

What IS So Great About Christianity?

My Notes on Dinesh D'Souza's *What's So Great About Christianity*

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Introduction

I was raised Catholic, spent twelve years in Catholic schools, and was pretty religious up through high school – I was even on two retreat teams when I was a senior. I had started losing faith in my last year of high school, and by the end of my first year of college, I had pretty much given up on religion.

It wasn't until about six months ago – five years later– that I actually started doing any reading about the subject. I've since read Dawkin's *God Delusion*, Hitchen's *God Is Not Great*, and Harris' *Letter to a Christian Nation* (I'm working on *End of Faith* as of this writing). I mention all this to give you some sense of my background in the subject – not too extensive, to be sure. I know I still have a lot of reading to catch up on.

But, before reading more things I already agree with, I figured I should take some time to consider arguments from the other side. I knew I wouldn't agree with D'Souza, but hey, due diligence and all. And I was right: I disagreed with most of it. He tends to contradict himself quite a bit, which certainly makes it easier to dismiss his arguments, but it makes for a frustrating read. I compiled these notes to argue some of D'Souza's points and to point out some of these contradictions. This is anything but an exhaustive response to the book, and there are a few chapters that I didn't even bother responding to. But, it's been four months since I wrote this, and it seems that I'll never find the time or inclination to get into it any deeper, so I'm posting this as-is.

Preface – A Challenge to Believers – and Unbelievers

In five short pages, I think the preface came out with the highest notes-per-page ratio of any section of the book. D'Souza quickly sets the tone for any atheists reading the book – he assumes that you're an amoral bloodthirsty tyrant with no sense of decency and no joy in your life at all. Also, you have no greater pursuit than to destroy the church by relentlessly attacking the poor, innocent clergy.

A few pastors have stood up to the atheists' challenge, but they have not, in general, fared well. Pastors are used to administering to congregations that accept Christian premises. They are not accustomed to dealing with skilled attackers who call the Christian God a murderer and a tyrant and who reject the authority of the Bible to adjudicate anything.

I exaggerate, of course, but hey – he started it. D'Souza goes on to list the seven items he intends to demonstrate in the book, the last being:

7. Atheism is motivated not by reason but by a kind of cowardly moral escapism.

And further down the same page, he specifically addresses atheists reading the book:

You are a rationalist at work and a romantic in your person life. You have been engaged in the pursuit of happiness for a fairly long time; ever wonder why you haven't found it? How long do you intend to continue this joyless search for joy?

So there's not a lot of hope for us godless heathens, but Dinesh is a good guy, so he wrote a whole book to tell us how great Christianity is. I should mention, however, that he doesn't actually get to that point until the last few chapters; up until then, he's mostly just trying to defend against the attacks of The Four Horsemen: Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennet, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens.

Part 1 - The Future of Christianity

Chapter 1 - The Twilight of Atheism: The Global Triumph of Christianity

D'Souza kicks things off by claiming that Christianity is growing faster than any other religion – including Islam, though he doesn't really back that up. Apparently, Christianity is no longer an endeavor

limited to white people, because it's spread the world over. This indicates, in D'Souza's mind, the "twilight of atheism," which is hard to back up given the popularity of atheist literature and event in the past few years. If anything, I think it's us infidels that are gaining ground.

But, Dinesh says that secularization is "going the way of Zeus and Baal," which I found particularly entertaining. If Zeus and Baal can be set aside, what makes you think your god won't be? He mentions this argument – barely – in chapter 5.

Chapter 2 - Survival of the Sacred: Why Religion is Winning

One of my favorite arguments in this book is on page 16:

The important point is not just that atheism is unable to compete with religion in attracting followers, but also that the lifestyle of practical atheism seems to produce listless tribes that cannot even reproduce themselves. Sociologists Pippa Norris and Ron Inglehart note that many richer, more secular countries are "producing only about half as many children as would be needed to replace the adult population" while many poorer, more religious countries are "producing two or three times as many children as would be needed to replace the adult population." The consequence, so predictable one might almost call it a law, is that "the religious population is growing fast, while the secular number is shrinking."

I highly doubt that anyone who would be reading this would need me to point it out, but I feel I must mention the issue of overpopulation. As it stands, we do not have the resources to support the world population – particularly in those poorer, more religious countries where people are pumping out babies at four to six times the rate of those countries that *could* reasonably care for more children. Honestly, I didn't have high expectations for D'Souza when I started the book, but after a gem like that, how could I possibly read the rest of it expecting anything more than utter nonsense? And yet, I soldier on.

Chapter 3 – God Is Not Great: The Atheist Assault on Religion

D'Souza declares that America is currently experiencing an "atheist backlash," leading to "not a religious war but a war over religion, and it has been declared by leading Western atheists who have commenced hostilities." I would argue that we have not commenced any hostilities, but have finally starting fighting back. Atheism has been considered taboo until very recently, and even today our society seems largely unwilling to accept atheists in their families or government. As someone at the Atheist Conference put it, "We're like homosexuals in the 80's." More and more people are coming out, and it's starting to be seen as acceptable, but we still have a long way to go. We are fighting back against something that we see having a negative effect on our lives. We are fighting to keep other people's superstitions out of our laws and bedrooms, and to keep those superstitions from being imposed on our children. Christians have this wonderful way of making themselves out to be the victimized minority, and seem to forget that they are the majority in this country, and have thus gained the privilege of running most of it. But we're out here too, and we're fighting back the same way you would if we tried to impose our values, morals, and beliefs on your lives. Commenced hostilities my ass.

D'Souza goes on to describe Darwinism:

The great achievement of Darwin's theory of evolution and natural selection, Dawkins and other say, is that it shows how creatures that appear to be designed have in fact evolved according to the pressures of chance and survival. Atheists now an alternative explanation for why fish have gills, why birds have wings, and why human beings have brains and arms and lungs.

Dawkins addressed this specifically in *The God Delusion* – **evolution doesn't happen by chance**. A fish didn't one day sprout gills, a bird didn't just happen to be born with wings, and it's no chance that we have brains and arms and lungs. Yes, chance plays a part in the mutation of genes, but D'Souza makes it sound like things just randomly happen this way. He simplifies it to make it sound unlikely, and thus, dismissible.

On the atheist ideology:

One may think that atheism – based as it is on rejection or negation of God – would be devoid of a philosophy or worldview of its own. Historically it would be virtually impossible to outline anything resembling an atheist doctrine. Today, however, there are common themes that taken together amount to a kind of atheist ideology.

For the last time, there is no such thing as an atheist ideology! Atheism, as Dinesh says, is the *rejection* of a belief, not a belief system of its own. Humanism can be described as an ideology, and

many atheist groups have their own philosophies that they get behind, but that doesn't make it an atheist ideology. That would require a commonly shared belief, and you can't just take the opinions of the Four Horsemen and label it the Atheist Ideology, especially since we don't all agree with everything they have to say. Furthermore, atheism is not a religion, any more than bald is a hair color, or not collecting stamps is a hobby, so stop trying to declare what we all believe in.

One of my favorite quotes in the book: "The Christian villain, Satan, has now become the atheist hero." This is supported by referencing Milton's *Paradise Lost* and a couple of quotes that have nothing to do with Satan, so I'm not really sure where he got the idea that we're all worshipping the devil – who, incidentally, we also don't believe in.

Chapter 4 – Miseducating the Young: Saving Children From their Parents

The basic premise of this chapter is that atheists are using science education to eradicate religion in our schools. How so? "In recent years some parents and school boards have asked that public schools teach alternatives to Darwinian evolution. These efforts sparked a powerful outcry from the scientific and non-believing community." First of all, I would say that they did more than "ask" for Intelligent Design to be taught in schools. Second, it's not a scientific alternative to Darwinian evolution; it's an outright dismissal of scientific evidence because of religious beliefs...which shouldn't be taught in our schools. If you want your kids to have a stunted education in science, send them to a Catholic school, that's your business.

D'Souza goes on to argue that high school graduates are largely ignorant of science, "So why isn't there a political movement to fight for the teaching of photosynthesis? Why isn't the ACLU filing lawsuits on behalf of the Boyle's Law?" Because no one is demanding that public schools teach that plants get food from fairies, that's why. This argument isn't about the quality of education from our public schools, because we can all agree that it needs to be better. That doesn't justify making them worse by injecting religious dogma disguised as scientific fact.

Next up, D'Souza attacks atheists for "indoctrinating" children with science. I have no idea why it's worse to teach children facts about the world than it is to force the religion of their parents on them.

Another amusing quote:

A second strategy commonly used to promote atheism on campus utilizes the vehicle of adolescent sexuality. "Against the power of religion," one champion of agnosticism told me, "we employ an equal if not greater power – the power of hormones." Atheism is promoted as a means for young people to liberate themselves from moral constraint and indulge their appetites. Religion, in this framework, is portrayed as a form of sexual repression.

To hear Dinesh tell it, the amoral atheists are busting into campus Christian groups and promising all the promiscuous sex they can handle if only they renounce their faith. The only time I heard any discussion of faith – or lack thereof, for that matter – in my four and a half years of college was when I attended a Campus Crusade for Christ event. I'm sure there are professors that let their own beliefs affect the way they teach, but not to the extent that D'Souza would have us believe. In addition to being amoral bloodthirsty tyrants with no sense of decency and no joy in life at all (see the preface), atheists seem to be sex-crazed, too.

Part 2 – Christianity and the West

Chapter 5 – Render unto Caesar: The Spiritual Basis of Limited Government

D'Souza starts out Part 2 by pointing out Americans' ignorance of the Bible:

The problem is not that our children know too much about Christianity, but that they know too little. In America we do not have the problem of the Muslim *madrassas*, where only the Koran is studied. Rather, we live in a religiously illiterate society in which the Bible is rarely taught. Consequently many people in America and the West cannot name five of the Ten Commandments or recognize Genesis as the first book of the Bible. There's no point in even asking about the meaning of the Trinity. One in ten Americans apparently believes that Joan of Arc was Noah's wife. Ignorance of this kind has made many Westerners aliens in their own civilization, as they no longer know the literature, history, and philosophy that made the West the civilization it is today.

First off, I'm not sure how D'Souza feels about the Muslim *madrassas* – he first calls them a problem, but then seems to imply that similar schools to teach the Bible in America would be appropriate. If

Americans are ignorant to religious teachings, it is the problem of the churches – most have Sunday schools, don't they? Dinesh argues it's value in "literature, history, and philosophy," but I have a feeling he doesn't mean that the Bible should be taught in literature classes as a book of dubious origin and uncertain authorship – and I'm pretty certain he wouldn't be too pleased if that literature class taught the Koran in the same manner.

On page 46:

Christianity introduced not only a new religion but a new conception of religion. So successful was this cultural revolution in the West that today the ancient paganism lives only in the names of planets and for those that follow astrology charts. Atheists do not bother to disbelieve in Baal or Zeus and invoke them only to make all religion sound silly. The atheists' real target is the God of monotheism, usually the Christian God.

This one's a doozy. Anyone who has spent any time arguing religion has certainly heard this argument: "You don't believe in Zeus or Thor, so why do you believe in your god?" The idea is that the ancient pagan religions have pretty much been set aside, as Dinesh says, so what makes anyone think that the same won't happen to Christianity in a couple thousand years? What makes it better or more believable than the gods of the Greeks and Romans? Simply mentioning this argument and claiming that our "real" target is the god of the Christians does not adequately answer the question. Why is the Christian god any better than Zeus?

Also, I don't intend to speak for all atheists, but we *do* bother to disbelieve in Baal and Zeus, because we don't believe in *any* gods. However, there aren't many people around these days that DO believe in them, so we rarely need to argue their non-existence.

Dinesh then talks about people who try to use the state to enforce Christian orthodoxy, and how their actions are partly understandable because (I'm paraphrasing) they believed themselves to be in possession of the sole truth and were driven to use extreme lengths, such as imprisonment, to persuade others to join them. On page 51:

They were trying to establish the heavenly city here on earth, which is precisely what Augustine warned against, as did Christ before him. Moreover, they were violating the principle established by God in the Garden of Eden. God could have easily compelled Adam and Eve to conform to His command, but He didn't. Even though He knew they were making a bad decision, He respected their freedom enough to allow them to make it.

I'm not going to bother speaker to the Inquisition, because we all agree it was a bad thing. Rather, I'd like to talk about the free will god gave Adam and Eve by putting forth a great argument I heard at the Atheist Conference.

God dropped the tree of knowledge there in the Garden of Eden and told Adam and Eve not to eat from it. They had the free will to do as they chose, but god trusted them to do the right thing and stay away from it, right? But isn't god all-knowing and all-seeing? Surely, he knew that Adam and Eve would eat from the tree if he put it there, or else he isn't all-knowing. And if you believe that he is, then he knew exactly what was going to happen when he gave them the tree. They never stood a chance; god knew he would be banishing them from the garden before he even made them. That's not free will.

Just so we're clear, I'm not saying that humans don't have free will. I'm arguing that you can have one or the other: an all-knowing god, or a god that gave you free will. The two are incompatible together.

Chapter 6 – The Evil That I Would Not: Christianity and Human Fallibility

I think it was about here that I stopped taking so many notes, because I realized that this book would have way too many poorly founded arguments and stupid points for me to address them all. There are only a couple of things that I wanted to mention.

Dinesh gets into the habit of comparing modern society to the ancient Greeks and Romans. This is done here and there throughout the book, but more significantly here. He mentions it early on, in the preface I think, saying something about how secularists today see those empires as the height of human society, and I'm really not sure where he gets this idea. Maybe because people quote Socrates and Aristotle? I don't know.

Also, Christianity is apparently responsible for capitalism. I don't even know what to say about that one.

Chapter 7 – Created Equal: The Origin of Human Dignity

Christianity has always treated everyone as equals, despite their complacent view towards slavery and continued discrimination toward women (who still can't be Catholic priests). Better than Islam, to be sure, but come on.

Unlike Judaism and Islam, which treated men and women unequally in matters of divorce, Christian rules on the matter were identical for women in men.

Yep: it's not allowed. Thank goodness for that, or we probably wouldn't have so many unhappy marriages that continue for the sake of religion.

Dinesh addresses slavery on page 70. He first quotes Sam Harris and Steven Weinberg on the matter, then:

These atheist writers are certainly not the first to fault Christianity for its alleged approval of slavery. But slavery pre-dated Christianity by centuries and even millennia. It was widely practiced in the ancient world, from China and India to Greece and Rome, and most cultures regarded it as an indispensable institution, like the family.

My comment on this isn't actually about the church's stance on slavery; I just want to point out this one of D'Souza's many self-contradictions. Slavery was an indispensable institution, just like the family, was it? If you'll be so kind to flip back to page 58, you'll find that family life *was* dispensable, until the Christians made it so great:

First, Christianity made family life important in a way that it wasn't before. No longer was family life subordinated to the life of the city, as both Plato and Aristotle thought it should be.

The book is chock full of contradictions like this. After reading that, I had an even harder time taking him seriously.

Part 3 – Christianity and Science

Chapter 8 – Christianity and Reason: The Theological Roots of Science

I have a big red note under the title of this chapter: "This chapter says nothing meaningful about science." It's true.

D'Souza spent some time talking about the origin of the universe, and how everything has a cause, and you can trace causes back further and further until you get to the Big Bang. And something must have caused the Big Bang:

Therefore there must be an original cause responsible for this chain of causation in the first place. To this first cause we give the name God.

This may be the best argument he made in the book. Something must have caused the Big Bang; if you want to call that cause "god," I'm sort of OK with it, except for the fact that "god" comes with a lot more baggage than just being the push that started the Big Bang.

But then he (sort of) addresses the, "well, then what caused God?" question that inevitably follows.

Since God is by definition outside the universe, He is not part of the series. Therefore the rules of the series, including the rules of causation, would not logically apply to Him.

Simply declaring "the rules don't apply" is no way to answer the question, but that's about the best you'll get out of Dinesh.

On page 87, Dinesh puts forth Anselm's ontological argument. I'm not going to bother repeating it here; basically, it's a play on words that implies the imagination of a perfect being must mean that the being exists, because an existing being would be more perfect than a being that doesn't exist. However, I can't simply will a plate of pancakes to my kitchen table because it would be more perfect on my table than elsewhere. It's a meaningless play on words and nothing more, and I'm kind of surprised that someone as well respected as D'Souza would try to get away with it.

Chapter 9 – From Logos to Cosmos: Christianity and the Invention of Invention

Christianity invented science.

Chapter 10 – An Atheist Fable: Reopening the Galileo Case

D'Souza discusses the "war" between religion and science. I don't have any notes for this chapter.

Part 4 – The Argument for Design

Chapter 11 – A Universe with a Beginning: God and the Astronomers

This chapter elaborates the point made in Chapter 8, that god kicked off the Big Bang. Again, I'm sort of OK with this argument, to some extent. D'Souza tries to rectify the creation story with current understanding of the Big Bang. For example, the creation story says that god created light on the first day, and on the fourth day separated the night from the day. D'Souza's opinion is that the creation of light could be the incredible light and energy that surely accompanied the Big Bang, and the separation of night and day would be the formation of the sun and earth billions of years later. And yet again, I'm sort of OK with this argument. Obviously, I don't believe that god did these things, but I don't have a problem with someone using that story to describe it. However, I think the writers of the creation story just got lucky, and that their version can kind of be applied to what actually happened.

Dinesh continues arguing that god must have been the cause of the Big Bang, because it was the beginning of the universe as we know it. He never addresses the idea that the Big Bang may in fact have been one in a series of bangs and compressions, and that the universe always *has* been, and always compresses or expands. In his argument, there was no "before" the Big Bang, because that was the moment that god willed everything into existence.

Chapter 12 – A Designer Planet: Man's Special Place in Creation

In this chapter, D'Souza argues that our universe must have been designed for us by some intelligent being, because several constants in the universe – its age, the force of gravity, etc – are just perfect for life to exist. He offers the three common explanations for the fact that our universe has turned out this way:

1. Lucky Us. The universe is how it is by blind luck, and thus, we were able to evolve in it.
2. Multiple Universes. There are infinite universes that operate according to their own set of laws, and the one we're in is the one with these ideal conditions for life.
3. Designer Universe. God designed it this way for us.

Obviously, as a Christian, Dinesh is a proponent of number three. Of the three options, I think I lean most towards number one, but I don't have a good reason for it. The idea of infinite universes is hard to swallow, and D'Souza has no trouble defending against that idea. I'm not convinced that many people actually believe that to be true; I suspect it's just an idea that's been put forward, and we are unlikely to ever be able to prove it anyway.

Dinesh invokes Occam's razor to justify the designer universe. Basically, Occam's razor says that the simplest option is probably the right one. As Carl Sagan put it, "When faced with two hypotheses that explain the data equally well, choose the simpler." However, Dinesh is thus suggesting that the simplest explanation for our infinitely complex universe is an even more complex being of unknown origin that created it out of nothing. That may be the simplest way to explain it to a child, but doesn't really hold up to further questioning (questioning I surely don't need to elaborate upon, but just in case you lack imagination: what made god, what was he doing before he made our universe, why hasn't he shown himself to us if he made everything we know, etc).

Also, I want to quote one paragraph from page 134, where Dinesh is arguing against the idea of multiple universes. I don't have an answer for him, I just found it interesting:

It seems worth pointing out here what Harvard astronomer Owen Gingerich seems to be the first to have noticed: anyone who can believe in multiple universes should have no problem believing in heaven and hell. Just think of them as alternate universes, operating outside space and time according to laws that are inoperative in our universe. Even the atheist should now be able to envision a realm in which there is no evil or suffering and where the inhabitants never grow old. These traditional concepts, which have long been dismissed as preposterous based on the rules of our world, should be quite believable and perhaps even mandatory for one who holds that there are an infinite number of universes in which all quantum possibilities are realized.

A damning argument, to be sure, but I still don't buy into the multiple universes idea.

Chapter 13 – Paley Was Right: Evolution and the Argument from Design

On page 142, Dinesh describes "Darwinism as atheism masquerading as science." He's referring to the misuse of the ideas of natural selection, as in racism, eugenics, and anti-immigration laws. In those cases, yes, the ideas of Darwin were twisted for misuse, but Darwinism *is* science. Plenty of good

Christians have managed to unify their religious beliefs with the findings of evolutionary biologists, even if prominent atheists use his theories to describe how our world came to be without god. Darwinism is science, and atheists use it to further their agenda; there's no "masquerading" about it. He argues, late in the chapter, that evolution is a scientific theory, while Darwinism is a metaphysical stance and a political ideology. He can use that to support the argument he made above, but I disagree.

Furthermore, I would be remiss if I didn't mention those poor parents and school boards that politely asked for Intelligent Design to be taught in science classes back in chapter four, on page 31. Who's masquerading as what now? Another quote from page 153: "It is this ideological indoctrination (Darwinism) masquerading as science that should be fought in the classroom."

On page 150, Dinesh makes a comment that he also used during a debate with Michael Shermer recently: "Yes, science has made huge strides in explaining some things but in other area science has not markedly advanced since the days of the Babylonians." I'm honestly curious what areas of scientific study are so far behind, but Dinesh doesn't bother to back up this accusation.

Chapter 14 – The Genesis Problem: The Methodological Atheism of Science

Basically, god must exist, because science doesn't have all the answers and we're not creative enough to imagine a possible solution to many of the questions about our universe.

On page 161, D'Souza describes science as a search for natural explanations.

Science is indeed atheist in this procedural or narrow sense. And this is okay, because we don't want scientists who run into difficult problems to get out of them by saying, "You know, I'm not going to investigate this any longer. I'm just going to put it down as a miracle."

This is exactly what religion has been doing for centuries! Scientists try to explain the world around us by proposing and testing lots of theories – multiple universes, for example. Over time, plenty of really weird ideas have been proposed – again, multiple universes – but we have also found natural explanations for things that were long attributed to god: the rise and fall of the sun each day, the passing of seasons, eclipses, tides, etc. How can Dinesh make this statement, but maintain that scientific inquiry into the birth of the universe should be set aside because god did it?

Part 5 – Christianity and Philosophy

Chapter 15 – The World Beyond Our Senses: Kant and the Limits of Reason

This one was a little beyond my grasp, what with the alternate ways to comprehend reality and whatnot.

Chapter 16 – In the Belly of the Whale: Why Miracles Are Possible

Dinesh argues that miracles are possible; I argue that the universe sometimes behaves in ways we don't yet (or may never) fully understand.

Then he offers a synthetic statement: "My neighbor weighs three hundred pounds and enjoys reading books by Richard Dawkins." Now we're just being childish, aren't we?

Then, on page 185, I think he contradicts himself again:

But can't scientific laws be derived from the logical connection between cause and effect? No, Hume argued, because there is no logical connection between cause and effect. We may see event A and then event B, and we may assume that event A caused event B, but we cannot know this for sure. All we have observed is a correlation, and no number of correlations can add up to a necessary connection.

I'd like to direct your attention back to chapters 8 and 11, where god ("event A") created the universe ("event B"), thus making him the cause of everything. By D'Souza's own argument, this is just a correlation, and no number of correlations can add up to a necessary connection, so I guess you can forget everything you read in chapter 11 because he didn't mean it after all.

Chapter 17 – A Skeptic's Wager: Pascal and the Reasonableness of Faith

D'Souza spends some time here discussing agnostics, and describes their attitude as bizarre because they are incurious about the most important questions in life (why are we here?), and because they show no hint of an awareness of the limits of reason. I think Dinesh is simplifying agnostics and making assumptions for them; agnostics simply say that they do not know if there is a god, not that they don't

care where they come from or expect reason to be limitless. Furthermore, I don't see how the agnostics' "I don't know" is any more bizarre than the Christians, "I *do* know, and in more detail than I can prove without dying and seeing what happens after that."

On page 196, Dinesh quotes social critic Michael Novak:

Using reason is a little like using the naked eye, whereas 'putting on faith' is like putting on perfectly calibrated glasses...to capture otherwise invisible dimensions of reality.

I see it the other way around. Technological advances have given us plenty of ways to capture otherwise invisible dimensions of reality: infrared cameras and x-rays, for example. I would say that reason figured pretty prominently into developing those technologies. When I read this quote, I couldn't help but think of those drunk glasses the police officer brought in during DARE classes back in middle school. They were supposed to simulate the effect of several alcoholic drinks to impress upon us the dangers of drunk driving. I think 'putting on faith' is kind of like this: you'll see otherwise invisible dimensions, all right, but I'm not convinced they'll have any bearing on reality.

Dinesh goes on to make one of the worst arguments for faith in god: Pascal's Wager. Pascal said that if you believe in god and it turns out to be false, no harm done. But, if you don't believe in god and he *does* exist, then you'll burn in hell for eternity. Logically, you should hedge your bets and believe just to be safe. Dinesh derides atheists for maintaining their lack of faith in the face of such obvious logic, but does little to address the point that the all-knowing god would surely see through one's "just in case" belief and send one off to hell anyway. The idea of forcing oneself to believe in something is contradictory to the whole idea of religion.

Part 6 – Christianity and Suffering

Chapter 18 – Rethinking the Inquisition: The Exaggerated Crimes of Religion

The Inquisition didn't kill as many people as you have been led to believe, and neither did the Salem witch trials, and the Crusades weren't *all* that bad. The point is that these events were all motivated by religious zealotry, and none of those people would have been killed if it hadn't been for religious motivation.

Chapter 19 – A License to Kill: Atheism and the Mass Murders of History

Stalin and Hitler killed in the name of atheism, according to D'Souza and others. Honestly, my knowledge of history in this area is insufficient to argue this well. I'm sure atheism had something to do with it, but I'm not yet convinced that either of them were killing for atheism. Dinesh says himself, on pages 217 and 218, that Hitler's anti-Semitism was racial, not religious, and that Jews could not escape his persecution by converting or declaring themselves atheists. This seems to undermine his argument that he was killing for atheism, but as I said, I can't speak to this adequately.

Part 7 – Christianity and Morality

Chapter 20 – Natural Law and Divine Law: The Objective Foundation of Morality

D'Souza's stance is that morality is possible without religion, but its source is ultimately divine. All of the Four Horsemen have addressed secular morality, quite extensively in most cases, but Dinesh maintains that it must come from god.

On page 226, Dinesh says, "It is not Christian morality that is the obstacle to our freedom; it is conscience itself, the judge within." This seems to imply that our morality *is* derived from our conscience (though he later claims, on page 237, that his "inner voice" is in fact god's voice). More importantly, this statement conflicts with his argument that atheists cast religion aside so as not to be burdened by its restrictive morals (you know, since we're all sex-crazed psychopaths and all).

He goes on, over pages 229 and 230, to describe universal morality. Every culture has slightly different standards of morality, but every culture *has* a standard of morality, with the basics – don't kill, don't steal, etc. He argues against relative morality, insisting that there is an absolute morality, which (I guess) comes from god. I think that one has to have very little faith in humanity to assume that we aren't generally good and moral beings, and that our morality has to come from some higher being and not ourselves. I agree that morality is absolute, but I would still like to believe that people are generally capable of being good on their own accord.

Chapter 21 – The Ghost in the Machine: Why Man is More than Matter

D'Souza addresses consciousness and the mind-body separation. His point is that we have consciousness because god breathed life into us and turned what would otherwise be a meat computer into a conscious, self-aware being. He says on page 243:

In an earlier chapter on evolution we saw that there is no good scientific or Darwinian account of consciousness. The best that cognitive scientists like Steven Pinker can offer is promissory materialism: we believe consciousness is an epiphenomenon of material reality, but we'll explain later how atoms and molecules can produce something as radical and original as subjective consciousness. But an explanation yet to come is no explanation at all. Until it arrives it makes far more sense to take consciousness for the irreducible reality we experience it as. Why let conjecture and unpaid intellectual IOUs make us abandon something as fundamental as our self-awareness? Why accept the mental as a projection of the physical when, as far as we are concerned, it is our indispensable window to all the physical reality we can ever experience?

It's true, science hasn't explained consciousness. But Dinesh and so many others take the "god of the gaps" way out – "we can't explain it, so god did it." What's wrong with promissory materialism? Why is it so hard to believe that science will be able to explain things in the future? Less than two hundred years ago, people thought that disease was spread by smell. It's been less than 60 years since we learned about DNA. Just 25 years ago, the computing power in my iPhone would fill the better part of a room. How can one possibly look back at the incredible scientific and technological advances of the last century and think that we *won't* find answers? Maybe we don't have them right now, but none of us knows what will be discovered in the next fifty years. Furthermore, how is, "We'll figure this out later," any worse than, "Well, we don't have any idea, so we'll put it down as a miracle." (see also: chapter 14 notes)

Chapter 22 – The Imperial "I": When the Self Becomes the Arbiter of Morality

This one's a doozy (frankly, I expected to use that phrase more than twice by now). The margins of this chapter are filled with red question marks in my book. As far as I can tell, D'Souza is arguing that love causes immoral actions, with the excuse of "Love made me do it," and art has replaced religion in the secular world, which I just don't get at all. Also, he's hatin' on Oprah.

Beginning on page 255:

Under the secular code, art assumes the central role as a means of self-realization and self-expression. The artist is no longer copying nature, in the manner of conforming to an external code, but rather employing sculpture and painting and poetry to reveal his own (sometimes incomprehensible) inner self. No wonder art has largely replaced religion as the institution to which secular people pay homage: it is much more fashionable to serve on the local museum's board than on the parish committee's.

I can only assume that Dinesh was denied a spot on the local museum's board and he's bitter, because I have no idea where all this came from.

Further down on page 256, he digs his claws into love:

High rates of divorce in the West can be accounted for by the moral force generated by the secular ethic. Today the woman who leaves her husband says, "I felt called to leave. My life would have been a waste if I stayed. My marriage had become a kind of prison. I just had to follow my heart and go with Ted." So divorce has become, as it never was before, a form of personal liberation, what Barbara Defoe Whitehead terms "expressive divorce."

He then declares that the central domain of secular morality is love, and that "Love made me do it" provides "an ideal banner for anyone who seeks to act self-indulgently without regard to the consequences for others." (page 258)

So yeah, love is bad, art is...also bad, I guess. I don't know what the hell he's talking about.

Chapter 23 – Opiate of the Morally Corrupt: Why Unbelief Is So Appealing

Atheists reject religion so that they can be immoral. I'm pretty sure he talked about this in an earlier chapter, but we're so awful that the topic needs another chapter of its own. On page 263:

The aversion to religion and the embrace of atheism becomes especially baffling when you consider that, on the face of it, atheism is a dismal ideology. Many atheists like

to portray themselves as noble figures venturing into the cold night, raging against the dying of the light, and facing the pointlessness of it all.

Again, atheism isn't an ideology, but I think that portraying us as "facing the pointlessness of it all" cheapens the human experience. Is it impossible to have a meaningful life without god? I don't think so. We atheists are generally happy, we've got hobbies and friends – we just don't expect to see them again after we die. It may seem dismal to Dinesh, but I think most of us are OK with making the most of the one life we've got.

On page 266, Dinesh quotes Julian and Aldous Huxley on the rejection of god and acceptance of meaninglessness. And of course, he finds the quote from Aldous that says he rejected god for the moral liberation – particularly sexual freedom. You can cherry-pick quotes like that, the same way I can quote pedophilic priests if I want to make a point, but that doesn't mean he speaks for the rest of us.

What is it about the Christian hang-up with sex, though? Honestly, I think they put more effort into condemning it than we put into *doing* it. On page 269, Dinesh declares, "It is chiefly because of sex that most contemporary atheists have chosen to break with Christianity." No! I've never heard an atheist say that the reason they left the church was because they weren't getting laid enough. We leave Christianity because we find its teachings dubious at best, because it's based on a self-contradicting book of uncertain origin, because of rampant hypocrisy among its leaders and followers both, and because we can't bring ourselves to believe in an invisible beast in the sky who is so intimately interested in our lives. It almost never has anything to do with sex.

Chapter 24 – The Problem of Evil: Where is Atheism When Bad Things Happen?

I first heard of Dinesh D'Souza back in April, when I saw an article he wrote about the Virginia Tech shootings. He refers to it again on page 274:

I noticed this in April 2007 when a deranged student at Virginia Tech went on a homicidal rampage, perpetrating one of the worst mass killings in American history. In the aftermath of the carnage, even on the secular campus, atheism was nowhere to be found. Every time there was a memorial ceremony or a public gathering, there was talk of God, divine mercy, and spiritual healing. Even people who were not personally religious began to use language that was drenched with Christian symbolism and meaning.

The problem is not with atheists, but with atheism. Of course, atheists were present among the victims and mourners. I am not implying that they suffered less than anyone else. What I am saying is that atheism has little to offer at a time like this.

To some extent, this is true: atheists have struggled with the best way to console friends who have lost loved ones. A religious person might assure the bereaved that their loved one is with god, or that they'll see them again someday, but atheists don't believe these things. However, I'm not the only one that was infuriated in April when Dinesh published an article basically claiming that we didn't care about the victims. Just because we don't have promises of the afterlife doesn't mean we can't console the bereaved or that we aren't similarly hurt by events like this.

On page 277, Dinesh asks, "Why do evil things happen to good people? One answer is free will. God does not want to reign over an empire of automatons." I argued this point back in chapter 5.

Part 8 – Christianity and You

Chapter 25 – Jesus Among Other Gods: The Uniqueness of Christianity

It's about here that Dinesh finishes attacking atheists and gets around to explaining what *is* so great about Christianity. Basically, hooray god!

Chapter 26 – A Foretaste of Eternity: How Christianity Can Change Your Life

Yadda yadda, Christianity sure is great, thanks for reading this far to find out why, YAY GOD!