



Atheist Dawkins: Gov't Must Protect Children From Religious Parents

Freedom of religion is a right treasured by many Westerners. But then there are those people who want freedom *from* religion — and atheism point-man Richard Dawkins is among them. In fact, not content just purging faith from public institutions, the biologist turned irreligious bad boy is now taking aim at families. Writes the [Independent](#):



Richard Dawkins has called on schools to protect children from being indoctrinated by their religious parents.

The renowned evolutionary biologist and atheist argued that parents were given too much power over their children's educations, and that it was time to give more rights back to the individuals themselves.

"There is a balancing act and you have to balance the rights of parents and the rights of children and I think the balance has swung too far towards parents," he said.

"Children do need to be protected so that they can have a proper education and not be indoctrinated in whatever religion their parents happen to have been brought up in."

Dawkins' comments were made prior to a talk at Trinity College Dublin late last month while being interviewed by the *Irish Times*, which, providing more detail, [writes](#), "Warning against the 'power of childhood indoctrination,' he said it was futile debating with people who put the Bible ahead of scientific evidence. 'You have to write off those people' but you can try to convince younger people to avoid superstition, Prof Dawkins said."

Echoing these sentiments were his co-speaker at the college event, physicist Lawrence Krauss, who was also interviewed by the *Times* and said that parents "don't have the right to shield their children from knowledge." Kraus continued, "That's not a right any more than they have the right to shield their children from health care or medicine. And those parents that do that are often tried and imprisoned when they refuse to allow their children to get blood transfusions or whatever is necessary for their health. And this is necessary for their mental health."

There is much to criticize in Dawkins' position. As a simple point of fact, it is a falsehood to say that the "balance" of rights has "swung too far toward parents"; in reality, recent decades have seen a steady erosion of parental rights.

This isn't to say these "rights" have generally been reassigned to children; this won't happen because we universally recognize that, as immature beings, children lack the judgment necessary to successfully negotiate the world on their own. Left to his own devices, a child might eat ice cream for dinner or dispense with academics in favor of full-time play. This is why we don't allow children to drive, vote, buy cigarettes or alcohol, join the military, or enter into contracts; it's why we generally don't charge them



as adults in criminal courts. And it is why the 14th Amendment — dictating that *no citizen* may be denied the privileges and legal protections other citizens of his state enjoy — isn't applied to children, despite their being citizens.

So Dawkins' words are deceptive: At issue aren't "rights of children" but control over children. Thus, insofar as this power is stripped from parents, it transfers to another adult entity — obviously, today, the state.

None of this is to say that Dawkins has no use for things religious. In a recent *Time* article, to perhaps prove his open-mindedness, he [says](#) he sees "no harm in celebrating traditional festivals" and enjoys "a Carol Service in a great cathedral, or Harvest Festival Evensong in a country church." Yes, perhaps it's like attending a baseball game or opera or truck-and-tractor pull. Dawkins doesn't mind your indulging the forms of religion as long as the substance isn't taken seriously. And it is all window dressing to him. Making the case that there's no such thing as a "Catholic" or "Protestant" child because we aren't born with beliefs, he writes, "Religion is the one exception we all make to the rule: don't label children with the opinions of their parents." But there's the rub: No true believer considers his faith mere "opinion" — but a matter of Truth.

"Ah, there's the dogma!" says the atheist. "That's where indoctrination comes in!" But is there such thing as dogma-free child-rearing or education? To echo Dawkins, children aren't born with beliefs. And all authority figures indoctrinate them, with ideas about right and wrong, manners, social norms, and today's politically correct fashions (lamentably), to name a handful. In schools, the dogmas take the form of multiculturalism, feminism, environmentalism, equality doctrine, and a host of other things. Note that these aren't presented as *options*; no teacher says, "Well, Johnny, feminism holds that the sexes are equal, but, hey, if you want to be a patriarchy-pushing male chauvinist, more power to ya', kid!" But why not? As Dawkins says, "children should be taught to think for themselves."

Why not? Because it's simply not how man operates. Unlike animals, man is an intellectual being who believes — things. And when a little man is born, again, he knows nothing, and, as the *Week's* Michael Brendan Dougherty [points out](#) critiquing Dawkins, we teach our children not just in explicit but in implicit ways, in the examples we set and in what we assume, the assumed and modeled being learned best. But most significantly, as G.K. Chesterton said, "In truth, there are only two kinds of people; those who accept dogma and know it, and those who accept dogma and don't know it." Dawkins seems to occupy the latter category.

What are his dogmas? One is, as he [puts it](#), that we "should" not and "don't" "get our moral compass from religion." In point of fact — and this is a rare principle that can be called philosophical "fact" — there's no other arena from which morality (properly understood) can be gotten. Another dogma is a seemingly unbending faith in science, his belief that it can provide all or virtually all life's answers, and, insofar as it cannot, there's no reason to think religion could do any better. Let's examine his faith.

With uncanny timing, author and Professor of European Thought John N. Gray just published an essay that, while not mentioning Dawkins' name, describes him perfectly: an "evangelical atheist." An atheist himself, Gray points out that while such people aggressively proselytize and inveigh against religious faith, they place their faith in science. Yet science is far from infallible.

Gray opens his piece talking about another biologist, German Ernst Haeckel, who "devised his own 'religion of science' called Monism"; he helped popularize doctrines of racial superiority, and also eugenics, which is the improving of humanity via selective breeding. Gray points out that eugenics was



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the “thinking man’s” position among atheists, embraced by Julian Huxley, H.G. Wells, George Bernard Shaw, and many others. It was “Science” with that capital S, only rejected by snake-handling religionists steeped in superstition. That is, until eugenics was discredited by the genocidal Nazis.

Gray then makes an important point: It is often claimed that Christianity “follows changing moral fashions,” but, he writes:

The same might be said, with more justice, of the prevalent version of atheism. If an earlier generation of unbelievers shared the racial prejudices of their time and elevated them to the status of scientific truths, evangelical atheists do the same with the liberal values to which western societies subscribe today — while looking with contempt upon “backward” cultures that have not abandoned religion. The racial theories promoted by atheists in the past have been consigned to the memory hole — and today’s most influential atheists would no more endorse racist biology than they would be seen following the guidance of an astrologer. But they have not renounced the conviction that human values must be based in science; now it is liberal values which receive that accolade.

It isn’t just eugenics, either. Galileo’s conflicts with the Catholic Church are well known (and widely misunderstood), but most of heliocentrism’s opposition came from his fellow scientists. Scientific “consensus” once also scoffed at continental-drift theory, just as it held that the disease pellagra was caused by a germ, when it was actually induced by malnutrition. And there are [countless other examples](#) of scientific “facts” that turned out to be fiction.

Also fiction is the notion the world would be a more peaceful, enlightened place if only religion could be purged and replaced by the light of science. As Gray wrote:

When organised as a movement and backed by the power of the state, atheist ideologies have been an integral part of despotic regimes that also claimed to be based in science, such as the former Soviet Union. Many rival moralities and political systems — most of them, to date, illiberal — have attempted to assert a basis in science. All have been fraudulent and ephemeral. Yet the attempt continues in atheist movements today, which claim that liberal values can be scientifically validated and are therefore humanly universal.

It’s no surprise that atheist ideologies and political systems have claimed a basis in science — and it’s no surprise they descended into abject immorality. After all, it took till 2010 for neuroscientist Sam Harris to come along, author *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Moral Values*, and say he wants a “scientific morality.”

But he’d have better luck trying to turn lead into gold.

Science tells us only what we *can* do — not what we *should*. “Should” is the realm of philosophy. You cannot observe an eternal truth through a microscope or a moral principle in a Petri dish. You cannot prove murder is wrong scientifically. Some may protest, and then you go on that merry-go-round to nowhere. “Murder is wrong because it hurts others.” Okay, prove it’s wrong to hurt others. “It’s wrong to hurt others because it causes pain and disrupts society.” Alright, prove that’s wrong. And ’round and ’round it goes and where it stops the good theologian knows. For according to science, murder isn’t right or wrong — only possible.

As Gray puts it, “When monotheism has been left behind morality can’t go on as before. Among other things, the universal claims of liberal morality become highly questionable.” But that is quite the understatement. It’s the difference between Truth and taste: Just as we wouldn’t say an unusual flavor



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was “wrong” or “evil” just because the vast majority of the world didn’t like it, it makes no sense saying murder is “wrong” *if the only reason we do so* is that the vast majority of the world prefers we not kill in a way the vast majority of the world calls “unjust.” Murder would then, like flavors, occupy the category of man’s preference — of taste.

For morality to be real — and not just “values,” opinions, or some other misnomer for “the current in thing” — it must be based on Truth, which is eternal and universal and transcends man. Of course, this is just a fancy way of saying it must be “God’s law,” which is why the existence of “morality” presupposes the existence of God. And this is why Gray the atheist said himself, “Anyone who wants their values secured by something beyond the capricious human world had better join an old-fashioned religion. If you set aside any view of humankind that is borrowed from monotheism, you have to deal with human beings as you find them, with their perpetually warring values.”

I don’t know what renowned biologist Richard Dawkins thinks of “consensus science,” frequently cited in the climate-change debate, but far more ridiculous is oxymoronic “consensus morality.” In a brilliant 2003 Caltech Michelin Lecture, late author Michael Crichton condemned the former notion, [saying](#) “There is no such thing as consensus science. If it’s consensus, it isn’t science. If it’s science, it isn’t consensus.” But one thing can be said for it: While it dispenses with the scientific imperative of providing demonstrable proof of a phenomenon and instead uses combined *ad populum* and appeal-to-authority arguments (fallacies) to convince others what the truth is, it’s universally agreed that a physical truth *is at issue*. The notion of “consensus morality” presupposes there are no spiritual realm and Supreme Lawgiver and thus no Moral Truth, but we’ll rebrand taste as “values” and hope no one notices, especially not us. It’s analogous to incorporeal beings in a spirit-only universe acting as if science, the study of a physical world, is somehow a reality and relevant in their devoid-of-matter realm.

This is why Dawkins’ world view is contradictory. If atheism and its implied relativism are reality, he has no logical reason to profess right and wrong. But he does. He not only upholds the immorality of many of the old evils and modern isms, but also believes that authentic religious faith is a bad thing. Yet his atheism makes “bad” a relative term. Who is to say what’s right or wrong? Don’t impose your values on others, doctor.

But if Dawkins believes his moral positions truly are “moral” positions, that they are axiomatic — meaning, self-evident and needing no further proof — then he has accepted the unscientific, the empirically unprovable. He has embraced what Gray called a “pre-Darwinian, teleological way of thinking that has no place in science.” He has, in a word, faith.



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