

INDIAN SKEPTIC

No. 02/01

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*Atheism: A Very Short Introduction***

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*It shall be the duty
of every citizen of
India -*

*to develop the
scientific temper,
humanism and the
spirit of inquiry and
reform*

*(Article 51A (h) Part IVA -
Fundamental Duties,
Constitution of India)*

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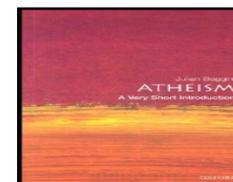


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Need Judicial Reforms and a Debate on the Issues of Sedition and Governance

Vidya Bhushan Rawat

As year 2010 is approaching to an end, the outrageous verdict pronounced by a Raipur court to Dr Binayak Sen is a reminder of how judicial system is working in India particularly the lower judiciary. It has not only shocked the nation but also proved that in this country any talk of senses would be dealt by the government and its authorities in the similar way. It is more shameful when we find the same charges being leveled against Arundhati Roy for alleged 'anti-national' remarks on Kashmir. It is sadly a poor reflection on how things are manipulated in India by authorities.. Definitely, it shocked the middle class upper caste Hindus also who think how such charge can be leveled

against him. So far treason and sedition charges were always domain of the 'Muslims' but now we are turning more 'secular' for the same.

But my issue is not with what Binayak Sen and Arundhati Roy write or who they meet which actually is part of the life of all of us who claim to work for people. As human rights activists we are supposed to meet and visit people who feel they are threatened and wrongly abused by the state and its authorities. All this is part of democratic process as the aim is to bring people to negotiating table and force the state to be more responsible. State has all the power and that power need to be used with utmost



care and more responsibility and accountability. State can not act in a streetfight acting on tit for tat slogan.

We all know that in the past 20 years in India, the core values of state's responsibility has further degenerated. The directive principles of our constitution guided us to make a responsible state towards the Dalits and Adivasis. As the assertion of Dalits and Adviasis grew, the state started abdicating its responsibility in a very shrewd way. Two important issues that are part and parcel of our struggle are Land Redistribution and participation in power structure through reservation in the government jobs. Since 1990s, they

people and incited hatred against the 'second largest community' in India. Contrary to what we felt that these communalist forces would be thrashed and sent to jail, we saw Lal Krishna Advani became deputy Prime Minister of the country for his Ayodhya Kand. Narendra Modi became the Chief Minister after massacring thousands of Muslims in Gujarat and Kalyan Singh who took oath to defend the Babari Mosque was sentenced to one day imprisonment for a clear act of sedition which actually created an unprecedented divide in the country. We did not a find single sentence for those who allegedly were responsible for massacring thousands of Sikhs in Delhi's 1984 riots.

Two important issues that are part and parcel of our struggle are land redistribution and participation in power structure through reservation in the government jobs. Since 1990s, they became target of the ruling elite.

Though this country had a history of communal disturbances, the Babari demolition shook the very basic foundation of our nationhood

became target of the ruling elite. Hence on the one hand, the subsequent government in post 1990s opted for opening up of Indian market and thus killing our farmers on the one hand and allowing privatization of more and more companies thus reducing the job quota to a virtual nil in the government sector. This was the silent poison introduced by the government. The ruling elite were not satisfied with this only. The marginalization and isolation of Muslims was complete. Though this country had a history of communal disturbances, the Babari demolition shook the very basic foundation of our nationhood; yet nothing happened to those who were behind the killings of

After 1993 riots Bal Thackrey's Shiv Sena came to power in Maharashtra. Why not a fast track court for our politicians? Can there be any case against Lal Krishna Advani, Narendra Modi, Uma Bharati and Kalyan Singh under sedition. No, they have raised the consciousness of this country for Ram Mandir, the 'most important' issue the country, hence they got awarded with power in the country. Actually, questioning the mainstream politics has become very much like a blasphemy law in India and that could send you to jail. This has to be challenged at all level.

If these things were not enough to break the bone of the people of India, the power

brokers forced the government to grab the fertile land of the country. Millions of hectares of land were handed over for throw away priced to the industrialists who suck our blood from morning till evening. The authorities were hell bent on grabbing all these for the 'development' of our country. In each spheres of our life we find rampant corruption which is killing us. Our politicians, bureaucrats, journalists, along with corporate have looted our resources and displaced people from their own places without providing an alternatives. No debate is taking place in parliament on the issues of national concern. If one party opposes certain initiative, they are doing the same in their state. The Hindutva people knew it very well that a cocktail of 'capital' and 'brahmanism' is best suited to protect their interests in India and hence they have Brahmanised the Indian polity resulting almost no opposition for government policies on corporate. That is why any mention of 'Hindu terrorist evoke such sharp reactions in Indian media. They do not have the same when we refer to Islamic terrorists or Muslim terrorists. The media already become part of the power gangs and judiciary out of domain for the poor, there is no way out for the poorest of the poor. The issues of tribal are in direct conflict with the issue of development. It is not that they do not want it but then the question is whether any one of us ever thought what they want. The democratic deficit in tribal land turned their anger against the state. Hundreds of them have been arrested and put into the jails for no faults of them. Their voices rarely got representation in the mainstream for the sake of 'community representation'. It is difficult to understand that even the political parties claiming to work for them rarely raised those issues in Parliament and state assemblies.

Land grabbing helped all those contractors come in close contacts of the power elite. Each event in this country has relation with land grabbing and corruption. It is therefore important why right from Common Wealth Games to building of dams, parks, hotels,

resorts, SEZs, High ways are the out come of a big disease called brahmanical capitalism at the moment being developed under the supervision of power elites. There is no debate for it as most of them have their hand strained in the blood of the people. That the issue of corruption will never become an issue as it does not influence people who have grown up in worshipping our political class. The only thing is that it has decentralized. Earlier it has brahmanical hegemony but now slowly the Dalit-Bahujans are also having their take in it though their percentage seems to be very low. But at the end of the day, the impact of this is on the poorest of the poor whether it is taken by any one. You can only be good if you dance to the tune of corporates. Hence a Nitish Kumar will turn sour if he does not allot land to some Tatas or Ambanis on throw away prices like Naveen Patnayak.

When the voices of opposition are nowhere then who has to play the role of it. Hundreds of local struggles have emerged up against the state policies which are uprooting people from their land. Whether it is Chhattishgarh state which is currently being ruled by a non tribal and that is the biggest irony of the state,. Similarly, other states have been governed by those who did not remain behind to keep the Dalits and tribal out of their developmental plans. States such as Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Tamilnadu, Gujarat, Maharastra and Uttarakhand, have provided their fertile land and water resources are at the cost of their people to these greedy corporations, many of whom are being run by our 'esteemed' politicians, are facing the protest of the people who are resisting every bit of this illegal take over of their land cultivated and nurtured by their ancestors. For 'national' media these are 'regional' news but the unrest is high though not formidable as people have to look for their next day meal too. It is not my contention that people do not need development but as a human rights defender, I must add that if State has failed to improve the condition of the people then

its sovereignty has no right to take the lives of the people. Where is the state when tribal people are dying of hunger or their women are being raped by our police and forces? Will that not turn the people against its might? Why is Kashmir boiling? Why is the North East still unable to reconcile to us? It is not that they do not want to be with us but it is how have we treated them has created the present situation. Can a Kashmiri Muslim get a room on rent in our cities? Why do the girls of the North East face truants in Delhi and other parts of the country? What are we as a state? A State of racist nature, which look down upon those who it feel different from us. Yes, as a nation we still worship the white skin and look down upon the black.

Therefore, it is logical for humanists, human rights activists, and social action groups to play the role of the opposition. The issues of Human Rights of the Dalits were taken to international agenda not by the political parties but by the Dalit rights activists who spoke there and presented despite the powerful opposition from the government of India which denied existence of caste based prejudices in India citing the laws and acts in Indian constitution. It is important for the health of democracy that political parties raise the issues concerning the masses but over the last 20 years, politics has just become the game of non political actors and that is a dangerous phenomenon. Political parties might have empowered some of them but it is the social movements which have changed the lives of the people. And since many of the writers, activists, struggles for people's right over resources are challenging government's action particularly on the issue of sovereignty they are easily targeted as 'being anti national' or supporting secessionists or in more popular discourse, supporting the Maoists. For a nation to survive as a healthy democracy, it is important that we have an open debate on issues concerning our people. A debate on Kashmir can not be judged on Barkha Dutt's upper caste show on NDTV. It needs to be organized in

Kashmir and let those champions of Hindutva be there and speak among the masses. The issue of Advasis needs to be discussed with their people and not with one or two members showcased in the TV studios of Delhi to justify that 'we have space for 'their' voices. Let the journalist report going to nook and corners of the country and not become part and parcel of our 'intelligence' network. The greatest danger to our democracy is the growing disappearance of demarcation line between a reporter and an intelligence person, between a PR person and an editor. They all have merged together so much so that it is important to know who the person is and what he is writing.

The self styled mainstream media has rarely spoken for people who are rotting in our jails. They speak for Dr Binayak Sen as they feel he was one among them. It is a class-caste consciousness which has shocked them that if such a thing could happen to him, it might happen to them. But the fact is media has completely lost interest in people's issues. Binayak Sen is not important. Important is the issue of charges against him and the way police framed him. Important is to question our sedition laws and the issue of my right to criticize the state. He was critical of Salawa Judum which the state felt was providing justice to the tribal who were not Naxalites. Even the Supreme Court had held that state can not give private citizens right to kill each other and Salwa Judum was that. Hence, questioning state polices today is being considered as challenge to our sovereignty. Therefore, I am also happy that this verdict will result in a discussion on the requirement of judicial reforms in India.

It is not necessary for me to dwell on the arguments of Dr Binayak Sen or Arundhati Roy which may suffer from flaws and we all have those flaws as we become too sensitive to the issues close to our heart and that is true about most of those who fight for people's right. We may differ on our perceptions but as writers, authors, human

activists always believe in their perceptions and beliefs and that makes them different than others. We are not political leaders who speak for the 'people'. We speak our voices and our feeling. As a human rights defender, I write many things which many may not like, of course, many others like them too yet, it is important that this freedom remain unchallenged. For, because of such people, the forces of state and its sponsored campaigns and laws are challenged.

Is it not hypocrisy that when a Chinese dissenter got Nobel Peace Prize earlier this year, Indian government sent its representative to attend the ceremony despite China's effort to dissuade India from doing so? It was a great gesture in support of a human rights defender for democracy in that country who has been allegedly framed for treason in that country. Its shameful that Binayak Sen's case is becoming a very similar one where the state is hell bent on proving that he worked against the state. Binayak Sen might not have done so many things but in their dirty tricks the government officials will only make him bigger and larger than life. The world will only cry foul on conviction of the local court which looks like a kangaroo trial.

For long there have been demands for a National judicial Commission and implementation of quota for SC-ST-OBCs, in the judiciary so that the judges themselves understand their issues with utmost care before passing a judgment. Judges with an upper-caste background

may have biases against Dalit-Adivasis and their issues related to them. The issue of quota is being made redundant through judicial interventions. Similarly, land reforms failed in India as in most of the cases the high and mighty went to court against land ceiling laws. The brahmanical minds created various side ways to destroy all the reforms and acts. The courts should not become obstacles in the implementation of progressive laws.

Binayak Sen has a formidable background as a doctor as well as a civil rights activist and hence his case became internationalized; other ordinary mortals like us would never ever think of civil libertarians and newspapers supporting this freedom. Hence, we must support his release and ask for a thorough scrutiny of the conditions in Indian jails and reform in the judiciary. Binayak Sen is definitely bound to get justice but in the din of halo being created around, we must not forget thousands of innocents being put in the jail for being Jehadis, Naxalites and what not. Any one who raises the issue for his right is charged with challenging the state and this mindset has to be challenged. It is time to start a complete debate on these issues which have emerged out of Binayak Sen's conviction.

BS

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**To know what is right and not to do it is the
worst cowardice**

Confucius

God's Priorities

ATHEIST EVE

TD DESIGN ©2010

According to the Child Molestation Research & Prevention Institute, "more than three million American children are victims. Most of them are children, struggling alone, believing there is no adult who can help them."

"Children throughout the developing world lack access to even the most basic cancer treatment and pain relief, leading to the needless deaths of 100,000 children every year, say two leading cancer organisations."

—British Medical Journal

In December 2010, MSNBC reported, "Earthquakes, heat waves, floods, volcanoes, super typhoons, blizzards, landslides and droughts killed at least a quarter million people in 2010 — the deadliest year in more than a generation."

"Oh please, God, let me find — YES!!! I can't believe it!!! A parking space! And RIGHT IN FRONT!!! Thank you, JESUS!!! Thank you!"



Tracie Harris is a graphic designer in Austin, Texas, US. According to the website, <http://www.atheist-community.org/>, "her long, slow recovery from a rabid fundamentalist upbringing led her to the creation of *Atheist Eve*".

Tracie Harris has been publishing *Atheist Eve* since 1 October 2004 and all her earlier works are archived at: <http://www.atheist-community.org/atheisteve/>. *Atheist Eve* is reproduced by *Indian Skeptic* with the author's permission.

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The Super Intelligent Superstitious

Narendra Nayak

While people all over think of themselves as very intelligent we of the Dakshina Kannada have gone a step further we consider ourselves as super intelligent! This makes us proud that no one can take us for a ride or in anyway get the better of us. Now we have proved to be super-superstitious too. While we laugh at others for their stupidities; our own are conveniently forgotten. That is why we are in the news once more for the wrong why once more? Again and again we have proved ourselves to be newsworthy at international levels. Whether it be the pub attack and the moral policing, air crash or something else we are proud to be in the news. This time it is our turn to demonstrate we are not behind anyone as far as superstitions as the two incidents which happened this month demonstrate.

The first one can be called as a tragic comedy while the second one is a despicable crime against humanity. Let us examine them in chronological order: The first one was at the famous Kukke Subramanya temple. It is famous for taking people for a ride whether it be a cricketer or a film star, doctor or engineer. Whoever that goes there tailor, tinker, soldier, rich man, poor man or beggar the diagnosis is the same- you have naga dosha that means either you or one of your ancestors running back to past several generations have killed a snake and you are being penalized for it! Not any snake mind you but Naga the cobra which is a sacred one and is considered as equal to a Brahmin. This can cause anything from ascites to Zollingers syndrome. If you don't understand what are these don't worry it covers all diseases



from A to Z! But, the snake god is partial to skin diseases in fact very much to Hansen's disease also known as leprosy, while the rest of the world believes that it is caused by mycobacterium leprae. So, one has to propitiate this god for having sinned against. How to do it? Don't worry after diagnosis comes the treatment. After paying hefty amounts solutions are found and everything comes to a fairy tale happy ending! There are innumerable rituals here including the Naga Mandala which is the Rolls Royce of the stable. That it works is beyond question because if Sachin Tendulkar is hitting century after century it is because he came here, if Aishwarya Rai is happily married today it is because of the god here. For the commoner there are less expensive ways to get treatment for their skin diseases. They can grovel before the god and achieve that. Not anywhere but over the leaves discarded by the diners after having had a rich meal. Sorry, not the leaves on which the hoi-polloi have eaten but on those on which the Brahmins have partaken food. Again not on any day but on the Shashti day which comes once a year. We don't know whether it is their saliva

that is the active ingredient or whether the same is formed after they have partaken their refined carbohydrate -saturated fat rich meals or the banana leaves used therein is the major ingredient but the combination of three seems to be necessary. The fourth component is the gullible lot who believe in this but that is never in short supply in our district of super-intelligent geniuses! Any way, if there is a caste factor in the panacea there should be one for the patients too and it is there! Most of those who seek solutions for their problems by taking bath on these left overs (made snana as it is called in Kannada) belong to the backward castes and the daliths. However, the temple management has clarified the upper castes are not banned from doing it! The temple management has also clarified that they were helpless on this issue because it was a matter of 'faith'. So this time again the footage of people rolling over the discarded leaves hit the headlines with all the national level channels gloating over that! There

were protests against this by various progressive groups including some dalith outfits but it had no effect on the government. at all. In fact the minister for medical education Dr.V.S.Acharya defended the practice saying that it is a matter of faith and skirting the main issue of whether any disease could be cured by that as claimed. The heads of the mutts, the various dals and senas did not utter a word about the inhumanity of this. When I was queried by many of the channels for our take on that I put forward these points:

1. If some one wants to do that for recreation we have no objections as people are welcome to entertain themselves any way they like provided it is within the norms of decency and does not cause problems for others.
2. If curative powers are claimed then we would demand for randomised controlled trials for the verification of the same and after it is proved efficacious it could be



added as a form of therapy.

3. If people are being coerced to do it, then we like all right minded citizens should oppose it with all means at our command.

Before the controversy over that subsided we hit the headlines once more again for the wrong reasons and this time a despicable crime against humanity. On the 17th of December a child was killed by a gang of three at Sharbatkatte which can be now called as the center of the city. It was killed not in a fit of passion or by accident it was done to death as a ritualistic sacrifice allegedly to please some spirits. The person who is said to have performed this despicable crime is an old man of 75 years Kamalaksha Purusha. His accomplice was a lady called Chandrakala and the relationship between them was dubious to say the least. This innocent girl was enticed and kidnapped from her by this gang who are their neighbours. When the child disappeared a complaint was made to the police who came to the spot and did not search the premises. Only after the public protested they arrested the woman who confessed to the crime and took them to the place where the body was concealed. Once it was discovered all hell broke loose. The irate public threw stones at the police for their inaction who finally arrested both of them along with Kamalaksha's brother and produced them before the court and have now been remanded to judicial custody.



While these are the events that have taken place an analysis of these issues is very much needed for an understanding of the psyche of these criminals and the attitudes of our people in general. The undivided districts of Dakshina Kannada and parts of Kasargod have their own brands of superstitions with their brands of snake worship, bhoothas and such. There are numerous myths of human sacrifice including one of why there is a matrilineal system of inheritance among some communities here. That added to the high level of literacy, higher per capita income and what is called as 'education' have made a potent brew of a sixteenth century mindset super imposed on a 21st century technology and it is this combination that have caused these incidents which are not isolated but are a sign of the malaise in general.

The old man has been described as a weirdo by his neighbours. He is stinkingly rich and lives with his accomplice. The third person arrested is his long estranged brother with whom he had started speaking very recently. They have had nothing to do with each other for many decades until they had made peace not very long ago. His wife died under mysterious circumstances which, people say was murder but nothing happened to him. They say the police took him and he returned the same evening back to his house where he was living at the time of this ritual sacrifice. It looks like getting away with this made him confident that he could get away with anything. The people of the locality also said that he used to perform all sorts of pujas and many times create smoke to hide what was happening. The angry people in the surrounding houses have attacked his house and damaged everything there except the idols and the other items of worship found there. The attitudes of the society in general, the ruling Hindutwa party, the religious heads and the saffron outfits have been very peculiar to say the least. Some of them made weak noises and threatened that no lawyer should take up the case of the accused. In fact their advocate has sought police protection. Only

one outfit the CPI(M) affiliated Democratic Youth Federation of India staged a protest condemning the incident. The moral police of the district (in) famous for their attacks on intermixing of people, particularly youngsters of different religions have been very silent on this issue. The pub attacking, stone throwing senas have not been anywhere protesting against this inhuman murder of an innocent child. The heads of the mutts who have been crying hoarse about Hindu religion being in danger day in and out have not let out a whimper about this event which lays bare their hypocrisy. The Chief Minister of the state Yeddiyurappa who has been always busy in amassing wealth for his family and trying to save his chair visited the house of slain child and promised two lakh of rupees for the bereaved family and did not utter a word about rituals of black magic which have caused this. For, he himself is a big votary of such and is very much into them. During the elections and every time his chair has been shaky he has been performing such rituals for saving it. Not that the opposition is any better his main rival, Kumaraswamy the immediate past Chief minister had been a big fan of such and continues to be so. His father Deve Gowda who was once the Prime minister had conducted such pujas to save his chair which had resulted in the mysterious death of an attendant of a buffalo which had been taken in procession in the area where this ritual was being performed. There was a public furore that this mute animal was going to be sacrificed on the last day of the ritual. But it ended with the body of the attendant leading this animal being found floating in a well one morning. This family is fans of tantriks who perform all sorts of pujas which are allegedly connected to black magic. During the last assembly elections they are supposed to have sacrificed a donkey to ensure victory for their party. That it did not happen so was

probably because those performed by the winning party were more powerful. This sort of a mindset has resulted in Karnataka being a state leading in software and also in black magic! This is more applicable to our district which has one of the highest literacy rates in the country! The swamis of the mutts have been silent on this because they too would like people to believe in stupidities like black magic as they can promise protection for their flock by conducting equally irrelevant rituals to 'protect' them against those. The so called intellectual classes are more interested in furthering their own interests to take up any sort of stand against such superstitions.

But there are some positive signs too. The Chairman of the state Child Welfare Committee has initiated measures to help the surviving children. The State Human Rights Commission has sought a report on the whole issue as a violation of human rights and has asked the administration to initiate steps to stop such anti human superstitious practices. We have planned to have campaign against these all over the district to educate people that no one had or has any supernatural powers.

It is time for the educated, super intelligent Mangalorean to decide whether be a part of this supernatural skull duggery or be against it for there can be no middle way. We have reiterated our challenge to those with supernatural powers to come forward and demonstrate them under fraud proof conditions and take away all my worldly belongings. Any takers?

BS

*Narendra Nayak , is the president of
Federation of Indian Rationalist
Associations*

The most violent element in society is ignorance

Emma Goldman

Arguments for God in Classical Indian Philosophy

Ajita Kamal

Many classical Indian philosophers, driven to ideological defense of the Vedas as divine manifestation, were among a long tradition of thinkers who ceremoniously presented arguments for the existence of god, first in response to the ancient Carvakas and later to the other Nastika schools that developed strains of Atheistic thought. Of the ones on record, the most sophisticated compilation of arguments came from Udayana (Udayanācārya), the 10th century Indian philosopher who unified and reformed the Old Nyaya and the Vaisheshika schools of Indian Logic, to found the Navya Nyaya (literally New Nyaya) school. Udayana famously attempted to prove the existence of god using nine arguments. Logic and modern science render these arguments impotent.

It should be noted that all of Udayana's arguments (listed below) can be rebutted conclusively using nothing but the empiricist logic contained within certain philosophical schools of the period and of the centuries before, such as the later Lokayata school and some traditions of Buddhist thought. Indeed, these arguments for god most certainly were conclusively rebutted by the Atheists of the day, as evidenced by the fact that specific counter-arguments are known to have been quite common in the philosophical discourse of the period. But let's not allow the fact deny us the satisfaction that comes with shining the light of modern scientific logic and naturalistic philosophy on these ancient arguments for god.

I will list Udayana's arguments and provide

a short rebuttal below each. The arguments are taken from this page (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nyaya>) on Wikipedia, I understand that all of Udayana's arguments taken from the above cited source are terse pronouncements presented without any extended context, and I'd be happy to be corrected if my interpretation of any of the arguments turns out to be wrong, provided this correction is devoid of all citation-free claims about the translation/context, evidence-less claims about reality, and common logical fallacies.

So, here we go!

1. *K r y t* (lit. "from effect"): *An effect is produced by a cause, and similarly, the universe must also have a cause. Causes (according to Naiyayikas) are of three kinds: Samavayi (in case of the universe, the atoms), Asamavayi (the association of atoms) and Nimitta (which is Ishvara). The active cause of the world must have an absolute knowledge of all the material of creation, and hence it must be god. Hence from the creation, the existence of the Creator is proved.*

This argument is also known today as the Cosmological or First Cause argument for god, and is seen in practically all cultures, regardless of whether they had a strong classical tradition or not. Here are some points we can note:

a) If the universe has a cause and that cause is god, then that god must also have a cause. If you look at the entire argument it becomes obvious that such arguments do not really solve the problem posed by the

question that the proponents believe to have answered! This is because they just move the question back one nonsensical step, and they do so with no evidence and offering no real information, verifiable data or testable predictions. This problem is known as infinite regress.

God is a mind-block for believers, as evidenced by this argument. The really irrational thing is believing that this supposedly causeless, all-powerful and unobservable thing called god is the reason why everything exists in the observable universe.

As a side note, modern physics suggests that it is meaningless to talk about a time before the universe came into existence, because time in our universe came into existence at the moment of the big bang. Recently a group of physicists led by Roger Penrose have proposed, after observing the patterns of cosmic microwave background found in the universe, that the beginning of our universe was the end of another universe. These conversations continue in

the scientific realm. In any case, these scientific discussions do not make god necessary or logically coherent.

b) All we can reasonably infer from the laws of cause and effect is that there probably was a cause to the origin of the universe. Extrapolating from there to god is a logically incoherent leap in reason. Claiming god as the cause of the universe is positing an enormously complex, intelligent and powerful entity that we know nothing about to explain an inanimate universe that we know something about. The principle of parsimony known as Occam's Razor dictates that this god is much less likely.

c) The argument squeezes god into a gap in our knowledge of the universe while ignoring all the phenomena that were once thought to be the work of god and are now understood in purely naturalistic terms. God as intelligent initiator of the big bang (which today we know as the starting point of our universe) is a "god of the gaps". Essentially, this argument takes the form



“I don’t know how something so complex could have come about through mechanistic processes, so it must have been created by god”. This is a leap in logic. This form of argument is called the argument from ignorance.

d) The premise that “the active cause of the world must have an absolute knowledge of all the material of creation” is false, and the argument is a tautology when used as proof of god- that is, its a circular argument. A tautology, or circular argument, is when at least one of the premises of the proposition under investigation assumes as true that which must be proven. In this case, the argument simply assumes that god must exist, and uses that assumption to “prove” that god exists.

Of the above-noted points (b) Implausibility and (c) god of the gaps errors repeat quite a bit throughout the arguments presented by Udayana. Also, almost all of Udayana’s arguments contain (d) circular reasoning.

2. *yojan t (lit., from combination): Atoms are inactive and properties are unphysical. So it must be God who creates the world with his will by causing the atoms to join. Self-combination of inanimate and lifeless things is not possible, otherwise atoms would only combine at random, creating chaos. There is to be seen the hand of a wise organizer behind the systematic grouping of the ultimate atoms into dyads and molecules. That final organizer is God.*

In addition to making many of the same errors noted for the previous argument, this above argument is particularly fraught with a certain type of error that can simply be chalked to the fact that the premises underlying the arguments are influenced by beliefs from a pre-scientific period.

Again, positing that a complex intelligent god keeps atoms glued to each other violates Occam’s Razor. And again, god seems to have fallen in the gaps. Its amusing today to watch religious

revisionists casually misappropriate the word ‘atom’, as though the scientific conception of the atom was what the mystics and philosophers of ancient India were talking about in the Vedas. To be fair, the word ‘atom’ can indeed be used in a generic form, but this usage is very different from the specific scientifically defined and established physical unit known as the atom.

The practice of science has led to the discoveries of different sub-atomic particles and forces responsible for the various inter and intra-atomic interactions that we know about today. The gap Udayana shoved god into is sealed shut, and all resident gods are dead.

Finally on this point, “self-combination” of inanimate and lifeless “things” happens all the time. It can be beautifully illustrated using crystals which self-combine into ordered and mathematical structures. It happens in the production and action of enzymes- proteins which are essential molecules for life on earth. Indeed, life is “created” by the actions of completely inanimate chemical reactions and processes guided by purely naturalistic organizational principles, as we know now thanks to modern science. We know today about how chemical bonds are formed between elements and molecules. We know a bit about the composition of atoms and how they interact with each other.

Scientists today study complexity as the emergence of unique behavior and organizational structure in a system, by the action of purely stochastic processes. Professor Vinod Wadhawan has written a fantastic series on this new science of complexity, specifically designed for the layperson (<http://nirmukta.com/complexity-explained-the-complete-series-by-dr-vinod-wadhawan/>)

At the time that Udayana’s arguments were made we knew nothing about dyads or molecules, let alone atoms. Which makes one wonder why these particular words

were used by the translators. I suppose these particular modern and scientific terms could have been used simply for want of convenient words to describe certain ancient ideas, but the attempt to co-opt modern science here in the modern translations of pre-scientific arguments for god (while misrepresenting science) is unmistakable and even brazen.

3. *Dh ty dé* (lit., from support): *Just as a material thing falls off without a support, similarly, God is the supporter and bearer of this world, without which the world would not have remained integrated. This universe is hence superintended within God, which proves his existence.*

This argument may seem laughable today, but let's take it seriously for a bit to see how people's minds operated at a time when certain facts about the universe were unavailable to them. Today we can comprehend a spherical planet with no objective up or down, and on which all things are pulled to its center. We can comprehend, at least in theory, the force of gravity that keeps us on earth, and the repulsive forces that prevent all the atoms on the planet from collapsing into each other. We can comprehend a vast universe filled with galaxies and planetary systems. And we can imagine how so much of our sensory reality, informed by a brain shaped by evolution on 'middle earth', is an illusion. But we can only imagine this 'more-true' reality because today we have the greatest amount of information that we humans have ever had about our universe, made available through science.

Science is the most powerful tool and the most magnificent achievement of the human imagination. God is a failure of the human imagination. Udayana's argument from support is nothing but an utterance from ignorance.

4. *Pad t* (lit., from word): *Every word has the capability to represent a certain object. It is the will of God that a thing should be represented by a certain word. Similarly, no*

knowledge can come to us of the different things here unless there is a source of this knowledge. The origin of all knowledge should be omniscient and, consequently, omnipotent. Such a being is not to be seen in this universe, and so it must be outside it. This being is God.

Udayana is starting to get a bit preachy now, which is usually a good bet that there is fuzziness afoot. This deliberate attempt at confusion creates the perfect smoke-screen for masking circular arguments.

We use words to represent many things, including objects. There is no need to invoke god in order to explain this fact. The entire argument is weirdly imagined. If I'm properly interpreting it, when Udayana talks about knowledge that "comes to us" he is not referring to the empirical (observable sensory) information that can scientifically be verified, but to some mysterious external source of knowledge that is all powerful.

The whole argument is one big tautology. Only if you buy into the idea that "*It is the will of God that a thing should be represented by a certain word*", or that "*The origin of all knowledge should be omniscient and, consequently, omnipotent*", can you buy into the rest of the BS. This is begging the question! The argument begins with an assumption that it needs to prove! It is simply not reasonable to accept belief in god as an argument for god's existence, which is exactly what this argument is asking us to do!

At the end Udayana resorts to a classic theology trick.

"Such a being is not to be seen in this universe, and so it must be outside it. This being is God."

Let's just say for argument sake that an omnipotent and omnipresent god is absolutely required for words to have meaning. Even given this ridiculous premise, how can one say anything at all

about objects outside of the universe with absolutely certainty? What evidence is available to declare with such impunity that the unlikely being in question is a god? Udayana's fifth argument doesn't tell us, but it offers some insight into the motives behind his vigorous, flailing defense of the idea of a supernatural god.

5. *Pratyayata* (lit., from faith): *the Hindu holy scriptures, the Vedas, are regarded as the source of eternal knowledge. Their knowledge is free from fallacies and are widely believed as a source of proof. Their authors cannot be human beings because human knowledge is limited. They cannot obtain knowledge of past, present, and future, and in depth knowledge of mind. Hence, only God can be the creator of the Vedas. Hence, his existence is proved from his being the author of the Vedas, which he revealed to various sages over a period of time.*

From here down the arguments are just plain dumb. Even during the time of Udayana it surely must have been silly for any serious philosopher to believe that the Vedas are absolutely correct about all the ideas contained within them. In any case, Udayana seems to be confused in making this argument from 'Faith', because while claiming to do so he actually makes objective claims about reality by talking about the supposed inerrancy of the Vedas. This is not faith at all, but rather a sneaky way of avoiding logical scrutiny by pretending to claim faith while actually suggesting that the inerrancy of the Vedas is proof of god. Of course, it can be argued that it is his claim about the inerrancy of the Vedas that he asks us to take on faith, which would just make this another form of circular argument.

6. *Shruté* (lit., from scriptures): *The Shrutis, e.g., the Vedas extol God and talk about his existence. "He is the lord of all subjects, omniscient, and knower of one's internal feelings; He is the creator, cause and destroyer of the world", say the Shrutis. The Shrutis are regarded as a*

source of proofs by Naiyanikas. Hence, the existence of God is proved.

This is the most common form of tautology coming from religious apologists who defend god, usually Christian and Islamic apologists. "God is real because the book says so" is circular reasoning on a pretty low level of sophistication. Udayana also seems to have a wrong understanding of the meaning of the word 'proof', also apparent from his previous argument.

7. *V ky t* (lit., from precepts): *Again, the Veda must have been produced by a person because it has the nature of "sentences," i.e., the sentences of the Veda were produced by a person because they have the nature of sentences, just as the sentences of beings like ourselves. That person must have been God.*

This is simply an extension of point 4, which argued that god is real because words have meaning. It is also related to points 5 and 6 because these three arguments (5, 6 and 7) proclaim the nature of the Vedas as proof of god, making them all tautologies.

8. *Samkhy vi e t* (lit., from the specialty of numbers): *According to the Nyaya, the magnitude of a dyad is produced by the number of two atoms. The number "one" is directly perceived but other numbers are created by perceptions, which is related to the mind of the perceiver. Since at the time of creation, souls, atoms, Ad a (Unseen Power), space, time and minds are all unconscious, hence it depends on divine consciousness. So God must exist.*

a) In today's context this argument perpetuates a false interpretation of Udayana's ancient conception of the smallest unit of matter, deliberately conflating that ancient notion with the modern scientific concept 'atom'. The New Nyaya school is still extant, and much of the misappropriation of scientific words by the apologists must have first occurred in relatively recent translations of the original

works.

b) The statement “*The number “one” is directly perceived but other numbers are created by perceptions, which is related to the mind of the perceiver*” is just pure BS. All numbers are conceptually interpreted by the brain. Objects in the natural world are perceived by the senses.

c) See this part of the argument: “*Since at the time of creation, souls, atoms, Ad a (Unseen Power), space, time and minds are all unconscious*”. What nonsense! Creation, souls and unseen powers are all things for which proof must be offered. Udayana simply builds them into his arguments, assuming them to be true!

d) This part “*...are all unconscious, hence it depends on divine consciousness. So God must exist*” is so perfectly circular that its amazing how these philosophers could have kept a straight face while expounding so. All these things are unconscious, so they depend on god, so god exists. WTF?

e) The same part quoted above “*...are all unconscious, hence it depends on divine consciousness. So God must exist*” is an argument from ignorance- a god-of-the-gaps. It is of the form “I don’t know how all of this complexity we see in the universe could have come about due to mechanistic reasons, so it must have been god”.

f) Occam’s Razor is shamelessly violated.

9. *Ad t (lit., from the unforeseen): Everybody reaps the fruits of his own actions. merits and demerits accrue from his own actions and the stock of merit and demerit is known as Ad a, the Unseen Power. But since this unseen power is unintelligent, it needs the guidance from a supremely intelligent god.*

We may all believe that, in a fair world, we should all reap the fruits of our efforts. But what the hell does that have to do with unseen powers? Merits and demerits are real and relative and can only be

understood properly in each specific context. Moreover, there are factors that are out of our direct control, including our own genetics and much about the greater environment in which we exist, both of which are the arbitrators of the deck we are dealt.

The argument also resembles point 8 in form. All the criticisms of that point can be applied here, including circular reasoning, violation of Occam’s Razor and the argument from ignorance.

Conclusion:

There are a whole lot of unnecessary assumptions in Udayana’s arguments, which probably is the answer to why Indian Philosophy was stuck in a rut for all those centuries after the golden age of reason in India during the early classical period. In modern times we have failed to revive our great philosophical traditions, mainly because we Indians are not formally educated about the relevance of philosophy in our political and socio-economic lives. Given that the great New (Navya) Nyaya logicians (along with the religious apologists who have dominated intellectual discourse for much of our history) dedicated their lives to making philosophy irrelevant to reality, the fact that most educated Indians don’t think philosophy is relevant to their lives is quite understandable. We need to cast out the rotten ideas in the history of Indian Philosophy and usher in a new Scientific Naturalism that celebrates great rational Indian minds of the past and great scientific Indian minds of our time. Failing this, we Indians will continue to remain passive observers at best and myopic participants at worst in regards to the important discussions of our day, such as those on the future of technology, ethics, society, government and culture.

BS

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K. Sudarshan, RSS Ideology and Scandalous Statements

Ram Puniyani

In public space one keeps hearing many a things which are horrifying, vicious and bad in taste. K.Sudarshan, the father figure of RSS, recently (November 2010) stated that Sonia Gandhi was a foreign agent, that she had some role in the deaths of her mother-in-law and her husband, and that Rajiv Gandhi had wanted to leave her. This statement was not carried by the large section of media, and there were only few commentators who took it up for analysis. While Congress supporters did outpour their anguish through protests and filing of some cases, the RSS itself distanced itself from this statement. Tarun Vijay of BJP, with RSS background, also dissociated BJP from this statement. Interestingly even while distancing BJP from Sudarshan's statement he made it a point to pay compliments to the intellect of K.Sudarshan.

Overall even the other people from RSS stable were mild enough to dissociate themselves from the outpouring of their ex-Chief and one of the longest serving leaders of RSS. Still they did not condemn Sudarshan. They reverentially upheld the high level of his intellect. There is nothing surprising about RSS combine not condemning him, and there are deeper reasons for the same. What Sudarshan said was not a flash in the pan but its' what RSS probably believes, that's why Sudarshan is not condemned, as a matter of fact one can see the 'logic' of his saying, this statement of his, is just the further extension of the ideology of RSS.

RSS core ideology is based around looking at the society through communal angle.



Communal view of society looks at peoples' interests, material and otherwise only through the prism of religion. According to this ideology all Hindus have similar interests; all Christians have similar interests and so on. This communal ideology begins with 'sameness of the interests' of one religious community and then goes on to say that interests of two religious communities are different from each other. And in the next stage it asserts that the interests between two religious communities are irreconcilable and hostile to each other.

According to this ideology a Hindu industrialist and the Hindu beggar are supposed to have similar interests! A Muslim entrepreneur and a Muslim sweeper or beggar is supposed to have similar interests. So a Hindu king in History and poor Hindu farmer-Shudra are on the same page. It looks at history as unified Hindu community standing against others and so on, as if all Hindu Kings were hunky dory with each other and supping with the Shudras and poor peasants of society. The communal ideology, irrespective of any religions in

whose name it operates, changes the horizontal social differences into vertical ones'. The society has divisions according to the rich and poor, privileged and deprived. According to this ideology what matters is the vertical divisions according to one's religion. This ideology as such focuses on issues of identity and undermines the real worldly problems. It is an attempt to undermine and sweep under the carpet the unjust social system, where the major contradiction is social and economic. It is a way to hide one's birth based privileges under the guise of religion. Religion is a potent instrument as faith is its central component. Abuse of faith for political goals generates blind social hysteria, which is used to promote the political and social agenda of communal organizations. This pattern applies to all the faith-religion based politics.

In India communal ideology, both Muslim and Hindu, developed in opposition to the democratic secular ideology which looked at people in their primary Indian identity. The communal ideology originated from amongst elites, landlords-kings, their associated clergy and middle class followers and ideologues.

So while these communal ideologies may look hostile to each other at surface, essentially their roots are same, their values are the same, they operate on the same social logic and dynamics. Those elements, entrenched in the social privileges talk of identity issues while those struggling to make both ends meet talk of the worldly issues, problems related to daily life. We can see the rudiments of this in teachings of Lord Gautam Buddha who talked of the misery of the society, the deprivations of society and against the caste system. His influence was systematically undone by projecting that this World is an illusion, (Jagat Mythya: Brahm Satyam). The attack on Buddhism also symbolized the ascendance of exploitative caste system and the economic system which went with it. During medieval period also we see that



most of the kings, irrespective of their religion patronized the clergy (Raj Guru with Hindu kings, Shahi Imam with Muslim kings, alliance between King and the Pope in Europe). The clergy is more interested in rituals and preservation of 'status quo' of the system.

Contrary to this, the saints of religions focused on the moral values and used religions' moral values as binding glue for the society, cutting across religious divides. Same saints talked of 'problems of this world'. Kabir in one of his dohas (couplet) tells us that if one can get God by worshipping a stone idol, why not worship the whole mountain. He points out that the Chakki (Grinding stone) is more important than the idols of God. Same way he criticizes Mullahs for emphasizing on mosque and shouting to get people in the mosque. The contrast in the social interests of exploiters and exploited is reflected in the patterns of clergy on one side and saints on the other.

Coming back to communal streams, Muslim and Hindu, both harped on similar things and opposed the process of social

change which was accompanying the freedom movement. Freedom movement, from which Muslim League, Hindu Mahasabha-RSS remained aloof, was aiming not just to get rid of British rule but was also the harbinger of caste and gender transformation in the society. It was also the beginning of the talk of economic justice and was against imperialism.

So when RSS sees a Sonia Gandhi, at the helm of affairs of the major rival party, they do not see a person, an Indian citizen,

many of their swaymasevaks do what is desired by their politics, but RSS can't own it overtly. This is not the first time such a thing has happened. Gandhi murder (Nathuram Godse), murder of Pastor Stains (Dara Singh), Pramod Mutalik's antics (Sri Ram Sene), communal violence and all that is the outcome of divisive sectarian ideology. RSS wants to usurp democracy and strengthen communal politics, but it can't be stated publicly as the limits of democratic norms will be breached. So this balance, some one says or does something but the organization disowns it, overtly

In India communal ideology, both Muslim and Hindu, developed in opposition to the democratic secular ideology which looked at people in their primary Indian identity. The communal ideology originated from amongst elites, landlords-kings, their associated clergy and middle class followers and ideologues. So while these communal ideologies may look hostile to each other at surface, essentially their roots are same, their values are the same, they operate on the same social logic and dynamics

they only see a Christian. Sudarshan, a die hard RSS ideologue, is merely telling us the details of RSS belief system. And of course Sudarshan is the one who has headed RSS for nearly a decade and has been with this organization he served for close to five decades! Who can tell us more about RSS belief system than him?

These contradictions, beliefs and overt expression, are bound to be there for organizations which are communal and want Religion based state. For Sudarshan-RSS the goal is a Hindu state. At the same time they want to use the democratic space given by present Indian Constitution. They have to play a delicate balancing role most of the times and so

only, and that too with due respect for the person concerned!

BS

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You must be the change you wish to see in the world

M K Gandhi



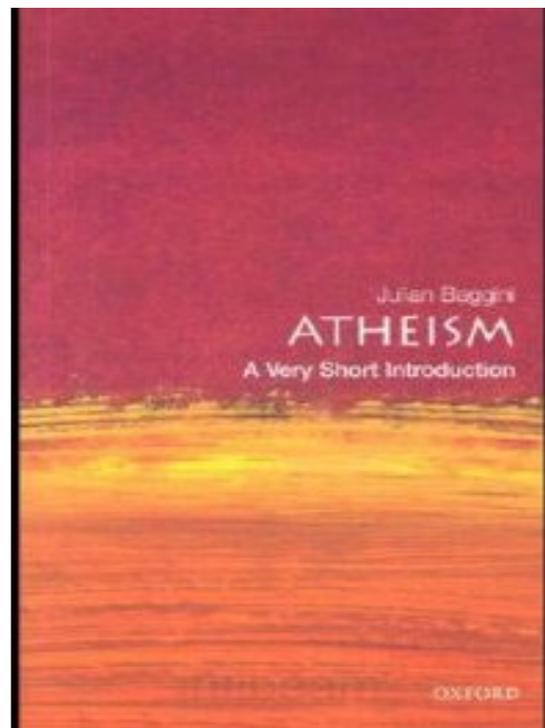
Atheism in a Nutshell

Prabhakar Nanawaty

The book, *Atheism: A Very Short Introduction* written by Julian Baggini is intended for atheists looking for a systematic defence and explanation for their stand, position and conviction; agnostics who think they might be atheists at one point of time and religious believers who have a sincere desire to understand what atheism is all about. The author had written a masterful introduction to atheism avoiding footnotes and referencing. The book helps atheists to organize their thoughts and put the arguments in order without being too academic or scholastic.

While describing how he embraced atheism, though brought up as a catholic from childhood, he feels that rational case for atheism cannot be made simply based on rational discussions with blank, open minds. People approach towards this kind of concept with prejudices, fears and certain reservations. Generally there is a deep rooted image of atheists as miserable, pessimistic, amoralists and argumentative. This deep rooted psychological resistance does not allow accepting the concept that easily. The author had made very good efforts to clear the doubts about atheism and emphasized that atheism is in several respects not as people think it is.

According to the author, the definition of atheism is: it is the belief that there is no



God or Gods. (Perhaps this may not be same as disbelief in God exists!) In fact atheist's negativity is restricted only in case of belief in god. Or otherwise he has positive view of all other aspects of life. The author then goes on defending his case against people who think that atheists believe there is no God and no morality; or no God and no meaning to life; and no God, no human kindness. Baggini sets forth his case for atheism which includes the absence of evidence of the supernatural; the physical dependence of the mind upon the brain; the simplicity of naturalism

compared to supernatural alternatives and the problem of evil.

While commenting upon the absence of evidence of the supernatural, he emphasizes that the atheist's rejection of belief in God is usually accompanied by a broader rejection of any supernatural or transcendental reality. This includes the existence of immortal souls, life after death, ghosts, supernatural powers etc. One more misconception about atheists is that they are too materialistic. This may be because atheism is motivated by naturalism, a belief that there is only a natural world and not any supernatural one. What most atheists believe is that although this universe is bound by physical sciences like physics,

varieties; evidence can be right or wrong and rhetoric is simply the use of language to persuade. In fact rhetoric can be used to persuade falsehood as truth and vice versa. Generally religious practitioners take a stand like that of George W Bush, former president of US, 'with us or with the terrorists'. This is pure rhetoric. It has no basis in facts or logic. Contrary to what theists do, author has taken a stand to avoid rhetoric and make a case for atheism using evidence and arguments.

While making case based on the evidence, author goes into detail what is the real evidence and what the anecdotal evidence is and also considers absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. There is strong

The book is intended for atheists looking for a systematic defence and explanation for their stand, position and conviction; agnostics who think they might be atheists at one point of time and religious believers who have a sincere desire to understand what atheism is all about. The author had written a masterful introduction to atheism avoiding footnotes and referencing. The book helps atheists to organize their thoughts and put the arguments in order without being too academic or scholastic.

chemistry, biology, etc, still out of these physicality stuff came minds, beauty, emotions, moral values – in short the full gamut of phenomena that gives richness to human life. In fact, atheism is not just physicalism but the broader claim of naturalism. While arguing for positiveness in atheism author rejects, the absurdity of saying that atheism is fully dependent upon the religious belief like a parasite. In fact atheism can stand alone and exist without religiosity; because atheism is a way of life not just opposite of religion or God.

While opposing the concept of atheism, God believers generally make a case by a combination of evidence, argument and rhetoric. Arguments can be in various

evidence in nature about human being is of biological in nature and he/she is not embodied spiritual soul. Once you accept contrary view which includes God, then it also includes goblins, hobbits, ghosts and witches. But atheists can't believe in such hearsay which is of historical residue. Atheists strongly view that we are mortal, biological organisms and ultimately meet the death and there will not be any trace of us after death except in memory. Those who do not accept this materialistic view, generally include evidence such as testimony of mediums, supposed appearances of ghosts and near death experiences. All these forms of evidence are extremely weak and most of them are of personal convictions. They cannot make

for good evidence; evidence should be observable and verifiable in broader sense. Author also takes the issue whether atheism is also one more form of faith position. However faith goes beyond what there is evidence or argument for. The status of atheist and religious belief are quite different. Only religious belief requires faith because this belief postulates the existence of entities which are no evidence at all.

One more strong point that generally is being raised by religious believers that is about morality and ethics. According to them there can't be moral and ethical values without God. God is necessary for morality. However author argues that morality exists without the concept of God and for this he refers to Euthyphro dilemma. The dilemma states that do the gods choose what is good because it is good, or is the good 'good' because the gods choose it? If first option is true, that shows that the good is independent of the gods and if second option is true then goodness becomes arbitrary and relative. According to author, the person who doesn't steal only because he fears that he will be caught is not a moral person. The truly moral person is the one who has the opportunity to steal without being caught but still does not do so. Author then traces the source of morality and finds that religion cannot be the source. It is mostly a basic human instinct. It is a kind of enlightened self-interest. It is a basic concern for the welfare of others; a concern may not be based on rational argument but empathy or our shared humanity. So whether we have religious faith or not we have to make up our own minds about what is right and wrong. It is a basic commitment of someone who has human feelings. The mistake is that if we have religious belief, moral principles just come along with the package and there is no need to think about and justify them.

In chapter 4, author takes the issue of one of the common objections to atheism: that it leads to a life devoid of meaning and

purpose. He refutes that life's meaning and purpose are prepackaged together with religion. It is generally believed that if we are created by God then our purpose is simply handed to us on a plate by that God, since he made us with some purpose in mind. While declining this argument, the author cites the example of people who for many centuries thought it was simply their role in life to work for the aristocracy and the upper class. If some one believes that to serve the God is the purpose of life, author wonders, why God needs domestic help or anything like that. So God or no God, if life is to be really meaningful it must be so in away which speaks to our own projects, needs or desires. When times are hard and life is going badly, lie can be seen pointless. But this happens to everyone whether you believe in God or not.

Some believers generally object that atheists are pleasure seekers whereas they have eternal life to seek. The idea that meaningful life needs to be eternal is simply false. The modern history shows there are many atheists do and have lived meaningful and purposeful lives without bringing any eternity. He cites names of celebrities like Milan Kundera, Francois Mitterrand, Richard Feynman, Aurndhati Roy etc. In fact, he advises us to visit the web site celebatheists.com to view the long list of atheists who have contributed to humanity.

Sometimes the believers pass the derogatory remark quoting the issue of Nazi Germany and Stalin's era as a result of atheism. According to them, atheism was responsible for 20th century totalitarian atrocities. Author discusses the relationship between atheism, Nazi Germany and Soviet communism and concludes that Nazi Germany was not atheist state and what happened in Russia was partially the result of 'militant atheism'. In fact, Baggini argues against militant atheism throughout his book. Atheism's most authentic political expression takes the form of state secularism, not state atheism.

Baggini rejects the hearsay that the perception of atheism as being essentially anti-religious in character rather than pro-naturalist. The perception is hard to shift since in most of the countries of the world religion is more respected and atheist has to fight for space and expression. In fact this argument is like feminists who want equal representation for women have lazily criticized as 'man-haters'. Author then briefly considers some arguments for God's existence including cosmological, teleological and ontological arguments. The atheist may begin with the basic laws of logic to refute the god's existence, but the believer often begins with conviction that God exists. This belief trumps all reason and logic.

While concluding the introduction on atheism, author points out that atheism which has been described in this book is really a form of humanism. In the broad sense of the term humanism, humanists are simply atheists who believe in living purposeful and moral lives. While defending the belief in God, believers generally make a statement that human beings are children of god. Atheism is throwing all childish illusions and accepts that we have to make our own way in the

world. Atheism speaks to the truth and does not seek to shield us from truth by myth and superstition.

The reader of this book will certainly notice that while defending the atheism author never brings science into argument and he did not raise the issue of science versus religion. He kept his arguments briefly and precisely. Thus this book is great in the sense that it is a very strong case for atheism without being either to scientific or militant against God and theism.

***Atheism:
A Very Short Introduction***

Julian Baggini

Oxford University Press

BS

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The essential condition of theoretical or divine idealism is the sacrifice of logic, of human reason, the renunciation of science. in defending the doctrines of idealism one finds himself enlisted perforce in the ranks of the oppressors and exploiters of the masses. These are two great reasons which, it would seem, should be sufficient to drive every great mind, every great heart, from idealism.

Bakunin
God and the State

Skeptic News

Bangalore Vicharavadi Sangha (Bangalore Rationalist Association)

Bangalore Vicharavadi Sangha conducts monthly lectures and discussions on various topics. Those who are interested in attending the programmes conducted by the association may contact:

Dr. M.N.Keshava Rao (Phone: 26690269. Email: keshava_rao@hotmail.com)

A.S.Nataraj (Phone: 26696553. Email: rajsri@bgl.vsnl.net.in)

District Level meetings of Karnataka State Federation of Rationalist Associations are being convened across the state. Those who would like to be part of the organization are requested to contact the State

Convener of KSFRA

BVV Subba Rao. Phone: 09886679088.

Email: babukadur44@gmail.com

Tools for Skeptical Thinking

Carl Sagan

Carl Sagan's famous essay, *The Fine Art of Baloney Detection*, more or less encapsulates the basic tenets of Skeptical Thinking. The present article is an extract from the essay.

The full text can be found in one of Sagan's best-sellers *The Demonhaunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark*.

- Wherever possible there must be independent confirmation of the "facts."

- Encourage substantive debate on the evidence by knowledgeable proponents of all points of view.

- Arguments from authority carry little weight—"authorities" have made mistakes in the past. They will do so again in the future. Perhaps a better way to say it is that in science there are no authorities; at most, there are experts.

- Spin more than one hypothesis. If there's something to be explained, think of all the different ways in which it could be explained. Then think of tests by which you might systematically disprove each of the alternatives. What survives, the hypothesis that resists disproof in this Darwinian selection among "multiple working hypotheses," has a much better chance of being the right answer than if you had simply run with the first idea that caught your fancy.

- Try not to get overly attached to a hypothesis just because it's yours. It's only a way station in the pursuit of knowledge. Ask yourself why you like the idea. Compare it fairly with the alternatives. See if you can find reasons for rejecting it. If you don't, others will.

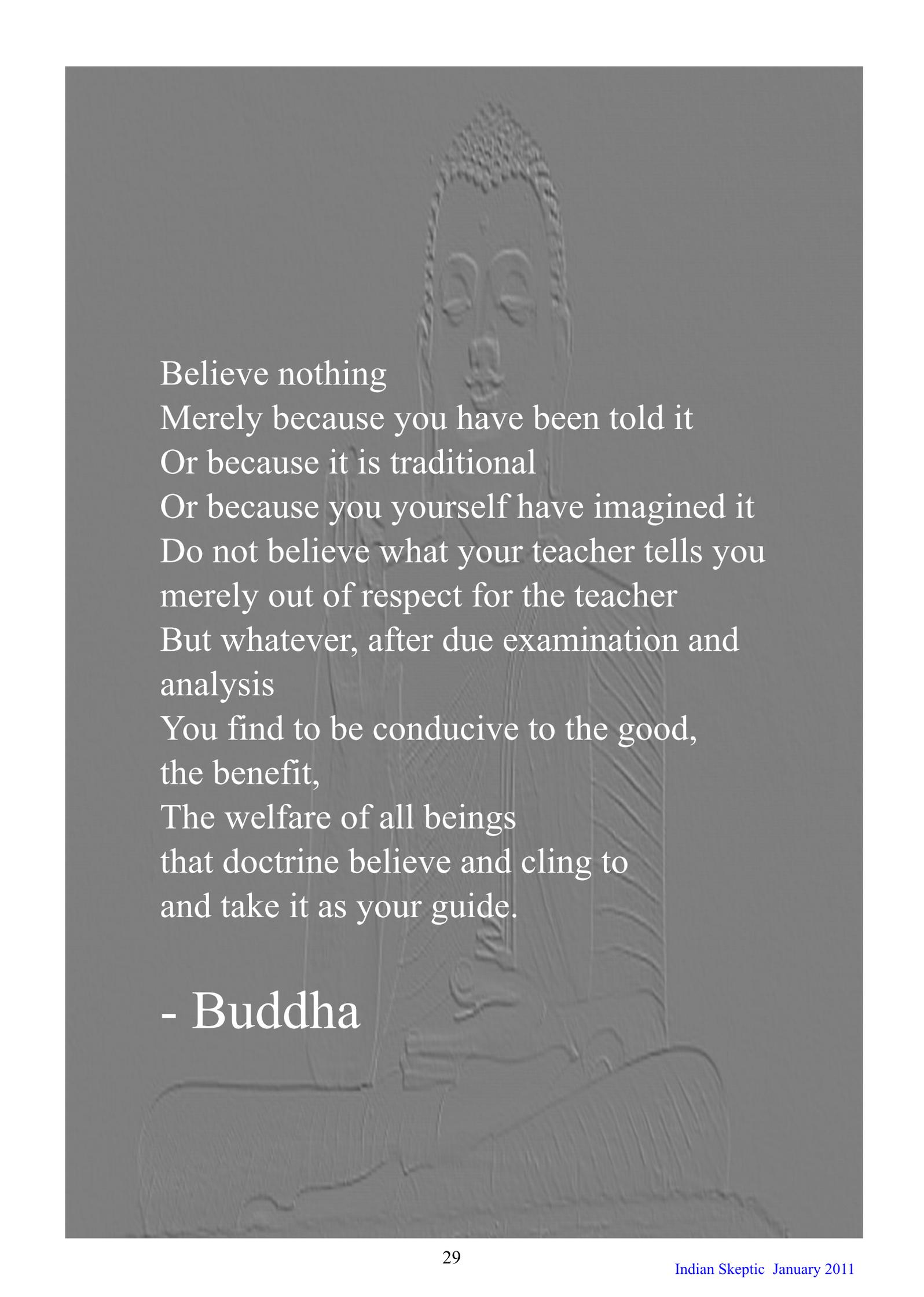


- Quantify. If whatever it is you're explaining has some measure, some numerical quantity attached to it, you'll be much better able to discriminate among competing hypotheses. What is vague and qualitative is open to many explanations. Of course there are truths to be sought in the many qualitative issues we are obliged to confront, but finding them is more challenging.

- If there's a chain of argument, every link in the chain must work (including the premise) —not just most of them.

- Occam's Razor. This convenient rule-of-thumb urges us when faced with two hypotheses that explain the data equally well to choose the simpler.

- Always ask whether the hypothesis can be, at least in principle, falsified. Propositions that are untestable, unfalsifiable are not worth much. You must be able to check assertions out. Inveterate skeptics must be given the chance to follow your reasoning, to duplicate your experiments and see if they get the same result.



Believe nothing
Merely because you have been told it
Or because it is traditional
Or because you yourself have imagined it
Do not believe what your teacher tells you
merely out of respect for the teacher
But whatever, after due examination and
analysis
You find to be conducive to the good,
the benefit,
The welfare of all beings
that doctrine believe and cling to
and take it as your guide.

- Buddha