

# Skeptical and Spiritual Atheisms

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**ABSTRACT:** Skeptical atheism is deeply concerned with the development of a true atheistic belief-system which competes with allegedly false theistic belief-systems. Spiritual atheists are concerned with building a successful atheistic culture to compete with an allegedly dysfunctional theistic culture. These atheisms are compared in terms of their epistemologies, metaphysics, axiologies, eschatologies, soteriologies, prosocial activities, and individual practices. Skeptical atheism is likely to remain a perpetually marginal community. Spiritual atheism may become a significant alternative to theism.

## 1. Introduction

One way to organize the diverse ecosystem of atheisms is to arrange the various species of atheism on a spectrum with two extreme ends. On the right side of this spectrum, there is *skeptical atheism*. On the left side, there is *spiritual atheism*. Since these two atheisms are extremes, most of species of atheism lie between them. Most atheisms take features of both the skeptical and the spiritual atheisms. Consequently, by understanding these extremes, it becomes easier to understand the intermediate types. Spiritual and skeptical atheisms involve different ways of dealing with established theistic religions. Spiritual and skeptical atheisms are hostile towards each other. Stedman (2012) offers a moving account of the ways that skeptical atheists denounced his spiritual atheism.

Skeptical atheism focuses on the *belief model of religion* (Kitcher, 2011: 1-4). The belief model treats religion as primarily a theoretical enterprise. For skeptical atheists, the most important human values are epistemic. Hence skeptical atheists are deeply concerned with the development of an allegedly *true atheistic belief-system* which competes with the allegedly *false theistic belief-system*. For the development of their own belief-system, skeptical atheists tend towards an extreme version of empiricism. By focusing on belief, the skeptical atheists pay little attention to the pragmatic aspects of religion. These include the aesthetic, emotional, moral, social, and political aspects of religion. Thus skeptical atheists have little concern with developing an atheistic culture which might compete with theistic culture. They have little interest in (and often great scorn for) those who urge atheists to develop practices, rituals, ceremonies, holidays, moral codes, social networks, and political institutions. Unfortunately for skeptical atheists, the *biocultural study of religion* indicates that the primary role of religion is pragmatic.<sup>1</sup> If that is right, then skeptical atheism will never compete well with theism.<sup>2</sup> It does not offer a viable cultural alternative. It will remain a marginal protest movement, with little cultural influence.

Spiritual atheism focuses on the orientation model of religion (Kitcher, 2011: 4-6). On this model, religion is primarily pragmatic. An orientation involves valuable shared goals and collective activities intended to realize those goals. Religions aim to maximize group cohesion and social solidarity. Resulting from the evolution of cooperation, religions are

strategies for solving group coordination problems.<sup>3</sup> Hence spiritual atheists are concerned with the development of a *successful atheistic culture* to compete with an allegedly *dysfunctional theistic culture*. They have more interest in developing practices, rituals, ceremonies, holidays, moral codes, social networks, and political institutions. Of course, spiritual atheists do not lack beliefs. But their beliefs serve the interests of group flourishing. On this point, spiritual atheism tends towards rationalism; hence it can gain competitive power from *axiarchism*. Spiritual atheism remains closely associated with humanism. Nevertheless, it has begun to move towards *transhumanism*. Spiritual atheists can also gain competitive power from *Theravedic Buddhism*. If the biocultural analysis of religion is correct, it predicts that spiritual atheism may come to compete very well with established theistic religions. It may become a significant alternative to Christianity in the West. It may develop into a godless religion.

## 2. Skeptical Atheism

### *Skeptical Epistemology*

Skeptical atheists subscribe almost entirely to the belief model of religion. They treat religion as if it were a system of doctrines (e.g. Dennett, 2006). The belief model regards religions and their gods as true or false. There are true religions (with true gods) and false religions (with false gods), and they can be distinguished by empirical tests. Here skeptical atheism is institutionally represented by the *Center For Inquiry* (CFI). But the way of belief does not entirely exclude the way of orientation. Skeptical atheism values truth; it regards scientifically revealed truth as sacred or holy, and takes that truth as its object of reverence or even worship (Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, 344).

Skeptical atheism has ancient roots. The Old Testament prophets were skeptical atheists with respect to all foreign gods. The Old Testament prophet Elijah illustrates skeptical atheism in his encounter with the Prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18: 21-40). An early Popperian, Elijah regards religions as empirically falsifiable. He proposes an experiment to decide the truth-values of the Yahweh Hypothesis and the Baal Hypothesis. The experiment empirically proves that Yahweh is the true god and Yahwism the true religion. Modern skeptical atheists take up this Old Testament approach by testing Yahweh in much the same way that Elijah tested both Yahweh and Baal. Of course, Yahweh is now the Judaeo-Christian God. For skeptical atheists, the existence of God is central to the Abrahamic religions; but the existence of God is a scientific hypothesis. The God Hypothesis is empirically falsifiable (Dawkins, 2008: ch. 2; Stenger, 2007).

On the basis of modern science, the God Hypothesis turns out to be as false as the Baal Hypothesis. The God Hypothesis is empirically inadequate: God was posited to explain certain features of the universe; however, God fails to explain those features; hence God plays no explanatory role in our best science; hence God does not exist. Much skeptical atheism condemns God in almost exactly the same way that the Old Testament prophets condemned foreign pagan gods (God is causally impotent).<sup>4</sup> Thus almost every writer in Blackford & Schuklenk (2009) rejects God on *purely theoretical* grounds. This explains

one strategy of skeptical atheists: they point out that religionists are atheistic about foreign gods; atheists just say that all gods are false, all gods are idols.

Skeptical atheists demand consistency with science. Of course, mere consistency with science permits many gods: it permits the gods of deism and pantheism; of Spinozism and Neoplatonism. Mere consistency with science permits doctrinal systems in which purely scientific beliefs are mixed with metaphysical and theological speculations. But such mixtures are impure; to avoid speculative contamination, skeptical atheists tend to demand much more than mere consistency with our best science. For example, Rosenberg endorses scientism (2011: 6-7). For him, “science is the only possible source of justification” (2011: 279). The old positivists said that beliefs not justified by science were *meaningless*. As such, they were neither true nor false. But the skeptical atheists go further and declare that if some theory is not justified by science, then it is *false*.

Skeptical atheism looks like an *ascetic purity cult*, where the asceticism is the denial of any satisfaction outside of skepticism and the purity is intellectual cleanliness. Rosenberg urges a kind of cleaning of the mind (2011: chs. 7-10). For the skeptical atheists, atheistically correct belief must remain free from unscientific contamination. For example, Rosenberg mocks Dawkins for finding emotional beauty in the laws of nature (2011: 278-9). Mental uncleanness is sin. As a cleanliness cult, skeptical atheism has a carefully policed boundary between permitted and forbidden beliefs. This boundary is empirical falsifiability (which, following Popper, skeptical atheists identify with science). Skeptical atheism is obsessed with *correct belief*. It insists on *orthodoxy*. Parallels can be drawn here between the intellectual purity demanded by skeptical atheism and the dietary and sexual purities demanded by Jewish and Islamic fundamentalists.<sup>5</sup> Parallels can also be drawn with the Christian dichotomy of the saved and the damned.

The demand for strict binary division, for a strict either/or with no ambiguity, is the main characteristic of skeptical atheism. The cult of purity leads to a strict affective division between the loved in-group and the hated out-group (Abrahamists). Skeptical atheists are characterized by anger (Christina, 2012) and by vicious hostility towards their enemies (Hitchens, 2007; Myers, 2012). The hateful rhetoric of atheists like Myers is directed both at Abrahamists and at atheists who are insufficiently pure. The rhetoric of skeptical atheism is negative and reactionary. It is characterized primarily by mockery, and it relies heavily on insulting the intelligence of its enemies. Skeptical atheism thus produces an art of mockery (Serrano’s *Piss Christ*) or the Flying Spaghetti Monster. However, skeptical atheism has not produced any rhetoric or art which displays any positive imaginative content.

### *Skeptical Metaphysics*

All atheists embrace some type of naturalism: nature is all that exists. Atheistic naturalism is intended to compete with the supernaturalism of the Abrahamic religions. But what is nature? Skeptical atheists tend to argue for physicalism: our physical

universe is all that exists. Just as Abrahamic fundamentalists insist on highly literal readings of their sacred texts, so skeptical atheists insist on highly literal readings of scientific (especially physical) texts. They are materialists. All that exists are particles (Rosenberg, 2011: ch. 2). Complex things are just particles arranged thing-wise (e.g. cats are particles arranged cat-wise). Skeptical atheists may allow that our universe is a foam composed of many bubbles (a multiverse). However, since there is no empirical evidence for other possible universes, skeptical atheists tend to deny the existence of other possible universes (see Gardner, 2001). They are *actualists*. And, since there is no empirical evidence for the existence of abstract objects (such as numbers and values), some skeptical atheists may want to deny the reality of those objects. Such skeptical atheists would be *nominalists*.

One of the traditional tasks of Abrahamism has been to account for the existence and nature of the universe. Abrahamists aim to answer the *Question*: Why is there something rather than nothing? Obviously, they offer the theistic answer: God explains why there is something rather than nothing. Older skeptical atheists tended to say that the existence of our universe is just a brute fact. Rosenberg endorses irrationalism. He says the answer to the Question is “No reason, no reason at all” (2011: 38). Other skeptical atheists dismiss the Question as meaningless. However, since silence does not compete very well with the theistic answer, skeptical atheists have worked to develop their own positive answers to the Question. Most recently, they assert that fundamental physics can answer the Question (see Stenger, 2007: 132-3; Krauss, 2012). Unfortunately, this answer has widely been viewed as a failure to even understand the Question (Albert, 2012). On this point, skeptical atheism does not compete very well with Abrahamism.

There are three problems with the naturalistic metaphysics of skeptical atheism. The first is that our best current science is inconsistent: quantum mechanics and the theory of relativity are mutually contradictory. Far from getting closer to some final theory of everything, current physics is an incoherent mess. Surely it is pointless to base elaborate metaphysical claims on an inconsistent theoretical foundation. The second is that the naturalism of skeptical atheism is highly materialistic. But this materialism may well be superseded: physics has long been thinking of matter in highly abstract terms. Matter may ultimately turn out to be information. The apparently ultimate naturalistic categories of space, time, matter, and causality may not be ultimate at all.

The third is that physics is that final science may be far different from what skeptical atheists expect it to be. Our universe may turn out to be a vast software process running on some computational substratum (Fredkin, 2003). Our universe may turn out to be some kind of hologram (Bekenstein, 2003). Nature may be radically unlike anything envisioned by twenty-first century materialism. Of course, none of this suggests that either traditional gods or Cartesian minds exist; but it does suggest that skeptical atheists have little *evidential* basis for making deep claims about what naturalism rules in or out. Or, to put it more epistemically, skeptical atheism appears to be based on *faith*. It is based on the faith that our present ideologies will be preserved by final science. Current physicalism may turn out to be as delusory as Abrahamic theology.

## *Skeptical Axiology*

Skeptical atheists tend to argue that human morality is the product of evolution: groups of humans which adopted moral rules were more cooperative, more likely to produce more offspring, and thus more likely to survive (Dawkins, 2008: ch. 6). Since we all share the same evolutionary history, we all share a similar system of moral rules. Our moral rules are written into our shared human genetic nature. Of course, due to random genetic variations, this shared moral system is not universal. Thus Rosenberg (2011: ch. 5) argues that almost all humans naturally share a “core morality”. However, if it becomes maladaptive, then future humans will cease to have it (2011: 259). Our core morality is merely conventional. However, since that moral convention was shaped by evolution, it has natural objectivity. Rosenberg rejects moral relativism (2011: 97).

Evolution selected core morality as an adaptation for group living; however, it did not select core morality because of its moral correctness. Rosenberg states that there is no reason to think that “our moral core is right, true or correct” (2011: 112).<sup>6</sup> He argues for moral nihilism (2011: chs. 5-6). He argues that intrinsic value is illusory (2011: 98, 279). All moral judgments are “based on false, groundless presuppositions” (2011: 97). For any human act or practice, it is absurd to say that it is morally forbidden, permissible, or obligatory (2011: 97). According to Rosenberg, science does not justify our moral values; but “Since science is the only possible source of justification, if it doesn’t work to justify values, nothing does” (2011: 279). Moral nihilism contrasts with moral realism. For the moral realist, there are *abstract standards* according to which any moral conventions can be evaluated. These abstract standards are necessary Platonic ideals, which hold for all possible rational social agents, whether they be humans, aliens, or robots.

There are several problems with the skeptical atheistic approach to morality. The first is that the evolution of cooperation suggests that adaptive conventions are closely correlated with mathematically necessary solutions to coordination problems (Alexrod, 1984). Rosenberg bases morality on necessary results in game theory (2011: ch. 6). For instance, in the iterated prisoner’s dilemma, evolution naturally selects the tit-for-tat strategy. All the evolutionary histories that produce rational social agents will also produce rationally justified systems of moral principles. This holds for ants, humans, dolphins, aliens, and robots. There is an objective *moral landscape* whose points are moral conventions and whose higher points more accurately correspond to the conventions of an ideal society of rational agents (Harris, 2011). Height in this landscape does track abstract moral rightness. Evolution takes a random walk through this landscape; but the conventions it generates can be compared on the basis of their heights, not their histories.

The second problem with the skeptical atheistic approach to morality is that it makes skeptical atheists untrustworthy and undesirable social partners. Since skeptical atheists tend to embrace materialism, they are open to easy attacks from Abrahamists, who charge that they cannot account for moral values or even for the laws of nature. When Martin

rebuts these charges (2003: 41-3), he does so by appealing to an expanded ontology, which includes abstract objects. When it comes to moral issues, skeptical atheism does not compete well at all with Abrahamic religion. Skeptical atheism is maladaptive; hence, by its own evolutionary standards, it fails itself.

### *Skeptical Eschatology*

Skeptical atheism offers a nihilistic view of the future. Rosenberg argues that purposes are impossible in the physical world (2011: 279). Newton drove purpose out of physics (2011: 40-4); Darwin drove purpose out of biology (2011: ch. 3); and Rosenberg himself drives purpose out of psychology (2011: chs. 8 & 9). Consequently, he argues for a nihilistic view of the future (2011: ch. 11). History has no purpose and no goal; it has no direction; it is mostly random events. It is pretty much impossible to learn anything from the past and it is pretty much impossible to try to control or shape the future. Civilization does not make progress. It is merely a chaotic random walk.

There are two difficulties with this nihilistic eschatology. First, it is patently absurd. Although the physical universe may not have any purpose, purposes clearly do emerge within the universe, through a variety of well-known mechanisms, such as feedback loops. And while evolution itself may not have any goals or purposes, the organisms which it evolves do have goals and purposes. Organisms have minds: they have memories, and they learn. They are capable of self-modification. This is especially true of rational agents, which can modify their own neural and even genetic programming.

The second problem with nihilistic eschatology is that it makes skeptical atheism aesthetically empty. Skeptical atheism does not rank alternative futures as better or worse; hence all are equally desirable. Since it fails to rank possible futures, it fails to select any for display as attractive goals. Skeptical atheism offers no positive atheistic art. It is utterly lacking in imagination or vision. On this view, it fails radically to compete with Christianity, which offers rich and attractive architecture, music, and painting.

### *Skeptical Soteriology*

Skeptical atheists often make something like the following materialist argument against life after death: (1) There are no immaterial thinking substances (no Cartesian minds). (2) If there are no immaterial thinking substances, then all traditional Western religious theories of life after death are false. (3) If all traditional Western religious theories of life after death are false, then all theories of life after death are false. (4) Therefore, all theories of life after death are false. Of course, the weak link in this argument is the third premise. Atheists may turn to theories of life after death that lie outside of traditional Western religion. Atheists may turn to the soteriologies of Theravedic Buddhism (Rahula, 1974).

Skeptical atheists generally insist that your present earthly life is your only life. This raises a very deep problem for skeptical atheism: terror management theory entails that skeptical atheism cannot compete with religions which promise life after death. According to terror management theory (Burke et al., 2010), when people become aware of their own deaths, they become more supportive of conservative cultural positions and more hostile to those who violate those positions (Rosenblatt et al., 1989). Awareness of death especially makes people defend those cultural systems which promise life after death and justice after death. It increases religious in-group loyalty and religious out-group hostility (Greenberg et al., 1990). By denying life after death (and justice after death), atheists solidify allegiance to Christianity and deepen the hatred of atheists.

As long as they insist on the impossibility of life after death, as long as they refuse to develop positive atheistic soteriologies, atheists may expect to remain culturally marginal. Since they have no soteriologies, atheists have been excluded from public events that commemorate loss. They were excluded from the memorial services for the victims of the bombings at the Boston Marathon in 2013 (Webster, 2013). The US military does not include atheistic or humanistic chaplains, since they cannot provide satisfactory comfort and counseling in response to death (McAuliff, 2013).

### *Skeptical Prosociality*

Skeptical atheists tend to have little interest in the development of prosocial attitudes and institutions. They show very little interest in building social networks. Skeptical atheism tends towards an individualism which is so extreme that it poisons efforts to build group solidarity. Dialog among skeptical atheists, most of which is conducted on the internet, had become so hostile by April 2013 that the leading secular organizations issued an explicit call for civility (“An Open Letter to the Secular Community”).<sup>7</sup>

One explanation for the apparent asociality of skeptical atheists comes from psychology. A positive correlation exists between atheism and autistic spectrum disorder (Caldwell-Haris et al., 2011; Norenzayan et al., 2012).<sup>8</sup> Another explanation comes from brain science. Skeptical atheists tend to be intensely analytical. But neurological work shows that analytical brain networks compete for activation with social brain networks (Jack, 2013). Hence analytic (thus skeptical) thinking inhibits empathy.

On the basis of its intolerance and militancy, skeptical atheism has been referred to as *right-wing atheism* (Sparrow, 2012). Politically, skeptical atheists tend towards libertarianism and free-market capitalism (Shermer), with little interest in communal forms of society or sharing. Rosenberg argues that atheism is irrelevant to debates on crucial political issues (2011: 286-91). Rosenberg rejects humanism (2011: 277-82).

The celebration of group holidays helps build group solidarity. Holidays provide opportunities for shared public display of group affiliation and identity. Within the United States, the end of year holidays are highly culturally and socially significant. They are highly politicized.<sup>9</sup> The end of year holidays include two major points of

religious conflict. The first point involves the public display of religious group symbols, especially on public land. The second point involves the public or private display of group affiliation by way of the ritualized exchange of holiday greetings.

The major end of year holiday in the United States is Christmas (which, obviously enough, is a Christian holiday).<sup>10</sup> Christmas provides two points of religious conflict. First, Christians seek to publicly display Christian symbols, often on public land (e.g. courthouse lawns or town squares). Such displays often violate the First Amendment to the US Constitution. Second, Christians challenge others to publicly reveal their group identities by way of the ritualized exchange of greetings (“Merry Christmas”). Such challenges are often intended to compel others to reveal their religious affiliations to their military superiors, employers or business partners, friends, or family members.

Skeptical atheists tend to seek to eliminate all holiday displays of religious group affiliation. Hence they often sue to stop the displays of all religious symbols on public lands (especially, therefore, Christian symbols). But skeptical atheists go even further, and oppose even atheistic or secular holiday displays of group affiliation. For instance, many atheists celebrate the Winter Solstice as an alternative to Christmas. But Tom Flynn has urged atheists not to participate. Flynn is the editor of *Free Inquiry*, the main organ of the Center for Inquiry. He wrote that “it devalues our commitment to a clear-eyed, rational understanding of science when we attach quasi-mystical significance to what is actually a thoroughly mundane astronomical event” (2012). By rejecting any end of year holidays, skeptical atheists cannot compete with Christians.

Prayer is central to public life in the United States. It is performed at invocations of institutions (e.g. inaugurations of political leaders, openings of legislative chambers, and the openings of town hall meetings). It is performed at the openings of sporting events. It is performed at ceremonies like weddings and funerals. It is increasingly performed (often illegally) in public school events (such as sporting events and graduations). It is frequently performed before meals. It is essential at any Thanksgiving dinner.

Skeptical atheists are typically extremely hostile to prayer, seeking to prevent it in all public contexts. They have sued to stop prayers at schools and at government functions. This is deeply unfortunate. Atheists ought to see prayer as symbolic action between humans (rather than between humans and any supernatural agents). Prayer builds social solidarity through the exchange of symbolic gifts. By seeking to stop prayer, skeptical atheists reject the social symbolic economy. They want to shut the symbolic market down. This makes atheists untrustworthy and undesirable social partners. It entails that skeptical atheists cannot effectively compete with Christians.

### *Skeptical Practice*

The theory of atheistic practice covers the things that atheists do both individually and socially to deal with the exigencies of life (especially negative exigencies). Skeptical atheists argue for *eupraxsophy* – a heroic approach to life (Kurtz, 2012). They argue for stoic calm in the face of tragedy. Skeptical atheists tend to reject all forms of communal



practice (e.g. rituals, ceremonies, holidays). Skeptical atheists tend to reject the development of coping strategies in favor of tough-minded acceptance of reality as it is.

Skeptical atheists tend to treat prayer as an ineffective form of technology: prayer produces no worldly effects. Unfortunately, such an attitude discounts the profound effects prayer can have in the facilitation of individual and group action. Sharp (2010) shows how prayer helps abused women deal with and escape from their situations. For these women, God served as a friend and helper. It matters not that God is imaginary; the context of prayer leads to the suspension of disbelief, so that the brain treats God as real. Other studies show that Christian religious social activities and personal practices significantly help individuals cope with negative life events (Pargament, 1990). Religious practices can produce the *illusion of control* and *illusion of agency*. These illusions produce significant behavioral effects. Of course, skeptical atheism cannot produce any such illusions. Unless it finds some equally powerful alternatives, it will fail to compete with Christianity.

### 3. Spiritual Atheism

#### *Spiritual Epistemology*

Spiritual atheists demand consistency with science. But the radical positivism developed by the skeptical atheists is self-refuting. For the sake of consistency, atheists need to be more open to logically consistent extensions of science. They need to be more open to pure reason. One clear way to develop an atheistic epistemology is provided by Salmon (1966). Salmon says that a statement is *empirically justified* iff it is either a basic statement or the conclusion of some correct inductive or deductive argument from empirically justified statements. Empirical justification exceeds empirical testability: many empirically justified statements are not empirically testable. For instance, on the basis of the Indispensability Argument, the existence of mathematical objects (like numbers) is empirically justified. But the existence of mathematical objects cannot be empirically tested.

Spiritual atheists are open to cognitive relations with the natural world which go beyond mere observation of particular facts. They recognize the value of *mystical experiences*. Comte-Sponville describes his mystical experiences (2006: 155-159). The spiritual atheists include the religious naturalists (associated with the journal *Zygon*). Religious naturalists also describe mystical experiences (Goodenough, 1998: 101, 164). The Pew US Religious Landscape Survey states that 37% of surveyed atheists experience weekly or more a “deep sense of wonder about the universe” while 28% experience weekly or more a “deep sense of spiritual peace and well-being” (2008: 56). For spiritual atheists, mystical experiences are not experiences of any supernatural agent. On the contrary, they are typically experiences of the wholeness or universality of nature.

Spiritual atheists are open to cognitive relations with the natural world which go beyond mere representation or discursive assertion. They welcome *affective* responses to reality.

Many spiritual atheists regard *gratitude* as an essential affective response to being in the world (Young, 2005; Solomon, 2006; Aronson, 2008: ch. 2; Bishop, 2010; Walters, 2010: 169-171). They are grateful for their existence. But they are not grateful to any supernatural person; on the contrary, they are grateful to being-itself, to nature, or to the evolutionary process which brought them into being.

Many spiritual atheists also welcome aesthetic responses to the natural world. They value beauty as well as truth, and they argue that the truth is beautiful. They celebrate the beauty of nature as revealed by science. Consequently, they tend to think of the natural order in reverent terms (Dawkins, 2008: ch. 1). The religious naturalists advocate deeply affective-aesthetic relations with the natural order (Goodenough, 1998; Raymo, 2008). Religious naturalists have developed aesthetically attractive depictions of evolutionary history (Big History, the Epic of Evolution). Nevertheless, at the present time, there is no art which represents any atheistic vision of anything. Atheists are visionless.

### *Spiritual Metaphysics*

Spiritual atheists tend to embrace a more liberal naturalism, which permits the existence of all rationally justified objects. Many naturalists are open to the existence of abstract objects, especially mathematical objects. Max Tegmark is an atheistic physicist who argues for a radical Pythagoreanism, in which all objects are purely mathematical (1998). Tegmark also affirms the existence of other possible universes (2003). Many naturalists are open to the existence of other possible universes. David Lewis is an atheistic philosopher who affirms possible universes (1986). Many atheistic philosophers are Platonists, who affirm both concrete things and abstract objects (e.g. Quine, Lewis).

Platonism offers atheists many benefits. The celebration of the beauty of particular natural things, and the beauty of the lawful structure of nature (e.g. Dawkins, 2008: ch. 1), tends to go hand in hand with a kind of Platonic celebration of beauty and form. If spiritual atheists embrace abstract Platonic objects (like laws, norms, and values), they can compete more effectively with Abrahamists when it comes to defending positive doctrines which depend on those objects (such as moral realism). Abstract Platonic objects include abstract laws (such as the Principles of Sufficient Reason and Plenitude). These abstract laws are deeper than any physical laws. If they hold, they hold across all possible universes. Theists often use these laws. Spiritual atheists who embrace Platonism can use those laws to develop atheistic arguments that can compete with theistic arguments.

Spiritual atheists can use arguments from complexity to justify the existence of other universes. Dawkins has developed a sophisticated theory of complexity (1986, 1996, 2008). According to him, purely mathematical laws of probability ensure that all complex things occur in *cumulative trees*. A cumulative tree is a ramified structure in which complexity tends to increase along any linear path. The Dawkinsian theory of complexity motivates an *Argument for Cosmological Evolution* (2008: 139-147, 184-9). It goes like this: (1) Our universe is extremely complex. (2) Every complex thing

occupies some high place in some cumulative tree. (3) Therefore, our universe occupies some high place in some cumulative tree of universes. This is the *cosmological tree*. Of course, some argument is needed to define the shape of the cosmological tree.

A argument can be given that the shape of the cosmological tree is *complete*. A complete tree is defined by three rules. The *initial rule* says that the tree has exactly one initial simple root. The *successor rule* has two parts. The first part states that for every universe in the tree, there are many ways to make it more complex. The second part states that for every universe in the tree, for every way to make it more complex, there exists some successor universe which is more complex in that way. The successors of any universe occur after the universe. They are more complex future versions of that universe. The *limit rule* takes the ramification of the cosmological tree up through infinite degrees of complexity. It defines endlessly many generations of infinitely complex universes. However, since the limit rule involves mathematical technicalities, it will not be discussed here.

The *Completeness Argument* now runs like this: (1) Our universes exists in a cumulative tree with some shape. (2) The tree which is most likely to contain our universe has the complete shape. (3) But the most likely explanation is the best explanation. (4) Hence the best explanation for the existence of our complex universe is that the cosmological tree is complete. (5) By inference to the best explanation, the cosmological tree is complete. If these arguments are correct, then the cosmological tree has a simple root. This simple root is the simple initial universe. Since this root universe does not depend on any prior universe, it exists with physical necessity. It is an initial simple necessary physical thing. This simple universe is an atheistic *first cause* (Dawkins, 2008: 185-6). Hence spiritual atheists can compete with theists by giving an atheistic version of the Cosmological Argument. One may argue that the first cause answers the Question. But perhaps some will counter that physical necessity is not deep enough: why does the initial universe exist?

Spiritual atheists are open to all rational answers to the Question. One intriguing way to answer the Question is to appeal to some abstract Platonic law. Parfit (1998) has argued that an abstract law defines physical reality by selecting certain abstract universe-forms for concrete instantiation.<sup>11</sup> The law is an abstract necessary principle which entails the existence of at least one universe (such as the initial universe in the cosmological tree). For some philosophers, known as *axiarchists*, the universe-creating law involves value. Thus Rescher argues for a *Principle of Axiology*, which asserts that “among otherwise equally possible law-arrangements, that one is (or tends to be) realized which is maximally value-enhancing” (1984: 43). The Principle of Axiology is the *ultimate sufficient reason* for all concrete things. Rescher thus provides an entirely non-theistic explanation for the apparent fine-tuning of the laws of our universe for the emergence of complexity (such as life and intelligence). Hence spiritual atheists can compete with theists by giving an atheistic version of the Fine Tuning Argument. However, Rescherian axiarchism wrongly entails that our universe is the best of all possible universes. Since our universe is clearly not the best of all possible universes, Rescherian axiarchism needs modification.

Although John Leslie discusses many theistic or quasi-theistic versions of axiarchism, he also discusses atheistic versions of axiarchism (1970, 1979, 1989). For Leslie, the axiarchic law may bring into existence a plurality of increasingly valuable universes. Since increases in value eventually entail increases in complexity, an axiarchic atheist may rewrite the rules for completeness in terms of value. The *axiarchic initial rule* states that there exists some initial least valuable universe. The *axiarchic successor rule* has two parts. The first part states that for every universe in the tree, there are ways to make it more valuable. The second part states that for every universe in the tree, for every way to make it more valuable, there exists some successor universe which is more valuable in that way. The *axiarchic limit rule* takes the ramification of the cosmological tree up through infinite degrees of value. It entails the existence of infinitely valuable universes. Of course, increasing the value of any universe entails increasing the values of the things it contains. Increasing the value of our universe entails increasing the values of the human lives it contains.

### *Spiritual Axiology*

Skeptical atheists (such as Rosenberg) argue against the existence of any intrinsic value (2011: 98, 279). However, spiritual atheists argue for positive naturalistic accounts of intrinsic value (Dennett, 1995: 511-513). Spiritual atheists have developed naturalistic accounts of morality. Almost all atheists are moral realists who argue for the objectivity of morality. Atheists who have argued for objective morality include Martin (2003); Wielenberg (2005); Epstein (2009); Sinnott-Armstrong (2009); Harris (2011); and Kurtz (2012: chs. 6 & 7). For entirely godless accounts of the foundations of morality, one may turn to Aristotelians, Stoics, Kantians, and utilitarians. More recently, Gert (1973, 1989) grounds an entirely secular system of moral rules in human rationality. Humanist organizations have made clear declarations of their values (e.g. “Humanist Affirmations: A Statement of Principles”, by the Council for Secular Humanism).

Atheists are so insistent on the universality and objectivity of moral values that it is hard to understand why theists so persistently accuse them of being moral relativists or lacking foundations for morality. Perhaps the accusation is that atheism cannot provide any mechanism for the enforcement of moral norms (Walters, 2010: 134-6). Theists (both ancient and Abrahamic) argue that their gods are all-knowing witnesses and norm-enforcers: the gods will inevitably and appropriately reward all good deeds and punish all evil deeds. Moral compensation (reward or punishment) may depend on life after death; yet atheists deny life after death; hence atheists deny moral compensation. Spiritual atheists still need to develop more convincing means of moral enforcement.

Sacred things are supremely valuable. Spiritual atheists embrace the sacred. Atheistic conceptions of the sacred can compete with Christian conceptions. They can provide an orientation for action (for the defense of sacred values). Dennett says “This world is sacred” (1995: 520). He says that he has these sacred values: “democracy, justice, life, love, and truth” (2006: 23). Harris acknowledges the sacred (2005: 16). And Dawkins

also argues for an atheistic conception of the sacred (2004). Comte-Sponville says that he has these sacred values: “humanity, freedom, and justice” (2006: 18). Blackburn (2004) discusses things that are sacred for atheists.

For many spiritual atheists, the sacred expands beyond any humanistic conception to include non-human aspects of nature. Religious naturalists have been deeply concerned with the sacred in nature. Goodenough regards the earthly evolutionary tree of life as sacred (1998: 170). Peters affirms that “the sacred is the process of ongoing creation in the world, the dance of ever evolving nature” (2002: 136). Kauffman aims to “reinvent the sacred as the creativity in nature” (2008: 142).

According to religious naturalists, we are intrinsically obligated to show a special type of respect to sacred things. This special type of respect is *veneration* or *reverence*. Goodenough writes “Reverence is the religious emotion elicited when we perceive the sacred” (1998: 170). She writes that we are “called to revere” the earthly tree of life (1998: 170). Crosby writes “The sacred or holy is that which we reverence as the focus of religious faith and that which deserves to be so revered” (2008: 64). Thus spiritual atheists may venerate and revere; however, because their sacred objects are not persons, they cannot *worship* them. Such reverence may support an atheistic liturgy.

### *Spiritual Eschatology*

At the end of the nineteenth century, humanists painted a picture of humanity as making progress towards a utopian future. The humanist utopia remains one of the best available portraits of an ideal human civilization. Unfortunately, the twentieth century shows that humanity is not good enough to realize its own best dreams. We are utterly unable to govern ourselves and to make progress towards the humanist utopia. As Kant famously said “Out of the crooked timber of humanity, nothing straight was ever made.” And, as the grand narrative of progress turned into a myth, much of the cultural support for humanism vanished (Aaronson, 2008: ch. 1). At the start of the twenty-first century, humanity appears hell-bent on the destruction of the earthly conditions of human life. Calvinist pessimism is more accurate than humanist optimism. Humanism has failed.

For their eschatological visions, spiritual atheists may wish to turn to transhumanism. Transhumanists argue that we will realize our utopian dreams through advanced technology (Garreau, 2005; Kurzweil, 2005). However, to realize those dreams, we must overcome our human-all-too-human natures. Transhumanists argue that we may soon be able to use advanced technologies, especially genetic engineering and neural enhancement technologies, to make *morally enhanced* humans (Douglas, 2008; Faust, 2008). Spiritual atheists can endorse an objective moral code based on rationality. Hence spiritual atheists can argue that we ought to morally enhance ourselves. We ought to engineer our own natures so to make it more likely that we achieve the transhumanist utopia.

Atheistic imagination is engaged in the description of possible futures in which the positive values of atheism are manifest. It depicts the humanist or transhumanist utopia. Atheistic art which portrays the vision of atheism. At present, no such vision exists. Here spiritual atheists may want to learn from the transhumanists. Transhumanists have a rich and generally utopian vision of the future of humanity, based on technological progress. Consequently, transhumanists can and do display this vision in art.

### *Spiritual Soteriology*

On the one hand, spiritual atheists reject the account of the soul given by Descartes. They reject the notion that the soul is an immaterial thinking substance. On the other hand, they need not reject the Aristotelian theory of the soul. For Aristotle, the soul is the form of the body (*De Anima*, 412a5-414a33). The form of the body is the structure of the body; it is a pattern which the body instantiates. More technically, this pattern is a computer program (Barrow & Tipler, 1986: 659). Tipler writes that “the human ‘soul’ is nothing but a specific program being run on a computing machine called the brain”(1995: 1-2). Spiritual atheists who embrace Platonism can argue that the soul is an eternal Platonic form. It has the same ontological status as any other mathematical structure.

Of course, if the soul is a computer program, then it can be run many times on many different physical substrates. Transhumanists and singularitarians have used this reasoning to argue for a variety of technologically-based forms of life after death. One technological version of life after death states that we will *upload* our bodies into computer-generated universes (Kurzweil, 2005: 198-202). Another version states that we are already living in a computer-generated universe, and that we may be *promoted* into the higher universe (Moravec, 1988: 152-3; Bostrom, 2003). A third version states that our earthly lives will all be reproduced in detailed *ancestor simulations* running on the great computers of the future (Moravec, 1988: 123-4; Tipler, 1995).<sup>12</sup> Perhaps all these scenarios are merely science fiction. Nevertheless, none of them involve any Abrahamic God. All of them are consistent with our best science. All these forms of life after death are naturalistic versions of the Theravedic Buddhist doctrine of rebirth (Rahula, 1974: 34). Importantly, even if none of these technical solutions to the problem of death work out, spiritual atheists can appeal to other arguments to justify naturalistic theories of life after death.

Spiritual atheists may develop *rational soteriologies*. These soteriologies use reason alone to justify life after death. One of the most interesting rational arguments for life after death is the *Godelian Argument for Rebirth* (Godel, 1961: 429-31). It goes like this: (1) Nature has produced rational agents (e.g. humans). (2) We do not realize all of our rational potentials in our earthly lives. (3) If we do not have future lives in which we realize all our rational potentials, then there are some rational agents in nature which do not realize all their rational potentials. (4) If there are any rational agents in nature which do not realize all their rational potentials, then nature is not rationally organized. (5) However, the success of science shows that nature is rationally organized. (6) Therefore, we will have some future lives in which we realize all our rational potentials. (7) The

lives needed for us to realize all our rational potentials cannot all exist in the future of our universe. (8) Consequently, since these lives will exist, they will exist in other future universes. We will have lives in other future universes, and through those lives we will realize all our rational potentials. This is yet another version of the Theravedic Buddhist doctrine of rebirth.

Spiritual atheists may use axiarchic metaphysics to develop rational soteriologies. One argument for an axiarchic soteriology uses the *Axiarchic Principle*. The Axiarchic Principle states that if any proposition about any thing ought to be true, then it will be true. The Axiarchic Principle is a *law of nature* (it is not the disposition of any divine will). An *Axiarchic Argument for Life After Death* now runs this way: (1) Many propositions about our lives ought to be true, but are not true. (2) The Axiarchic Principle states that if any proposition about any thing ought to be true, then it will be true. (3) Therefore, all the propositions about our lives that ought to be true will be true. (4) But clearly most of those obligatory propositions never come true within the futures of our earthly lives. They are not true of our earthly lives. (5) Consequently, we will have future lives, in future physical universes, in which those obligatory propositions will come true.

The Axiarchic Principle can also be used as the basis for an argument for trans-world justice. The *Axiarchic Argument for Justice* goes like this: (1) Those who do evil ought to be punished and those who do good ought to be rewarded. (2) The Axiarchic Principle states that if any proposition about any thing ought to be true, then it will be true. (3) Therefore, those who do evil will be punished and those who do good will be rewarded. (4) But clearly most evil-doers are not punished in their earthly lives and most good-doers are not rewarded in their earthly lives. (5) Consequently, those evil-doers will have future lives in which they are punished for their earthly bad deeds and those good-doers will have future lives in which they are rewarded for their earthly good deeds. The Axiarchic Principle is like a *karmic* principle. And *karma* is naturalistic and lawful.

These two axiarchic arguments are both supported by the Godelian Argument for Rebirth. According to the Godelian Argument, reason demands the actualization of all rational potentials of all rational beings; but this demand is satisfied by the Axiarchic Argument for Life After Death. According to well-known Kantian arguments, reason demands justice for all rational beings (and your rational potentials cannot be fully actualized without justice); but the demand for justice is satisfied by the trans-world punishments and rewards defined by the Axiarchic Argument for Justice. These two axiarchic arguments are also supported by the earlier reasoning which justified the use of three axiarchic rules to define the shape of the cosmological tree. If any proposition ought to be true of some universe, but is not true of it, then it will be true in some descendent of that universe.

One objection to the axiarchic soteriology is that the Axiarchic Principle is not justified by science; it is not empirically falsifiable. The first reply is that positivism is a self-refuting epistemology. Nature is bigger than the observable universe. The second reply is that science raises questions which it cannot answer. Science is not explanatorily

complete. For the sake of explanatory completeness, science requires the addition of laws which are not empirically testable. The Axiarchic Principle is one of those laws. Another objection to the axiarchic soteriology is that (since even spiritual atheists reject Cartesian minds), its conception of life after death cannot involve any personal identity. The first reply is that there is no identity through time in our earthly lives anyway. Here spiritual atheists agree with the Theravedic doctrine of no-self (*anatta*). The second reply involves temporal counterpart theory: our future lives are composed of our future temporal counterparts. Here again axiological soteriology resembles Theravedic Buddhism.

### *Spiritual Prosociality*

An easy argument demonstrates the need for atheists to develop prosocial institutions: if atheism is going to flourish in some culture, then it has to compete with the established religion of that culture; if it's going to compete with established religion, then it's going to have to provide the same sorts of prosocial institutions; therefore, either atheism will provide the same sorts of prosocial services as established religion, or it will not flourish. Since atheists want to flourish, they consequently want to develop the same types of prosocial institutions that are provided by established religions.

Spiritual atheists are developing a variety of prosocial institutions and performing a variety of prosocial services. These institutions and services are mainly associated with humanist groups like the *American Humanist Association* or groups like *Ethical Culture*. Many *Unitarian Universalists* are spiritual atheists. Religious naturalists have formed the *Spiritual Naturalist Society*. They include student outreach organizations like the *Secular Student Alliance* (which competes with Campus Crusade for Christ). They include community-building groups like the *Humanist Community Project*, based on the Harvard Humanist Chaplaincy. Spiritual atheists do interfaith work. One well-known example is the work of Chris Stedman at the *Interfaith Youth Core* (Stedman, 2012).

Religion plays a central role in politics. Spiritual atheists have begun to participate in politically progressive movements and to develop their own social justice movement. For example, the American Atheists are participating in the 2013 Netroots Conference, and some atheists have begun work on the progressivist A+ movement.

Religions often provide support services in response to suffering. Many people suffer from poverty and illness. Religions typically respond to poverty and illness through large-scale and well-organized charity services. As an alternative to religions charities, atheists are developing their own charitable organizations. Perhaps the best-known are the *Foundation Beyond Belief* and the *International Humanist and Ethical Union*. Atheist charities have responded both to structural poverty and to suffering caused by natural disasters (e.g. the Haitian earthquake, as well as the recent Oklahoma tornados).

Many people suffer from addiction to alcohol or drugs. Sobriety support groups aim to help people overcome those addictions. Among these groups, Alcoholics Anonymous



(AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) are most well-known. These groups have developed the Twelve Step Program. However, since the Twelve Step Program requires its practitioners to submit to a “Higher Power”, most atheists reject it. A group known as *Secular Organizations for Sobriety* aims to provide sobriety support without any reference to any higher power. Many people suffer from psychological illness or stress, for which they seek therapy. As an alternative to religiously oriented therapy, atheists are developing their own therapist networks, such as the *Secular Therapist Project*. Humanist chaplains serve the psychological needs of their own humanist congregations.

Spiritual atheists are building their own holidays. Spiritual atheists choose the way of inclusion: rather than demanding that all religious symbols be excluded from the public sphere, they demand equal inclusion of their own symbols. As an alternative to Christmas, atheists are increasingly celebrating the *Winter Solstice*. For example, HumanLight is a humanistic celebration of the Winter Solstice (Speckhardt, 2012). Atheists send solstice cards rather than Christmas (or Hanukkah) cards. Atheists insist on the inclusion of atheistic winter holiday displays on public land (e.g. Winter Solstice signs or Flying Spaghetti Monster signs on courthouse lawns or in town squares). As an alternative to Easter, many atheists celebrate the *Spring Equinox*. As an alternative to the National Day of Prayer, atheists have developed the *National Day of Reason*. Atheist groups also celebrate the *Summer Solstice*. Atheists have developed other holidays as well. These can be found at the *Secular Seasons Project* website. These are useful for atheistic social groups, such as the Secular Student Alliance, which hosts campus events on these holidays. When they come together, atheists can perform group activities like the *Cosmic Walk*.

Christianity has traditionally provided important *life-cycle services*, which deal with dating, mating, birthing, and dying. Churches and para-church networks have traditionally controlled the dating process. They have provided crucial match-making infrastructure (“we met at church”) and regulation of the sexual market. Spiritual atheists are developing competing markets. Atheist dating sites exist on the internet (and major internet dating sites like OkCupid have become atheist-friendly). Christians have traditionally controlled marriage. But humanists and other spiritual atheists have developed non-theistic marriage ceremonies. Of course, mating often leads to children. Christians have long provided welcoming ceremonies for newborns (e.g. baptisms). But spiritual atheists can turn to alternatives, such as humanistic naming ceremonies. Atheists are building non-theistic resources for child rearing and youth organizations. These include *Parenting Beyond Belief* and *Camp Quest*. The American Humanist Association sponsors the website *Kids Without God*. On all these life-cycle events, spiritual atheists are competing with Christianity.

Spiritual atheists are developing ways of personally preparing for death. Humanist celebrants officiate at funerals. Every human will suffer grief when a friend, partner, or family member dies. Religions provide grief support services. Atheists have begun to try to compete with those religious services. One atheistic grief support service is *Grief Beyond Belief*. At present (June 2013), Grief Beyond Belief is a Facebook page where bereaved atheists offer mutual support. Public disasters (such as natural disasters, or acts

of war or terrorism) are often marked by public memorial services. Spiritual atheists increasingly lobby for the inclusion of humanists or non-theists at these events.

### *Spiritual Practice*

Spiritual atheists cannot petition any supernatural agents for favors; hence they cannot engage in any petitionary prayers.<sup>13</sup> But spiritual atheists can perform communal symbolic acts which resemble other types of prayer. Atheists can perform thanksgivings, blessings, affirmations, and benedictions. They can perform these acts at meals, at invocations (e.g. at the openings of institutions and at the start of sporting events), at ceremonies (e.g. at weddings and funerals). Religious naturalists have discussed prayers of thanksgiving (Goodenough, 1998: 47; Crosby, 2002: 153). Atheists can say Buddhist prayers, which have been developed for various occasions. Buddhist prayer is not prayer to anyone nor is it prayer for anything. By performing symbolic action, rather than refusing to perform it, atheists affirm the social symbolic economy. They show that they want to keep the symbolic market open, rather than to shut it down.

Theists often use personal prayer to regulate arousal (e.g., to reduce anxiety or to build confidence). Spiritual atheists cannot engage in personal prayer to any god. But they can perform arousal regulation exercises. These exercises include meditation, verbal affirmation, visualization, breathing, and yoga. Religious naturalists advocate arousal regulation exercises (Goodenough, 1998: 101-102; Peters, 2002: ch. 13; Crosby, 2007: 496). Some New Atheists advocate arousal regulation exercises (Comte-Sponville, 2006; Walters, 2010: ch. 8). Many atheists practice Buddhist meditation (Harris, 2005: ch. 7; Blackmore, 2011). The Pew US Religious Landscape Survey states that 18% of surveyed atheists meditate at least weekly (2008: 13). The New Stoics advocate a wide variety of personal psychological exercises (Irvine, 2009: part 2). By developing personal arousal regulation techniques, spiritual atheism competes well with theism.

## **4. Conclusion**

Skeptical atheism is a voice of theoretical protest. However, by subscribing almost entirely to a belief model of religion, skeptical atheism fails to compete with already established religions. Perhaps skeptical atheism represents a pioneering vanguard, an acidic movement that helps to dissolve the unity of Abrahamic theism. It is not capable of social solidarity. It cannot build large-scale social movements or institutions. It will never become a political force. Skeptical atheism is not likely to be attractive to women. It is not likely to become attractive to anyone outside of the economic, racial, and social elite. It is not likely to be attractive to anyone who suffers from racial discrimination or economic injustice. It represents very little threat to Abrahamic theism.

Spiritual atheism is building a powerful alternative to Abrahamic theism. Spiritual atheism has ambiguous relations with old-fashioned humanism. It needs to clarify those relations, and it needs to move beyond humanism. It needs to develop a vision of future

possibility that transcends humanity. It needs to develop an atheistic concept of transcendence. Perhaps here the transhumanists and singularitarians may help. If it can develop that concept, then perhaps it will also develop art. It needs to develop a more distinctive conceptual vocabulary for its practices so that they will not be confused with older Abrahamic practices (e.g. stop talking about “atheist churches”). It needs to develop a theory and practice of moral norm-enforcement that can successfully compete with theistic practices. It needs to develop an atheistic account of suffering and atheistic ways to respond to suffering (remedies for the failure of purely rational technique). It needs to develop a richer system of purely symbolic practices and markers and thus to develop a more socially vivid display of common identity and social affiliation. Spiritual atheism can do these things. It represents a significant threat to Abrahamic theism.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>According to the biocultural theory, religion is a biological adaptation. It is a system of evolved individual strategies which enable human groups to flourish. These strategies aim at group survival and coordination (e.g. solidarity, the cultivation of loyalty, the suppression of deviance). They aim at group integrity (e.g. the exclusion of outsiders). They are especially concerned with reproduction (sex) and with conflict (war).

<sup>2</sup>Atheism itself is an adaptation; how well does it compete with theism? Bioculturalists say not well (Geertz & Markusson, 2010; Johnson, 2012).

<sup>3</sup>Thus Gods are primarily social agents posited to maximize group cohesion. Gods are omnipresent and omniscient witnesses, they are powerful enforcers of social norms, they justify both altruistic sacrifice and altruistic punishment. Gods ensure that nobody is ever alone: you are always socially connected to the gods.

<sup>4</sup>For Old Testament condemnations of idols as causally impotent, see 1 Chronicles 16, Jeremiah 10, Jeremiah 14, and Psalms 135: 15-17.

<sup>5</sup>Many theists as well as atheists argue that skeptical atheism is a kind of faith. Critics of skeptical atheism sometimes argue that it closely resembles Abrahamic fundamentalism (McGrath & McGrath, 2007; Hedges, 2008).

<sup>6</sup>Consider the ancient Chinese practice of binding the feet of girls. Rosenberg shows how this practice was a sexually advantageous local adaptation (2011: 253-4). However, he does not (and cannot) argue that the practice was wrong.

<sup>7</sup>The document “An Open Letter to the Secular Community” was posted on the American Humanists Association website in April 2013. See <http://www.americanhumanist.org/news/details/2013-04-an-open-letter-to-the-secular-community>. It was posted on the Center for Inquiry website on 2 April 2013. See <http://www.centerforinquiry.net/news/an-open-letter-to-the-secular-community/>. Both accessed 25 June 2013.

<sup>8</sup>The American Religious Identification Survey (Kosmin & Keysar, 2008: 11) shows that among American religious groups “The most gender unbalanced group is the Nones, those who profess no religion or self-identified as atheists or agnostics. The ratio of 60 males to 40 females is a remarkable result.” According to Norenzayan et al. (2012), the correlation between atheism and autism is stronger in men than in women, which they say may explain why males tend to be less religious and more atheistic.

<sup>9</sup>On national television (e.g. Fox News), conservative Christian pundits regularly accuse secularists of making a “War on Christmas”.

<sup>10</sup>For atheist responses to Christmas, see Harvie & Meyers (2010).

<sup>11</sup>The universe-creating law looks like this: for every Platonic universe-form  $F$ , if  $F$  satisfies the selector  $S$ , then there exists some concrete universe  $x$  such that  $F(x)$ .

<sup>12</sup>Tipler writes: “the physical mechanism of individual resurrection is the emulation of each and every long-dead person – and their worlds – in the computers of the far future”(1995: 14). Of course, it may be objected that the Omega Point theory developed by Tipler is false. The reply is that ancestor simulation does not require his Omega Point.

<sup>13</sup>The Pew US Religious Landscape Survey states that 10% of surveyed atheists pray at least weekly (2008: 13). It is not clear what this means.

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