

C. Jay Vreeland wrote this “sermon” which was delivered by Robin Mitchell on 9 August 2009 to the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of San Dieguito. Jay called it:

YOU KEEP YOUR DELUSION.

I’LL KEEP MINE

Jay is referring to the book *The God Delusion* authored by the renowned evolutionist Professor Richard Dawkins. Jay writes with tongue in cheek while contending that Dawkins’ belief (faith!) that “Science” will provide us with the ultimate answers to all the questions we have about the meaning of human existence is as much a delusion as belief in a higher power. Both science and religion begin with imagination. Whichever road you take you are left with absurdities and imponderables.

Jeff Skillings, the main architect of the Enron fraud, now serving 24 years in prison said his favorite book was *The Selfish Gene* authored by Richard Dawkins. As Skillings saw it, selfishness was ultimately good even for the victims because it weeded out the losers and forced the survivors to become strong. Dawkins was “mortified” that Skillings derived inspiration of a Social Darwinism character from it.” (*The God Delusion (TGD)* p215) Just wait a minute professor! Don’t you think that good Christians, Jews, and Muslims are mortified that mass murderers and sadists are deriving inspiration from their holy books?

Whether the professional atheists like it or not, Social Darwinism is the popular understanding of evolution, and powerful people prefer Social Darwinism to Dawkins’ more enlightened views. On the political right, Social Darwinism merges with Randian Objectivism as a justification of unregulated capitalism. Does the name Alan Greenspan come to mind?

The professional atheists state or imply that religion is the greatest scourge of mankind; the cause of wars and various other evils. The twentieth century saw 15 million deaths in WWI, 55 million in WWII, 9 million in the Russian Civil War, 20 million under Stalin, 49 million in the Chinese civil war and under Mao Zedong, 7 million Jews in the Holocaust. 5 million Vietnam, 4 million in the Korean war, and multimillions more under other tyrants like Pol Pot and Idi Amin. These were primarily political and ideological struggles in which religion was a victim, not an aggressor.

Professor Dawkins conceded in a radio program in England that there is a wide difference between what he terms “decent, understated religion” and Robertson, Falwell or Haggard, Osama bin Laden or the Ayatollah Khomeini. But in his book he asserts that the vast majority of religious believers are closer to the beliefs of evangelists or of bloodthirsty Islamic terrorists than to quiet and rational religion. That is a highly disputable sociological judgment, and I don’t believe it for a moment.

Dawkins writes “I do everything in my power to warn people against faith itself, not just against ‘extremist’ faith. The teachings of ‘moderate’ religion, though not extremist in themselves, are an open invitation to extremism.” (*TGD* p306)

If ‘religion’ is as bad as Dawkins, Harris and Hitchens would have us believe, it ought to be banned. There ought to be a law against it. The framers of the Constitution were wrong. Who among them would like to tell us how to amend the Constitution to eliminate the evils they complain of? Would these militants have us attack the Vatican, Salt Lake City, Mecca, Jerusalem and a host of other “holy” places?

They are using the time-honored but often fallacious two-valued approach: black or white; with us or against us: good guys and bad guys.

Dawkins quotes Einstein: “To sense that behind anything that can be experienced there is a something that our mind cannot only indirectly grasp and whose beauty and sublimity reaches us only indirectly and as a feeble reflection, this is religiousness. In this sense I am religious.” Dawkins goes on to say “In this sense I too am religious with the reservation that ‘cannot grasp’ does not have to mean ‘forever ungraspable’.” Dawkins is saying that ultimate reality can be known. That is a statement of faith.

Both in the vocabulary they share – “hope,” “belief,” “undoubtedly,” “there will come a time” – and the reasoning they engage in, Harris and Dawkins perfectly exemplify the definition of faith found in Hebrews 11, “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

Hans Vaihinger in his *Philosophie des Als Ob*, (*The Philosophy of “As If”*) argues that human beings can never really know the underlying reality of the world; here he agrees with Immanuel Kant who made the same observation in his “*Critique of Pure Reason*.” Kant tells us it is not irrational to entertain beliefs that are beyond our powers to ascertain or verify with the physical equipment we have. We don’t know what gravity is, or consciousness.

We construct systems of thought and then assume that these match reality we behave “as if” the world matches our models. No one has ever observed protons, electrons, and electromagnetic waves, but science pretends that they exist, and uses observations made on these assumptions to create newer constructs.

Astrophysicists (cosmologists) joke about dark matter and dark energy saying. “You get to invoke the tooth fairy only once” meaning dark matter “but now we have to invoke the tooth fairy twice,” meaning dark energy.

Vaihinger proposes that man willingly accepts falsehoods or fictions in order to live peacefully in an irrational world. I contend that we do that all the time.

Myth, legend, and folklore are fictions which tell us a great deal about the human condition.

Closely related to “as if” thinking is the suspension of disbelief.

Poet and author Samuel Taylor Coleridge called drama “that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.” We voluntarily allow ourselves to be brought into a fictional world for a short while, just for the experience of it.

Most of the time we act or think “as if” without quite knowing that we are doing so; whereas when we lend ourselves to the enjoyment of admittedly fictional characters we do so willingly unless the portrayal is too “unrealistic” or offensive to our moral sensibilities and we withdraw the suspension and the disbelief returns.

Neurologically speaking, emotions which arise in our primitive lizard and mammalian brains must pass the reality testing of our higher brain centers before we act on them. When we suspend our disbelief we turn off the reality test and allow free rein to our emotions.

The actor suspends any disbeliefs she/he may have about the character, and acts as if that character is real. We suspend our disbelief in order to enter the “as if” world of the play. In this way we experience a whole universe of ideas, viewpoints, emotions that may otherwise not be available to us.

But, strictly speaking, we are listening to imaginary beings.

Let me tell you what is wrong with the scientific atheist mindset and its devotion to what it perceives as “truth.” First, a story. A Christian minister, a rabbi and a scientific atheist were all condemned to the guillotine. The rabbi’s last words were “I believe in the only true God and he will save me!” The blade plunged toward his neck and stopped just inches away. The rabbi cried out “I told you so!” “It’s a miracle” cried the crowd and they let him go. The priest declared “I believe in Jesus Christ, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost who will save me.” Once more the blade plunged down and stopped just short of the priest’s neck. A miracle.

They had to let him go free. It was the scientific atheist’s turn. He said “I see the problem; it’s right there in the gear box.” The guillotine was fixed and worked fine as he took his turn. He was trying to be helpful but got it in the neck anyway.

The moral of that story could be that truth does not always set you free; or perhaps: where ignorance is bliss, ‘tis folly to be wise: or maybe let well enough alone; or being too smart for your own good.

Scientific truth is not necessarily useful or helpful: The odds are good that every time you drink a glass of water you are taking in at least one molecule that passed through the bladder of Oliver Cromwell. It’s just elementary probability theory. (TGD p.366) This scientific truth applies just as well to the bladder of Jesus Christ and provides a basis for belief in the efficacy of holy water. What a lovely thought – being sprinkled with the holy tinkle!

Science is fact oriented. If you can’t measure it, quantify it, it isn’t true. The Humanities are oriented toward the imagination, the arts, philosophy ... the immeasurable, the unquantifiable, intangible truths of the soul. Scientists can’t find the soul, so they deny its existence. We in the Humanities **feel** the soul. That’s why we know it is there.

Science is not common sense. Sometimes it may be useful to ignore science and follow your common sense.

Science teaches us that solid things like rocks are really composed almost entirely of empty space. The nucleus of an atom of such a rock would be like a fly in the middle of a sport stadium. The next atom is right outside the stadium. The hardest, solidest, densest rock is “really” almost entirely empty space. (*TGD* p368) Later, on the same page, Dawkins writes “It is useful for our brains to construct notions like solidity and impenetrability, because such notions help us navigate through the world.”

Is it then not useful for our brains to construct religious notions to help us navigate through the world?

Steven Pinker a cohort of Dawkins asserts: “Every aspect of conscious experience can be tied to or caused by some process in the brain.” He goes on to say that we cannot visualize the universe being curved in the fourth dimension, not because there is deficit in physics: the problem is a deficit in our own intuition. There is an aspect of reality that can never be intuitively satisfying even though our best science tells us that it is true.

Our best science tells us that a rock aimed at my head is almost entirely empty space. I don’t care if there is a deficit in my intuition, I’m going to duck and get the intuitive satisfaction of not getting my head bashed in. To hell with scientific truth! Those “notions” of solidity and impenetrability which I have attributed to that rock beat all hell out of scientific “reality.”

That scientific truth is about as helpful as being told that you don’t need a parachute if you are only going to skydive once.

Dawkins is understandably outraged at the attack on his own field of evolution by fundamentalists who want to inject creationism into the science curriculum. He feels that “Science” itself is under attack and therefore he must attack “Religion” the source of irrational beliefs. But look at what “Science” would have us believe. One or more of the following is true:

1. Your consciousness affects the behavior of subatomic particles. (Mind over matter).
2. Particles move backwards as well as forwards in time and appear in all possible places at once.
3. The universe is splitting into billions of parallel universes every  $10^{-43}$  seconds (Planck time).
4. The universe is interconnected with faster-than-light transfers of information

Each competing interpretation explains all the facts and predicts every experimental outcome correctly.

A memorable quote from Albert Einstein seems apropos here: “As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain: as far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality.”

There is an old joke about a philosopher being in a dark room looking for a black cat who isn’t there. And a theologian who claims to have found it. I would add a scientist, a pioneer in quantum physics, Erwin Schrödinger who wrote the equations which are the foundation of quantum physics. He enters the room, turns on the light and reveals the scientific truth. Suddenly there are an infinite number of cats unborn being born at all stages of life, death, white, orange blue black ancient future appearing disappearing as time goes forward and backward and stands still. And all the while Mrs. Schrödinger is pounding on the door hollering: Ervin, Ervin mein schatze, vat are you doing mit de katze?

Several years ago I told a story about a little girl who was starting to paint a picture when her teacher asked her what she was going to paint. The little girl said “God.” The teacher said “nobody knows what God looks like.” The little girl said “They will when I’m finished.”

We are all forced to imagine what God looks like, if not to ourselves then to other people. If we alt atheist or not, had a mandatory assignment to draw a picture of God, what would you come up with? An angry vindictive old man pointing his accusing finger at multitudes of sinners falling off a precipice into the fires

of eternal damnation? A stern but fair and impartial judge? A gentle Jesus? A vision of Man reaching out to God like Michael Angelo's painting on the ceiling of the Sistine chapel.?

I could not draw a picture of love, beauty, pain, grief, ecstasy, rapture, reverence, remorse, hatred or any human emotion in the abstract. Yet they exist in my experience. So how could I capture God – the ultimate abstraction – the sum of my desires, hopes and dreams – transcending time and dimensions? And frame it on a nine-by-twelve canvas?

Yet. I have to turn in my assignment. I can treat the whole thing as a joke. I could claim to be a Pastafarian. As Dawkins reports (*TGD* p53) the *Gospel of the Flying Spaghetti Monster* has been published. I could paint a picture of this deity, whose existence has never been disproved, and has touched many with its noodly appendage. He also reports that a great schism has already occurred resulting in the Reformed Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster. I have further reports that rival factions; romanos, mozzarellas, parmiolanos, gorgonzolas and provolones have grated on the very essence of the deity. Cheez! Holy Marinara! Pasta fagioli!

I have a soft spot for a certain 6'2" imaginary white rabbit called Harvey. Harvey had a real person who believed in him. Elwood P. Dodd told his psychologist "I wrestled with reality for thirty-five years, and I'm happy to state that I finally won out over it." In the end his sister decides it is better to accept Elwood as he is, including his imaginary friend, than to let the bad guys win.

My only alternative would be a cop-out. I could paint an amorphous, wispy being, not Harvey, of course but an imaginary friend: a grown-up Binker. My God.

Allison read the Binker poem from Winnie the Pooh. Binker is an imaginary friend that only Christopher Robin can see. Binker is like Hobbes the tiger in the Calvin and Hobbes comic strip. Like Harvey the rabbit, Shakespeare's Puck, and Hobbes the tiger, Binker is a pooka. And so is Tinkerbelle.

Dawkins in his book *The God Delusion* warns us not to teach children to believe in imaginary beings. I can just see a group of children who have been taught by Dawkins going to see a production of Peter Pan. Remember in the second act Tinkerbelle drinks some poison that Peter is about to drink in order to save him. Peter turns to the audience and says. "Tinkerbelle is going to die because not enough people believe in fairies. But if all of you clap your hands real hard to show that you do believe in fairies, maybe she won't die." Dawkins' star pupil cries out "Where's the evidence?" The children do not clap. Tinkerbelle dies and the curtain falls. Scientific Atheist children do not fall for such claptrap.

As for talking to non-existent creatures, Dawkins cries out to a dead friend Douglas Adams: (*TGD* p117)

Douglas, I miss you. You are my cleverest, wittiest, tallest and possibly only convert. I hope this book might have made you laugh – though not as much as you made me.

Does Dawkins really think that Douglas can hear him? He is playing an as-if game. Let's pretend Douglas is still alive. Isn't this much like a prayer? Does he really believe in life after death? Douglas no longer lives in an empirical world. Where is the evidence that he can hear you? If he can't, who the hell are you talking to, Professor?

Pinker the neuroscientist *cum* evolutionary psychologist asserts that specific places in the brain associate with specific thoughts. I have the feeling that the scientific atheists would like to excise my "God spot" which Dawkins associates with my Binker spot. If they do that, there go Harvey, Hobbes, Tinkerbelle, and god only knows what other collateral damage would occur. Maybe I'd toss away those unscientific notions I have about rocks being solid.

If Dawkins ever enters that room opened by Schrödinger he's going to have one hell of a time grasping the reality of all those cats now, then tomorrow or yesterday here there and everywhere in all those expanding universes.

Just remember, your delusion is your very own. Don't leave home without it.

Walk with your invisible friend. If you don't have one, get one!

Live as if you have a reason to.

Let your soul soar to lofty ecstatic heights even if you don't believe you have one!  
Think impossible things before breakfast. And after too.

And remember, if you don't clap for Tinkerbelle, the show doesn't go on.

## Intergenerational Sharing (Binker Poem)

From Winnie the Pooh, Binker is an imaginary friend of Christopher Robin. Richard Dawkins is the author of a book called *The God Delusion* in which he suggests that the idea of God is akin to a childish belief in an imaginary friend like Binker.

Binker--Binker - what I call him-is a secret of my own,  
And Binker is the reason why I never feel alone.  
Playing in the nursery, sitting on the stair,  
Whatever I am busy at, Binker will be there.

Oh, Daddy is clever, he's a clever sort of man,  
And Mummy is the best since the world began,  
And Nanny is Nanny, and I call her Nan-

But they can't See Binker.

Binker's always talking, 'cos I'm teaching him to speak  
He sometimes likes to do it in a funny sort of squeak,  
And he sometimes likes to do it in a hoodling sort of roar...  
And I have to do it for him COs his throat is rather sore.

Oh, Daddy is clever, he's a clever sort of man,  
And Mummy knows all that anybody can,  
And Nanny is Nanny, and I call her Nan-

But they don't Know Binker.

Binker's brave as lions when we're running in the park;  
Binker's brave as tigers when we're lying in the dark;  
Binker's brave as elephants. He never, never cries...  
Except (like other people) when the soap gets in his eyes.

Oh, Daddy is Daddy, he's a Daddy sort of man,  
And Mummy is as Mummy as anybody can,  
And Nanny is Nanny, and I call her Nan...

But they're not Like Binker.

Binker isn't greedy, but he does like things to eat,  
So I have to say to people when they're giving me a sweet,  
"Oh, Binker wants a chocolate, so could you give me two?"  
And then I eat it for him, COs his teeth are rather new.

Well, I'm very fond of Daddy, but he hasn't time to play,  
And I'm very fond of Mummy, but she sometimes goes away,  
And I'm often cross with Nanny when she wants to brush my hair...  
But Binker's always Binker, and is certain to be there.

## **No way, Dawkins!**

Hi, there Dawkins, what'cha say?  
Tryn'a scare that ghost away?  
Someone maybe you can't see  
Has laid an awful hex on thee.  
Now He's here.  
Now He's there.  
It's as you fear  
He's everywhere.  
Almighty God your bugabear.

Others see Him, but you can't;  
No matter how you rave and rant.  
You ran into Him yesterday  
He wasn't there, so you say  
He won't be there again today.  
Oh, don't you wish He'd go away?

Just close your eyes  
And you won't see.  
How close He is  
To you and me.  
Go away, you say, go away!  
No way! C Jay