

Inquiring Minds: Facing One's Fears, pt2.

Issue #33 January-March, 2015 "Atheism is a non-prophet organization." -- George Carlin

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SCIENCE VERSUS BELIEF: A GROWING GLOBAL MOVEMENT

Written in 1955, banned by the Catholic Church until it was embraced and finally became part of my required reading in 1968; *The Phenomenon of Man* was written by a paleontologist, theologian, and Jesuit priest, Pierre [Teilhard de Chardin](#). The work was a welcomed breath of fresh air for many Catholics trying to reconcile the science of evolution with the belief in a Divine Creator, the End to which all was supposedly drawn. Unless I misunderstood--and there was a lot to understand--part of Chardin's God allowed humankind to evolve as it did but assisted the process over the rough spots by infusing the mysterious, transcendent quality of consciousness. From there humankind's job was to bring that consciousness to its full potential.

Just recently, I stumbled across Richard Dawkins' 2006 book, [The God Delusion](#)--maybe Providence sent it my way. To my surprise I found it an even fresher breath of air and a more liberating and long overdue work. Whether one agrees with the author's conclusions, I found the journey



Richard Dawkins

informative, enlightening, thorough, elegant, and even entertaining. I especially enjoyed and learned more about the science of evolution, even as Dawkins made believable arguments to dismantle the intelligent design theory. He refers to Chardin's deity as the God of the Gap: the one who is responsible for all the mysteries science has not figured out yet. Mystics and scientists both embrace the mysteries of the unknown, mystics as evidence of divine intervention, and scientists as something to explore.

Dawkins reviews the **deist** view of a creator, much like that embraced by many of our Founding Fathers, as one who created man, but then stepped out of the picture, impervious to prayer and man's fate. On the other hand the

personal God of the **theist** is a creator who listens to personal prayer, intervenes in history, rewards the righteous, etc. The author presents and examines the various arguments for a creator deity from [Thomas Aquinas'](#) Prime Mover to [Saint Augustine's](#) *City of God* conversion story. And much much more, not setting up straw men to easily dismember, but credible arguments with which to grapple.

While "some equate an avowed atheist on equal par with that of a rapist" Dawkins also does much to dispel such a label. He and thousands of other like-minded atheists and agnostics will not allow religions to hide behind the "immunity of belief" once that faith has propelled its believers to use those unscientific beliefs and superstitions to change or limit society at large. Think of vaccination exemption for religious reasons, various laws limiting sexual expression between consenting adults, *et cetera*. That which motivates the Muslim jihadist can (and has) motivated the Christian, Jew, etc; and as such should have its tenants and teachings subject to the rule of public inquiry just as any other hypothesis. The world cannot afford having sacred cows beyond the pale of rigorous scrutiny once they wander beyond the land of their domain. What works in India would not work in New York City. Belief, faith, or religion, these thinkers reason, are not beyond the domain of critical thinking.

The book asks new questions, and redirects our barking up more relevant trees. One such question would be "from where does morality come if not from religion?" Look up the term [Zeitgeist](#) for a clue, but better yet, read this book if you dare to question these thinkers of another brave new world.

ROAD SCHOLAR ADVENTURE

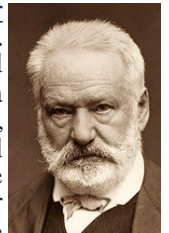
We just returned from our Hawaiian tour lead by [Road Scholar](#) (formerly Elder Hostel). It was our alternative to taking a cruise to the Hawaiian islands of Oahu, Hawaii, and Maui without spending 9 days at sea to get

there and back.

We were not disappointed by the overall plan and the experience. The accommodations, the meals, the expert and entertaining teachers, and the food--all part of the package--we're excellent. The cost was a little more expensive since we had to arrange our own flights to Oahu versus cruising out of SF; but we gained more time, experienced more, met more like-minded travelers in our smaller group of 28, and had the trip better planned than we would have done.

SEEING *LES MISERABLES* AGAIN GAVE PERSPECTIVE

One of the most powerful novels ever written was [Victor Hugo's](#) *Les Miserables*. The musical fashioned lyrics and music into a powerful story of pain, suffering, and redemption. My favorite line is "To love another person is to see the face of God." Favorite scene is the Bishop of Digne (played by Livermore pastor, Father Mark Wiesner) giving his silver pieces to the thieving Jean Valjean, an act which would forever change his life into a man of compassion and charity. A much needed kudos both to the clerics of the age and those of today who have been overshadowed by the abusers of their sacred trust.



Victor Hugo

NATURE SHOWS US OUR INSIGNIFICANCE AND FRAILTY

All the growth, culture, cities, and achievements of humanity might be easily taken out by the [Yellowstone caldera](#) which is statistically more probably than a meteor hit, but less depressing than us doing ourselves in by a nuclear holocaust. And all we know will be be swallowed up into the mindless mass of a natural event. We are just shrimp in a sea of uncertainty.

And yet I am OK with my powerlessness even as I try to control my little life, guard my health, better my life and that of my family the best I can, enjoy my petty little interests, and the illusion of controlling a golf or tennis ball, finding meaning and maybe even God in those I learn to love. Life is still good and blessed

Forgive me my somber sentiments. -Joe

