

World Religions

Animism, New Age, Secularism, Atheism

Ross Arnold, Summer 2015

World Religion Lectures

- August 21 – *Introduction: A Universal Human Experience*
- August 28 – *Hinduism*
- September 4 – *Judaism*
- September 11 – *Religions of India (Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism, etc.)*
- September 18 – *Religions of China & Japan (Taoism, Confucianism, Shinto, etc.)*
- September 25 – *Christianity*
- October 2 – *Islam*
- **October 9 – *Animism, New Age, Secularism, Atheism***

Today's World Religions by Date of Founding

	<u>Pop. (000s)</u>	<u>% of World</u>	<u>Founded (c.)</u>	<u>Where</u>
Hinduism	1,100,000	12.65%	4000-2500BC	Indus Valley
Judaism	14,000	0.20%	2000 BC	Palestine
Buddhism	488,000	5.29%	560-490 BC	India
Chinese Trad. ¹	394,000	5.54%	500 BC	China
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Sikhism	28,000	0.32%	1500 AD	India
Bah'aism	7,300	0.10%	1863 AD	Persia
Other ²	690,000	9.70%		
Non-relig. ³	1,100,000	15.46%		

¹ Includes Confucianism, Taoism, Shamanism

² Includes all other smaller religious affiliations identified

³ Includes secular, non-religious, agnostic and atheist

What is “Religion?”

- “Genuine religion is fundamentally a search for meaning beyond materialism...” Joseph Runzo, *Global Philosophy of Religion*
- Religion is... “the belief in spiritual beings (a belief which has existed in all known societies).”
Edward Burnett Tylor

Different Perceptions About God

- Monotheism – one God: Judaism, Christianity, Islam.
- Polytheism – many gods: Hinduism, Shinto
- Pantheism – everything *is* god: Stoics; New Age
- Panentheism – all things exist *within* god: Native American; New Age
- Deism – God created, but either is not personal or is no longer present: Enlightenment thinkers
- Animism – all natural phenomena have souls: primitive religions
- Atheism – there is no god or gods; no supernatural
- Agnosticism – I don't or can't know God
- Lazyism – “don't think about anything; can't be bothered about anything; where's my beer?”

Animism

Animism: folk religion with the worldview that non-human entities — animals, plants, and inanimate objects — possess a spiritual essence.

- **Animism** sees no separation between the spiritual and physical (or material) world, and souls or spirits exist not only in humans, but also in animals, plants, rocks, mountains, rivers, or other aspects of nature, including thunder, wind, and shadows.
- **Totemism** is a belief that each human has a spiritual connection or a kinship with another being, such as an animal or plant, often called a "spirit-being" or "totem."
- **Shamanism** involves a practitioner reaching altered states of consciousness in order to perceive and interact with a spirit world and channel these transcendental energies into this world



New Age

The New Age Movement is applied to a range of spiritual or religious beliefs and practices that developed in Great Britain and the US in the 1970s. The movement drew heavily on older esoteric traditions, including astrology, occultism, channeling, spiritualism, Hinduism, Gnosticism, Theosophy, Wicca, New Paganism, New Thought, UFO cults of the 1950s, the Counterculture movement of the 1960s, and the Human Potential Movement.

Secularism

Secularism is the principle of the separation of government institutions and persons who represent state, from religious institutions and dignitaries.

From the end of the 19th century secularism in Europe has meant freedom of public institutions, (especially primary schools), from the influence of the Catholic Church, based on respect for freedom of thought and freedom of religion. Thus the absence of a state religion, and the subsequent separation of Church and State, is considered by proponents to be a prerequisite for such freedom of thought.

Atheism

- In the broadest sense, **atheism** is the rejection of belief in the existence of deities (God, gods or supernatural beings).
- Arguments for atheism range from the philosophical to social and historical approaches, and include arguments that there is a lack of empirical evidence; the problem of evil; the argument from inconsistent revelations; the rejection of concepts that cannot be falsified; and the argument from nonbelief. Some atheists have adopted secular philosophies (eg. humanism and skepticism), but there is no one ideology or set of behaviors to which all atheists adhere.

The New Atheism

- Late 20th-early 21st century social and political movement in favor of atheism and secularism. It is marked by an aggressive attitude, advocating the view that *“religion should not simply be tolerated but should be countered, criticized, and exposed by rational argument wherever its influence arises.”*
- 2004 publication of ***The End of Faith: Religion, Terror and the End of Reason*** by Sam Harris marked the beginning of a series of popular atheistic best-sellers. (Also ***The God Delusion*** in 2006 by Richard Dawkins; ***Breaking the Spell*** in 2006 by Daniel Dennett; ***God is Not Great*** in 2007 by Christopher Hitchens)

The “Four Horsemen of the Non-Apocalypse”



➤ **Richard Dawkins:** English ethnologist, evolutionary biologist, known for his gene-centered view of evolution. (*The Selfish Gene; The God Delusion; The Blind Watchmaker*)

➤ **Christopher Hitchens:** English author, journalist, polemicist, debater (died 12/11). (*God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything; The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Non-Believer*)

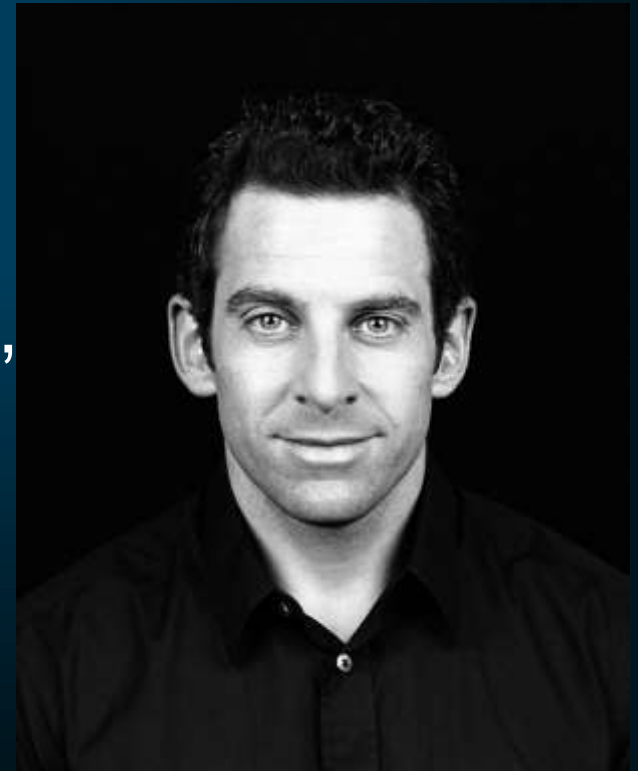


The “Four Horsemen of the Non-Apocalypse”



➤ **Daniel Dennett:** American philosopher, cognitive scientist, evolutionary biologist. (*Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon; Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*)

➤ **Sam Harris:** American author, philosopher, neuroscientist. (*The End of Faith; Letter to a Christian Nation; The Moral Landscape*)



Religion is a Universal Human Experience

- As noted, all human cultures have had *some* religion.
- A global 2015 poll found that 78% of the world's people identified themselves as “religious.” (11% self-identified as “convinced atheists.”)
- 92% of Americans believe in a personal God.
- In 2011 a 3-year Oxford University-based project, incorporating 40 different studies of various cultures world-wide, reported that “religion comes naturally, even instinctively, to human being.”

“We tend to see purpose in the world. We see agency. We think that something is there even if you can't see it. All this tends to build up a religious way of thinking.”

Dr. Roger Trigg, Oxford University

Are humans “hard-wired” to believe?

Neurotheology is a new branch of brain research which studies the relationship between the brain and religious experience.

Studies in Tibetan monks, Catholic nuns and Pentecostal Christians have all demonstrated that religious experiences have a measureable stimulating effect on *several* brain areas:

- The temporal lobes, which processes sensory input into meaning and emotions; the frontal lobe, right behind our foreheads, which helps focus attention in prayer and meditation; the parietal lobe, near the backs of our skulls, is involved in the feeling of becoming part of something greater than oneself; and the limbic system, deep in the center, which regulates emotions and is responsible for feelings of awe and joy.

WHY do religions exist?

“Religious beliefs and practices are found in all human groups and go back to the very beginnings of human culture.”

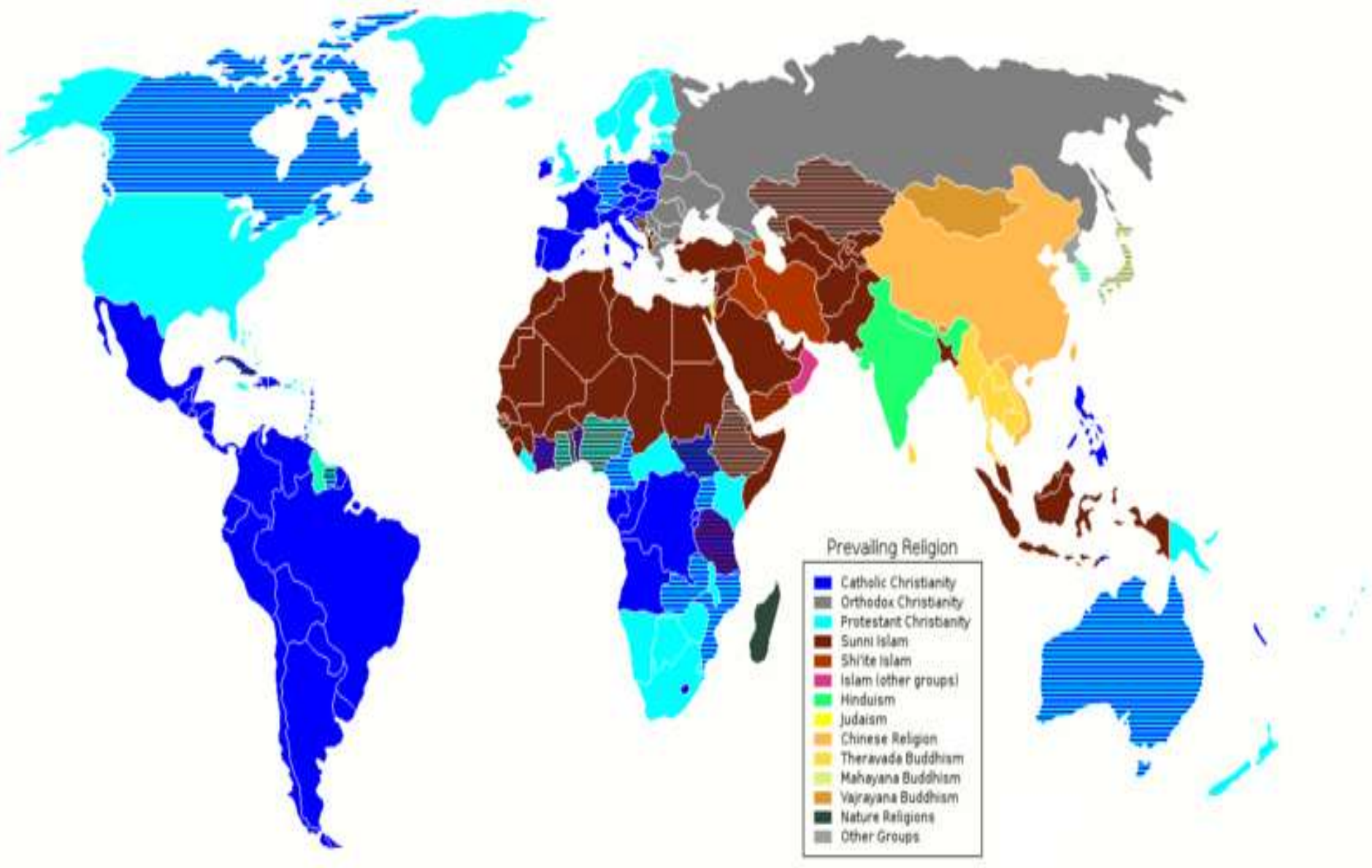
Pascal Boyer, Skeptical Inquirer

- To provide a set of ideas about how and why the world is put together as it is.
- As a means to help people deal with problems of human life that are significant, persistent and intolerable.
- As a respond to the seemingly inherent sense of there being something beyond the material world.
- To bind together a society and/or culture.
- As a means to transcendental meaning and purpose, and often a goal to aspire to after life.

Ancient Religious Beginnings

- **223,000-100,000 BC**
 - Hominid graves represent earliest ceremonial rites.
- **33,000-25,000 BC**
 - 30,000-year-old Tsodilo place of worship in Botswana.
 - Oldest “Venus figurines” appear in graves.
- **25,000-21,000 BC**
 - Personal objects become common in graves.
- **9831-7370 BC**
 - Neolithic Revolution brings first cities, kingdoms and organized religion.
 - Gobleki Tepe is oldest confirmed place of worship.
 - Catalhoyuk develops as spiritual center of Anatolia.
 - Stonehenge begun.
- **3300-1300 BC**
 - Indus Valley Civilization, development of Indian religions.
 - Oldest surviving religious writing—Egyptian Pyramid Texts.

World Religion Distribution Today



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