PART ONE
INTRODUCTION

Is Religion Dangerous?

New Atheists
Richard Dawkins
Sam Harris
Christopher Hitchens

Culture of Death?
Secularism and its Consequences for Family and Society

Introduction to Christian Education
A set of three papers
Paper Two

New York, September 11th 2001

New York, September 11th 2001

Madrid Bombings
11th March 2004
London Bombings
7th July 2005

London Bombings 7th July 2005

Richard Dawkins
Bantam Press
October 2006

Bantam Press
London Bombings
7th July 2005

Sam Harris
2004

Letter to a Christian Nation
2007

Richard Dawkins
The God Delusion

Daniel Dennett
2006

More4
2012

Christopher Hitchens
GOD is NOT GREAT

Richard Dawkins
The Meaning of Life

Channel 4
2006
“[Religion] fuels war, foments bigotry and abuses children.” (front cover flap)

Is Secularism Harmless?

Aren’t the new atheists rather extreme?

Eric
Aged 18, in 1999 he killed himself.

“There’s no such thing as True Good or True evil, it’s all relative to the observer. It’s just all nature, chemistry, and math, deal with it.”
(Eric’s notebook, 12 June 1998)

Secularists also face hard questions

Which Kind of Secularism?

So which story is being told?

Materialism

Material world is all there is

Materialism1

Materialism2

Enjoying material possessions is all that matters

Christian?

Hindu?

Muslim?

Buddhist?

Secular?
Materialism

Nothing

Many Christians appear unaware of the extent to which materialistic assumptions now shape people and society.

Many atheists find it very difficult to accept – to believe – what it would really mean to be in a godless world.

Materialism is False

It is untenable as a philosophy and as a basis for any science.

It cannot accommodate many features that have foundational significance for human life.

But hasn’t modern science (Darwinian evolution) shown that materialism is true?

Darwinism

Darwinism, for both its original author and its leading modern proponents, is the materialistic theory of evolution

Richard Dawkins

“‘It is absolutely safe to say that if you meet somebody who claims not to believe in evolution, that person is ignorant, stupid or insane (or wicked, but I’d rather not consider that)”

(Dawkins, 2004)
Thomas Nagel

“I realize that such doubts will strike many people as outrageous, but that is because almost everyone in our secular culture has been browbeaten into regarding the reductive research program as sacrosanct, on the ground that anything else would not be science.”

(Nagel, 2012: 7)

Richard Dawkins

“An atheist before Darwin could have said, following Hume: “I have no explanation for complex biological design. All I know is that God isn’t a good explanation, so we must wait and hope that somebody comes up with a better one.” I can’t help feeling that such a position, though logically sound, would have left one feeling pretty unsatisfied, …

Richard Dawkins

“… and that although atheism might have been logically tenable before Darwin, Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist.”

(Dawkins 1986: 6)

Richard Dawkins

“the greatest show on earth, the only game in town”

Evolution: 2009

Thomas Nagel

“… as it is usually presented, the current orthodoxy about the cosmic order is the product of governing assumptions that are unsupported, and that it flies in the face of common sense.”

(Nagel, 2012: 5)

PART TWO
INDOCTRINATION TODAY

London Zoo
“A lot of people think humans are above other animals. When they see humans as animals here, it kind of reminds us that we’re not that special.”

Thomas Mahoney (inmate of the Human Zoo 2005)

“Monogamy is a weird thing to me. It’s overrated because, let’s face it, we’re all f***ing animals. The fact is, no one is perfect.”

Sienna Miller

“I do think on some basic level we are animals, and by instinct we kind of breed accordingly… But as much as I believe that, I work really hard when I’m in a relationship to make it work in a monogamous way.”

Scarlett Johansson

“Our perspective is you don’t avoid what’s natural. You’re going to be attracted to people. In our marriage vows, we didn’t say ‘forsaking all others’. …

Will Smith

“… If it came down to it, then one can say to the other, ‘Look, I need to have sex with somebody. I’m not going to if you don’t approve of it – but please approve of it’.”

Will Smith

Celebrity Culture

Arthur Koestler

Darkness at Noon
Ivanov: “Every year several million people are killed quite pointlessly by epidemics and other natural catastrophes. And we should shrink from sacrificing a few hundred thousand for the most promising experiment in history?” (to Rubashov)

Ivanov

No Country for Old Men

Carla: You don’t have to do this.
Anton: People always say the same thing.
Carla: What do they say?
Anton: They say, “You don’t have to do this.”
Carla: You don’t.
Anton: Okay.
(He flips a coin)
Anton: This is the best I can do. Call it.

Carla: I knewed you was crazy when I saw you sitting there. I knewed exactly what was in store for me.
Anton: Call it.
Carla: No, I ain’t gonna call it.
Anton: Call it.
Carla: The coin don’t have no say. It’s just you.
Anton: Well, I got here the same way the coin did.

Lawrence Krauss

“You are all stardust”...
... and the only way they could get into your body is if those stars were kind enough to explode. So, forget Jesus. The stars died so that you could be here today.”

(Krauss, 2009)

Harry Kroto

Religious people “don’t have the intellectual integrity to teach science”

Michael Reiss

(b 1960)

Professor of Science Education, University of London

“...He, together with all religious people... fall at the first hurdle of the main requirement for honest scientific discussion because they accept unfounded dogma as having fundamental significance ...”

(Guardian, 28/9/2008)

Richard Dawkins

Let’s All Stop Beating Basil’s Car

Fawlty Towers

John Cleese as Basil Fawlty

Richard Dawkins

My Dangerous Idea

“...Why do we not react in the same way to a defective man? ... Isn’t the murderer or the rapist just a machine with a defective component? Or a defective upbringing? Defective education? Defective genes? ...
Richard Dawkins

... Why is it that we humans find it almost impossible to accept such conclusions? Why do we vent such visceral hatred on child murderers, or on thuggish vandals, when we should simply regard them as faulty units that need fixing or replacing?“

(The Edge Annual Question, 2006)

Eric Pianka

“We’re no better than bacteria”

Dr Eric Pianka

2006 Distinguished Texas Scientist
3rd March 2006

“We’re no better than bacteria.”

(Texas Academy of Science, 3rd March 2006)

He argued that there are too many people. He believes that the human population needs to be reduced by 90%. War and famine are too slow; an Ebola plague would be ideal.

(Student RE Teachers)

“You must keep your religion out of your professional work”

In almost every professional training today there is an explicit or implicit message: “In order to be professional and objective you must not bring your religion or personal values into your public, professional work.”

(Revell & Walters 2010:4)
“the majority of agnostic or atheist students assumed that not only was it acceptable for them to share their absence of faith with pupils but that this sharing could have a positive impact on learning in the classroom.”

(Revell & Walters 2010: 23)

Professor Trevor Cooling

“In the case of those who identified themselves as Christians, a consensus emerged that they had to be careful not to let their own private beliefs influence the pupils; that was not considered objective. Essentially, they saw their beliefs as a problem to be managed. However in the case of those that were atheist or agnostic there was a contrasting consensus: these students thought that their beliefs enhanced their professionalism. In other words their atheist beliefs contributed to their being objective RE teachers because they didn’t have a religious belief. In their case they viewed their atheistic beliefs as an asset to be tapped. This was only a small scale project and as such one cannot generalize from it. Further research is necessary. But it does indicate the existence of a mindset within contemporary education which is influencing students.”

(Cooling, 2011: 4)

In order to be ‘professional’ a Christian teacher must not talk about God as if he exists, must not pray with pupils, must not say that there are objective moral norms, and must not teach science as if natural things are designed.”

(Signe Sandsmark Is World View Neutral Education Possible and Desirable? Paternoster, 2000)

In order to be similarly ‘neutral’, ‘objective’ and ‘professional’, what should an atheist or agnostic teacher do, or not do?
(1) Nothing

Graham Haydon

“... it is simply ‘not done’ to bring one’s religion, or views based on it, into any public sphere. But a society in which this kind of secularism reigns, even though not enforced by law, is surely not one in which it can be said that all persons are equally respected; it means, effectively, that some people are being silenced on matters of central importance to them.”

(Haydon 1994: 70)

(2) Teach in a way that hides their real beliefs

Does it matter?

✓ Unbelieving parents succeed in passing on their unbelief to almost 100% of their children

Prof David Voas
Manchester University
(ESRC 2005)

Does it matter?

✗ Believing parents pass on their faith to barely 50% of their children

David Voas

“Today much of the world of adulthood is characterized by the secular rather than by the religious ... The socialization process is persistently and inevitably drawing young people into the ethos of that post-Christian world. In this sense, to be irreligious is to be normal.”

(Kay & Francis 1996: 144)
Lesslie Newbigin

(1909-1998)

Theologian, pastor, author, limerick writer, rock climber and prophet

Lesslie Newbigin

“Even in homes where the parents are committed Christians, it is hard, to the point of impossibility, for children to sustain belief in the meta-narrative of the Bible over against that understanding of the meta-narrative – the picture of the origins and development of nature, of human society as a whole – which is being offered to them at school. It is possible to maintain the story contradicts the meta-narrative of the schools, young people are placed in an impossible situation. … A belief which is permitted only to exist in a bunker may survive for a time, but it must finally be obliterated.” (Faith and Power, SPCK, 1998: 158-9)

Professor Terence Copley

Professor of Educational Studies (Religious Education), University of Oxford

(d. January 2011)

Indoctrination, Education and God: The Struggle for the Mind (SPCK, 2005)

“… a secular indoctrination process is at work in British and European society, programming people against religious belief … People in Britain are frequently negative, even hostile, towards institutional Christianity, …

Sir Walter Moberly (1881-1974)

Philosopher and University Administrator

(1949)

“If in your organization, your curriculum, and your communal customs and ways of life, you leave God out, you teach with tremendous force that, for most people and at most times, He does not count … It is a fallacy to suppose that by omitting a subject you teach nothing about it. On the contrary you teach that it is to be …
... omitted, and that it is therefore a matter of secondary importance. And you teach this not openly and explicitly, which would invite criticism: you simply take it for granted and thereby insinuate it silently, insidiously, and all but irresistibly. If indoctrination is bad, this sort of conditioning and ...

... preconscious habituation is surely worse. ... If a planner of atheistic conviction and Machiavellian astuteness had been at work, he could hardly have wrought more cunningly."

The Crisis in the University. London, SCM, 1949, page 56

"Our predicament then is this. Most students go through our universities without ever having been forced to exercise their minds on the issues which are really momentous. Under the guise of academic neutrality they are subtly conditioned to unthinking acquiescence in the social and ....

... political status quo and in a secularism on which they have never seriously reflected .... Fundamentally they are uneducated."

The Crisis in the University. London, SCM, 1949, page 70

Conclusion to Part Two

- secular assumptions are universal and all-pervasive
- those assumptions are almost never declared, or put forward for examination
- we and our children are being indoctrinated

Does it matter?

The New Atheists accuse religion of being harmful, but what about secular materialism? Is it harmful?

Part Three

Secular Materialism is Dangerous

Genocide in South West Africa
Imperial Germany

General Lothar von Trotha (1848-1920)

In 1904 von Trotha ordered the complete destruction of the Herero tribe in South West Africa. In his diary he referred to the Herero as Unmenschen – non-humans.

Herero Tribe

Herero Tribe

Herero Survivors...

Samuel Maharero, 1853-1923, Herero Chief

...after escaping through the Kalahari Desert

Columbine

“only science and math are true”

Eric David Harris (1981-1999)

Eric was one of two boys who shot 12 students and a teacher at Columbine High School, Colorado, USA, on 20th April 1999.

Columbine

“just because your mommy and daddy told you blood and violence is bad, you think it’s a f—g law of nature? wrong, only science and math are true, everything, and I mean every f—g thing else is Man made.” (Eric’s notebook, 21 April 1998)
“There’s no such thing as True Good or True evil, it’s all relative to the observer. It’s just all nature, chemistry, and math, deal with it.”

(Eric’s notebook, 12 June 1998)

Materialism and Education

Where – how – did Eric learn this?
What are our children learning in school?
Education and the media are never neutral.
Is the ‘hidden curriculum’ of school and media that of materialism?

Jeffrey Dahmer (1960-1994)

American serial killer who murdered and dismembered 17 young men and boys, in some cases eating parts of their body.

“He felt that he was up – up from the slime, as he put it. You know, molecules to amoebas to Larry type of a thing, evolution. That there was nothing, no direction by a god. No one to be accountable to. No one to answer to at all.”

(Father, Lionel Dahmer, 17 June 2004 interview on Larry King Live, CNN)

Pekka-Eric Auvinen

“There is no higher authority than me”

German Cannibal

Armin Meiwes (b 1961)
In Rotenburg in 2001 Meiwes killed and ate a man he met through a website.

Pekka-Eric Auvinen (18)

Jokela high school, Finland
07 November 2007
8 killed

Materialism and Education

Will they – like Eric – absorb materialism and conclude that truth and morality are just some people’s opinions they can choose to accept or reject?

Does it matter?
Could it be harmful?
Materialism declares that only physical nature exists and so it is not possible to speak about purpose, goodness and wickedness. Evil is an illusion. Moral assertions hook on to ….Nothing.

At the end of the day there are simply animals that are struggling to survive. Nature is blind and pitiless.

Richard Dawkins
“We have the power to defy the selfish genes”

Many atheists find it very difficult to accept – to believe – what it would really mean to be in a godless world.

Richard Dawkins
“We are built as gene machines and cultured as meme machines, but we have the power to turn against our creators. We alone on earth can rebel against the tyranny of the selfish replicators.”

(Gray 2002: xii, 31)

John Gray
(b 1948)

John Gray
(Granta, 2002)

“Myth of the human race is overrated”

“It’s time to put natural selection and survival of the fittest back on tracks.”

“I am the law, judge and executioner. There is no higher authority than me.”

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John Gray
(b 1948)

John Gray
(Granta, 2002)

“Humanists turn to Darwin to support their shaky modern faith in progress; but there is no progress in the world he revealed. A truly naturalistic view of the world leaves no room for secular hope. … Humanism is a secular religion thrown together from decaying scraps of Christian myths.”

(Gray 2002: xii, 31)
The Problem of Evil
A very real problem .... for Christians
For materialists, the problem doesn’t exist – they can say nothing by way of explanation or comfort
For them, there is neither good nor evil. What happens is what happens. What animals do is what animals do. There is nothing more to be said.

CONCLUSION:
What do we teach the children?

Richard Peters
(1919-2011)
Professor of the Philosophy of Education, Institute of Education, University of London

Education in a Materialist World

Secular Materialism is very dangerous

How, then, should we live and teach?

Richard S. Peters
“Our basic predicament in life is to learn to live with its ultimate pointlessness. We are monotonously reminded that education must be for life, so obviously the most important dimension of education is that in which we learn to come to terms with the pointlessness of life.” (Peters 1973:1)

Culture of Death?

Shouldn’t secularists consider worldview stories that make real and liveable sense of the human condition?

Shouldn’t Christians live and teach as if God exists and faith is relevant to all of life and to every aspect of education?

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