Part-Three of a Five-Part Series: Questions Answered by Herb Silverman

The following Part-Three questions are about morality:

How can you be moral without God?
We are all without any gods. I go along with Abraham Lincoln: When I do good, I feel good. When I do bad, I feel bad. That is my religion.

How is your morality different from religious morality?
Morality is doing what is right, regardless of what we are told. Religious morality is doing what we are told, regardless of what is right.

Can atheism provide meaning for one's life?
We create or find our own meanings in life.

Do atheists believe in the importance of being good?
The atheists I know feel better about themselves when they are good to others in this one life they have. Make others happy, and we will be happy too.

As an atheist, can you explain your philosophy of life?
My philosophy of life is based on the title of an old soap opera (which I never watched): One Life to Live*. Atheists, who believe this life is all we have, try to make the most of it in pursuit of happiness and fulfillment. This usually requires that we help others fulfill their needs, too.*

How would you succinctly describe how we should live?
I think the mathematician and philosopher ***Bertrand Russell*** *summed it up nicely:*

"The good life is one inspired by love
and guided by knowledge."

How do you think Christians differ from secularists?
Here's an interesting distinction: Christians have the same unifying word, but sometimes fight over ideology. Secularists have the same unifying theology, but sometimes fight over words (like atheist, humanist, secular humanist, infidel, and more). At least our wars are only verbal. What does the Bible say about how to treat atheists? Not with civility. See II "Corinthians" 6:14:

"Believers must not commune with unbelievers.
What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness, light with darkness,
believers with infidels?"

What are your expectations toward religion?
To not have religion forced on anyone or have Christians turn our secular country into a Christian nation. We've seen countries that were forcibly turned from secular to Muslim.

Do atheists try to convert theists?
If asked, we tell people why we don't believe in any gods. Some might agree with our reasoning and convert themselves into atheists.

What do you think about religious texts?
Religiously justified violence is a problem of "sacred" texts and not a problem of misinterpretation of texts.

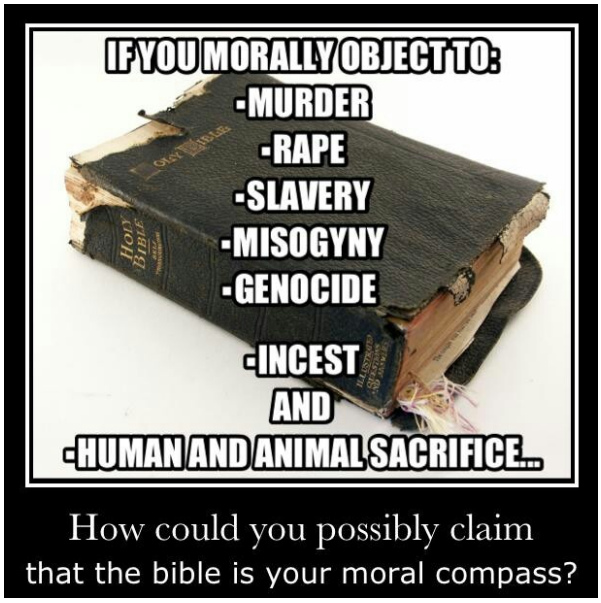
Since atheists base their morals on human law and not God's law, do atheists realize that human laws can change?
Human laws should change as we accumulate new evidence. We no longer think being gay is immoral or that we should try to impose a religion on anyone. Unchanging morality in a mostly fictional bible has caused theists to promote much immorality.

How would the world be different if everyone identified as an atheist?
People would be more rational and work together to solve problems without thinking things will be solved in an afterlife.

Can you read the Bible without bias?
Only atheists can read the Bible without bias. Theists read the Bible with a preconceived notion that what they are reading is true.

Do you want to eradicate religion and impose your beliefs on society?
We atheists believe in freedom of religion and freedom from religion. We think everyone should decide for themselves what to believe, as long as they don't harm others.

How do atheists explain the existence of universal rights?
Humans create human rights. Gods in "holy" books oppose universal rights, and only promote rights for their believers.



Are atheists more likely to engage in criminal activities than Christians?
Check the prison records in western countries and Christian-colonized countries and you will find most prisoners are Christian, with hardly any atheists.

Religious believers have holy books that tell them how to have a moral life. Are there any guidelines atheists live by to have a moral life?
I care most about whether an individual is a good person, regardless of religious belief. I have favorite words authored by sages throughout the ages to live by. Some examples of these secular words are on the next page.

*Rabbi **Hillel** (110 BCE-10 CE), when asked to recite the entire Torah (Hebrew Bible) while standing on one leg, replied:*

"What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor.
The rest is commentary."

***Thomas Jefferson** (1743-1826):*

"It does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods or no god.
It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg."

***Robert Ingersoll** (1833-1899):*

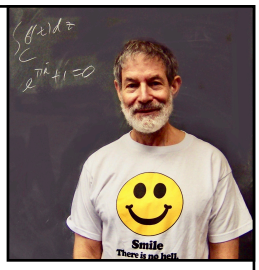
"The hands that help are better far than lips that pray."

***John Lennon** (1940-1980):*

"Imagine nothing to kill or die for, and no religion, too."

Are atheists more liberal than religious people?
Since there is such a strong link today between White Christian Nationalists and MAGA Trump Republicans, you can say by default that atheists are more likely to be liberal.

Do you think religious books should be removed from public library collections?
No, but I think they should be listed under fiction or mythology. When I see a section in the library called "Religious Fiction," I say to myself, "Isn't that redundant?"



Herb Silverman is a regular contributor to the Freethought Society's (FS) quarterly publication *The Freethought Society News*.

The editors are grateful for all of his excellent submissions. Silverman's past articles can be found at the following FS website page:

https://www.ftsociety.org/herb-silverman-articles/

Silverman is the author of two very popular books, *Candidate Without a Prayer* and *An Atheist Stranger in a Strange Religious Land*. Both books are available online and at your local bookstores.

Silverman is available for local, national, and international speaking engagements and he welcomes communication from readers. Please contact him at the following email address: silvermanh@cofc.edu

Some Background Information About Silverman:
Silverman is president emeritus of the Secular Coalition for America. Born in Philadelphia, Herb received his PhD. in mathematics from Syracuse University and is Distinguished Professor of Mathematics at the College of Charleston. He founded the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry in Charleston, South Carolina. After an eight-year legal battle, Silverman won an overwhelming unanimous decision in the South Carolina Supreme Court that nullified the anti-atheist clause in the South Carolina Constitution.

Online Atheist Community Survey Opportunity

Below is an email message that was recently sent to the Freethought Society by **Ryan Goffredi** (pictured below):

Greetings,

I am a PhD candidate in psychology at the University of Missouri (AKA Mizzou). I'm currently conducting my dissertation research on core values, self-concept clarity, and motivation in both nonreligious and religious individuals.

My goal is to understand how nonreligious and religious individuals may differ in their awareness of, and confidence in, their core values and sense of self, as well as how this awareness may affect the goals they set for themselves.

Nonreligious folks are an understudied group, and I think it could be important work as the number of nonreligious people in the United States is increasing rapidly.

Would you and the members of The Freethought Society (FS) be open to participating in the online research survey I've created? It would only take about 25 minutes to complete.

Participants must be 18 years of age. The survey will be open only until December 22, 2024.

While we are not currently offering monetary compensation, all study findings of note will be freely shared with FS following the conclusion of the study. Below is the link to the survey:

https://missouri.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_2fVxihL8Nb1R4Jo

***Note:** Several of my previous studies have shown that people who are religious tend to demonstrate a higher degree of self-concordance, that is, tend to create goals that are in better alignment with their core values, compared to non-religious people. The question is, why might this be the case? The current study aims to look at how this kind of motivation may be affected by various group processes such as attendance of non-religious group meetings or participation in nonreligious groups on social media, as well as by measures of self-understanding. Nonreligious organizations such as FS are one such avenue where nonreligious people interact with those of similar mindsets and philosophies, and this might play a role in helping group members to enact shared and valued goals. Thus, it may be the case that nonreligious people who interact more frequently with other nonreligious group members are better able to identify valued goals and pursue them, therefore enhancing self-concordant goal striving. This is important because achieving self-concordant goals is associated with increased well-being.* ♦