

NO SACRED COWS

Nick Cohen has noted, however, there is enough blame to go around. “Compulsive liars shouldn’t frighten you. They can harm no one, if no one listens to them. Compulsive believers, on the other hand: they should terrify you. Believers are the liars’ enablers. Their votes give the demagogue his power. Their trust turns the charlatan into the president.”

while fundamentalists themselves are undoubtedly problematic, there may be something wrong with a religion itself if those who strictly adhere to its most fundamental principles are violent bigots and sexists.

If a superstition is a belief or way of behaving that is based on fear of the unknown and faith in magic,¹⁹ then I think it’s fair to describe religions as (mostly archaic) organized superstitions. Superstition isn’t an insult; it’s just the broader umbrella term, under which some religious practices and beliefs most certainly fit. When asked which church I attend or which religion I follow, for instance, I oftensay, “I’m not superstitious,” just to cover all the potential bases. It might be difficult for some believers—and even former believers—to accept it, but, whether you carry a four-leafed clover for good luck or worship Jesus for salvation, the faith-based belief stems from the same place and follows the same format:
 SUPERSTITION: “IF I CARRY THIS CHARM, I’LL HAVE GOOD LUCK IN ALL MY ENDEAVORS!”

Humans are pattern-seeking creatures by nature, which means we search for what’s familiar about our surroundings to help us make sense of them. For instance, our ancient ancestors may have (falsely) associated all rustling grass with a predator’s approach. In most instances, the wind was likely the cause, but that doesn’t take away from the lives that were saved because of that assumption of danger. Petitionary prayer—defined as an act in which one person (who is by definition unworthy) asks that the laws of the universe be altered to achieve an earthly result—a common practice in the Christian religion and a number of other faiths,²² is just one example of a superstitious principle that many religions share. The individual saying the prayer (no matter to which deity or supernatural force it is directed) sees the positive results (or hits) as divine intervention, and ignores those prayers that remain unanswered (misses), much like a gambler would.

The supernatural in general is appealing to many people for a lot of different reasons, but one of the keys is the unknown factor. We humans fear the unknown, which causes us to create heavens, hells, ghosts, reincarnation schemes, and more to save us from the greatest mystery of all: death. A

But that’s antifaith for you can’t say it’s completely unknown

Atheism doesn’t necessarily make anyone intelligent or a good person, and that’s just a small part of my identity. I’m also an agnostic, a humanist, and a naturalist.

Some believers suggest my evidence-based worldview amounts to nothing more than scientism, which is defined as a philosophical position that “embraces only empiricism and reason to explain phenomena of any dimension, whether physical, social, cultural, or psychological.”² I wholeheartedly disagree with this characterization of my method because I only use science to address falsifiable questions, those to which scientific inquiry might provide a helpful answer. Science isn’t an all-purpose tool that can be applied to any mystery—it is a specialty device used to uncover more of the observable world.

In fact, I think science is so amazing specifically because it is fluid and not a clear, all-encompassing answer to every question. Contrary to what some have suggested, I don’t worship or even believe in science; I just find it easier to accept outcomes that

I learned more about circumcision, including that newborns may actually feel more pain than older groups and that about 115 children die during routine cuts in the United States each year.

Should we doubt everything we’ve ever discovered? No, because our shifts in understanding aren’t a result of science itself being “wrong” or unreliable. Science is simply a method designed to help us follow the evidence, and new data becomes available all the time, which is why it has a track record for improving on its own existing ideas.

I think most people would agree with that basic notion, including philosopher and logician Irving Copi. In a book called *Introduction to Logic*, he showed that a lack of evidence sometimes is evidence of absence. “In some circumstances it can be safely assumed that if a certain event had occurred, evidence of it could be discovered by qualified investigators,” Copi wrote. “In such circumstances it is perfectly reasonable to take the absence of proof of its occurrence as positive proof of its non-occurrence.” While a lack of evidence may be a good reason to not believe in something in most cases, a lack of

evidence is not always a good reason to proclaim that something definitely does not exist or did not occur.

Those who sell nontruths take more than money from their victims; they also take their right to reality.

PRAYER DOESN'T AFFECT OUTCOMES, REGARDLESS OF HOW IT MAKES YOU FEEL.

Banachek: I believe that psychic mediums are scum. They cross over that line of personal sanctity for profit. They halt the important grieving process. Yes, many say they make people feel good about a loss but I can give crack to a junkie. It will make him feel good but it is not good for him. The grieving process allows people to go on living without a loved one and it is important. I once had a friend who lost her son; he was ten years old and died of cancer. A medium convinced her that she could communicate with her son. That he could fill that hole in her heart. As a result, she communicated with her dead son and stopped communicating with her living daughters and husband. She almost ended up in a divorce as a result. Luckily she came to her senses. These people do harm, not good, and they do it all in the name of putting a lot of money in their pockets. This is not the only way they do harm. Once a person depends upon a medium, that medium opens a door to other forms of pseudoscience.

As a naturalist, I'm often asked what I believe will happen when I die. But for me, it's not about what I believe; as usual, it's about the evidence. T

Parnia stated that death, contrary to popular belief, "is not a specific moment but a potentially reversible process that occurs after any severe illness or accident causes the heart, lungs and brain to cease functioning." "If attempts are made to reverse this process, it is referred to as 'cardiac arrest'; however, if these attempts do not succeed it is called 'death,'"

Researchers at the Phase Research Center (formerly known as OOB Research Center) in Los Angeles, which purports to study and help people control out-of-body experiences, lucid dreams, and astral projections, claim they can "deliberately reproduce" NDEs. They say their 2012 NDE-simulating experiment,²¹ in which 20 volunteers in no danger of dying were able to experience flying through a tunnel and other events associated with near-death memories, "casts doubt on many earlier theories" on the origin of these events. Michael Raduga, founder and head of the Phase Research Center, says REM sleep "may indeed help explain at least a portion of near-death experiences."

Despite there not being a scientific consensus on the specific origins of NDEs, the fact that this phenomenon can be studied, and even recreated in a laboratory setting by administering ketamine and through other tactics, shows us that it is likely a completely natural occurrence—as opposed to a paranormal or divine one.

While it is a person's right to believe as they see fit, that doesn't make all beliefs right and it doesn't change the expectation of evidence for any particular claim. A

"GOD IS SO GREAT THAT HE HID ALL THE EVIDENCE FOR HIS EXISTENCE. HE WANTED US TO HAVE FAITH!" "OUR ANCIENT ALIEN OVERLORDS WOULD BE TOO SMART AND ADVANCED TO HAVE LEFT EVIDENCE OF THEIR TIME ON EARTH!" "THE GOVERNMENT IS SO POWERFUL AND CORRUPT THAT IT HID ALL THE EVIDENCE FOR MY FAR-FETCHED AND UNSUBSTANTIATED CONSPIRACY CLAIM!" No matter the topic of discussion, "someone stole the evidence" cannot be used as evidence of anything in and of itself.

Noticing unrelated coincidences and attributing meaning to them is called synchronicity, and it was first coined by Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung.

Jonathan C. Smith pointed out, "Popular paranormalists have made much of coincidences." "A present-future coincidence might be seen as a prophecy, an event that correctly follows an omen or prediction. A present-present coincidence might suggest a set of events that are remarkably linked by some paranormal process outside of the world of causality," he wrote. "The best way to explore what is going on is to contemplate a variety of remarkable coincidences."

Seth Andrews, author of *Deconverted: A Journey from Religion to Reason* and other titles, points out that prayer "can give comfort in times of medical crisis," but cautions people not to rely on it. "It can also be a cop-out ... an excuse for people to do absolutely nothing substantial and yet declare they have moved mountains," he wrote. "

With prayer and positive thoughts, any purported results likely stem from the customer's (or patient's) own mind. I call this the prayer placebo effect: a positive effect, produced by a request to a god, that can't be attributed to a god and must therefore be a result of the belief itself. The

placebo effect is already regularly utilized by "mainstream" physicians when appropriate, to make people feel healthier without expensive procedures or dangerous medications. If a small feeling of improvement is all that is needed, then—in some instances—that may be the best action. The problem begins, however, when the placebo effect is mistaken for a

“cure” or used instead of necessary medical advice.

It can sometimes work even when you know it's a placebo—rendering the deception component of homeopathy and other woo-based faith-healing methods completely unnecessary.

So-called exorcists are a form of faith healer because they utilize many of the same deceptive tactics to achieve their results.

Here are just a few of the church's frequently cited biblical passages about hatred from God: Leviticus 20:23: “And ye shall not walk in the manners of the nation, which I cast out before you: for they committed all these things, and therefore I abhorred them.” Deuteronomy 32:19: “And when the LORD saw it, he abhorred them, because of the provoking of his sons, and of his daughters.” Psalm 5:5: “The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity.” Romans 9:13: “As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.”²⁹

I see it as a huge, huge issue. As long as people continue to say that this kind of hateful conduct is not real Christianity, we can continue to downplay the importance that religion plays in creating these hateful ideas that do oh-so-much harm. It is, and was, Christian preachers who put forth the idea that gay is evil. Full stop. If you want to separate yourself from this behavior, it is necessary to separate yourself from the label of Christian.