JULY 4, 2010 THESKEPTICARENA.COM

NICK MATZKE POSTED THIS REBUTTAL TO PZ MYERS

I'VE READ MOST OF MIDGLEY'S BOOKS AND ARTICLES, I DON'T THINK YOU [THE UNPUBLISHABLE PHILOSOPHER] OR PZ ARE GETTING HER AT ALL.

THE SHORT VERSION OF WHAT SHE'S SAYING IS THAT THERE IS A LOT MORE TO LIFE THAN SIMPLY SCIENTIFICALLY ASSESSING EVERYTHING AS IF IT WAS A HYPOTHESIS.

(NICK: WHO SAID THAT LIFE WAS SIMPLY SCIENTIFICALLY ASSESSING EVERYTHING AS IF IT WERE A HYPOTHESIS?

UNTIL YOU CAN COME UP WITH A NAME, YOU HAVE CREATED A STRAW MAN ARGUMENT).

THE PRIMARY REASON MANY PEOPLE LIKE THEIR RELIGION, DESPITE ITS OBVIOUS PROBLEMS FROM A SCIENTIFIC POINT OF VIEW, HAVE TO DO WITH THINGS LIKE:

PROVIDING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

(NICK: RELIGION PROVIDES A SENSE OF COMMUNITY ONLY IN THE SENSE THAT IT CREATES AN "US-AGAINST-THEM" TRIBAL MENTALITY. THAT IS ESPECIALLY TRUE OF THE BARBARIC ABRAHAMIC RELIGIONS).

INSTILLING VALUES IN CHILDREN AND IN THEMSELVES

(NICK: I'VE READ THE KORAN AND THE BIBLE AND I HAVE SEEN THE VALUES THEY INSTILL IN CHILDREN. IT'S AMAZING THAT THEY DON'T ALL TURN INTO SERIAL KILLERS. FORTUNATELY, MOST OF THEM HAVE ENOUGH COMMON SENSE TO IGNORE THE VALUES YOU ARE EXTOLLING).

AND WHATEVER RANTING AND RAVING THE NEW ATHEISTS DO ABOUT THE EVILS IN THE BIBLE AND THE EVILS PROMOTED BY PARTS OF MODERN RELIGION, AN ACTUAL FAIR, NON-RAVING ASSESSMENT SIMPLY HAS TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT A LARGE PART OF RELIGION THROUGHOUT HISTORY, AND ESPECIALLY IN LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES IN THE 20TH CENTURY, HAS BEEN ABOUT PROVIDING OFTEN-CORRECT MORAL GUIDANCE TO THE PARISHIONERS.

(NICK: YOU HAVE TO BE RAVING MAD YOURSELF TO MAKE SUCH AN IGNORANT STATEMENT. THE BIBLE IS FULL OF EVIL. MODERN RELIGION DOES PROMOTE EVIL.

AS FOR THE "OFTEN CORRECT MORAL GUIDANCE" YOU CLAIM IT PROVIDES, THERE IS NOTHING IN THE BIBLE WORTH PROMOTING THAT CANNOT BE OBTAINED WITHOUT RELIGION. SOMEHOW THE CHINESE WERE ABLE TO CONSTRUCT A SOCIETY THAT IS FAR LESS WARLIKE THAN OUR OWN; AND THEY DID IT WITHOUT YOUR BIBLE.

FOR EXAMPLE: WE DON'T NEED YOUR SCRIPTURES TO TEACH US THAT KILLING IS WRONG. UNLIKE YOU, WE HAVE ENOUGH COMMON SENSE TO FIGURE THAT OUT ON OUR OWN. THE FACT THAT YOU NEED TO BE THREATENED BY AN INVISIBLE GHOST TO KEEP YOU FROM KILLING PEOPLE SHOULD SCARE THE HELL OUT OF ANY NORMAL PERSON).

FOR EVERY INSTANCE OF CHILD ABUSE OR WITCH BURNING IN HISTORY THERE ARE PROBABLY MILLIONS OF INSTANCES OF INDIVIDUALS FINDING GOOD MORAL GUIDANCE IN THEIR RELIGION.

(NICK: GOOD MORAL GUIDANCE COULD HAVE BEEN FOUND WITHOUT RELIGION, WHILE THE WITCH BURNING WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN DONE WITHOUT YOUR BIBLE).

OF COURSE THERE ARE A GOOD NUMBER OF CASES OF PEOPLE FINDING POOR MORAL GUIDANCE AS WELL, BUT THEN YOU CAN SAY THIS ABOUT DEMOCRACY, SCIENTIFIC LEADERS, ATHEIST LEADERS, ETC. AS WELL.

(NICK: THAT'S RIGHT. THERE IS EVIL IN MANY OF US. RELIGION ONLY ADDS FUEL TO THE FIRE. WITHOUT IT, THERE IS ONE LESS SOURCE OF EVIL).

RELIGION WORKS FOR MANY PEOPLE MUCH OF THE TIME.

(NICK: IT DIDN'T WORK SO WELL FOR THOSE POOR WOMEN YOU CALLED "WITCHES." IT DIDN'T WORK SO WELL FOR THOSE UNFORTUNATES WHO REFUSED TO WORSHIP YOUR INVISIBLE GHOST. IT DIDN'T WORK SO WELL FOR MANY WHO GOT CAUGHT WORKING ON THE SABBATH. IT DIDN'T WORK SO WELL FOR SLAVES. IT DIDN'T WORK OUT SO GREAT FOR HOMOSEXUALS. IT DIDN'T ... OKAY, YOU GET THE PICTURE).

PROVIDING A HOPEFUL VIEW OF THEIR PLACE IN THE GRAND SCHEME OF THINGS (THE TYPICAL ATHEIST ALTERNATIVE IS PRETTY DOUR AND DEPRESSING)

(NICK: LET'S COMPARE ALTERNATIVES AND SEE WHICH ONE IS REALLY DOUR AND DEPRESSING: YOUR "GRAND SCHEME" INCLUDES BILLIONS OF HUMANS BEING MURDERED IN A GLORIOUS CHRISTIAN RAPTURE WHICH WILL BE FOLLOWED BY AN ETERNITY OF HORRIBLE TORTURE.

I WOULD SAY THAT PRETTY MUCH DESCRIBES "DOUR AND DEPRESSING." THE FACT THAT YOU DON'T, SHOWS HOW SICK YOUR MIND BECOMES ON A DIET OF RELIGION).

PROVIDING AN ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL ACTION, CHARITY, AND/OR POLITICAL ACTION

(NICK: UNFORTUNATELY, THAT SOCIAL OR POLITICAL ACTION USUALLY INVOLVES THE REMOVAL OF CIVIL RIGHTS FOR ANYONE OUTSIDE YOUR RELIGIOUS GROUP.

AS FOR CHARITY, CONSIDERING THAT BELIEVERS SIMPLY GIVE YOU THEIR MONEY - TAX FREE, IT IS PATHETIC THAT YOU SCREAM AND BRAG AND POINT TO THE PENNY THAT YOU THROW BACK FROM EVERY DOLLAR THEY GIVE YOU).

IN THESE AND MANY OTHER WAYS, THERE ISN'T MUCH THAT THE ATHEISTS OFFER AT THE MOMENT THAT CAN COMPARE TO WHAT BELONGING TO A CHURCH OFFERS PEOPLE.

(NICK: THAT IS TRUE. YOU OFFER A MAGICAL FANTASY INSTEAD OF BRUTAL REALITY, YOU OFFER THE CHANCE TO SPREAD HATE AGAINST THOSE OUTSIDE YOUR GROUP, YOU OFFER THE CHANCE TO CHANGE HISTORY AND SPREAD LIES ABOUT OUR SCIENCE AND OUR HISTORY, AND YOU OFFER ETERNAL LIFE FOR THOSE WHO LACK THE MATURITY TO FACE THEIR OWN MORTALITY).

SOME PEOPLE FEEL FINE WITHOUT IT, THAT'S GREAT, BUT I WONDER IF IT WILL EVER BECOME A COMMON THING OUTSIDE OF CERTAIN PROFESSIONS LIKE ACADEMIA.

(NICK: NOT AS LONG AS YOU CAN KEEP THEM CONVINCED THAT AN INVISIBLE GHOST WILL TORTURE THEM FOREVER IF THEY QUIT BELIEVING. RELIGION SURVIVES ON FEAR. YOU WILL LAST UNTIL HUMANS FIND THE COURAGE TO FACE THE TERROR THAT ENSLAVES THEM).

AND PRETENDING LIKE THESE FACTORS DON'T EXIST AND DON'T MATTER AND THAT IT'S ALL JUST A SIMPLE MATTER OF SCIENTIFICALLY ASSESSING RELIGION BASED ON THE WORST CLAIMS OF ITS CRAZIEST PROPONENTS, OR ON THE UNSUPPORTED NATURE OF SOME VERY FUZZY THEOLOGICAL CLAIMS OF MODERATES - WHICH IS BASICALLY WHAT THE ATHEIST CAMPAIGNERS DO - IS A PRETTY SILLY THING TO DO. THIS IS WHAT MIDGLEY IS TRYING TO POINT OUT.

(NICK: RATIONALISTS NEVER PRETEND - YOU ARE CONFUSING US WITH RELIGION. RELIGION IS NOT ASSESSED ON THE WORST CLAIMS OF ITS CRAZIEST PROPONENTS OR ON THE UNSUPPORTED NATURE OF SOME VERY FUZZY THEOLOGICAL CLAIMS OF MODERATES; IT IS ASSESSED ON THE EVIDENCE IT OFFERS IN SUPPORT OF ITS CLAIMS. AFTER 2,000 YEARS OF INTENSE EFFORTS BY BILLIONS OF CHRISTIANS, THE ASSESSMENT STILL STANDS AT ... ZERO).

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

MITOCHONDRIAL GENOME ANALYSIS REVEALS THAT NORTH AMERICA'S FIRST PEOPLES MORE GENETICALLY DIVERSE THAN THOUGHT

THE INITIAL PEOPLING OF NORTH AMERICA FROM ASIA OCCURRED APPROXIMATELY 15,000-18,000 YEARS AGO. HOWEVER, ESTIMATIONS OF THE GENETIC DIVERSITY OF THE FIRST SETTLERS HAVE REMAINED INACCURATE. IN A REPORT PUBLISHED ONLINE IN GENOME RESEARCH, RESEARCHERS HAVE FOUND THAT THE DIVERSITY OF THE FIRST AMERICANS HAS BEEN SIGNIFICANTLY UNDERESTIMATED, UNDERSCORING THE IMPORTANCE OF COMPREHENSIVE SAMPLING FOR ACCURATE ANALYSIS OF HUMAN MIGRATIONS.

SUBSTANTIAL EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THAT HUMANS FIRST CROSSED INTO NORTH AMERICA FROM ASIA OVER A LAND BRIDGE CALLED BERINGIA, CONNECTING EASTERN SIBERIA AND ALASKA. GENETIC STUDIES HAVE SHED LIGHT ON THE INITIAL LINEAGES THAT ENTERED NORTH AMERICA, DISTINGUISHING THE EARLIEST NATIVE AMERICAN GROUPS FROM THOSE THAT ARRIVED LATER. HOWEVER, A CLEAR PICTURE OF THE NUMBER OF INITIAL MIGRATORY EVENTS AND ROUTES HAS BEEN ELUSIVE DUE TO INCOMPLETE ANALYSIS.

IN THIS WORK, AN INTERNATIONAL GROUP OF RESEARCHERS COORDINATED BY ANTONIO TORRONI OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PAVIA IN ITALY PERFORMED A DETAILED MITOCHONDRIAL GENOME ANALYSIS OF A POORLY CHARACTERIZED LINEAGE KNOWN AS C1D. MITOCHONDRIAL DNA (MTDNA) IS PASSED DOWN THROUGH THE MATERNAL LINEAGE, AND MTDNA SEQUENCE MARKERS ARE EXTREMELY USEFUL TOOLS FOR MAPPING ANCESTRY. SIMILAR TO OTHER HAPLOGROUPS THAT WERE AMONG THE FIRST TO ARRIVE IN NORTH AMERICA, C1D IS DISTRIBUTED THROUGHOUT THE CONTINENT, SUGGESTING THAT IT MAY HAVE BEEN ALSO PRESENT IN THE INITIAL FOUNDING POPULATIONS. HOWEVER, C1D HAS NOT BEEN WELL REPRESENTED IN PREVIOUS GENETIC ANALYSES, AND THE ESTIMATED AGE OF APPROXIMATELY 7,000 YEARS, MUCH YOUNGER THAN THE OTHER FOUNDING HAPLOGROUPS, WAS LIKELY INACCURATE.

TO RESOLVE THESE INCONSISTENT LINES OF EVIDENCE, THE GROUP SEQUENCED AND ANALYZED 63 C1D MTDNA GENOMES FROM THROUGHOUT THE AMERICAS. THIS HIGH-RESOLUTION STUDY NOT ONLY CONFIRMED THAT C1D WAS ONE OF THE FOUNDING LINEAGES IN NORTH AMERICA 15,000 TO 18,000 YEARS AGO, BUT REVEALED ANOTHER CRITICAL INSIGHT. "THESE FIRST FEMALE AMERICAN FOUNDERS CARRIED NOT ONE BUT TWO DIFFERENT C1D GENOMES," SAID UGO PEREGO OF THE SORENSON MOLECULAR GENEALOGY FOUNDATION AND PRIMARY AUTHOR OF THE STUDY, "THUS FURTHER INCREASING THE NUMBER OF RECOGNIZED MATERNAL LINEAGES FROM BERINGIA."

THESE FINDINGS RAISE THE NUMBER OF FOUNDING MATERNAL LINEAGES IN NORTH AMERICA TO FIFTEEN. FURTHERMORE, THIS WORK EMPHASIZES THE CRITICAL NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF RELEVANT POPULATIONS TO GATHER A COMPLETE PICTURE OF MIGRATORY EVENTS.

ALESSANDRO ACHILLI OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PERUGIA, A COAUTHOR OF THE REPORT, SUGGESTS THAT THE NUMBER OF DISTINCT MITOCHONDRIAL GENOMES THAT PASSED FROM ASIA INTO NORTH AMERICA IS PROBABLY MUCH HIGHER. "THESE YET UNDISCOVERED MATERNAL LINEAGES WILL BE IDENTIFIED WITHIN THE NEXT THREE TO FOUR YEARS," ACHILLI NOTED, "WHEN THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH THAT WE USED IN OUR STUDY WILL BE SYSTEMATICALLY APPLIED."

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

ABROAD

INDIA - RATIONALISTS BATTLING EVIL

SANAL EDAMARUKU CALLS FOR SILENCE, STRETCHES OUT HIS UPTURNED HANDS AND THEN ISSUES A SINGLE COMMAND: LEVITATE.

UPON THAT, THE BOY APPEARS TO FLOAT FREE FROM THE FLOOR, RISE THREE FEET IN THE AIR AND HOVER FOR A FEW SECONDS, BEFORE GENTLY DESCENDING.

WITH HIS UNBLINKING GAZE AND HIS HYPNOTIC VOICE, MR EDAMARUKU COULD BE ANYONE OF HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF HOLYMEN, ALSO KNOWN AS “FAKIRS” AND “BABAS”, WHO CLAIM TO BE ABLE TO PERFORM SUCH MIRACLES. ONLY ... HE IS NOT.

IN FACT, AS HEAD OF THE INDIAN RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION, MR EDAMARUKU SPENDS HIS TIME EXPOSING THESE PEOPLE AS PART OF HIS MISSION TO BRING ABOUT AN INDIAN ENLIGHTENMENT.

“THE GOAL I HAVE IS TO STOP THESE FRAUDULENT BABAS AND GURUS,” MR EDAMARUKU SAID. “DESPITE OUR PHENOMENAL PROGRESS, SUPERSTITION AND OBSCURANTISM ARE STILL STRONG IN OUR COUNTRY. THESE PEOPLE HAVE HUGE POWER OVER THE LIVES OF MANY INDIANS.”

TO DIMINISH THAT POWER, MR EDAMARUKU IS RUNNING A COURSE AT DELHI ’S NATIONAL SCIENCE CENTRE THIS MONTH TITLED “THE SCIENCE BEHIND MIRACLES”, WHERE HE TEACHES SCHOOLCHILDREN HOW TRICKS SUCH AS LEVITATION ARE PERFORMED.

THE IDEA IS TO FOSTER A HEALTHY SCEPTICISM IN THE NEXT GENERATION OF TEACHERS, LEADERS AND MANAGERS AND A DESIRE TO SEEK SCIENTIFIC RATHER THAN MYSTICAL EXPLANATIONS WHEN FACED WITH SEEMINGLY INEXPLICABLE PHENOMENA. “WE WANT THESE CHILDREN TO BE AMBASSADORS OF CHANGE,” MR EDAMARUKU SAID. “WE WANT THEM TO GO HOME AND SHOW THEIR FRIENDS AND FAMILIES WHAT THEY HAVE LEARNT.”

RELIGION AND SUPERSTITION HAVE A LONG AND RICH HISTORY IN INDIA. THREE OF THE WORLD’S SIX MAJOR FAITHS WERE FOUNDED HERE AND THE COUNTRY HAS MORE TEMPLES THAN IT DOES SCHOOLS. THE COUNTRY’S LARGE POPULATION, HIGH LEVELS OF POVERTY AND LOW LEVELS OF EDUCATION PRODUCE THE PERFECT CONDITIONS FOR OLD WIVES’ TALES AND SUPERSTITIOUS BELIEFS TO ENDURE.

DURING A RECENT SOLAR ECLIPSE, FAMILIES BURIED HANDICAPPED CHILDREN UP TO THEIR NECKS IN EARTH IN THE BELIEF THAT IT WOULD CURE THEM. INDIAN NEWSPAPERS OFTEN CONTAIN STORIES OF PEOPLE CARRYING OUT HUMAN SACRIFICES TO CONCEIVE, OBTAIN OCCULT POWERS OR ACHIEVE BUSINESS SUCCESS.

EXPERTS SAY THE DECENTRALISED NATURE OF INDIA’S MAIN RELIGION, HINDUISM, ALSO PLAYS A ROLE BECAUSE THERE IS ALMOST NO REGULATION OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICE OR THE ACTIONS OF THOSE WHO CLAIM TO REPRESENT IT. AS A RESULT, ANYONE CAN SET THEMSELVES UP AS A GURU OFFERING ADVICE ON MATTERS RANGING FROM THE SPIRITUAL, TO HEALTH OR MONEY.

IN MARCH, DELHI POLICE ARRESTED SHIV MURAT DWIVEDI, A FORMER SECURITY GUARD TURNED GURU, FOR RUNNING A MULTIMILLION-DOLLAR PROSTITUTION RING OUT OF HIS RELIGIOUS HEADQUARTERS. LAST MONTH, POLICE FINALLY CAUGHT UP WITH PARAMAHAMSA NITHYANANDA, A SELF-STYLED GURU FROM BANGALORE WHO WAS WANTED ON CHARGES OF RAPE AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF HIS DEVOTEES, AND FRAUD. “THESE PEOPLE ARE CRIMINALS AND CONMEN. THEY ARE HIDING BEHIND RELIGION,” MR EDAMARUKU SAID. “WE HAVE TWO – ONE 21ST-CENTURY AND ONE 16TH-CENTURY . THE 16TH-CENTURY IS HOLDING THE 21ST-CENTURY BACK.”

THE LEVITATION TRICK IS SIMULATED BY LYING ON THE FLOOR UNDER A BLANKET AND THEN SITTING UP SLOWLY WHILE HOLDING OUT TWO HOCKEY STICKS TO MIMIC THE RISING OF THE LEGS AND FEET. ANOTHER “MIRACLE”, IN WHICH GODMEN MAKE ROCKS EXPLODE SIMPLY BY SPRINKLING HOLY WATER ON THEM, IS ACHIEVED BY EMBEDDING SODIUM CRYSTALS IN THE ROCKS, WHICH EXPAND RAPIDLY ON CONTACT WITH WATER.

MR.EDAMARUKU DEMONSTRATES TO SCHOOLCHILDREN SOME OF THE TRICKS USED BY FAKE HOLYMEN IN INDIA.

LIKEWISE, A TRICK WHERE A FAKIR IS ABLE TO CREATE FIRE BY POURING GHEE, OR CLARIFIED BUTTER, ON A PILE OF WOOD AND STARING AT IT, IS ACCOMPLISHED BECAUSE THE GHEE IS ACTUALLY GLYCERINE AND THE WOOD HAS BEEN SPRINKLED WITH POTASSIUM PERMANGANATE. THE TWO CHEMICALS REACT AND COMBUST A FEW MINUTES AFTER COMING INTO CONTACT.

EXPOSING THESE FAKE BABAS CAN BE DANGEROUS, HOWEVER.

“I HAVE NEVER FELT THREATENED BY THE MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC, BUT THE BABAS HAVE ATTACKED ME,” MR EDAMARUKU SAID.

ONE FAKIR THREW A POT OF BURNING COALS IN MR EDAMARUKU’S FACE WHEN HE REVEALED HOW THE TANTRIC WAS ABLE TO HOLD IT WITHOUT BURNING HIMSELF. ANOTHER TIME, THE STATE GOVERNMENT IN KERALA TRIED TO ARREST HIM AFTER HE DISCOVERED THAT OFFICIALS AT THE FAMOUS SABARIMALA TEMPLE WERE FAKING LIGHTS IN THE SKY, WHICH DRAW MILLIONS OF PILGRIMS – AND GENERATE MILLIONS OF DOLLARS OF REVENUE – EVERY JANUARY.

MOST FAMOUSLY, THOUGH, MR EDAMARUKU AGREED TO PARTICIPATE IN A LIVE TELEVISION SHOW WHERE A FAMOUS TANTRIC TRIED TO KILL HIM USING BLACK MAGIC. THE SHOW WAS ONE OF THE MOST WATCHED IN INDIAN TELEVISION HISTORY AND WHEN THE GODMAN FAILED, HIS CAREER WAS IN TATTERS.

IN THE PAST, THE RATIONALISTS CONCENTRATED THEIR ACTIVITIES ON RURAL COMMUNITIES, THINKING THAT SUPERSTITION WOULD FADE NATURALLY IN THE CITIES.

OF LATE, MR EDAMARUKU HAS BECOME WORRIED BY THE DEGREE TO WHICH MANY WEALTHY URBAN INDIANS CONTINUE TO EMBRACE THESE BELIEFS.

“THERE IS A POPULAR MISCONCEPTION THAT SUPERSTITION ONLY EXISTS IN RURAL AREAS BUT SUPERSTITION IS THRIVING IN WELL-EDUCATED, URBAN MIDDLE CLASS FAMILIES AS WELL,” MR EDAMARUKU SAID.

THE GODMEN WHO WERE ARRESTED RECENTLY BOTH HAD MIDDLE- AND UPPER-CLASS CLIENTS AND A FEW WEEKS AGO IT EMERGED THAT A DELHI HIGH SCHOOL HAD HIRED AN ASTROLOGER TO GIVE CAREER ADVICE TO GRADUATING STUDENTS.

MODERN LIFE, WITH ALL ITS PRESSURES, MAY BE EVEN CONTRIBUTING TO THE PHENOMENON. FEW URBAN INDIANS HAVE THE TIME TO DO LONG PUJAS (PRAYER CEREMONIES) OR GO ON PILGRIMAGES ANY MORE, YET WITH COMPETITION FOR GOOD JOBS AND PLACES AT INDIA’S LEADING UNIVERSITIES HIGH, MANY PEOPLE FEEL THE SERVICES OF PRIVATE GURUS OR A NUMEROLOGIST MIGHT JUST GIVE THEM THE EDGE. HENCE THE COURSE, WHICH COVERS EVERYTHING FROM MIRACLES TO NUMEROLOGY AND ASTROLOGY.

“I WANT THESE CHILDREN TO REALISE THAT IF THEY GET GOOD EXAM RESULTS, IT IS BECAUSE THEY HAVE WORKED HARD NOT BECAUSE THEIR PARENTS HAVE PAID FOR A GODMAN TO DO A PUJA. I WANT PEOPLE TO MAKE THEIR OWN DECISIONS. THEY SHOULD NOT BE GUIDED BY IGNORANCE, BUT BY KNOWLEDGE.”

ONE AREA WHERE HE CHOOSES TO TREAD LIGHTLY, HOWEVER, IS RELIGION. HE IS MINDFUL OF THE FACT THAT MANY OF THE CHILDREN WHO ATTEND THE COURSE COME FROM RELIGIOUS HOMES. SO FAR, NOT ONE CHILD HAS BEEN WITHDRAWN FROM THE COURSE, WHICH LASTS FIVE DAYS, AND WHICH HAS BEEN RUNNING ON A WEEKLY CYCLE SINCE MAY 17. IN FACT THE LAST WEEK, WHICH STARTS TODAY, IS OVERSUBSCRIBED.

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

FAMOUS QUOTES

RICHARD DAWKINS (1941) 69 YEARS OLD.

HE IS A BRITISH ETHOLOGIST, EVOLUTIONARY BIOLOGIST AND POPULAR SCIENCE AUTHOR. HE WAS FORMERLY PROFESSOR FOR PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING OF SCIENCE AT OXFORD AND WAS A FELLOW OF NEW COLLEGE, OXFORD.

DAWKINS CAME TO PROMINENCE WITH HIS 1976 BOOK THE SELFISH GENE, WHICH POPULARISED THE GENE-CENTRED VIEW OF EVOLUTION AND INTRODUCED THE TERM MEME. IN 1982, HE INTRODUCED INTO EVOLUTIONARY BIOLOGY AN INFLUENTIAL CONCEPT, PRESENTED IN HIS BOOK THE EXTENDED PHENOTYPE, THAT THE PHENOTYPIC EFFECTS OF A GENE ARE NOT NECESSARILY LIMITED TO AN ORGANISM'S BODY, BUT CAN STRETCH FAR INTO THE ENVIRONMENT, INCLUDING THE BODIES OF OTHER ORGANISMS.

DAWKINS IS WELL KNOWN FOR HIS CANDID CRITICISM OF CREATIONISM AND INTELLIGENT DESIGN. IN HIS 1986 BOOK THE BLIND WATCHMAKER, HE ARGUED AGAINST THE WATCHMAKER ANALOGY, AN ARGUMENT FOR THE EXISTENCE OF A SUPERNATURAL CREATOR BASED UPON THE COMPLEXITY OF LIVING ORGANISMS. INSTEAD, HE DESCRIBED EVOLUTIONARY PROCESSES AS ANALOGOUS TO A BLIND WATCHMAKER. HE HAS SINCE WRITTEN SEVERAL POPULAR SCIENCE BOOKS, AND MAKES REGULAR TELEVISION AND RADIO APPEARANCES, PREDOMINANTLY DISCUSSING THESE TOPICS.

DAWKINS IS AN ATHEIST, SECULAR HUMANIST, SCEPTIC, RATIONALIST AND SUPPORTER OF THE BRIGHTS MOVEMENT. HE HAS BEEN REFERRED TO IN THE MEDIA AS "DARWIN'S ROTTWEILER", BY ANALOGY WITH ENGLISH BIOLOGIST T. H. HUXLEY, WHO WAS KNOWN AS "DARWIN'S BULLDOG" FOR HIS ADVOCACY OF CHARLES DARWIN'S EVOLUTIONARY IDEAS. IN HIS 2006 BOOK THE GOD DELUSION, DAWKINS CONTENDS THAT A SUPERNATURAL CREATOR ALMOST CERTAINLY DOES NOT EXIST AND THAT FAITH QUALIFIES AS A DELUSION − AS A FIXED FALSE BELIEF. AS OF NOVEMBER 2007, THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE VERSION HAD SOLD MORE THAN 2 MILLION COPIES AND HAD BEEN TRANSLATED INTO 31 OTHER LANGUAGES, MAKING IT HIS MOST POPULAR BOOK TO DATE.

"AQUARIUS IS A MISCELLANEOUS SET OF STARS ALL AT DIFFERENT DISTANCES FROM US, WHICH HAVE NO CONNECTION WITH EACH OTHER EXCEPT THAT THEY CONSTITUTE A (MEANINGLESS) PATTERN WHEN SEEN FROM A CERTAIN (NOT PARTICULARLY SPECIAL) PLACE IN THE GALAXY (HERE)."

“THE UNIVERSE THAT WE OBSERVE HAS PRECISELY THE PROPERTIES WE SHOULD EXPECT IF THERE IS, AT BOTTOM, NO DESIGN, NO PURPOSE, NO EVIL, NO GOOD, NOTHING BUT PITILESS INDIFFERENCE.”