

Ben Pobjie

What makes a person become an atheist? What compels one to abandon all hope and choose the way of hell-fire? What possible reason could there be to turn your back on decent society and hurl yourself into the abyss of immorality and baby-eating depravity?

It's a question I have often been asked, usually by Christians who simply can't grasp the concept of atheism. Tell them 'I don't believe in God', and they look at you as if you have just told them your parents are Murray cod. And then the questions start. They don't actually say, 'Why are you an atheist?' of course. They will probably say something like, 'So, why did you reject God's love?' Or 'Why do you hate God so much?'

That last one is actually the most common. Since it's entirely impossible that somebody could actually *not believe in God* — look at the evidence all around you, flowers, trees, clouds, 747s not getting assembled in junkyards, etc. — the only conclusion to reach is that these so-called 'atheists' actually *hate* the big man.

But having examined my own atheism minutely, I'm pretty sure I don't hate God. Because it's hard to hate a fictional character. To an atheist, God is like Jar Jar Binks: it's not that we *hate* him, it's just that we think he was a bad idea in the first place.

Also, the idea that atheists hate God is kind of insulting, because it assumes atheists are stupid. I mean, look in the Bible; God is not the kind of guy who accepts differences of opinion in a healthy and tolerant spirit. He's more the kind of guy who turns anyone who gets on his nerves into a condiment. If you believed in God, and hated him, you'd do your level best to keep the fact quiet, so as to avoid being struck by lightning or set on fire or sodomised by angels or some such.

Of course, Christians don't think atheists have read the Bible. That's why they're always coming up to us squawking about the ten commandments and Paul and Revelation and about how God so loved the world blah blah blah. They assume that the only reason we haven't converted is we haven't *heard*. Which is pretty funny, when you think about it — not knowing about Jesus is the religious equivalent of not knowing how *The Sixth Sense* ends — if you haven't heard the news you either haven't left the house, picked up a

paper or turned on a TV in your entire life, or you live in rural Turkmenistan.

One of the funniest sights in the world is a Christian's face just after they've hit you with the full force of their well-rehearsed Jesus-is-just-all-right monologue, and seen you shrug and say, 'No thanks'. It's hilarious; it's like telling a child Santa Claus doesn't exist. In more ways than one...

But we were talking about why someone becomes an atheist. Reasons vary, naturally: upbringing, apathy, living one's entire life in a remote Amazonian tribe that has never heard of gods. Not that that should really disqualify one from being religious: in Christianity, at least, you'd think Amazonians would be on board with the rest of us. Jesus knows they're there, doesn't he? But it's a funny thing, people only ever become Christians after someone else tells them about it. One of those eerie coincidences, like all the Muslims being born in Muslim countries. But I digress.

Why did I become an atheist? Well, it's a difficult one. The moment I remember is not the moment I *became* one, but the moment I realised I already was one. And I have given this several minutes of thought (a record on any issue for me), and come to the conclusion that this is often the case. In fact, I think there are a lot of atheists out there who just don't know it yet. Once I figured it out I realised that I'd been an atheist for years; a lot of others must be the same way.

You don't wake up one day and say, 'Yesterday I was a theist, today I am not'. It's more like, you wake up one day and say, 'talking snakes, parting seas, demon-possessed pigs ... hang on, I don't believe in *this!*' In short, the moment of atheism-realisation is the moment when the thinking person finally cries, 'what the hell, man?'

I am speaking, of course, only of those atheists who *are* thinking people. There are plenty of atheists who don't believe in gods just because they never got around to thinking about it, or whose brains are too heavily occupied with motor racing and *Backyard Blitz* to squeeze in theology.

But the atheists who devote a smidgen of brainpower to it, I reckon, didn't make a sudden switch. They simply admitted to themselves, 'you know, I never believed in zombies ... why would I make exceptions just because they cure leprosy?'

And I know I may be preaching to the deconverted here, but in case there are some Christians reading, or Muslims, Jews, Hindus, whatever ... come on, why don't you admit it too? It's easy — all you have to do is take the bit of your brain that you use for everything except religion ... and extend its reach a little. Come on ... go read the Bible again, and be honest ... you never really liked Jar Jar Binks, did you?



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