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Monday, May 18, 2009

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**Think Again**

**Stanley Fish**



May 17, 2009, 10:00 pm

## God Talk, Part 2

According to recent surveys, somewhere between 79 and 92 percent of Americans believe in God. But if the responses to [my column](#) on Terry Eagleton's "Faith, Reason and Revolution" constitute a representative sample, 95 percent of Times readers don't. What they do believe, apparently, is that religion is a fairy tale, hogwash, balderdash, nonsense and a device for rationalizing horrible deeds.

Of course, there is more than name-calling to their antitheism; there are arguments, and the one most often made insists on a sharp distinction between religion and science, or, alternatively, between faith and reason.

The assertion, generally, is that while "science is based on observation, religion is based on opinion" ([RM Paxton](#)) Or, in another formulation, science does not involve belief, it is "based on common observation" ([Dave Goldenberg](#)). Science "simply reports facts" ([Bob W.](#)) Or, in the same vein, "Science helps us to understand the world as it is" ([Mark Grein](#)).

In short, while science provides a window on the world, religion places between us and the world a fog of doctrine and superstition, and if we want to become clear-eyed, we have to dispel (a word that should be taken literally) that fog. This is the promise offered by Christopher Hitchens, who tells his readers (in "God is Not Great"), "You will feel better . . . once you leave hold of the doctrinaire and allow your chainless mind to do its own

thinking.” (Thinkers of the world, unite; you have nothing to lose but your chains.)

Sounds good, sounds simple. Just free the mind of pre-packaged beliefs and take a good look at things. But is it that easy? Is observation a matter simply of opening up your baby blues and taking note of the evidence that presents itself? Does evidence come labeled as such – “I am evidence for thesis X but not Y”?

When [Tony Eads](#) declares that “the overwhelming weight of the evidence fails to provide any ground for believing there is a God,” is the evidence he refers to (he doesn’t actually present any) just lying around waiting to be cited as independent confirmation or disconfirmation of an equally independent thesis?

I don’t think that’s the way it happens or could happen. Let’s say (to give a humble example from literary studies) that there is a dispute about the authorship of a poem. A party to the dispute might perform comparative analyses of the writings of rival candidates, examine letters and personal libraries, research the records of printers and publishers, look at the history of reception, etc. Everyone who engages in the dispute will do his or her work in relation to well-established notions of what counts as evidence for authorship and accepted criteria for determining whether or not the evidence marshaled is persuasive.

But suppose, you think (in the manner of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault) that the idea of the individual author is a myth that emerges alongside the valorization of property and property rights so central to Enlightenment thought? Suppose you believe that the so-called author is not the source of the words to which he signs his name, but is instead merely a site transversed by meanings neither he nor any other so-called “individual” originates? (“Writing,” says Barthes, “is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin.”)

I am not affirming this view, which has religious (“not me, but my master in me”) and secular (it is the age or zeitgeist that speaks) versions. I am just observing that there are many who hold it, and that for those who do the evidence provided by printers’ records or letters or library holdings will not be evidence at all; for they do not believe in the existence of the entity — the conclusively identified individual author — it aspires to be evidence of. If no one wrote the poem in the sense assumed by the effort to fix authorship, that effort is without a point and the adducing of evidence in the absence of something to be proved will seem quixotic and even perverse.

The example might seem to be to the side of the (supposed) tension between faith and reason, but it is, I believe, generalizable. Evidence, understood as something that can be pointed to, is never an independent feature of the world. Rather, evidence comes into view (or doesn’t) in the light of assumptions – there are authors or there aren’t – that produce the field of inquiry in the context of which (and only in the context of which) something can appear as evidence.

To bring all this abstraction back to the arguments made by my readers, there is no such thing as “common observation” or simply reporting the facts. To be sure, there is observation and observation can indeed serve to support or challenge hypotheses. But the act of observing can itself only take place within hypotheses (about the way the world is) that cannot be observation’s objects because it is within them that observation and reasoning occur.

While those hypotheses are powerfully shaping of what can be seen, they themselves cannot be seen as long as we are operating within them; and if they do become visible and available for noticing, it will be because other hypotheses have slipped into their place and are now shaping perception, as it were, behind the curtain.

By the same analysis, simple reporting is never simple and common observation is an achievement of history and tradition, not the result of just having eyes. And while there surely are facts, there are no facts (at least not ones we as human beings have access to) that simply declare themselves to the chainless minds Hitchens promises us if we will only cast aside the blinders of religion.

Indeed, there are no chainless minds, and it’s a good thing, too. A chainless mind would be a mind not hostage to or fettered by any pre-conceptions, a mind that was free to go its own way. But how could you go any way if you are not anywhere, if you are not planted in some restricted location in relation to which the directions “here,” “there” and “elsewhere” have a sense?

A mind without chains – a better word would be “constraints” – would be free and open in a way that made motivated (as opposed to random) movement impossible. Thought itself — the consideration of problems with a view to arriving at their solutions — requires chains, requires stipulated definitions, requires limits it did not choose but which enable and structure its operations. [MB](#) asks, “Why is it not possible to reason simply as a gratuitous exercise.” Why, in other words, is it not possible to reason without anything in mind? Just try it; you can’t even imagine what it would be like.

If there is no thought without constraints (chains) and if the constraints cannot be the object of thought because they mark out the space in which thought will go on, what is noticed and perspicuous will always be a function of what cannot be noticed because it cannot be seen. The theological formulation of this insight is well known: Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11). Once the act of simply reporting or simply observing is exposed as a fiction — as something that just can’t be done — the facile opposition between faith-thinking and thinking grounded in independent evidence cannot be maintained.

[Pking](#) gets it right. “To torpedo faith is to destroy the roots of . . . any system of knowledge . . . I challenge anyone to construct an argument proving reason’s legitimacy without presupposing it . . . Faith is the base, completely unavoidable. Get used to it. It’s the human condition.” (All of us, not just believers, see through a glass darkly.) Religious thought may be vulnerable on any number of fronts, but it is not vulnerable to the criticism that in contrast to scientific or empirical thought, it rests on mere faith.

Some readers find a point of vulnerability in what they take to be religion’s flaccid, Polyanna-like, happy-days optimism. Religious people, says [Delphinias](#), live their lives “in a state of blissfully blind oblivion.” They rely on holy texts that they are “to believe in without question.” ([C.C.](#)) “No evidence, no problem — just take it on faith.” ([Michael](#)) They don’t allow themselves to be bothered by anything. Religion, says [Charles](#), “cannot deal with doubt and dissent,” and he adds this challenge: “What say you about that, Professor?”

What I say, and I say it to all those quoted in the previous paragraph, is what religion are you talking about? The religions I know are about nothing but doubt and dissent, and the struggles of faith, the dark night of the soul, feelings of unworthiness, serial backsliding, the abyss of despair. Whether it is the book of Job, the Confessions of St. Augustine, Calvin's Institutes, Bunyan's "Grace Abounding to The Chief of Sinners," Kierkegaard's "Fear and Trembling" and a thousand other texts, the religious life is depicted as one of aspiration within the conviction of frailty. The heart of that life, as Eagleton reminds us, is not a set of propositions about the world (although there is some of that), but an orientation toward perfection by a being that is radically imperfect.

The key event in that life is not the fashioning of some proof of God's existence but a conversion, like St. Paul's on the road to Damascus, in which the scales fall from one's eyes, everything visible becomes a sign of God's love, and a new man (or woman), eager to tell and live out the good news, is born. "To experience personal transformation that in turn can truly move and shake this world, we must believe in something outside of ourselves" ([Judith Quinton](#)). "The kind of religion that moves me," says [Shannon](#) . . . is the story of hope and love . . . not the idea that any particular story describes concrete historical 'truth.'" "It isn't about moral superiority," says [Richard](#). "It's about humbly living an examined life held up to the mirror of a higher truth. It certainly does not seem to be about comfort."

So to sum up, the epistemological critique of religion — it is an inferior way of knowing — is the flip side of a naïve and untenable positivism. And the critique of religion's content — it's cotton-candy fluff — is the product of incredible ignorance.

One more thing. A number of readers chided Eagleton and me for daring to enter the lists against the superior intellects of Hitchens and Richard Dawkins. [E.R. Wood](#) predicts that "if Fish debated Dawkins, Fish would lose by KO in every round."

It would be hard to reply to that without seeming either defensive or boastful, so I'm happy to leave it to someone else. I refer you to [a piece by syndicated columnist Paul Campos](#), which begins by asking, "Why is Stanley Fish so much smarter than Richard Dawkins?" Darned if I know.

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1. 1. May 17, 2009 10:29 pm [Link](#)

Thank you for the reference to St. Paul, Dr. Fish. I, too, often believe that "everything visible becomes a sign of God's love." Of course, it's difficult to reconcile AIDS, 9/11 and (for the right-to-lifers) abortion with God's love. The dark night of the soul, indeed.

— *Martin Yanosek*

2. 2. May 17, 2009 11:14 pm [Link](#)

Let the naive comments from people with no understanding of philosophical hermeneutics begin!

And thank you, Dr. Fish, for a delightful read.

— *Mike*

3. 3. May 18, 2009 12:02 am [Link](#)

Question: why God's love? Why not Krishna's or multiple deities? Zeus and Athena, et al.

Question: why monotheism? Why not animism? Some people are still animists. So are monotheists somehow smarter because they believe in one God?

If God exists as one God, why does a large part of the believing world have no idea who he/she/it is?

What makes one God better than many?

Or in my case none?

— *kv505*

4. 4. May 18, 2009 12:10 am [Link](#)

So many people believe in God because it is an evolutionary advantage to believe in God, just like almost all physical and mental traits in humans.

Although I am a devout atheist, I myself understand the beauty and peace of a religious belief. I satisfy this need through meditation and other means, but cannot believe in such a thing as a God. -sp

— *Steve Poceta*

5. 5. May 18, 2009 12:21 am [Link](#)

Christopher Hitchens is full of hogwash.

I was an atheist for many years and my beliefs never led to anything but a feeling of emptiness.

— *marik7*

6. 6. May 18, 2009 12:25 am [Link](#)

Unless you perform the experiments yourself, you are relying on faith.

And when you perform the experiments, you are relying on faith in your senses or reasoning.

Science may rely less on faith than religion, but let's not ignore the role that faith plays in scientific belief.

— *marik7*

7. 7. May 18, 2009 12:25 am [Link](#)

Science rests on this particular article of faith: the universe contains regularities, and human beings, through sense experience and reason, are capable of finding candidates for these regularities, and then testing them to see how they mesh with experience.

I have no quarrel with religion, but I have a quarrel with particular adherents of some religions, who deny that there are regularities, or that the tests of such regularities give meaningful results.

My quarrel arises less from their denial of these things than from their SELECTIVE denial of these things: evidence for evolution based on the uniformity of scientific laws is discounted, while historical evidence about the transmission of religious documents is accepted; historical evidence of previous occupation by one's own religious community of land is accepted, while that of other religious groups is denied.

Fundamentalists accept the laws of physics when they turn on lights or print their holy scriptures, but deny them when somebody uses radioactive decay to find the age of the earth.

It is hard to generalize about "religion," since religions range from stern uncompromising monotheism to permissive polytheism, and within each of those extremes, range from pacifism to holy war.

As a legendary traveler to Los Angeles, finding a street corner with a mosque, synagogue, Protestant Church, and Hindu temple on the four corners of one intersection, is supposed to have said, "I hope that the Divine has a sense of humor."

— *mathprof*

8. 8. May 18, 2009 12:26 am [Link](#)

Ah, Dr. Fish—as much as I admire your work in general, you do that thing that all religious people do when pressed for evidence to support their claims—you fog out and say things like “But—we can’t know anything at all without some assumption in place! All knowledge is a leap of faith, really.”

True—even scientists assume certain things to be true about the world “before” any knowledge-gathering can be done. But the content of the assumption surely matters; in other words, not all starting assumptions are created equal, surely? And where to leap? Into the arms of an ancient monotheistic god who’s also his own son and a ghost? Into the saddle with Mohammed, as he flies away to Allah on his winged horse? I could go on. Surely where you arrive, after taking your operating assumptions on faith, as it were, matters a bit here.

And here’s another assumption that needs unpacking. You quote Judith Quinton: “To experience personal transformation that in turn can truly

move and shake this world, we must believe in something outside of ourselves” Um...okay. Like what? Would it be enough to believe that it’s worthwhile to love and nurture my fellow human beings? Can I do that without swallowing the whole Abrahamic God myth? How and why would one need to believe in God in order to “truly move and shake this world?” I’m afraid you’ve provided still more “cotton-candy fluff.”

When religions purport to tell us something true about the world and how we should conduct ourselves in it (the universe was made by God in six days, Jesus was conceived by a spirit and given birth to by a virgin, it is morally necessary for Muslim women’s vaginas to be sewn shut for chastity’s sake, we should condemn homosexuals, etc.), I don’t feel that it’s too much to ask for some evidence to support those claims. An “orientation toward perfection” might start with believable evidence.

— *Debra Walker*

9. 9. May 18, 2009 12:30 am [Link](#)

“...the epistemological critique of religion — it is an inferior way of knowing — is the flip side of a naïve and untenable positivism.”

I don’t think that is so. It’s true that many critics of religious literalism base their critiques upon naive philosophical premises, but this is not the case for all such critics. The idea that doctrinal religion, as revealed through sacred texts, is not a reliable guide to the truth is not only compatible with views popular within contemporary philosophy (in particular, philosophical naturalism, which I mentioned in my previous comment), but in fact might well be a consequence of them (in conjunction with established scientific theories).

As such, I have to wonder why someone would devote so much effort towards debunking the faulty philosophical ideas of some critics of religion, only to respond to them with other faulty philosophical ideas in defense of religion (yes, relativism of the kind developed here is considered by most philosophers to stem from basic confusions.) The points Fish makes about the theory-ladenness of observation are familiar and well taken, but these do not entail the kind of everything-is-a-matter-of-faith view that Fish holds. It’s fair enough to claim that a lot of people who question the reliability of religious texts don’t quite put their finger on the problem, but that doesn’t mean there is no problem; in fact there is. It might be more important, then, to convey that (or at least engage with it) then to substitute one set of confusions for another.

— *Lebombo Bone* (<http://lebombo-bone.blogspot.com/>)

10. 10. May 18, 2009 12:33 am [Link](#)

The most intellectually questionable problems with discussions of the “existence” of god is the assumption that there is a simple up down yes no answer to the question of whether nature admits a spiritual immanence.

Systems of spirituality constructed outside the Biblical monotheistic orbit do not present the mind with such a dyadic simplicity. Hinduism for example does not posit a “boss” god. In some versions of that system all sorts of spiritually active essences— human and animal souls, abstractions which influence existence such as power, compassion, evil etc are all expressions of an overarching spiritual essence which a soul or consciousness might join through extinction (nirvana). If you view the universe as this soup of personified essences how can you answer the question of whether “god” exists. Buddhism is a decidedly atheistic religion which posits the continued influence of certain powerfully enlightened individual essences— Buddhas, bodisatvas etc who achieved a certain continued existence as spritual presences offering solace to those who seek it through meditation. There are other systems but most don’t posit a cetral personal controlling force. When you say “Does God exist?” , in some paradoxical way you have already admitted that he (she It) exists. In effect the phenomenon is a valid existential possibility and and “he” either is or is dead. In this sense the so called “debate” over the “existence” of god has a peculiarly solopsistic quality to it. Those who are clutched up over whether this all powerful personal entity is there hiding in the dark jor not engage in an endless vicious fraught contention. Really, why bother?

— *William Haboush*

11. 11. May 18, 2009 12:41 am [Link](#)

Man - as a moderate/liberal person of faith who has spent most of my life in very secular western Europe and high school in very religious Saudi Arabia - it’s nice to know some people can still talk about religion in a way that is level-headed and fair-minded. See Also: John Polkinghorne, Marilynne Robinson, Barack Obama... Thanks Stan.

— *Ben Self*

12. 12. May 18, 2009 12:41 am [Link](#)

“But the act of observing can itself only take place within hypotheses (about the way the world is) that cannot be observation’s objects because it is within them that observation and reasoning occur.”

Try hypothesizing that you can walk on the ceiling and tell me how that works for you.

— *Patricia*

13. 13. May 18, 2009 12:43 am [Link](#)

Thank you for this. If intelligence is a matter of reducing and sexifying issues into false and vitriolic dichotomies, then indeed Hitchens, et al are far more intelligent.

Or at least have a better concept of the drama which drives all good fiction...

I prefer your effort to give this debate shades of the complexity which is its due. You cannot demonize religion without demonizing human nature. And you cannot elevate science to the position of truth without creating a new God.

— *steven*

14. 14. May 18, 2009 12:43 am [Link](#)

As an avid Times reader and a somewhat recent agnostic, I'm very pleased to have stumbled upon your writing. I'm bound to read more of your column from now on.

— *Caleb*

15. 15. May 18, 2009 12:48 am [Link](#)

In defednding faith, Fish blurs his answers with generalities and more unrelated questions. In reality, God is an invention of the human mind when men were fearful of calamities and wanted answers to questions at a time when tools for finding answers were to develop centuries later. Consider the telescope, microscope, periodic chart etc.

Fowler, Milw.

— *Eugene Fowler*

16. 16. May 18, 2009 12:50 am [Link](#)

It is hard to convey the reality of social interdependance to people who have learned to take what they need instead of share what is aailable. the idea of God as a final arbtor of one's life's actions is shallow but necessary for those who cannot grasp how interdependent all life is.

— *Glenn A.*

17. 17. May 18, 2009 12:51 am [Link](#)

You ARE smarter than Dawkins, who is reductive and simplistic in all his arguments against faith.

Thank you for this beautiful piece.

— *Abigail*

18. 18. May 18, 2009 12:51 am [Link](#)

... and all three great religions deal with the transformation of consciousness.

One should tread careful. Any form of drug that powerful, will have serious side effects.

— *saffron*

19. 19. May 18, 2009 12:51 am [Link](#)

A chainless mind .... is not anywhere ...

This is the problem with much of our search for knowledge - technology, consumerism, art and even much of religion.

We have no sense of place. We don't understand what our "knowledge" will do or where it will lead us. We often seek it for its own sake, believing that it is good. If this is not religion, what is?

We say we take off the so called blinders of religion, preconceived opinions, etc., in order to seek knowledge. But nothing is without context. And nothing is without consequence.

I believe in God, though I don't really know what that means - who God is. I had for a time believed that knowledge would save us - as a society. But I have more and more doubts about our ability to get past our hubris in our quest for these answers in modern scientific thought. I believe that many of the answers we need are readily available in the thoughts of truly wise people. People that are humble. People that have a respect for the earth, for all life and for everyone. But especially people who are intimately familiar with a piece of land they call home - be that the traditional homeland of native peoples, land handed down through generations and continues to provide in a sustainable way or somebody that has developed a love for a new place and through the years learned from others how to understand and care for it.

We have a long way to go and a decreasingly short period of time to do it in. I truly hope we can do it. But if we can't, it'll be interesting to see what happens next.

— *Richard in Winnipeg*

20. 20. May 18, 2009 12:53 am [Link](#)

Let's be real. No one knows squat.

We live in this physical world for all to a short time, only to disappear into oblivion. And yet, somehow, this time seems so significant, so real. Believing in G-d doesn't mean that you believe in a book (although often the two go together) or that you are surrendering your dignity as a human. It is acknowledging that you don't know squat. That for all the science you know, you'll never know why we exist, why the world was created, etc. with your own intellect. Believing in G-d is believing that the world, even the entire physical universe, is nothing in comparison to these questions. And their answers.

In a word, believing in G-d is believing that there is more to what we see, what we touch and all that. G-d is the truth behind the computer screen that is the world we inhabit.

— *Elad Nehorai*

21. 21. May 18, 2009 12:59 am [Link](#)

Fish,

As part of the 5% of loyal Times readers who all too well knows the doubt and dissent of faith, it's good to read something that elevates the discussion about the existence of a higher power beyond the usual ignorant drivel that does little to convince anyone of anything beyond what they already believe, consciously or not.

— Frank

22. 22. May 18, 2009 12:59 am [Link](#)

Bizarrely for an article that started with statistics [about what people believe], this moves to promoting [unconvincing denials aside] the view that evidence is not evidence, that facts are not facts, that reason is not reason because post-modernists tell me so. Even if this intellectual nihilism had any validity, where does that leave questions of whether to believe in fairy tales?

— j

23. 23. May 18, 2009 1:00 am [Link](#)

Dr. Fish is being misleading when he talks about textual analysis. Disputes over the authorship of a work of art have nothing to do with authorship in the sense Foucault meant. They are concerned with the analysis of STYLE, in addition to other, even more objective elements like watermarks, etc. Whether Dr. Fish believes that "The Jew of Malta" and "The Merchant of Venice" were written by Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare, respectively, or that they were both written by Elizabethan England, he can't deny that they weren't written by the same person. A trained reader would not confuse one writer's work for another's any more than a trained musician would mistake Mozart for Haydn.

But Dr. Fish's dishonesty doesn't end there. He claims to only know of religions which are entirely concerned with "doubt and dissent". How does he explain the the majority of Americans don't accept the theory of evolution (entirely on religious grounds)? How many churchgoing Christians know about the overwhelming consensus among biblical scholars that the bible contains no eye-witness accounts of Jesus's life. How many would still be churchgoers if they did? Don't the vast majority of Churches actively discourage critical thought among their (aptly named) flock? That would certainly describe most of the religious institutions I know. Maybe Dr. Fish should leave his ivory tower a little more often.

But wait? Perhaps that isn't necessary. Even the kind of theologians Dr. Fish prizes focus their study on one book. Why? If we are all enlightened enough to understand that the bible is just a series of metaphors for "a being that is radically imperfect" trying to "[orient] himself toward perfection" (setting aside the meaninglessness of words like "perfection"), why do we call religious people Christians, Muslims, Jews and Hindus rather than Shakespeareans or Whitmanians? After all, all great literature deals with the same question? The reason is that even the most enlightened theologians still believe, at least on some level, that bronze-age myths are literally true. To place that kind of thinking on a level with scientific inquiry is the very height of intellectual dishonesty.

Vadim Serebryany  
Assistant Professor of Music  
Huntingdon College

— Vadim Serebryany

24. 24. May 18, 2009 1:00 am [Link](#)

It is daunting to enter the debate with so many profound and provocative presentations on the issue. Some represent well considered and insightful perspectives on an essentially unresolvable and endlessly fascinating dialogue, while others are mere sophistry, God forbid I should be guilty of anything less than pure objectivity in my most sincere desire to participate in a discussion whose purpose is the furtherance of understanding the nature of reality! So here goes: I think Science is the miraculous and neverending discovery of the infinite manifestation of God's emergence out of eternity into time and space. At some point in the indefinite future the two will converge in a huge flash of enlightenment and transformation and we'll all hug and smooch one another with mutual wonder and appreciation.

— JLincoln

25. 25. May 18, 2009 1:02 am [Link](#)

It seems odd that you approvingly cite "I challenge anyone to construct an argument proving reason's legitimacy without presupposing it . . . Faith is the base, completely unavoidable. ". I am not a positivist myself but I think the assertion that religious faith and reason are epistemologically equivalent is the result of sloppy thinking. There is a strain in the Western philosophical tradition which wishes to start from a blank slate and attempt to deduce a philosophy through the application of pure reason from this point: Descartes is of course the classic example (I think therefore I am).

Obviously, starting from this philosophical perspective, the blank slate, attempt to prove that reason is a valid way of knowing the world is absurd, as it presupposes the concepts and rules of deduction: it must be taken on faith. But this is not the only way people arrive at a concrete distinction between faith and reason.

However, getting to this point, throwing up our hands and declaring that reason has no more value as a way of knowing than any other is, well, rather defeatist - and I suspect that even Stanley Fish intuitively understands that there are differences in the value and applicability in these ways of knowledge - why else would he be attempting to draw a reasoned argument about the topic of hand, rather than one based on religious faith.

We all have far more experience and knowledge to draw from than the naive philosophical view would indicate: the rules of reasoning and debate can be corroborated by our everyday experience, by our experience of cause and effect and reinforced by debate and intellectual exchange with others. If a pattern of reasoning is flawed, there are ways we can discover this, by experience, argument or thought experiment. Reason comes out of human attempts to understand the world, much as faith does, but it comes out of an understanding of causality that one develops by

living in it and by critical reflection.

The abstract rules of reasoning, developed over a long period of time and tested and reinforced by the experience of many generations, are ultimately grounded in human experiences of cause and effect, and individuals can develop and test their own faculties of reason as they grow up. If we are going to privilege one way of knowing over another, that seems to be a pretty damn good reason for doing it.

I could very much say that the process of self reflection and intellectual growth that characterises the genuine development and application of reason is about "about humbly living an examined life".

Dawkins et al have a certain intellectual arrogance, but this is not because they are too into the whole reason thing, it is because they are insufficiently self reflective and critical. To me though as well, there seems to be a certain degree of intellectual arrogance in presuming that one does in fact have direct access to a "higher truth".

Reason has it's limitations, but human knowledge and experience also have their limitations.

— *Tim*

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#### About Stanley Fish



Stanley Fish is the Davidson-Kahn Distinguished University Professor and a professor of law at Florida International University, in Miami, and dean emeritus of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He has also taught at the University of California at Berkeley, Johns Hopkins and Duke University. He is the author of 10 books. His new book on higher education, "Save the World On Your Own Time," has just been published.

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### Comments of the Moment

[“ Please don't get too worked up... or tomorrow's post could read: 'Pounded Fish Gets Steamed.'”](#)

— [Larry](#)  
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[“ The evidence for law based on individual conscience lies not in the fact that conscience and law occasionally find themselves at odds in the United States, but rather in the fact that they so very rarely do.”](#)

— [Wayne, NYC](#)  
[Conscience vs. Conscience](#)

[“ Universities should always fire quacks, even if their quackery came to light through sensationalism.”](#)

— [Alex K](#)  
[Ward Churchill Redux](#)

[“ I'm one of Ward Churchill's colleagues, unfortunately. ... When he "ghostwrote" articles and then cited them as proof for arguments he wrote under his own name, he lied. It was a deliberate lie, pure and simple. I'm ashamed to be on the same faculty as he is.”](#)

— [Elizabeth](#)  
[Ward Churchill Redux](#)

[“ 'Amateur' originally meant "one who loves." Love can make a surprisingly decent athlete out of practically anyone.”](#)

— [harry](#)  
[My Life on the Court](#)

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