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Richard Dawkins Fails Spectacularly on Feminism and Islam

by Lauren Nelson

*It’s not unusual for renowned atheist Richard Dawkins to rub people of faith the wrong way. It’s not unheard of for him to get on the bad side of feminists. But it’s not every day that he pisses off the intersection of the two groups. But this week, with a series of tweets, that’s exactly what Dawkins did. He started the hullabaloo off with this humdinger:*

*"Islam needs a feminist revolution. It will be hard. What can we do to help?"*

*What on earth could possibly be wrong with such a comment? Let’s count.*

*For starters, Dawkins is a wealthy white Western male dictating what just under a billion women — and overwhelmingly, women of color — around the world “need” to do, with little to no context for what their lives are like.*

Lauren, in Dawkins' tweet, I see 2 assertions followed by a question. Could you please explain where in those 3 sentences ... you see Dawkins dictating anything?

I also wish to question why you thought that Dawkins' economic status, race, geographic location, and sex were relevant to what he had to say?

Lauren, if your online business is successful, and if I am judging your picture correctly, I would guess that you are a well-to-do, white, Western female. Since you and Dawkins differ in those four categories only in sex ... is that your complaint? Must Dawkins restrict his comments only to men?

*He’s relying primarily on mainstream media accounts of what it’s like to be a woman living in Middle Eastern countries where Islam is prevalent.*

Lauren, on what basis do you make that assertion? How do you know what Dawkins is relying on? Did you ask him?

*To be sure, those stories can be jarring. Who can hear Malala tell her tale and not be moved? Who can read of an 11-year-old Iranian girl being gang raped without rage? But what Dawkins, and many critics of Islam’s relationship with women, forget is that this is only part of the picture.*

Lauren, since that's the part he's criticizing ... what's the problem?

*There are many more lived female experiences within this far-from-homogeneous culture of faith, and not all of them are ugly or oppressed.*

Lauren, again, so what?

Obviously, they aren't the experiences Dawkins is referring to.

*Much like most practicing Western Christian women are not sold to future husbands by their fathers for a couple of goats, many Muslim women embrace a very different interpretation of Islam than what we see in the headlines or read verbatim in the Qur’an.*

Lauren, the problem isn't so much what Muslim women embrace within Islam, as much as it is ... what the men are embracing.

*But beyond the arrogance of assuming all women experience Muslim life the same way*

Lauren, the only arrogance I see is you assuming that Dawkins thinks all women experience Muslim life the same way. We will all wait patiently while you attempt to locate the quote that supports that assertion. Failure to find it will prove that you did nothing more than to build a Straw Man argument.

*is the ignorance of assuming that Muslim feminism doesn’t already exist.*

Lauren, while you're looking for that other quote, see if you can find one for that last assertion as well.

But since Malala's story was featured on Dawkins' web site, it might be kind of a hard sell for you to convince us that Dawkins is ignorant of Muslim feminism ... but good luck finding those quotes.

*This couldn’t be further from the truth. As Noor Al-Sibai wrote earlier this year:*

(I'll skip over this section as it is just a long, boring quote that Lauren used to add more straw to her argument)

*In other words, Dawkins is way late to the party. The Muslim feminist revolution is well underway, and even a cursory amount of research (Richard? Meet Google.) would have demonstrated as much.*

Lauren, what you lack in coherent and logical writing ability is more than compensated for by your snarky and limitless pettiness. Until you can produce the quotes to back up your accusations you are simply embarrassing yourself by beating all the stuffing out of your army of Straw Men.

*His prior arrogance*

Lauren, talk about the pot calling the kettle black.

<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/hypocrisy?s=t>

*is compounded by the fact that he somehow thinks he is bringing something new to the table,*

So Lauren, now you're a mind-reader? How do you know what Dawkins is thinking? Do you have any quotes to support that?

Lauren, that cornfield is overflowing with Straw Men. Don't you have any other logical fallacies you can resort to?

*the implication being that these poor non-Western women of color could not possibly have figured this out before now and without his help.*

Lauren, what you need is not an implication but an explication ... backed up by facts. What you don't need are lessons in how to write nasty spiteful personal insults ... that, you have mastered.

*In this sense, at least, Dawkins is in good company. Western feminists have historically, erroneously, assumed they are the only ones up to the task.*

Lauren, and how do you know that? Can you produce any evidence for that assertion?

*In a post-colonial era, such charges add insult to injury in their condescending premise and clumsy execution. As Anne Theriault explained at Huffington Post:*

(I will save you all the long boring quote and pickup with Lauren)

*Ignorance was bad. Arrogance was worse. But Dawkins’ biggest offense rests elsewhere: ego.*

Lauren, this essay is the proof that you are describing ... yourself.

That is called psychological projection Lauren.

<http://changingminds.org/explanations/behaviors/coping/projection.htm>

The ego you think you see in Dawkins is actually you looking in a mirror; and what you see - you don't like. And judging from the tsunami of hate you received for writing this vile piece of trash ... you're not alone.

*After sending out his initial tweet, he was hit with an onslaught of messages from Twitter users calling him out on the first two problems with his message. Instead of hearing their words and correcting course, he defensively doubled down,*

Lauren, remember what I just told you about psychological projection?

Following this essay, instead of hearing the thousands of complaints and correcting course, you defensively doubled down and tried in vain to defend this sorry journalistic embarrassment by writing a pathetic defensive reply.

Lauren, every word you write about Dawkins, describes you ...

far better than it does him.

*rattling off passages from religious texts and referencing practices associated with fundamentalism.*

Lauren, what you call "rattling off" and "referencing" is called producing evidence to back up one's claims. Don't worry Lauren, that is one trait that you show no signs of developing.

*He pretended not to hear those informing him of the existing feminist movement.*

Lauren, Dawkins didn't have to pretend. As I already pointed out, Malala's story and many others like it, have already appeared on his web site, so he is quite aware of what is going on in Muslim culture.

*He shrugged off those who pointed out that, as a white Western male, he might not have the best perspective on what non-Western women of color might want. He was derisive and belittling.*

Lauren, much like you in this essay. If Dawkins truly is everything you claim he is ... then you may have found your soulmate.

*When you offer someone “help” and they decline, it’s hardly productive to berate them for turning you down. If Dawkins wants to help, here are some practical suggestions. He should educate himself on the rich history of Musawah. He should donate some of his wealth to the efforts of existing Muslim feminist organizations. He should use his wide network to signal-boost Muslim feminists advocating on Twitter. But most importantly, he should start by listening to the people he aims to assist.*

Lauren, you are such a wealth of great advice. Adding that to your charming, sweet personality; and then subtracting for your struggles with honesty; I tried to imagine what being married to someone like you might be like.

After one minute, I ran downstairs and hugged my wife as hard as I could ... and thanked her for being the person she was. People like you help me to realize just how lucky I am.

*For a man who values logic, you’d think that at least that last part would have occurred to him already.*

Lauren, I wouldn't have expected you to end this nasty little hack job any other way. But for someone who has just set a new world record for the number of Straw Man arguments in one essay ... your last sentence proved, yet again, that you possess a malignant case of psychological projection.

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2015/07/25/richard-dawkins-fails-spectacularly-on-feminism-and-islam/?utm_campaign=shareaholic&utm_medium=twitter&utm_source=socialnetwork>

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Atheism’s Next Frontier is Intersectionality

additional thoughts by Lauren Nelson

*The other day, I wrote a piece for The Friendly Atheist criticizing Richard Dawkins for his rhetorical choices in a tweet attempting to engage the subject of feminism in Islam.*

Yes Lauren, we know. That was an hour out of my life that I will never get back.

*The essay relied on academic and media coverage of Muslim feminist activism in addition to writings and social media posts of Muslim feminists, and argued that Dawkins’ approach to activism was problematic for a few reasons.*

Lauren, as I recall, you (a successful, white, Western woman) had a major problem because Dawkins' approach was written by a wealthy, white, Western man.

*The resulting uproar was fast and ugly,*

Lauren, when you write poorly thought-out, illogical, personal attacks filled with Straw Man arguments, you probably shouldn't be so surprised when it results in an uproar of protest from the skeptical community. We don't suffer dishonesty well.

*Let me start by saying this: I never said feminism could not be of benefit in the Muslim community. I never denied that women are often subjugated and abused under the justification of certain interpretations of Islam, particularly in Middle Eastern nations where religion is often wielded as a weapon against women. I never contended that we shouldn’t attempt to be allies to women in those positions. I don’t disagree with any of those sentiments.*

Lauren, yet you ignored all of those sentiments, and instead, focused on Islamic women who were not being oppressed. All the audience has to do is to go back to your essay and read where you tried to paint a picture of nearly a billion happy Muslim women.

*I disagree with the manner in which advocacy has been executed by Dawkins and others.*

Yeah Lauren, we got that whole wealthy, white, Western male shtick.

*My argument, in a nutshell, is that we must be mindful of the ways in which we lend our support, and self-critical of our missteps along the way.*

No Lauren, that was not your argument. Your argument consisted of a series of Straw Man attacks backed up by nothing more than your presumption that you could read Dawkins' mind. And you produced zero evidence to support any of your accusations.

*Why can’t it be enough to simply offer help?*

Lauren, if you hadn't let your emotions (probably hatred) get the better of you, you might have understood what so many others tried to tell you: that offering help was exactly what Dawkins was trying to do.

*The piece was about urging Dawkins, with all his influence, to apply historical and cultural consideration to the way he advocates for Muslim women fighting the good fight.*

Lauren, no it wasn't. Your piece on Dawkins was an amateurish hack job that would bring shame to any writer capable of feeling shame. Your essay dripped with hate, childish little snarky insults, and dishonesty.

Lauren, do you remember this from your essay:

*"he was hit with an onslaught of messages from Twitter users .... Instead of hearing their words and correcting course, he defensively doubled down"*

Lauren, in attacking Dawkins, you predicted precisely what you, yourself, would resort to, when attacked by thousands of rational people ... as this essay proves.

*Islam’s feminist revolution is underway, and has been for some time now. It may not be as advanced or visible as Dawkins and the rest of us would like, but there are women within the faith working hard to attain political, social, and economic equality for Muslim women, particularly in nations where Islam and government are inextricably intertwined.*

Lauren, you assumed Dawkins was unaware of all that, yet you produced no evidence to back up that assumption.

*To want to contribute to their noble pursuit is laudable,*

Lauren, and how did you show your gratitude to Dawkins for wanting to contribute to their noble pursuit?

What you did was disgraceful. If anyone hurt the chances of Muslim women in their fight for equality ... it was you Lauren.

Men who read the trash you wrote might now be hesitant to offer help, knowing that people like you are lying in wait.

*but in reflecting on history, it becomes clear that we should be measured in our approach to doing so. These struggles are taking place in a very different cultural context than Western feminisms’ wars. There are disagreements within these feminist communities as to how the movement should proceed. The conflict is complex, and demands a nuanced approach to allyship, particularly when coming from a place where one does not have first-hand life experience within the context in question.*

Lauren, Dawkins does not need first-hand life experience if he can learn from the many Muslim women who have taught us all what it is like to be a woman in such a society.

*This informs the criticism. When I point out that Dawkins is white and male, it is not to say that being white or male is inherently bad.*

Lauren, another Straw Man. No one is saying that you are saying that being male is bad. What everyone is trying to point out to you is that being male does not eliminate one from the conversation.

*When I criticize his activist efforts as a white male, it is not to say that white men should not participate in activism supporting people who are not white or male. It is to say that, as he has not lived as a woman, a Muslim, or a person of color — designations held common amongst a large portion of the most severely impacted by this issue — it is particularly important for him to be self-critical when engaging his influence, to consider history and culture in his attempts.*

Lauren, why does Dawkins need to be self-critical when offering to help Muslim women? And how do you know Dawkins did not consider history and culture before posting his tweet?

What in his tweet indicated that he failed to do so?

*There is a heightened level of responsibility for Dawkins. His high profile and large audience grant him a great deal of influence. Influence is power. It is the ability to inform, motivate, and shape the behaviors of others. And with such power comes responsibility, even in the context of character limits. The best way for us to help is not to blaze forward without recognizing the work that has been done.*

Lauren, what evidence can you provide to support your assertion that Dawkins has not recognized the work that has been done?

*It is to start by seeking information and understanding, follow with acknowledging the victories attained, and continue with asking members of the community how support can be provided to existing efforts. Dawkins’ mistake was skipping the first two steps.*

Lauren, the mistake was yours - in assuming that Dawkins skipped the first 2 steps.

*As atheists, not members of the community in question, we must not stumble by assuming the role of sparking others’ revolutions, particularly when they already exist.*

Lauren, you keep assuming that Dawkins is unaware that a revolution is underway in the Muslim world.

Methinks thou assumeth too much.

*We should strive instead to be those who support them.*

Lauren, I believe that's what Dawkins was trying to do when he tweeted *"What can we do to help?"*

Lauren, his tweet was less than 140 characters - how did you miss that part?

*Though the impact may not be readily clear today, history shows us that any other road is an unnecessarily slow one. This was the crux of the original piece.*

Lauren, the crux of the original piece was merely to construct a hit piece on someone important, in order to draw attention to yourself ... and you succeeded.

*What followed the publication of this criticism further proves the need for that intersectional self-criticism within atheism. Though the essay was a criticism of rhetoric, the backlash largely ignored this and was stunning in its lack of engagement with the substance.*

Lauren, you as an Atheist, should be better able to understand Christians and Muslims now, because this defensive, non-apology reply, proves that you mirror the same defective mental processes as religious believers, when confronted with evidence that they are wrong: you reacted exactly the same way.

Lauren, proving that you are incapable of admitting your mistakes makes me wonder if maybe you wouldn't be happier as a Christian. Think about it Lauren, if you become "born again," and Christians are right, you might get eternal life.

How great would that be?

Lauren. Do it. Do it now. Drop to your knees and accept Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. Christians will welcome you with open arms ... and we Atheists won't even notice you left.

*Many of the rejoinders came from people who seemed not to have read the post.*

Lauren, I did. In fact, I reprinted nearly every word and responded to nearly every sentence. Just reading the sickening crap that you wrote, left me feeling like I needed a shower.

*There were calls to prove Islamic feminism existed (something demonstrated with outside literature — check those links, folks).*

Lauren, yet you believe Dawkins hasn't. Why is that?

*There were incredulous, exasperated demands about how he possibly could have engaged fruitfully in light of my criticism (I point you to the last paragraph of the piece). There were claims that I was ignoring the plight of Muslim women in danger (read paragraph four). There were angry accusations of cultural relativism (ignoring that I cited, linked to, and reflected the opinions of many — not all, but many — Muslim feminists). The list goes on. So many of the laments were directly addressed in the piece, but that didn’t stop the rageful comments pretending they were not.*

Lauren, the rage I witnessed ... came mainly from you.

I think you have a great shot at being considered as the new poster child for the slogan "No good deed ever goes unpunished."

*A great deal of the reactions didn’t even pretend to respond to the piece. Instead, they resorted to personal attacks. I have since been called a sexist, a bigot, a racist, heartless, malicious, retarded, vile, evil*

Lauren, I strongly disagree ... with the "retarded" part.

 *— all for having the gall to criticize the rhetoric of a prominent atheist, for believing we were capable of more.*

Lauren, that's not why you were criticized. That's what you are telling yourself, is the reason that you were criticized, so that you can play the victim.

Think about that Lauren: Christians attack gays, Atheists, Muslims, and just about everyone else whom they cannot control. Then when they are called out on it, they immediately go into Christian Persecution Mode. It is a pathetic defense used when someone has been caught being intolerant and hateful.

Lauren ... that just described you perfectly. You unfairly attacked someone you obviously disliked intensely, and when everyone jumped on your bones for doing so, you borrowed the Christian Persecution Complex and used it as your defense. In your mind, you are now the one being persecuted; you are now the innocent victim ... just like all those Christian bigots.

Lauren, it seems as though I may have been right earlier when I suggested that you turn to Jesus. As you yourself pointed out earlier, countless people told you that you display sexism, bigotry, racism, heartlessness, maliciousness, vileness, and maybe even some evil. As I pointed out earlier, you also have the persecution complex down to a science. You have the outright hypocrisy that comes from accusing others of what you, yourself are guilty of.

Lauren ... Jesus. For you - He might be the answer.

*To be sure, not all the reactions can be characterized as such. Some raised valid questions, which is why this response was written.*

No Lauren, that is not why you wrote this response. If that had been the reason you would have addressed those valid questions; but we saw no such thing. The only thing we all just saw was someone who screwed up bigtime, who is now trying to weasel out of a mistake without having the integrity to admit that mistake.

*But the reactions that were defensive at best and derogatory at their ugliest were overwhelming.*

Lauren, and after reading your essay myself, I can understand why everyone was so outraged. You are possibly one of the most biased incompetent writers I have ever encountered ... and I do a lot of reading.

*If this is how the community responds to calls for growth, we’re in trouble.*

Lauren, this is how the community responds when someone tries to destroy another person unfairly. And I am proud of each and every one of them.

We all make mistakes, so Dawkins must have said things in the past that you could have attacked. But instead, you chose to attack him when he was just trying to help one of the most brutalized minorities in the world. That why the community beat the holy living shit out of you ... and you deserved every bit of it.

*If the community does not condemn such reactions vocally and publicly, it’s not just Dawkins failing to learn from the history of intersectional struggle; it’s the atheist movement as a whole.*

Lauren, that last paragraph proves to me that you are delusional beyond any hope of redemption. Please, please accept Jesus now. Do it for yourself; but most of all ... do it for us.

<http://rethinktherant.com/2015/07/27/atheisms-next-frontier-is-intersectionality/>

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THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

First evidence of farming has been found in the Middle East

Until now, it was believed that farming was "invented" some 12,000 years ago in the Cradle of Civilization -- Iraq, the Levant, parts of Turkey, and Iran -- an area that was home to some of the earliest known human civilizations. A new discovery offers the first evidence that trial plant cultivation began far earlier -- some 23,000 years ago.

The study focuses on the discovery of the first weed species at the site of a sedentary human camp on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Although weeds are considered a threat or nuisance in farming, their presence at the site of the 'Ohalo II people's camp' revealed the earliest signs of trial plant cultivation.

Because weeds thrive in cultivated fields and disturbed soils, a significant presence of weeds in archaeobotanical assemblages retrieved from Neolithic sites and settlements of later age is widely considered an indicator of systematic cultivation.

The Ohalo II people were fisher hunter-gatherers, and established a sedentary human camp. The site was unusually well preserved, having been charred, covered by lake sediment, and sealed in low-oxygen conditions -- ideal for the preservation of plant material. The researchers examined the weed species for morphological signs of domestic-type cereals and harvesting tools, although their very presence itself, is evidence of early farming.

The site bears the remains of six shelters and a particularly rich assemblage of plants. Upon retrieving and examining approximately 150,000 plant specimens, the researchers determined that early humans there had gathered over 140 species of plants. These included 13 known weeds mixed with edible cereals, such as wild emmer, wild barley, and wild oats.

The researchers found a grinding slab -- a stone tool with which cereal starch granules were extracted -- as well as a distribution of seeds around this tool, reflecting that the cereal grains were processed for consumption. The large number of cereals showing specific kinds of scars on their seeds indicate the likelihood of those cereals growing in fields, and the presence of sickle blades indicates that these humans deliberately planned the harvest of cereal.

The new study offers evidence that early humans clearly functioned with a basic knowledge of agriculture, and perhaps more importantly, exhibited foresight and extensive agricultural planning far earlier than previously believed.

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FAMOUS QUOTES

Winston Churchill

(no biography - previously quoted)

"You have enemies? Good.

That means you stood up for something

sometime in your life."