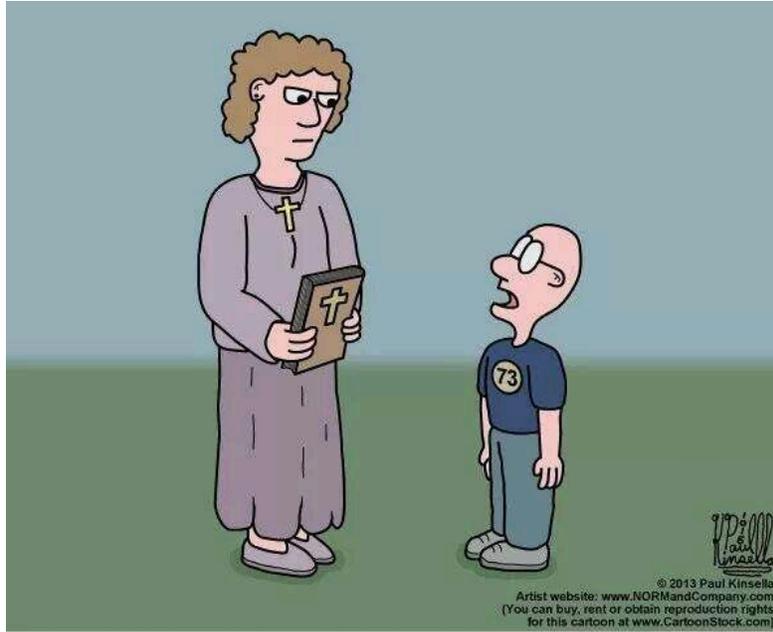
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Appendix 1. Humor

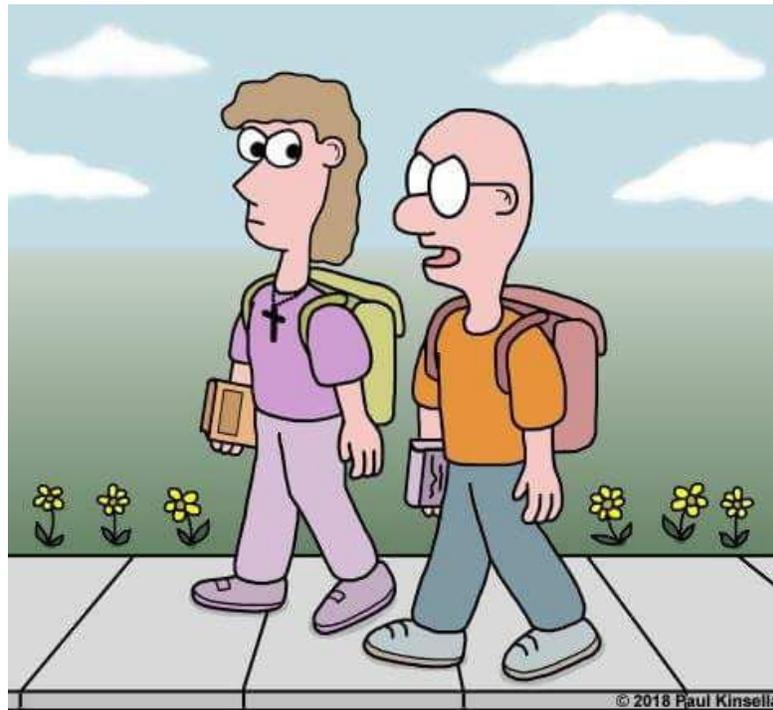
Nothing escapes humor. Certainly not politics. And certainly not religion. Paul Kinsella is one cartoonist who pokes fun at religion. Many of his cartoons can be seen at his Facebook page at, <https://www.facebook.com/cartoonistpaukinsella/photos>.

Several of his cartoons are provided below with appropriate copyright acknowledgement and attribution.

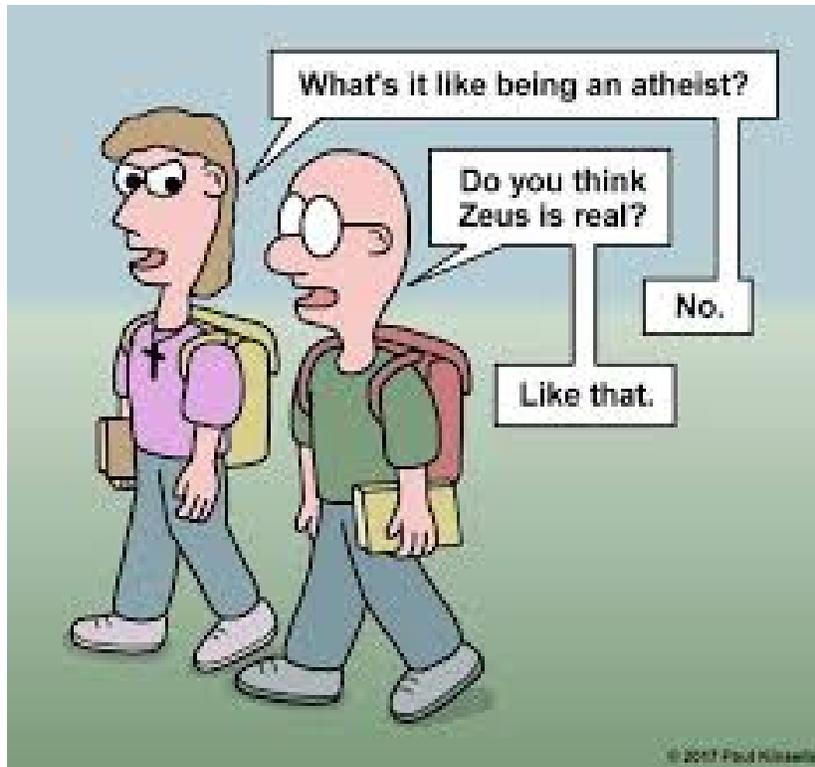




"Let me get this straight... God wants me to let him save me from what he will do to me if I don't let him save me?"

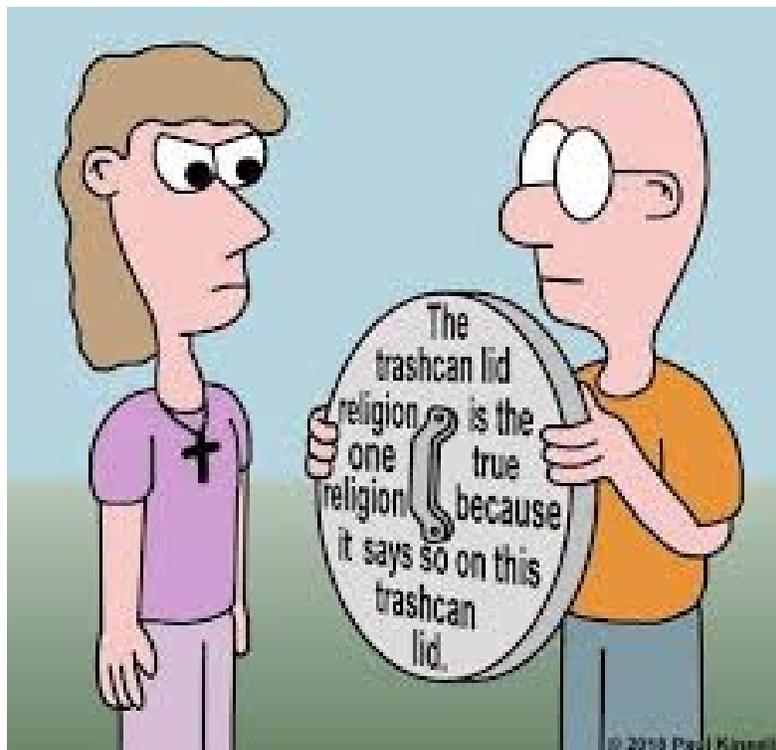


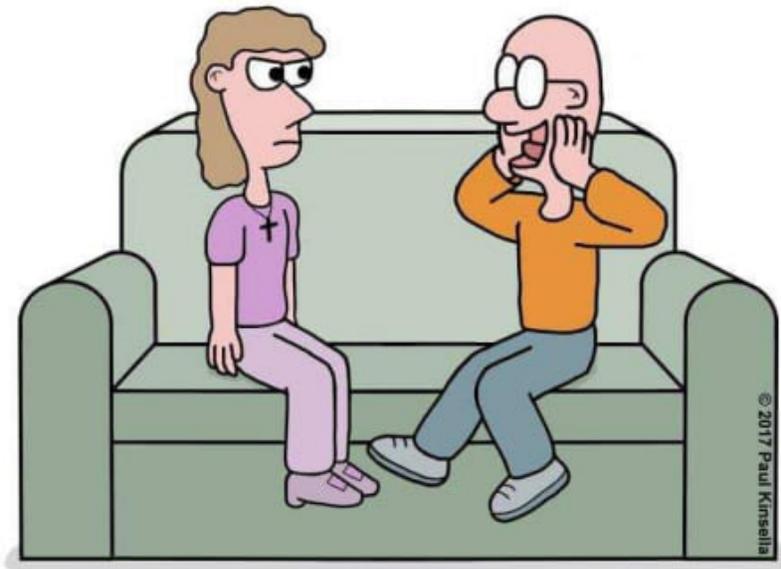
"Saying you're moral because you believe in God is like saying you're a soldier because you play 'Call of Duty'."



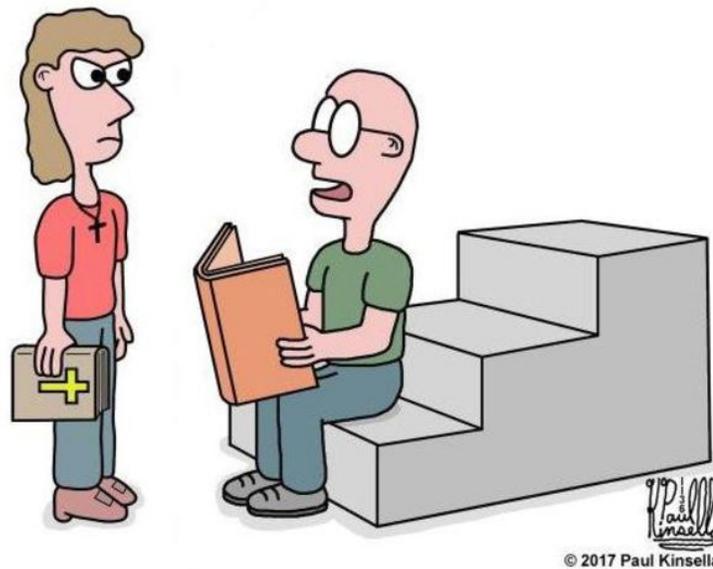


"Of course she can."

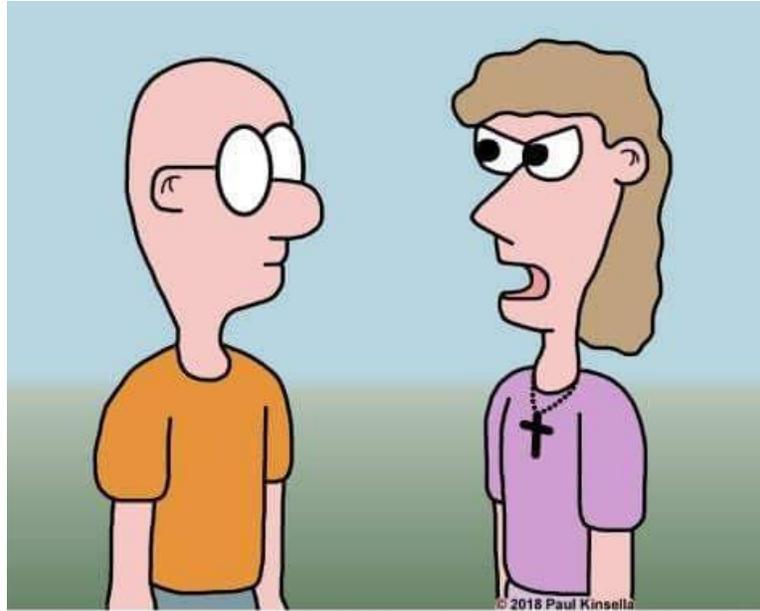




**"Jesus loves me?!? Did he say something to you?
This is freaking me out! What exactly did he say?!"**



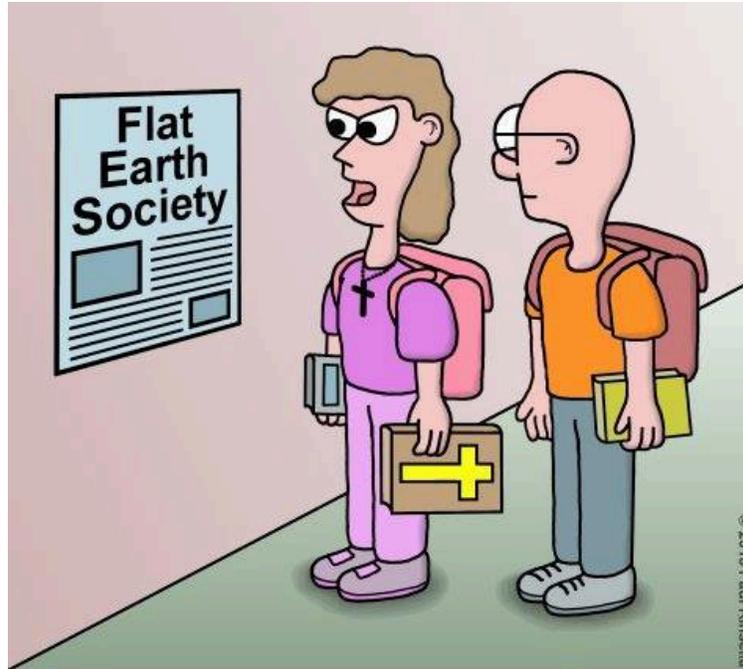
**"Perhaps it's your god's plan for humans to
become so intelligent they stop believing in him."**



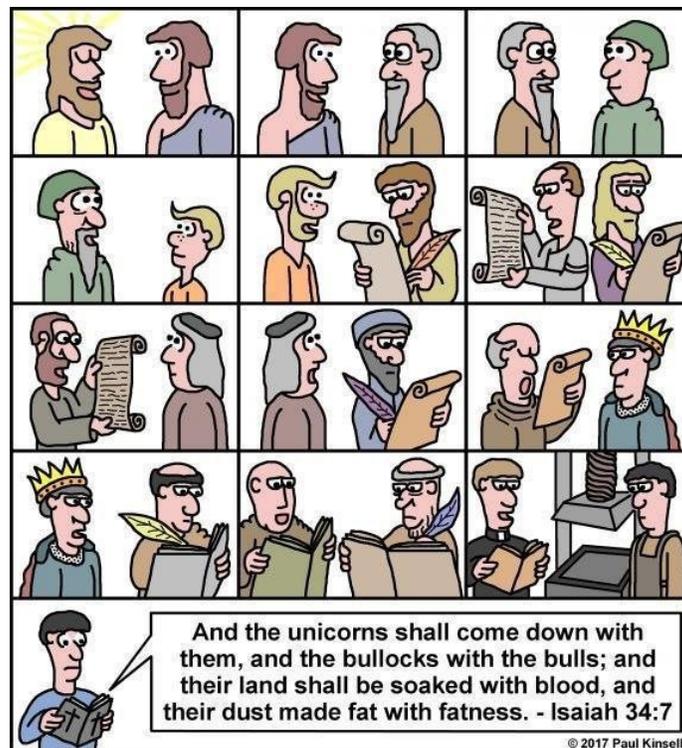
"The Bible does not say that!... And if it does, it's taken out of context!... And if it isn't, it's just a metaphor!... And if it's not, it's not a big deal!... And if it is, then that's just how things were done back then!... And if... er... shut up!"



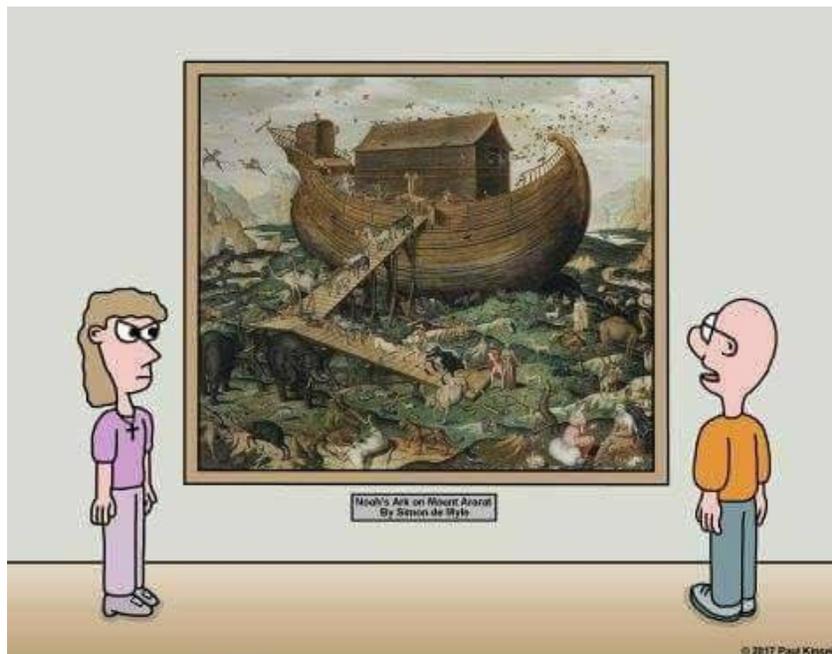
"Which God are you praying to? The one who caused the tragedy or the one who did nothing to stop it?"



"It's incredible what nonsense people will believe as long as there are others who also believe."



And the unicorns shall come down with them, and the bullocks with the bulls; and their land shall be soaked with blood, and their dust made fat with fatness. - Isaiah 34:7



"Anyone who worships a god who drowned millions of human babies should shut up about abortion."



"We have a choice between worshiping God or going to hell because he's given us free will."



"Your god sent two she bears to kill 42 children for making fun of a bald man. So I'm fairly sure he's fine with abortion."

