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## Dawkins Redux — Are the Atheists Already Winning?

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The reactions to Richard Dawkins' blockbuster tract for atheism, *The God Delusion*, range from enthusiastic agreement to intellectual dismissal. Several of the most interesting responses have come from his fellow scientists.

This is certainly the case with [Steven Weinberg's](#) review published in *The Times* [London]. [Weinberg](#) is a [Nobel laureate](#) and Professor of Physics and Astronomy at the University of Texas. In [his review](#) Weinberg argues that Dawkins is missing a very big point — that atheism is already winning the day in the West. Weinberg wants Dawkins to calm down and see the victory. In his words:



*Where I think Dawkins goes wrong is that, like Henry V after Agincourt, he does not seem to realize the extent to which his side has won. Setting aside the rise of Islam in Europe, the decline of serious Christian belief among Europeans is so widely advertised that Dawkins turns to the United States for most of his examples of unregenerate religious belief. He attributes the greater regard for religion in the US to the fact that Americans have never had an established Church, an idea he may have picked up from Tocqueville. But although most Americans may be sure of the value of religion, as far as I can tell they are not very certain about the truth of what their own religion teaches. According to a recent article in the New York Times, American evangelists are in despair over a poll that showed that only 4 per cent of American teenagers will be "Bible-believing Christians" as adults. The spread of religious toleration provides evidence of the weakening of religious certitude. Most Christian groups have historically taught that there is no salvation without faith in Christ. If you are really sure that anyone without such faith is doomed to an eternity of Hell, then propagating that faith and suppressing disbelief would logically be the most important thing in the world — far more important than any merely secular virtues like religious toleration. Yet religious toleration is rampant in America. No one who publicly expressed disrespect for any particular religion could be elected to a major office.*

We are winning, Weinberg encourages Dawkins. Europe is so thoroughly secularized that churches are virtually empty. Americans may look unsecular, but Weinberg sees this as an illusion. After all, millions of Americans claim to be Christians, but have virtually no idea of what Christianity really is. As he explained, "although most Americans may be sure of the value of religion, as far as I can tell they are not very certain about the truth of what their own religion teaches." All too true.

Further:

*Even though American atheists might have trouble winning elections, Americans are fairly tolerant of us unbelievers. My many good friends in Texas who are professed Christians do not even try to convert me. This might be taken as evidence that they don't really mind if I spend eternity in Hell, but I prefer to think (and Baptists and Presbyterians have admitted it to me) that they are not all that certain about Hell and Heaven. I have often heard the remark (once from an American priest) that it is not so important what one believes; the important thing is how we treat each other. Of course, I applaud this sentiment, but imagine trying to explain "not important what one believes" to Luther or Calvin or St Paul. Remarks like this show a massive retreat of Christianity from the ground it once occupied, a retreat that can be attributed to no new revelation, but only to a loss of certitude.*

This paragraph is very interesting. Weinberg recognizes that the approach of these "professed Christians" who do not try to convert him (being unsure of Heaven and Hell anyway) differs greatly from the approach of "Luther, or Calvin, or St. Paul." I wonder — do those "professing Christians" see the difference? This lack of conviction is the root cause of our

crisis — and it explains why some atheists are absolutely sure they are winning.

FOR MORE ON THIS: See immediately below.

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