THE SKEPTIC ARENA.COM

July 5, 2014

The Closing of The New Atheist Mind

by Graham Veale

*Perhaps the oddest feature of New Atheism is its tendency to be shaped by the movements that it implacably opposes. One reason that New Atheist literature rose to prominence was that it offered a radical response to Islamism.*

Graham, do you have any evidence to support that assertion? How do you know that Atheist's response to Islam caused it to rise to prominence? Can you provide polling data? Links? Anything?

And perhaps you could explain what part of the Atheist response to Islam is radical?

*This is the view found among some Muslim groups that true religion and a secular society must always be at war.*

Graham, I wouldn't call it a war as much as a genocide: religious freaks have been killing Atheists as long as there have been Atheists. There are very few examples of the reverse (Stalin being the most obvious one; and even he spent years in a Christian seminary where he learned from the Bible that mass murder was acceptable ... as long as you could justify it).

Graham, you justify every one of God's mass murders, don't you?

Of course you do.

*Bloodshed will always follow when the two societies meet;*

Graham, thanks for the intellectual nugget, but I don't think that one is going to fly very far through the history books. Since the American Constitution created the world's first secular government, you may have a difficult time coming up with "secular" societies.

*the believer will subjugate the infidel or be subjugated himself.*

Graham, in the Muslim world, the infidel was almost never an Atheist - but a Christian. You two cults have been banging each other over the head with your invisible ghosts for 1,400 years. 9/11 was simply the latest salvo. But you can feel good because, in response to Allah taking out 2 of our tallest buildings, your God took out 2 of His countries.

Chalk one up for the Jewish Guy.

*Now New Atheists might be a tad prickly, and they might call on unbelievers to be a little grumpier in public. But that’s as far as their “call to arms” goes.*

Graham, good catch. While Ghost Worshipers continue to kill each other all over the world as they have for centuries, Atheists pursue the battle over the internet, while fighting for the minds of people ... not for their blood.

*New Atheists cannot be associated with the violent intolerance of Islamism.*

Graham, but Christianity can. After all, the Muslims learned everything they know from you guys.

*How strange, then, to find the New Atheist and the Jihadist agreeing on what Western thought is all about. As Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit explain in Occidentalism, Islamism typically takes a two-dimensional and caricatured view of the Western mind.*

Graham, that's because for most of them, that's about as deep as their thinking is capable of going ... about the same as Christians.

*To the Islamist (or Jihadist or Islamofacist), Western thought is biased by materialism. Science, for example, is only interested in impersonal particles and the mechanical forces that operate on them;*

Graham, for them to believe that, is to ignore the more complex things that are formed by those impersonal particles and forces. That is a mistake commonly repeated by Christian Apologists, as well.

*it has no concern with the realm of meaning. Western economies are geared to producing material comfort and have no concern with righteousness.*

Graham, since America is 75% Christian, they can't be attributing those insults to Atheists who only make up 4%. They must be talking about you, Graham. They are claiming that Christians are materialistic and unrighteous; and the wild success of those preachers who specialize in spreading the "prosperity gospel" is evidence that the Muslims may be right about many Christians.

*Westerners are obsessed with practical problems, and are always focused on means rather than ends.*

Graham, tell them that their focus on ends rather than means is probably the reason why the only place on Earth that is more barbaric and backwards than Muslim countries ... is Africa.

*The individual’s preferences always trump moral concerns.*

Graham, that assumes that individual preferences cannot include moral concerns. Why can't they include moral concerns?

*The demands of the modern always triumph over the yearnings of the spiritual.*

Graham, the demands of the real world should triumph over the yearnings of the imagination. That doesn't mean you can't enjoy an imaginary world - it just means you need to be adult enough ... to know the difference.

*Given the inherent idolatry of the Western mind the faithful have no choice but to oppose such faithlessness by every means possible.*

Graham, of course they have a choice. They are not being forced into being murderous assholes - they choose that path ... just like Christians did for centuries.

*There can, by definition, be no point of compromise between the Sacred and the Secular.*

Graham, the fact that many religious and secular organizations in America work together is proof ... that they are dead wrong.

*If faith is to survive the Western civilization must die; or so the Islamist argues. But the Islamist analysis is merely a perverted reading of a highly selective sample of Western writers. What about the Romantics? The Reformers? What about Augustine, Aquinas, Anselm and Abelard? It is bizarre to suggest that the Western mind has no place for spiritual commitment.*

Graham, I'm afraid you are right. It will probably be many centuries before humans finally give up ghost worship.

*Yet, instead of answering Islamism with a careful analysis of Western thought, the New Atheist accepts the Islamist’s premises.*

Graham, that statement proves you know next to nothing about Atheists.

*The New Atheist agrees that there is a fundamental conflict between theism and Western thought;*

No Graham, Atheists agree there is a fundamental conflict between theism and rational thought.

*the Jihadist has simply picked the wrong side. New Atheists seem to accept that the Jihadist is the pure embodiment of theism.*

Graham, "seem to accept?"

Graham ... have you ever even met an Atheist?

The only thing this essay has proven is that you are completely unqualified to write on this subject.

*After all, New Atheists insist that the quantitative, empirical methods of scientific investigation are the paradigm of rationality.*

Wrong Graham. There are Atheists who believe in acupuncture, chiropractic, alien visitations, Bigfoot, ESP, and a whole assortment of crazy shit (sorry if I hit a nerve on any of those).

The only guarantee of rationality you get with an Atheist is in the area of religion ... and that is by definition.

*And because the Semitic religions of the Middle East depend on blind, irrational faith, there can be no room for compromise between the Western Mind and true religion.*

Actually Graham, modern progressive Christians are able to do the mental gymnastics necessary to accept provable scientific fact (like evolution and global warming) while at the same time, maintaining their faith in God.

In fact the vast majority of those who accept evolution are Christians. Surprised?

Do the math, Graham: 75% of America is Christian. About 4% are Atheists. But about 40% accept evolution as fact. The numbers don't lie Graham ... which is why you people have to.

*To the New Atheist, theology is founded on superstition and expressed in tyranny.*

Graham, that is pretty much what history has shown. There is no evidence to the contrary ... that's why you need faith.

*Sympathy is expressed for the deluded masses,*

Graham, I would offer my sympathy, but based on thousands of years of Christian horror, I just don't think sympathy is the appropriate response.

*but religious thought is the “root of all evil”.*

Wrong Graham. If all religion ended tomorrow, would all murders and wars cease?

Of course not.

Religion is not the root of all evil, but until its evil aspects have been brought under control, civilization will continue to pay a horrible price for its continued existence.

*Religious belief necessarily produces Crusades and Intifadas.*

Graham, that was an obvious attempt to bring other religions down to the level of Christianity and Islam ... but history doesn't support your assertion. Not all religions are as evil as Christianity and Islam.

*AC Grayling is adamant that the only reason that modern Christians no longer engage in terrible Inquisitions is that they no longer have the reigns of power.*

Graham, it is true that Christians have far less power now than they've had in the last 1,700 years, but I don't think you can attribute the civilizing of Christians to only that one fact. It is more likely that many factors have caused Christians to become more civilized, and to abandon their violent, murderous practices.

And not to be a grammar Nazi, Graham, but you make yourself look ignorant when you use the wrong "reins."

*Leaders violently opposed to organised Religion and obsessed with modernity, like Stalin and Hitler, are labelled “religious.”*

Graham, Hitler's autobiography proves that he *was* religious. Stalin, on the other hand, was trained in a Christian Seminary, but he rejected God and became an Atheist. How much influence his seminary training had on his murderous ways ... we'll never know.

*In the New Atheist worldview this must be so, because the Stalinist and Nazi regimes brought about great suffering.*

Graham, I'm glad that sentence made sense to you. Unfortunately, it makes no sense to rational people because Atheism is not a "worldview." It is a rejection of a worldview. That is not the same thing, Graham.

*So, in a panicked response to the dangers of religious violence, New Atheism forces false dichotomies on the reader.*

Graham, I see you've been hanging out on the logic pages of Wikipedia. Unfortunately for you, the false dichotomies you referred to, were a Straw Man argument ... and therefore illogical.

Those 'false dichotomies' only exist in *your* mind, Graham ... not theirs.

*You can either have religion or rationality;*

See what I mean Graham?

I already explained how Christians can accept rational, provable science while maintaining their faith. I also explained how Atheists can be very irrational outside the area of religion.

So the false dichotomies were created by your misunderstanding of Atheists, which led to your creation of a Straw Man argument.

Graham, watching a Ghost Worshiper like you, trying to manipulate logic, is like watching Paris Hilton trying to conduct a physics experiment.

*you can either be devout, or you can be tolerant.*

Graham, another Straw Man. At this rate, you'll be able to open up your own cornfield.

Believers and Atheists can be devout about some things and tolerant about others. Once again, you've proven that the false dichotomies exist only in *your* mind.

*But Tertullian and Chrysostom were arguing for religious tolerance centuries before the Enlightenment. Philosophers and historians have noted the importance of Christian thought for the very concept of human rights.*

Graham, too bad they never considered slavery to be an issue of human rights. As I recall, slaves were counted as less than a full human, and the people doing the counting in those days ... were nearly all Christians.

*And from Justin Martyr to the present day, mainstream Christian thought has emphasised and defended the rationality of the Christian faith.*

Graham, next time you find yourself near a dictionary, look up the word "oxymoron."

Let me help you with a hint: "the rationality of the Christian faith."

*The New Atheist is welcome to disagree with all these theologians and scholars;*

Graham, if they had tried disagreeing in those days, they would have found themselves tied to a stake, on the wrong end of a Bic Lighter.

*but only blind, prejudiced dogmatism could pretend that they never existed.*

Graham, yet another Straw Man. I have no problem with the existence of your theologians and scholars. I have no problem with the existence of Jesus. Whether He existed or not is of no concern to me.

My only concern is with your imaginary friend. And not because you people believe He is real - but because of the actions you have taken, and continue to take ... on His behalf.

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

THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

1 in 10 deaths among working-age adults in the U.S.

are due to excessive drinking

Excessive alcohol use accounts for 1 in 10 deaths among working-age adults ages 20-64 years in the U.S. Excessive alcohol use led to approximately 88,000 deaths per year from 2006 to 2010, and shortened the lives of those who died by about 30 years. These deaths were due to health effects from drinking too much over time, such as breast cancer, liver disease, and heart disease; and health effects from drinking too much in a short period of time, such as violence, alcohol poisoning, and motor vehicle crashes. In total, there were 2.5 million years of potential life lost each year due to excessive alcohol use.

About 70% of the deaths involved males. About 5% of the deaths involved people under 21. The highest death rate due to excessive drinking was in New Mexico and the lowest was in New Jersey.

Excessive alcohol use is a leading cause of preventable death that kills many Americans in the prime of their lives. Americans need to redouble their efforts to implement scientifically proven public health approaches to reduce this tragic loss of life and the huge economic costs that result.

Excessive drinking includes binge drinking (4 or more drinks on an occasion for women and 5 or more drinks on an occasion for men), heavy drinking (8 or more drinks a week for women and 15 or more drinks a week for men), and any alcohol use by pregnant women or those under the minimum legal drinking age of 21.

Excessive drinking cost the United States about $224 billion, or $1.90 per drink, in 2006. Most of these costs were due to lost productivity, including reduced earnings among excessive drinkers as well as deaths due to excessive drinking among working age adults.

The independent HHS Community Preventive Services Task Force recommends several evidence-based strategies to reduce excessive drinking. These include increasing alcohol taxes, regulating alcohol outlet density, and avoiding further privatization of alcohol retail sales.

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

FAMOUS QUOTES

William Kingdon Clifford (1845 – 1879) 33 years

He was an English mathematician and philosopher. He introduced what is now termed geometric algebra, a special case of the Clifford algebra named in his honor. The operations of geometric algebra have the effect of mirroring, rotating, translating, and mapping the geometric objects that are being modeled to new positions. Clifford algebras in general and geometric algebra in particular, have been of ever-increasing importance to mathematical physics, geometry, and computing. Clifford was the first to suggest that gravitation might be a manifestation of an underlying geometry, foreshadowing the theory that Einstein would develop.

"If a man, holding a belief which he was taught in childhood

or persuaded of afterwards,

keeps down and pushes away

any doubts which arise about it in his mind,

purposely avoids the reading of books and the company of men

that call into question or discuss it,

and regards as impious those questions which cannot easily be asked without disturbing it—

the life of that man is one long sin against mankind."