

## Coming Out Of The (Religious) Closet - Full Version

Sunday, April 13, 2008 at 1:35am

There you have it folks, I am officially an atheist.

It's taken me a long time of bouncing between this and agnosticism. The thing is, the proper term for what I believe does not exist. It's between the two. I am fully aware of the fallacy of being certain of something I cannot possibly know - on a philosophical level it is very weak to close my ears to all unknowns. However, for all intents and purposes, the term best expresses my beliefs to the Everyman. I mean to convey that **I do not believe in any deity man has ever come up with or heard of**, and think that the possibility of any God can only be attributed to man's imagination, and is therefore a load of bollocks.

Before anyone pounces on me, please understand that I could never justify this way of thinking in one sitting. It's doable, but a long haul. This has not been a snap decision nor a lazy one.

That said, I have no idea what caused the creation of our universe, I have no idea what caused the Big Bang. Nonetheless, I think that the impossibility of disproving God, the reason why I'm told agnosticism is the way to go, is the same as the impossibility of disproving the [Flying Spaghetti Monster](#), [Russell's Teapot](#), or Zeus for that matter. Therefore I am now comfortable with my new religious standing.

Simply put: I'm an atheist to any God anybody is likely to be referring to in any conversation I'll be having within my lifetime.

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I grew up a Catholic. I went to Church with my mother and sister nearly every Sunday. I went to catechism, did my first communion and was [confirmed](#) in grade 7. I was pretty comfortable believing what I did. I remember sometimes crying at church, the good kind, from feeling that sense of awe at the thought of a loving supreme God taking care of me. I was terrified yet lovingly submissive to God at the same time. I also remember, late in high school, being angry with my sister who stopped going to mass with mom and I. Around that point, I found the Church itself pretty much useless, other than being a medium for worshipers to gather. I found it to be a waste when we could/should all just worship on our own, in our own personal relationship with God. But it really hurt my mother to hear me say that, so I'd still go with her.

Come our high school graduation, I carried the cross to the altar for our special graduation mass. At this time I was asking myself things like: "Is Satan really bad? If he's bad, then why is he the one in charge for punishing the bad people in Hell?" I'm sure any aspiring theologian out there can answer questions like these, given the complexity of scripture (and rightfully so), but suffice to say that I was questioning some things, whether right or wrong.

Come university, I was really starting to rebel against the Church itself, as an establishment. I was learning of the atrocities caused by decisions at the Vatican (late to learn, I know), and found myself to call bull on a lot of local priests. I was still a believer in God though. I went off on a "personal relationship with Him" path. To me this was the obvious choice, but I only had one argument: The love I feel for others, the sadness I experience, life and consciousness, the beauty and perfection of our existence, the fact that *anything existed in the first place*, was reason enough to believe in God. For me that was good enough. I respected people of all faiths, figuring that God was benevolent enough to understand that we were born in different cultures, in different traditions, and the He would see we still loved Him, though we gave Him different names.

From here onward, I am fuzzy on dates. I'd say that the next thing that happened to me was when I first took part in an evolution/creation debate. I had never believed in creation. I just figured God was responsible for the Big Bang, and that He put it differently in scripture so that the people of yesteryear would be able to digest it (try telling someone who thinks the world is flat about [cosmic microwave background radiation](#), good luck). During these evolution debates, I found that many atheists and religious people, Christians in most cases, to be so one-sided in their arguments. A typical discussion I'd overhear:

***Atheist:** We've evolved from monkeys.*

***Christian:** No we haven't! God created the world 6000 years ago!*

***Atheist:** That's ridiculous, you are obviously retarded. There's evidence to support my claim.*

***Christian:** It's so obvious! God is right in front of you and you refuse to see Him! Besides, I know of some biologists who believe in creation as stated in the Bible.*

***Atheist:** You're a total moron.*

***Christian:** Your loss. At least I'm not going to burn in Hell.*

Frankly, I was annoyed by this. These people I was overhearing were giving both sides of the argument bad names. It was like watching kids cover their ears and scream "LALALALALA!". It was here that I started noticing that the people around me, like my parents, friends and peers were just passing along what they were told, and could very well be wrong. I was calling bullshit on people close to me for the first time of my life...

I stopped going to Church altogether by this time, to my mother's disappointment. I felt guilty, too. I think the next big part was when I moved to Lloydminster in the summer of 2006. I had no idea what I was in for, but it all started when my housemate, Amie, shouted to Alana, who was somewhere else in the house: "Alana! Have you seen my Bible?"

All I could think of was "*Your what!?*" I was stunned to hear her say this. I had never, never heard of anyone searching for their Bible for casual use, let alone a girl *my age*. She saw this in my stunned face (I was a bad poker player then, too), smiled at me and went off to...*Bible Study!?*

So began my introduction to a version of Christianity I never thought really existed. I thought most church-goers nowadays were just like me. Wrong. I remember having long conversations with my housemates about religion, sex, marriage, society, evolution and pretty much anything else. I found them to be so...old fashioned? I had a hard time, at first, believing that *none of* these people in their mid-to-late twenties had never had sex before. When we spoke of more religious stuff, I found myself to really disagree with them, or not understand their explanations. For example, I ask about the "Free Will vs. God is omniscient" thing. Their explanation sounded fair at first - it's like being a parent and telling your kid to wear a helmet when he's out on his bicycle, but you know he won't wear it. But then I'd go and ask why God made Eve, because he would have known that she would eat the apple long before There Was Light. Was this some kind of sick joke so God could entertain himself? Then they'd just laugh off my 'foolish' statement and carry on. But this was important! I had just found something that should shake their entire belief and they just laughed at me! What about the millions more people who pray and still get slaughtered in wars? I wanted answers!

This is when I started noticing social patterns, how we are products of our environments, how our parents raise us, etc. Soon I would think that most people believe in God because they were either 1) Afraid of death/infinity 2) Surrounded by their religion while growing up and never allowed their faith to be adequately challenged. I noticed how people hated to stray from their biases, including myself.

I went to church with them once in a while and I spoke to the pastors a couple of times. I remember one conversation I had with the pastor in the church I went to in Edmonton. I briefly gave him my background and told him how much I wanted to believe in God, but that my faith was really being shook up. I was looking *hard*. Because I'll admit to you right now that my greatest fear is death; and if this was my ticket to a happy eternal afterlife, I wanted in.

I asked about the [circular reasoning](#) in the Bible (Bible says God created everything - God inspired the Bible). His response was that I needed faith. Well frig, that's quite the leap. For me to believe in something that easily, I may as well have faith that the moon was made of cheese. Again, I'm sure a theologian would be chiming in here at any moment explaining it all, only to be countered by some militant atheist. I learned that no matter what side of the argument, you'll have experts who dedicated their lives to the study their side (which is cool).

But this whole staving off of my questions was getting to me. Therefore, I was slowly trickling into agnosticism. I had much more, pardon the term, *faith*, in the scientific method than the answers presented to me up to then. I was pretty much screaming to the

world: "Will someone PLEASE prove to me that God is real? I really friggin' want to believe in Him!". So I did that for about a year. I started to really question how people had come to believe whatever they did, and noticed that nobody challenged what they were used to knowing. Nobody asked "why?", nobody questioned authority. This is when I first started writing my blog. I'm sure you'll find interesting things if you go to the first few posts.

This is when I met Déborah. Wow, right in the middle of my "questioning everything" phase, I met this wonderful, cheerful, intelligent and beautiful girl who just so happened to be a Baptist, who's father is a pastor, no less! I fell head over heels for this girl, and was very OK with her faith, knowing full well that there would probably be no sex whatsoever. I didn't care. It didn't take long, however, before her parents had a lunch meeting with her and I, telling me about their concerns of their daughter dating a non-Christian. I told them how I stood (searching for God/Open to His existence but not yet convinced). They seemed to be okay with it. By this time I was going to Church with Deb on a regular basis. I'd find myself hearing some things the pastor would say, and fight off urges to scream "that's not true!". I didn't want to be like the people I saw arguing at university, so I'd make a conscious effort to put my bias aside.

After a few months, I had decided that I disagreed with mostly everything Deb believed in. This was *\*really\** tough, because she really loved God, yet we both really wanted to be together. I'll be honest, after hearing a guest speaker at her church shun gays and tout creationism saying "...and you have these scientists...they say they have a 'Ph.D.' Who cares?! A doctorate is worthless in God's eyes!" I remember looking to the side and watching Deb nod in agreement with him. I think this was more of a reflex on her part, because I know she is more of a [theistic evolutionist](#) than anything else. I would recall when she'd tell me about her summer jobs at a Bible camp, building an obstacle course for the kids, and calling the game "Running away from persecution". Well that just took the fucking cake. This is when we (first) ended things.

She had been the single most influential person in my life when it comes to making me want to believe in God. I loved her and wanted it to work out between us. Predictably, our polarized groundings split us up. Since then, we've modified our own opinions on matters of faith. She's become more open to the possibility of questioning things, and I have come to accept that I should not judge people for their beliefs. To this day, she is still one of my best friends.

By then I had lost most hope for God's existence, choosing to believe that religious people are doing nothing less than upholding tradition, doing what's comfortable for themselves, and warping their world view in order to accommodate God - instead of doing it the other way around. I decided to extend this to all major religions. I was officially an agnostic, citing that I didn't know anything, but that nobody else did either. For some reason, I still believed in the strong possibility of a human-type figure, with love and compassion *possibly* creating everything. I obviously hadn't heard of [Occam's Razor](#) by then. I was convinced that consciousness and emotion was little more than dopamine and various other molecules milling about in my brain.

Then came a second summer in Lloydminster. My beliefs were pretty much solidified then, but only then did I ponder the *statistical probabilities* of God. This is when I discovered [Russell's Teapot](#), and started to really read up on atheism. I think the toughest part of all this was trying to maintain a level of open-mindedness while becoming more and more certain of my beliefs. I had made up my mind, yet remained open to any new facts that would change it.

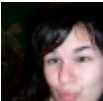
Also, my interest in astronomy has impacted me a lot. I'm realizing that I can't even come close to being able to imagine the complexity of our universe...let alone our galaxy or even my teeny tiny planet. Taking my cue from [Carl Sagan's 'Pale Blue Dot'](#), I'm realizing how insignificant we are, and that *daring* to suppose knowledge of how *the entire universe was created* is not only extremely naïve, it's just extremely ignorant. I think this is my greatest argument for my belief in the improbability of anything that man has come up with.

So here I am, now making the quantum leap to *de facto* atheism. I really wish I could share all the conversations I've had, all the good/bad things I've read (there are just as many dumb atheists as smart ones). I wish I could enumerate all the questions that are still inadequately answered. I think this is a fair introduction to how I have to where I now stand. Please understand that this is but only a small part of why I think the way I do, and that it would take me much, much longer to justify each of my opinions.

If you've read this far, you are one brave soul. It's been a great blog, and it's been fun to try to recount what I've been through. Thank you for reading.

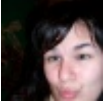


[Charles Landry](#) at 3:09am April 13  
Welcome to the wonderful world of Atheism



[Ysabelle Vautour](#) at 3:24am April 13  
I have a concern with your generalization here  
By then I had lost most hope for God's existence, choosing to believe that religious people are doing nothing less than upholding tradition, doing what's comfortable for themselves, and warping their world view in order to accommodate God - instead of doing it the other way around. I quickly extended this to all major religions.

- 1 not all religions have the same set up
- 2 the idea of the big bang theory was thought up by Hinduism
- 3 you seem to be concern about how other people act instead of what they believe. Example that guy is a jackass so what he believes is fucked up. Well if you turn this around you can have a very charming person who believes in some messed up shit.



[Ysabelle Vautour](#) at 3:26am April 13

Side note

I must say that what you believe effects your actions but more importantly your actions effect your beliefs.

So this means if you do the action of not going to church your brain will find reasons to for this to be justified. Eg your beliefs will change....hmmm wait ...better example u start downloading music from the internet. You think stealing is wrong. But you like downloading free songs. You will either not view downloading as stealing or think stealing in moderation is ok as long as you lets say go to concerts or buy the cd of a band u really respect or something.

4 Religion is about finding out what is important to you. So whatever you value the most you are going to find a way to accommodate it so of course they (as well as everybody else) are going to warp their worldview to accommodate god or whatever else they view as important.



[Andrew Manderson](#) at 3:30am April 13

1. I agree that religions can differ completely. However, they still claim to have answers. I think this is wrong.

2. They may have thought of some sort of cataclysm in space, but their beliefs then are not even close to what physicists are now seeing.

3. Most pastors or religious leaders are exactly that, charming and intelligent. How they act is still completely independent of whether their belief is valid or not.

I hope this is an adequate answer.



[Ysabelle Vautour](#) at 3:32am April 13

5 my grip I have with atheism is that is a reaction against something instead of being for something. This reactions against are submissive to whatever they are reacting too.

Nitche has a quote on this somewhere

So if Christianity did not exists there would not be atheism.

6 Blaze Pascal said something to the effect of you might as well believe in god then not to believe in god as in the event he does exist your fucked. So its better that you do

7 What I find useful is to breakup your values like to you believe in Integrity

Honesty

You get what you give

Compassion

Beauty

Do you think the world is a safe place...

Many religions a compilations of wisdom that tell you what is a good way to live life using these values

Suggestions if you will

Thanks for sharing. I think you are very gracious and considerate in your writing. takes my back to my 1st and 2nd year uni classes writing theses sort of things



[Andrew Manderson](#) at 3:32am April 13

4. Many religions preach things I find very important and valuable such as altruism, fairness, justice and respect for life. Again, this has little to do with it's validity.



[Andrew Manderson](#) at 3:37am April 13

5. I completely agree with 5. Completely.

6. That is the worst argument, EVER, for believing in a higher power. that is the ultimate example of "Jesus is my life insurance". it also implies that I have to believe in something I think is nonsense. I cant just flip a switch and say "I believe, now gimme my afterlife". Unfortunately you have people who believe in God solely for this, and I think it is the absolute worst reason to do so.

Again just because a religion shares my values, it does not mean I should think they are valid.

Thank you for your compliments, although I think this last post is far from gracious. Cheers Ys and thank you for reading!



[Ysabelle Vautour](#) at 4:04am April 13

"I hope this is an adequate answer." I was not looking for answers. I just want to make you aware of information. I am not trying to agree or disagree i just want get your wheels spinning

1 they do not all claim to have answers. they are just there for background information. people in the past sat there and thought about it. they talked about it and shared there experiences kind of like a blog of the old days

2 yeah ok what i wanted you to get from that was they thought of it first thus sparking the

discussion. thus some religious ideas can be useful

6 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bDsIFspVzfl>

same sort of reasoning

8 "Again just because a religion shares my values, it does not mean I should think they are valid." how do you determine is something is valid?

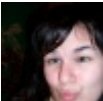
9 "How they act is still completely independent of whether their belief is valid or not" this is interesting their belief is valid to who? to them or to you?



[Andrew Manderson](#) at 4:07am April 13

8: I cannot personally determine if something is 100% valid, so I take a guess and claim it as a personal point of view.

9: Valid period.  $3+3=6$ , whether I think its 5 or buddy thinks its 8.



[Ysabelle Vautour](#) at 4:15am April 13

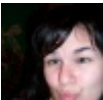
9 ok so ul have modern as view of truth that is truth is fixed.

you might want to check out post modern ideas of truth



[Andrew Manderson](#) at 4:16am April 13

Sounds sexy, I'll try to look it up, Ys. =) Feel free to send me some leads.



[Ysabelle Vautour](#) at 4:16am April 13

modernist

not modern as

sorry



[Michael Leukert](#) at 10:25am April 13

my comments have nothing to do with the preceding debate between mrs vautour and mr manderson.

"I was calling bullshit on people close to me for the first time of my life..."

-congratulations. thats one of the hardest steps in an honest life.

"...when my housemate, Amie, shouted to Alana, who was somewhere else in the house: 'Alana! Have you seen my Bible?' All I could think of was: 'Your what!?'"

-its always disturbed me, how so many human females have a certain tendency to completely conventionalise everything...as in reject EVERYTHING that's different, accept NOTHING that contradicts something told to them in early childhood, and surround themselves with things like bibles, religious organisations, and avoiding all stuff like international relations and important stuff in general. very passive, very gentle, but also very limited. im not saying every girl does this, and i know guys who do it, but the sheer masses of women who do this such a degree is very disturbing to me.



[Michael Leukert](#) at 10:34am April 13

that last comment was not in any way meant towards mrs vautour. i read her stuff and learned, looked some of it up and learned some more. im still thinking about it, and glad i learned. my comments are completely separated from your discussion in every way.

"I had a hard time, at first, believing that these people in their mid-twenties had never had sex before. "

-hey now, easy. humans endure all kinds of parent-induced illnesses that prevent them from having sex until their mid-twenties, later, or even ever. religion is ONLY ONE of these.



[Michael Leukert](#) at 10:35am April 13

"...building an obstacle course for the kids, and calling the game 'Running away from persecution'. Well that just took the fucking cake."

-im glad it did. i shed my "religion faith" too long ago to remember the details, but for my "authority faith" something else took the cake, much more recently: literally standing by ALL DAY LONG while a bunch of policemen are slowly killed across the street, because of united nations rules of engagement. the americans would have done something, wich adds to the twisted irony of the sit. anyways, that was my last straw, so to speak. that doesnt in any way mean i stopped complying with authority, i was a good soldier, and i still follow the law, but i was healed of my misplaced "faith" and see more clearly now.



[Michael Leukert](#) at 10:47am April 13

btw, i hope you post all your blog posts into facebook. and whole articles.

and that i didnt step onto anyone's feelings. im not yet in a gentle phase, but will be constructive someday, i hope.

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my belief for "everything" is that you can't know anything with absolute certainty, you can only guess at everything, even your own existence. i think i have disproved descartes' i think therefore i am, but im still going over my disproof for logical fallacies and not yet

ready to go making bigmouthed statements. in other words: i think you make decisions in life based on probability calculations, where the prob never reaches one. and you don't actually know anything. and thats all. just my 2 cents. i have no idea what you call that, and i dont really care.



[Andrew Manderson](#) at 1:11pm April 13

I've made a few changes to the blog and added a paragraph. Possibly more to come. Not that I expect you to re-read it all =>



[Jeremie Bourque](#) at 1:38pm April 13

While reading andrew's blog this morning, I was impressed how thoughtful of a writer he is when the natural tendency seems to be brash. It's rare to find such compassion in writing.

With that said, I feel like responding to a couple of things, most of them already having been expressed in other ways.

While there were generalizations in Andrew's writing, they were not unfair generalizations. In my experiences, there are reigning attitudes in christianity that are frustrating to anyone that is not of faith. I know that it has been the case for me sitting in church at a later age to experience frustration when hearing the old cliches that are repeated over and over.

I found these to be the following:



[Jeremie Bourque](#) at 1:38pm April 13

1) Fear of persecution.

This is an old tactic that is often repeated. While you can't coerce people into thinking a certain way like in the old days where you could ensure dominant power through violence, you can certainly appeal to that fear that is inherent in most humans since childhood. This is why I agree with Richard Dawkins statement that no child is born a christian child, a muslim child etc. They are just children of a certain faith. Deviating from Dawkins comments though, I do not think that instilling a fear of persecution in a young child is akin to child abuse in every case, but it certainly can be in some cases depending on the tactics used.



[Jeremie Bourque](#) at 1:39pm April 13

2)Atheists lacking direction.

Contrary to what was expressed in the comment section, I don't feel that atheism is a rebellion against christianity at all. Maybe it is for some but it has not been my experience

discussing with other atheists. Most of the atheist I met are well-rounded and rational people that are not merely rebelling. It's simply a matter of personal belief. Like Andrew said, I cannot bring myself to believe in something because it is the norm. . Let's not forget however that atheism is villified and if you hear atheist rebelling, it is more then likely because of that. Until atheism is accepted as a valid belief system, then the stigma attached to it will remain and atheists will always feel persecuted.

I think the most notable manifestation of this in modern times is the fear that political leaders feel about divulging their atheism.



[Jeremie Bourque](#) at 1:39pm April 13

The divulging of their belief in this case would destroy their careers because they would be viewed as immoral by their political opponents and by the majority of their constituency.

3)Evolutionists have it wrong.

Regardless of what scientific principles you abide to, I don't understand this need to discount other popular scientific theories just because you have an opposing viewpoint. I wish I was smart enough to even a passable knowledge of the theorie of evolution, but just because I read "Origin of species" does not make me an expert. So I will not claim to have it all figured out. What I can discount however is the ever-popular question asked by christians "what if you're wrong". The chance that you were born in a certain demographic is the only reason that you have your belief system in the first place (statistically speaking). Depending on the area you were born, you could have very well been hindu, budhist, christian etc.



[Jeremie Bourque](#) at 1:41pm April 13

I think again, Dawkins said it best when he answered "what if i'm wrong about God? well what if you're wrong about the great ju jube at the bottom of the sea or the flying spaghetti monster".

One thing i've always had a problem with is the belief that because you don't have a certain faith, you will be either not rewarded or downright punished. Doesn't this go against the idea of a just god? Isn't this a popular scare tactic that has been employed most of the popular religions? What are the chances that a just god would punish you for believing a certain thing? Shouldn't individuality be rewarded or at least the way you choose to live your life and perhaps your treatment of others? I meet kind-hearted christian like I meet kind-hearted atheists. Does what you believe really have that much relevance in the outcome after death? Apparently it does but i'd like for it to be explained to me because it doesn't make any sense.



[Jeremie Bourque](#) at 1:41pm April 13

I hadn't considered the moral foundation that is layed-out by a well-established religion. And while most organised religions are in direct violations with the basic moral principles by the propagandistic ways in which they operate, by their hoarding of riches, by their unfair distribution of power, I can see how a moral foundation could be helpful to some in principle.

Anyways, thanks for the insightful post Andrew.



[Jeremie Bourque](#) at 1:55pm April 13

I wanted to add (even though I seem like a douche for hogging a comment section like i'm doing), the point I was making about discounting popular scientific theories originated when I was reading Andrew's comments about creationist saying that the world is 6000 year's old. 6000 years old? based on what for the love of god? Twelve different methods of carbon dating would proove otherwise. Twelve different methods that all rely on different principles date the world several billion years old. This is not a small order of magnitude difference.



[Andrew Manderson](#) at 2:16pm April 13

Jeremie, I'd like to respond to 2).

What I mean when I say "If there was no religion, there would be no atheism", I think it would already be implied something like "We don't know". There would be no "atheist movement per se. It would just be the norm.

For example, I don't know of any "Humans who rely on oxygen to live" group. Know what I mean? My atheism, is in fact, a rebellion against established religion. Otherwise I'd just call myself an agnostic.

I wish atheism didn't have the stigma of apathy and evil, as many people perceive it. Hell, I'm going to Costa Rica for three months to conduct volunteer work!



[Charles Landry](#) at 2:17pm April 13

lol I can just see an answer to that last post, Oh Carbon Dating is the Devil's work ! haha



[Andrew Manderson](#) at 2:19pm April 13

"One thing i've always had a problem with is the belief that because you don't have a certain faith, you will be either not rewarded or downright punished. Doesn't this go against the idea of a just god?"

I disagree with you on this one. I'm questioning the very belief that God is, in fact, benevolent. How are we able to give such a complex property to the thing that may have created everything? Let alone the form of man, and omniscience, or even love. Man - Those are huge leaps!!

I think at best, it could be some vague creative force, without emotion, will or language. Know what I mean? Occam's Razor, baby!



[J-D Daigle](#) at 4:03pm April 13

I wish to bring a new side to this debate.

I always wondered, being an unrelenting atheist as well as a physicist-in-training :

Does atheism rhyme with science?

I know that not all scientists are atheists, but do all atheists believe in science?

(I had a lot of trouble writing that last sentence, I find it inconceivable to not believe in science, but as the 6000 year old world would suggest, some people do disregard it)

So that's the question I would like to ask the audience, is it conceivable for an atheist to believe in things like the 6000 year old world, which disregards entirely scientific proof?



[Jeremie Bourque](#) at 4:09pm April 13

What I find the most impressive about these postings is that Charles over there seems to be spitting fire. Spawn of Satan!!!

One complaints that I hear about atheism Andrew is the lack of organisation and communication. There doesn't seem to be any movement at all. If you can find them, I doubt they are all that popular. I suppose that by it's very definition, atheism is rebuttal of christianity. When I was contemplated where I fit in, I learned about atheism and agnosticisim and had to make that decision as well. I discovered however that definitions of atheism weren't universal just like definitions of libertarianism, communism, marxism have been distorted with time. So considering that, I suppose i'd put myself in the atheism catagory as well. I'm pretty sure it's unwavering because I doubted christian teachings back at age 13. I also discovered that sermons were always a repeat of the same sayings and mantras and that quickly bore me.



[Jeremie Bourque](#) at 4:18pm April 13

I wanted to know more but the church wasn't providing any answers so I read the bible for myself. I was then confused by the old testament versus the new testament. The old testament was a book full of vitriolic rage and the actions of a vengeful god while the new testament was more optimistic and full of hope. Of course, after reading the bible, you have more questions then anything else. Some of the more obvious ones are "how the hell did he build a boat that big?" and why is god divine interference so selective?

So you go on to learn about the origins of the stories and discover parallels between greek mythology and paganism. It seems more of then coincidence that entire stories would be rehashed in such a manner. Some parts downright smack of plagiarism. If anyone is wondering about these parallels, I can talk more about it but I don't know if this is the forum for that.

To be fair Andrew, you're questioning the very existence of god, maybe with teh justification



[Andrew Manderson](#) at 4:19pm April 13

J-D: Let us first define the term "Science", because in my opinion it is being thrown about and misused by many people. I would define it as obtaining facts through the scientific method, which is demonstrable with concrete examples and evidence. I think the weakness here is that most people do not understand how scientists come up with their findings - that's obvious, because it would take me a long time to explain what a Higgs Bozon is to someone - "But trust me it's something we're looking for, we have reason to believe it exists"

Having said this, I think there are many people who would call themselves atheists purely from an anti-religious standing, and have little to no background in science. I'm not saying they disbelieve in science, I say some atheists haven't even looked at it.



[Andrew Manderson](#) at 4:21pm April 13

If you want to get philosophical about it, I \*can\* see the possibility of a person who does not believe in the supernatural and still think Earth is only 6,000 years old, if the very few things he/she has encountered in life may seen to have that possibility in the cards. Take someone who lives under a rock or something.

Nonetheless, I don't think this a very common viewpoint and therefore not worth considering.



[Jeremie Bourque](#) at 4:35pm April 13  
that such a cruel god could never exist.

"One thing i've always had a problem with is the belief that because you don't have a certain faith, you will be either not rewarded or downright punished. Doesn't this go against the idea of a just god?"

Actually, I think we agree. I was discussing popular opinions repeated by christians, and that particular opinion is that you will be punished for doubting god's existence. The point was if you believe this, you have to abandon the belief that god is just. Yes, most of

us know that he is not depicted as just. Some have stated that the christian god is the most hateful, racist, genocidal, vengeful, sexist, spiteful character ever depicted in recorded literature (quoting dawkins again, but very loosely). But anyone go to church and convince me that he was not represented as just. Would anyone believe in an unjust god? Probably not.



[Jeremie Bourque](#) at 4:37pm April 13

I was under the impression that the creationist argument was that the world was several thousand year's old. There's even a university called "liberty university" that teaches this very thing along with a small archeological museum to try and back it up. If you take for example the church of what's his face, ted haggerty I believe, he has millions of followers which mostly all believe the same thing, and therefore most likely believe in the popular creationist theory that the world is several thousand year's old.

I am shocked as you are that it's a real debate.



[Andrew Manderson](#) at 4:51pm April 13

Jeremie: Atheists are not "organized" because it's theoretically a moot point. Again, there are no clubs or organizations for things that seem to just be given, apparent reality. The only reason why we're hearing of an "organized" atheism (I use "atheism loosely, because we've made it clear that the definition is so versatile), is because of the advent of Intelligent Design and it's teachings in public schools. So you'll see atheists and agnostics get together and try to counter this trend.



[Andrew Manderson](#) at 4:58pm April 13

As for the Old vs. New Testament, I'll have to side with Christians on this one:

The Old testament was written for a generation of people who lived in a world where crucifixion, beheading, dismemberment, feeding people to lions, etc. was commonplace. The atrocious things you'd read in the Old Testament, such as Killing your unbelieving children, or stoning your adulterous spouse to death to be the equivalent of suing someone's ass today.

So from a theological standpoint, I would not be a literalist Christian (splitting of the Red Sea, walking on water, etc. I would tend to see it all as metaphor, written in a place and time so that its readers would then most easily digest it.

I still think the Bible was written to have control over people, and that there are, like you said, numerous possible ways to see it as a hybrid of pagan belief.



[Andrew Manderson](#) at 5:03pm April 13

As for Liberty University, there are tons of others, such as Discovery Institute, or any of thousands of bible colleges all across the US. Now some of the "doctors" from these places are going to \*real\* universities and trying to get real biology degrees, so they can back up their creationist claims by saying "and I \*have my degree in biology!"



[Veronique Lavoie](#) at 5:50pm April 13

Oh Andrew, who would have thought we would come to this conclusion back in the day, when we under a strict Catholic upbringing? I lost faith a long time ago, first it was in the Catholic church because I couldn't stand all it's rules and the "guilty conscience". But the more I thought about it, the more I realized that religion is for those (weak) people who need something to cling to, something to tell them that there is a heaven for "good" people and a hell for everyone else. I don't go around picking fights about the issue but I take serious offense whenever anyone tries to push their religious views on me. Next time we get together I'll have an interesting story to tell you about the Javohas Witness who came to my door once...



[Jeremie Bourque](#) at 11:07pm April 13

I would kind of like someone to explain to me how Occam's razor is applied to religion in more specific terms.



[Jeremie Bourque](#) at 11:15pm April 13

There are no organisations for things that are self-evident? I don't believe that is the case. I see a motivation for organised atheism as do most atheists. This has actually been the work of many prominent atheist in the past years with books on the subject, websites dedicated to the cause, and forums for people to express themselves. I think there is no mass-organisation of atheism because it is hard to organise independent thinkers that are going against the grain to begin with. Organising atheists has been compared to herding cats; it's very difficult to do.

Atheism is not self-evident if you consider what makes christianity appealing and that is it's positioning as a universal truth. If you consider a complex infrastructure and seemingly infinite ressources, then it's really hard to ignore it's influence for most people. I do not think atheism is self-evident at all.

Also, you said it yourself, there is a stigma attached to atheism and there hasn't been a



[Jeremie Bourque](#) at 11:18pm April 13

because of that, there hasn't been a public forum for it for many years. Last time I checked, it was the third most popular choice of "faith" despite this. It would be nice to hear some information from people that live in predominantly atheist countries though as i'm more used to the American religious climate.

So yeah, Occam's razor godammit!



[Andrew Manderson](#) at 11:33pm April 13

Occam's Razor is that you should strip off excess details, simply because the more constraints you add to an argument, you're taking its complexity up at an exponential level. For example, 9/11 conspiracy theorists are usually not the types to use Occam's Razor:

"The US Government did it...they infiltrated the WTC and set thermite...because they wanted an excuse to go to war...and they paid osama bin laden to take the blame for it...because they hate America."

I'm exaggerating, but it's the first thing that comes to mind



[Andrew Manderson](#) at 11:35pm April 13

It's all about making as few assumptions as possible.

In my case, it's about God. Some add things like benevolence, omniscience and omnipotence, not to mention Man's image.



[Jeremie Bourque](#) at 11:36pm April 13

On another note, the absence of faith is the most rudimentary of belief systems so I can see why atheism wouldn't be organized. In its purist form, atheism is what you have before accepting a god in your life. That being said, because Christianity exists, I can see a convincing argument for the opposite. I think it hasn't had a chance to proliferate in an open forum is all. Another argument could be that you can get no money and no resources for a belief that doesn't give most people hope or that doesn't appease our sense of forbidding.



[Jeremie Bourque](#) at 11:38pm April 13

That's helpful. I read a lengthy Wikipedia post on it but I hadn't thought about things like man's image in the equation. It makes it a lot clearer to me.

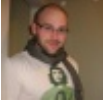


[Charles Landry](#) at 12:19am April 15

about atheism being the polar opposite to Christianity... it's not! Atheism simply means doesn't believe in a higher being. Not that they think gods are stupid or that people that believe in gods are stupid. That's like saying every kid is stupid until they figure out the

easter bunny if fake or Santa!

It's not stupid, some people just need to believe in something. Atheist don't! voila!



[Andrew Manderson](#) at 12:30am April 15

You do realize though, Cares, that expressly saying "I know 100% There are no Creative things that we have not even imagined yet" implies that you have \*faith\* in this.

However, just because it's the same word, it's usually associated with religion.



[Jeremie Bourque](#) at 12:45am April 15

Did someone say in this forum that it was the polar opposite to christianity? I'm honestly asking. I don't remember.



[Andrew Manderson](#) at 12:46am April 15

I'm saying I am a reaction to earthly faiths. By definition I'm an agnostic, but practically I'm an atheist. I'm just a practical guy.



[Jeremie Bourque](#) at 1:25am April 15

Yes, i've always thought that you were a practical guy. What are you doing responding to facebook comments at 12:46 anyways. As a practical guy, you should be sleeping for the love of Christ!

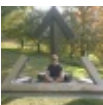
Yes, i've been slipping in sins in my writing to see if anybody would notice...



[Jon Richt](#) at 12:34pm April 17

A couple of things I'd like to add. Andy knows me well enough to realize I could probably write about this for the next 8 hours, but I'll try to keep it concise:

Occam's Razor is summed up by the following: When faced with several choices/answers, all other things being equal, the simplest choice/answer is the best. Related to the question of "Why do we exist?", an answer of "Because God put us here and tossed in a guy on a cross to pay for our sins and you need to believe in him or go to Hell" is less desirable than "I don't know".



[Jon Richt](#) at 12:35pm April 17

As for atheism being a reaction to Christianity... IMHO \*some\* people turn to atheism for this reason, but not all. For example, Bill Gates is a target for scrutiny and criticism simply because he stands out from the crowd. He's noticed wherever he goes and whatever he does - so it shouldn't be surprising that people complain about him from time to time. Christianity in the United States is a bit like Bill Gates; its values are frikkin everywhere, so it's not surprising that people get angry at its excesses (ie. people convert to atheism or some other religion or whatever).

Still, I blogged about the differences between the versions of atheism and agnosticism - they're subtle yet significant. Which version you choose to label yourself with can (I think) reveal some of the reasons you came to identify with that label.



[Jon Richt](#) at 12:44pm April 17

There \*are\* atheists who aren't scientifically bent - but they're rare. The extreme example of an atheist who believes the world is 6000 years old is so extreme that I can't say I think people like this exist.

But "faith" comes in many flavors. You can have lots of faith in your family - you can really feel that Astrology has all the answers. You can trust that a shift in the earth's magnetic poles will bring mass extinction in the year 2012. Any one of these 3 kinds of faiths does not preclude atheism.

I agree in general that atheists tend to rely upon logic and rationality. But there can be other motivators in the mix - it's not safe to assume "God doesn't exist" means the person isn't a fruitcake :)



[Jon Richt](#) at 12:46pm April 17

One last comment: if you don't have access to the actual alt.atheism FAQ, there's a great summary found here:

<http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/mathew/intro.html>

He does a decent job (imho) of summarizing the opinions and conventions of that newsgroup.



[Andrew Manderson](#) at 10:47pm February 26

Holy shit...I think this is my most commented on blog ever.