

Atheism...Plus What?

By Richard Carrier, Ph.D. (2013)

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This is a transcript of Dr. Richard Carrier's speech on Atheism+ for the American Atheists convention in Austen, Texas (2013). For video, see [here](#). For a flattened version of my slideshow accompanying it, see [here](#).

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Atheism...plus what? What do I mean by that? First I have to give you some background ideas, a certain concept that I think people overlook, even though it's quite obvious, [which] is that atheism is now a community. It's not just...if you're an atheist, you're not just an atheist if you are a part of this community, of the organized atheist community—if you're the sort of person who comes to conferences and so forth, you're part of an actual community. It's not just a bunch of isolated atheists anymore.

We know this, obviously, because we have the New Atheism movement. Notice, there wasn't a big, famous New Humanism movement, for example. It's atheism that's taking the lead in public and getting public recognition, and becoming the biggest identity movement. Lots of people identify as different things, humanists, skeptics, and so on, but the biggest one, the one that's growing it seems the most is the identity of being an atheist. Atheists are also recognized as a constituency in the media. You find that [the] media, journalists, and so forth, might have no idea what the skepticism community is, or the humanism community, but they know there is an atheist community and they'll use the term atheist. It's recognized as a community, that they can talk about and write about. And obviously we have numerous national, regional, and local organizations—tons and tons, hundreds and hundreds of local organizations—campus groups, community groups—that identify as atheists, as part of their identity and role. And of course, obviously, since we're here [at the 2013 American Atheists convention in Austen, Texas], we have conferences, meetups, and social societies all across the country and beyond, where we gather socially as atheists, and identify as atheists. So this is definitely a community. And we have our own periodicals, and most importantly, online networks. Our biggest presence is definitely online, where there really is an atheist community in a large scope.

Now, communities in general have responsibilities. If you are part of a community. Communities have a voice, for example. You can speak, the atheist community. Reporters will come and ask what does the atheist community think on this subject or that subject. So the question is, are we going to use the voice we have responsibly? Communities also have resources. We have money. We have manpower. We have online networks. We have communication networks. And many other aspects, resources we can deploy. Will we deploy those resources, use those resources, responsibly? And that includes information networks and action networks. And communities, as a community, will be judged, by people outside that community. So will we ensure as a community that we're being judged accurately? And how do we want to be perceived as a community?

These are questions we have to ask.

And also as a community, through our information networks, through our organizations, through just our own communication, communities can influence their own members. So the question is, will we do that for the better, or for the worse?

Now, our community has goals. Obviously one of those big goals, as has been talked about today already, is to increase the number of atheists. Hopefully, that means increasing the number of morally responsible atheists. I think that should be part of our goals as well. And also to protect the rights of atheists, the interests of atheists, the welfare of atheists. And that includes not just by enforcing church-state separation, and in fact several examples of that have been brought up today in various speeches [at this convention], of different ways atheist organizations are helping atheists, and looking after the rights and interests of atheists.

And then, of course, atheist organizations, the atheist community as a whole, one of its goals is to serve the needs of atheists. And these needs include knowledge interests, as a community we have knowledge interests, and social needs. (And I'll talk more about that as we go along.)

Now to give you an example of what I mean about the atheism community, I have to tell you a story. Many of you probably already know this story, I happen to know some of you might not know this story, so I'm going to tell it. A year ago or two, there was a fifteen year old atheist girl whose very religious mother gave her a copy of Carl Sagan's *Demon Haunted World*. [Audience chuckle.] And she went online, and was so happy about this, she put her picture online [holding the book]

and told her story, [saying something like] ‘Isn’t this great! My mom understands me! She got me this book, even though she [herself] was very religious, and she knows I’m not’. And so this should have been a really great story. But unfortunately this was on the atheism reddit, [which] is rather infamous, but nonetheless in this atheist forum, very quickly, the comments devolved into a long string of jokes between several atheists about raping her, essentially. [Audience gasp.] Often in graphic terms. It’s pretty disturbing if you read it.

Now, it was worse than that. There was a lot of other sexist and demeaning remarks being thrown at this woman, this girl, by the atheists on this thread. But worse than that is that hundreds of atheists were thumbing up these remarks. More in fact, originally very early on, more, there were hundreds more thumbing them up than thumbing them down. And like I said, there was a lot of other sexist [and awful] commentary as well.

Now, this isn’t an isolated incident. One of the women who wrote about this particular [story] is Rebecca Watson. You may know that she’s the target of this kind of thing a lot as well. And she’s not alone. (I’ll talk about others in a moment.) She was one of the earliest to write about all this, and she’s not even close to the only target. The harassment that [she] and other leading atheist women have received online includes rape threats, joking about raping them, or wishing they’d get raped, persistent jokes and insults about their appearance, calling them bitches and cunts and worse things. One of them, for example, had their blog comments bombarded by a handful of atheists exchanging dozens of comments graphically describing her giving them a blowjob. Another was sent pornographic drawings of her having been tied up and raped and jizzed on. To give you an idea.

And those are just examples.

This has in fact evolved into a constant pattern of intensified harassment of prominent atheist women by other atheists, mostly but not exclusively men. They actually are getting far more harassment, these atheist women are getting far more harassment and abuse from atheists, currently, than from Christians or Muslims or other religious believers. And when I discovered this myself I was extremely shocked and appalled.

And this included stalking behavior, in some of the cases of these women, sustained sexual harassment, following them everywhere online, digging through their past online histories to find things to make fun of or to invent new reasons to attack them with, repeatedly sending them hate mail, often with sexually harassing

remarks or images, or repeatedly filling their blog or YouTube comments with those things—and then they have the audacity to complain when these women close their comments feature.

Now it appears dozens if not hundreds of atheists have been engaging in this behavior, targeting any woman who complains about it, especially, or even who just discusses feminism in any substantial way.

And the women who have been targeted by this harassment campaign include not just Watson, but Surly Amy, Stephanie Zvan, Greta Christina, Ophelia Benson, Jen McCreight, and Amanda Marcotte. And that's just the short list.

So, when I am talking about the atheist community and Atheism+, what I have in mind here is, the first thing I mean by “plus,” is atheism plus basic moral values. Atheists should not be doing this. Atheists should not be tolerating this in our community. As a community, we should be speaking up against this, and disapproving it. [Long audience applause.]

It gets a little worse though. (I'm sorry!)

When I first blogged about this, and I was not the first to blog about the Atheism+ movement, not by a longshot, but when I first blogged about it, and made my first blog entry [on it], I basically, quite stridently denounced all this sexual harassment, in no [compromising] terms, [and] I argued for greater humanitarian concern from atheists and I advocated that we adopt at least three basic moral values. And I spelled them out, and I explained them in detail. And those were compassion, integrity, and reasonableness. And no sooner had I done this than I was accused of being Hitler, Stalin, and I was accused of starting a religious cult, and various other things shouted at me [online].

So, before I continue with the rest of this talk, let me just get one thing clear, let's get this out of the way... [Audience laughter — reacting to the slide, not shown in the video.]

Things that do not make you Hitler, Stalin, a cultist, or a religionist...

The obvious...

Calling men who engage in overt sexual harassment douchebags and assholes...

Not on that list. [Audience laughter.]

Arguing for greater humanitarian concern from atheists...

Doesn't make you Hitler. (Sorry!)

Asking people to be compassionate, honest, and reasonable...

Doesn't make that list.

Disowning people who declare their refusal to be compassionate, honest, or reasonable.

I mean if they stalwartly say "We reject your moral values," I'm going to disown those people, and I'm going to say so.

That does not make me a religionist or a cultist, or anything like that.

It doesn't make me divisive either. It means I am trying to promote humanist values [within the atheist community]. That's kind of the point of what I'm going to talk about [here].

But first of all, again, Atheism+ is a thing. We got to get that across. The term was first promoted by Jennifer McCreight, based on an idea from one of her readers, to describe a movement that had been growing within New Atheism over the last five years. In fact the movement existed before it was named. This movement was for promoting moral values more in the atheist movement and the discussion of societal problems among atheists more than we already do, and for making the atheist community more welcoming of, and responsive to women and minorities. And this was the basic idea of it.

So when we're talking about Atheism+ we mean, if we're going to be an atheist community, we should be not just atheists, but we should be atheists plus all of this.

When Jen did her blog, I quoted it, and this [slide presents] a quotation from my blog of her blog. She gave a list of, these are the kinds of things we're talking about: we're going to be atheists, plus we care about social justice; we're going to be atheists, plus we support women's rights; we're going to be atheists, plus we

protest racism; atheists, plus we fight homophobia and transphobia; atheists, plus we use critical thinking and [the tools of] skepticism on all subjects.

Now, the naysayers, of course, accused us, accused her and others, of making this the complete list. This is not the complete list of all the things we are talking about or advocating. This is just the list of what should be the clear and obvious no brainers.

So that's the basic idea of it.

But if we broke it down in a different way, in reality what we're really talking about is Atheism plus humanism plus skepticism.

Now these are actually three separate communities [right now], and they exist, and they do [overlap], there is a lot of overlap between them, obviously. There's the atheist community, the humanist community, and the skeptics' community. We want to merge the ideals of all these communities within the atheism movement itself. We want the atheist community to basically be this: atheism plus humanism plus skepticism.

Now it starts with atheism because we're atheists and we're within the atheist movement and atheism is the largest outspoken identity movement, of all of these groups. But that doesn't mean, for example, if we define agnostic as someone who is an "uncertain" atheist, they're not sure yet, if they're an atheist or if they're going to commit to atheism or how atheistic they are, they're welcome in the movement.

And there are different ways you can define atheism. One is the sort of clinical definition, [whereby] if you don't have a belief in god you're an atheist, and by that definition agnostics are atheists. But as an identity label, as something you call yourself, you may want to say you're an agnostic, to indicate that you don't have the certainty that [a] god doesn't exist that maybe other atheists do. So as an identity label, atheism can mean a different thing. And when I go through the rest of this talk, I mean atheism as an identity label, but also in that clinical sense of all nonbelievers who join and work with us in the same common community.

Humanism is a basic idea. We're talking about adopting some if not all the moral and social goals of humanism. This should not be controversial. And yet it has been.

And skepticism. This is important. Skepticism as a movement has its own set of values and methods that they're applying to ideas in different domains. We want to grab those values and methods and apply them to all domains, and make that a part of atheism as a movement. So that includes therefore the critical commitments and interests of modern skepticism, and the modern skepticism movement.

Now, Atheism+ is already a thing. Atheism+ as I just described, and everything I just told you, is and was and has been already a growing and active movement within New Atheism overall. Someone just gave it a name. That's all that really happened. It existed already, it was already influencing organizations and the community. Someone just realized, "Oh! All these people have common shared goals and values!" And they named it.

And that's when all hell broke loose.

[Audience laughter]

But, anyway...

Another point, not everyone furthering its goals adopts this specific label of Atheism+. Nor need they.

There's no requirement for this.

And to give you an example, Atheism+ is just a clinical name for a movement that exists. It's like saying you're a Homo sapiens sapiens. That's your species. But that doesn't mean you have to go around constantly saying [you are a Homo sapiens sapiens], or talking about Homo sapiens sapiens, or identifying as Homo sapiens sapiens. You can [just] call yourself a person, a human, a man, a woman. What word you use doesn't matter. You are still clinically defined as Homo sapiens sapiens. But it doesn't matter what label you use. We understand what you're talking about.

So Atheism+ is just that clinical name for the movement, the values and ideals that exist. We [advocates of the movement] don't require anyone to adopt the name.

And again, institutions, we have many different institutions within our movement, they can pursue, certainly, their own narrower goals, their own specific mission, while still embracing Atheism+ as a laudable set of goals within the wider atheist community that they serve.

And that's the basic vision we have in mind.

Now remember what I said earlier about communities having responsibilities.

Number one, I'll give you an example, Christians—you know this, all of you know this—Christians claim atheists have no morals. So, do you disagree with that? I'm assuming you do disagree with that. Then stand up for and act on your values. Defend them. Actually act on them in the way you treat your fellow atheists, [and not just lean on] the lip service you give to those values when you're debating Christians. Embody the values you believe in. Explain them and defend them.

Number two, we can use our resources, all of those resources—our manpower and communication networks, some of our money perhaps—to make the atheist community better informed and more active on social issues, and not just science, philosophy, and religion. And I'm going to explain exactly, [with] some examples in that respect, of what I mean as we go along.

And also, let's accept and encourage constructive criticism of each other within the movement, and use it to better ourselves and the community and its institutions. We have to be ready to accept that and to make good use of it. And not be talking about "We can't criticize each other." That's not going to be helpful for progress within the movement.

So to go back to the first of these: the main point here, as a community, as a representative, as someone who is representing the atheist community, as someone who is a member of the atheist community, don't let bad atheists represent you. Don't let them think they do by your silence either. That's the kind of thing we want. We want more proactive atheists representing and speaking out for their values, and pointing out which atheists don't represent them.

And regard to the second one: show the world that the atheist community is not tone deaf to major issues in the world. Christians can talk about how they care about poverty and all these other issues. Do atheists care about those things? Does that make them better people than us? Or in reality, and I think in reality, most of the people here do care about those things, as much as Christians do. And as atheists you should be seen as caring about those things, as atheists—[and] as an atheist community. The same way the Christians do. Because that's how Christians promote their own image. We can promote our own image the same way. And we had better do so.

And finally, we need to heed the difference between harassment and, just, gratuitous verbal abuse, and criticism. Whenever—first of all, obviously, we should be making that distinction—but whenever you see people making a false equivalency between these, saying that these are the same thing, you should call them out for that, and point out, no, they're not the same thing. At all.

So back to that idea of the community, that our community has goals.

I mean one of those, of course, is to increase the number of atheists. And here I'm saying preferably those should be morally responsible atheists. And so that should be part of our idea of how to achieve our goals. That should be a component of what we're thinking about. Not just increasing the number of atheists, as if their moral values and the things that they care about are irrelevant.

And then of course to protect the rights of atheists. And that includes the right to be free of harassment online and off. And that doesn't necessarily mean political rights. There are also moral rights as well. Moral rights that we can stand up and defend socially as a community.

And then to serve the needs of atheists, including knowledge interests and social needs. (And I'll talk about these each in turn.)

And as I talk about this, I'm going to be talking about what organizations can do, but I have to tell you, this movement has been around for years. We've been working on it, and we've been influencing and talking to organizations all across the country, locally and nationally, and many organizations have already been responsive to a lot of our ideas. And I have to say American Atheists is [right now] really on the forefront of being responsive to these ideas. And I'll give you some examples as we go along.

But when I talk about organizations, I have in mind all organizations. So if there are people here who are members of other organizations, local organizations, campus groups, other national organizations besides American Atheists, heed what I'm talking about. And all of you, there are many of you here who are going to be future leaders of the movement. Because I see this trend of people accepting these ideas and values and promoting them within organizations, and I want that to continue. And the only way to get that to continue is if you, future leaders in the audience now, also believe in what we're talking about and understand what we're talking about, and can promote [these goals and values], and keep the ball rolling

forward, when you finally come into control and influence within these organizations.

Now, I mentioned the fact that we're working on increasing the number of atheists. We say a talk earlier showing we're doing, it looks like we're doing, American Atheists especially doing, a pretty good job of this. Certainly, it's significant. They're having an effect. But we also, I think atheist organizations need to focus on the second bit a little bit more, this idea of promoting socially responsible, morally responsible atheism.

And when talking about the rights of atheists, in terms of the legal sphere, certainly with separation of church and state and so on, atheist organizations are already doing this very well—they could use more money and resources to do it better—but they already have the idea of how to solve these problems...they have pretty good plans for it. But they might not be doing the second thing [protecting women in the atheist movement from harassment] quite as well. And I'll talk about that a bit more. I'll give you an example later. However, some organizations have been stepping up and starting to do this. I think we could do more. And I think more organizations could get involved in that.

So when we get to serving the needs of atheists, I'm going to talk about two completely different types of interests here.

One is, what are we doing to make the atheist community better informed about the problems of the world. When you get a captive audience like this, of like minded people, atheists, we can actually use that as an opportunity to educate you and [help] make you better informed and make atheists better informed as a community. To do the things they want to do. And there are lots of different ways we can do this. (I'll give some examples later.)

But there's another side of this, too, which is what are we doing to meet the social needs of atheists. And this is something we also have been promoting over the years, and has been increasingly successful, especially, mostly, with local organizations, but national organizations are starting to get involved in it as well.

To give you an example: [there] are SIGs, Special Interest Groups, where you have for example—I've been to several large atheist local groups where they have their monthly meeting, everybody comes to their monthly meeting, and they do their things together as a group, but then they also break off into separate Special Interest Groups—there's a bowling group, there's a gay rights activism group,

there's an animal rights activism group, there's a knitting group, there's a book club group, there's a parenting and daycare-sharing group, [etc.]. So they have these Special Interest Groups, and you just join the Special Interest Group that interests you, and that group will be supported by the larger community in terms of financial and organizational stuff, and then you can have the different groups serving different interests in the field. And a lot of this can include fun stuff, obviously, like drinking parties and things of that nature. Roller skating parties. I think we could have more of those. I think we should have an atheist bowling club in every major city in the country. I think that would be awesome. [Audience cheers and applause]

So we'd like to see these things as well. And so this is the other side of the coin in terms of serving atheist needs.

So to get back to that first goal: increasing the number of atheists. This is something we've also been talking about. And again there has been good response to this from several organizations—it's been increasing visibly in just the past year and a half. Obviously [we should keep] focusing on education and science, reason and skepticism. That's important in a lot of different ways, and I'll talk about ways you might not have thought about how that's important. But if you want to make atheists, that's one of the first things you've got to do; I mean, that, besides getting people to read the Bible. Those are like the top two. [Audience laughter]

But the other [side of this] is broadening the appeal of atheist organizations and atheist events and so forth to women and minorities. And that's been improving lately. And one way to do that, of course, I should probably say the chief way to do that if not the only way it can be done, is to start giving them leadership roles, be responsive to their concerns, and treat them well when they show up. You know, kind of obvious things.

These were issues that we were talking about about three or four years ago, and there's been a lot of improvement on this and a lot of understanding of this goal. But this has been a part of what Atheism+ has been trying to advocate.

Now to give you an example: if you want more black atheists in your membership, of your organization, then you have to show that you actually care about their concerns. To give you an example of some concerns I've heard from black atheists: local black atheist communities are very interested in, their main issues, that they're struggling with, are not creationism in schools, they're more concerned with inner city poverty and prison reform. For example. That's not the whole list.

But that's an example of these things that are very seriously important to their community. And so we might want to at least give some ear to this and think about what if there's anything we can do to help them deal with these issues.

And that just brings out the whole general concept that you should actually ask women, as organizations, local organizations, national organizations, actually ask women, and minorities—a lot of them, not just a few of them: What would get them to attend your events? Become members of your organization? And financially support it? And then take their answers seriously.

And this is something we have been talking about over the past three years. And I think atheist organizations are starting to get it.

But to give you a bonus example, that goes back to what I was talking about before, about that education, the importance of our promoting the ideas of teaching logic and critical thinking and science and whatnot: if education is a major factor in making more atheists, and there are a lot of studies and statistics that suggest it does, and making more atheists is your goal, then shouldn't the disparity that often exists in education between white and black neighborhoods be of major concern to the atheist community? [Long audience applause]

So this is an example of something that's flown under our radar, because we're focusing on science education, critical thinking, and we're sort of not noticing the fact that there are already huge disparities in these social scenarios that we really should pay attention to and try to figure out a way that maybe we as atheists, as an atheist community, can do something about. Certainly if you want more atheists, we're going to have to do that.

So the basic idea is that we as a community, a community of atheists—are we going to care about stuff? Like sexism? Deception? Poverty? Crime? Corruption? Injustice? Or only care when it has to do with religion?

And I want you to think about this for a minute. I've run into a lot of atheists who say it's not relevant to them if religion isn't somehow involved in it. And I want you to think about that for a moment. Atheists are only interested in social issues when religion is involved in it. If that doesn't sound weird to you, you haven't thought about it. [Brief audience laughter]

Now, this doesn't mean, however, that organizations like American Atheists or any particular atheist organization has to engage in specific kinds of social or political

activism at the institutional level. That's not necessary. Organizations each have their own particular missions, their own particular set of goals. They're focused on those things. There are a variety of different organizations that have already been represented on this stage today, that each have their own particular mission goals. And that's fine. They can stick with that. But atheist organizations, even those atheist organizations, can at least do certain things that would be helpful.

One is to help encourage your membership, your members, to get more informed and involved in such issues generally. In other words, what I am saying is, we can promote morally responsible atheism as a general ideal. It's something we can talk about, something we can promote in various ways, without being specific on any particular issue—each atheist individually can engage their moral consciousness in different ways. But I think we should be, as organizations, trying to promote this idea of morally responsible atheism.

Another is to facilitate members' access to reliable information and discussion about these issues. Now, [it's true], certain organizations are better equipped to do this than others. But just think about, for example, building online communities where it's easier for atheists to find reliable information that's based on good science, on social issues, on maybe gun violence or drugs or anything like that. It doesn't even have to be slanted towards a particular political position, but just the best science, the best results. And facilitate their ability to communicate with each other and talk about these issues. The organization itself doesn't have to take a position or support any particular position, but they can make it easier for their organization [members], easier for atheists as a community, to get better informed about these things, have more reasonable debates about them, or evidence-based debates about them. And facilitate communication among atheists on these issues. And that's the whole idea of an atheist community anyway.

Another is to sponsor talks from atheist experts in these issues, in all these different kinds of issues, at atheist conferences and meetups. Some of my favorite conferences I've been to have had speakers talk about all kinds of different things. We had one speaker at one conference talk about the neurophysiology of transgenderism and homosexuality. Incredibly fascinating, incredibly important information, that atheists as a community can use when they go out into [the wider] community to debate these issues, even among themselves, as well as with the wider society. But you could talk about economics. You could talk about all [sorts of] different things. You can have experts on all kinds and varieties of issues, educating the atheist community, making the atheist community better informed, and thus better able to do good things as a community. It doesn't have to be talking

about God or separation of church and state all the time. It doesn't have to be talking about philosophy and Jesus studies all the time. And I have to tell you, I talk about all those things myself, I love talking about all of those things, so I'm not saying we should stop talking about them, in fact I love hearing about them. I just think our conferences shouldn't be only about those things. I think we can expand some of the slots to have more informative, broader subjects discussed.

And then, here's another one: occasionally co-sponsor charitable and educational activities and actions on these issues. There can be small amounts of money spent on these kinds of things. Because you know why. When the Coca Cola company goes into a neighborhood and does some sort of charity drive for a school or something, it's not that the Coca Cola company actually gives a damn about poverty or anything like that. There's no hand wringing in the corporate sphere over mission creep or over them losing their way, "We should only make Coca Cola!" No, no. They're smart. They know if they do this it's good PR. People will see the Coca Cola industry doing this, the Coca Cola brand gets out there, it gets associated with good feelings and good things, and they end up in the process doing something good as well. I think atheist organizations can do more of this. And some have done it. There's the example of the Black Skeptics' of Los Angeles having started a charity that helps, that gives scholarships to first college goers within poor families—[that is], if they have a child who will be the first member of that family to go to college, [BSLA] has a special scholarship fund that they're developing for that. You can look into that and still support that cause.

But I think this is something other major organizations could get behind, or do things like this around, so that this makes press, your name gets in the press, your organization gets noticed, people start noticing that atheists, "what, atheist organizations are involved in charity stuff!?" So it actually promotes atheist values, it shows that you care at least as much as the Coca Cola corporation does, about community issues. So this is a good one. You can think of the money you spend on this literally as marketing dollars, if you want to be Machiavellian about it.

And then the other thing is supporting social interest groups. You can do that if you have local chapters, if you are running an organization that has local chapters around, you can help them develop these and take advantage of this concept of the social interest group. You can also do it if you don't have local chapters, you can do it through, again, through national online forums. You can have, for example, as an atheist organization, a part of your website dedicated to having a bunch of guidebooks built by people who have run these SIGs, for people who want to run them. Because often times I go from community to community and I find that

they're reinventing the wheel over and over again. There is a lot of community experience out there making this stuff happen. We could pool and aggregate this experience and make really good handbooks and disseminate, make it centrally available to atheist groups everywhere, so every local atheist group, every campus group, can go, let's say to the American Atheists website, and find this stuff. One organization that's been doing this really well is the Secular Student Alliance. They've been building these kinds of resources for campus groups. But I think we can build similar resources for community groups. And do other charity activities.

So, to go back, full circle to my first example, and bring that back and use that as an example here: all atheist organizations should publicly and officially denounce the harassment of prominent atheist women. [Long audience applause and cheers]

Now, this does require really getting informed about what has been going on, so you really know, you're informed, you're not an uninformed outsider who's a little clueless. You can actually find out what's going on. And you shouldn't trust any single informant. Like, don't even trust me. You can go and find this stuff out yourself. Go to the source. Know many specific examples of what actually happened. So that you can make a good statement on this, that's informed and shows that you're informed, and shows that you know what's going on and you're aware of it, and disapprove of it.

And I think we should all, all organizations, call for atheists to speak out against and socially punish—meaning denounce, downvote, for example, things like that—any harassment behavior, wherever and whenever you can find it, whenever you have an opportunity to say, state, publicly, and make the world aware that atheists, and you in particular, are opposed to this. I think we should all be doing that, more actively. [Audience applause]

I would have loved to have seen that reddit thread where we have, like, twelve upvotes and a thousand downvotes, on those comments. That's the way our community should be behaving. And I want to see that happen.

And part of that is, we have to make it socially expensive and uncomfortable for harassers to continue their harassment. There is often the sort of the trope, the idea that you should never feed the trolls, but the reality is that trolls will always troll if there is no cost to doing it. If it doesn't cost them anything, they're going to do it. Because it's fun. They enjoy it. There are people I know. In my own particular example, I don't get harassed nearly as much as the women I was talking about, not even by a fraction, but I do get a little. And I have full moderation on my blog,

so that when they send me a comment on my blog it does not get seen by anyone, and so therefore I can delete it immediately and they've wasted their time. And yet I still get people trying to say hurtful things to me, knowing full well that no one will ever see it but me. They know, or at least they think, that they can hurt me that way. And that gives them satisfaction. If there is no cost to that, if that doesn't cost them anything, if they don't see that there's any massive, widespread social disapproval of that behavior within the community they pretend to be in, they're going to continue doing that. So we have to make it socially expensive and uncomfortable for them to continue doing that. And we have to find ways to make that possible.

And that begins just for an example. That was just the example I started with. And I was revisiting that to show you how all the things I'm talking about tie together.

And doing things like that will make your organization more attractive to atheist women, and more responsive to their needs and concerns, and thus will attract more women. That's kind of the whole cycle, the goal. And this is the whole concept that we've been promoting over the last three years or more.

It will also confirm your moral values to the public, and thus better represent atheism as a community. And I think this is one of the important elements of this: it's that the way you behave, the things you denounce, the things you speak out about, communicate to the wider public—not just the atheist community—what atheists are all about, what atheists stand for, what atheists are against, and what they are for.

And ditto for every other issue you can come up with.

Because this is not the only thing that many atheist women want to talk about or see action on. For example, what about child care at conferences and meetups? And take note: American Atheists has been at the forefront of being responsive to this concept. For this conference and the last conference they've had childcare that they've arranged [for attendees], to make it possible for more women, more parents, single parents, men and women, to come to these conferences. [Long audience applause]

We should see more of this! Try to get, try to find, creative ways to make it happen. I think allying with Camp Quest was a brilliant idea. I think there are a lot of the larger conferences that could do that all across the country. Smaller conferences, that probably might not be feasible, but you can still, as your own little local atheist

community, you've probably got parents that could volunteer to do this. You could probably arrange it in some various ways. So it's something to think about, and look for. Because if you make it possible, and not just possible but you make it publicly known, that single moms, single dads, parents and so forth, can come to your local event and have their kid taken care of, while they enjoy the event—the learning event or the fun event or whatever it is—you're going to get more people showing up, and you'll have wider influence, and you're going to grow a stronger community.

And then another example, just of others I could come up with, is: What about correcting misinformation about feminism among atheist men and women? There's a lot of that in the atheist community, where there are people who are a little clueless, and don't quite understand what feminism really is vs. what anti-feminists say it is. That's an example of something a lot of women would like: information disseminated to the atheist public. And that ties into what I was talking about, about making the atheist community better informed. And this is the sort of thing you can have someone come up here and give you, a feminism 101 seminar, for example. And that's just one example of many different ways we could do this.

And of course women aren't the only neglected group. How are you serving the disabled? The blind? The deaf? For example. [Brief audience applause] You have seen the signers who have been interpreting some of the speeches [at this convention]. Those are volunteers. [Long audience applause] And I think that applause should go not just to the volunteers who are doing it, but also for American Atheists, who thought of doing it. And there are other organizations, other conferences, who have done that. And it's happening more and more. And so I have warm fuzzies that we're actually [seeing it happen]. This was something we were talking about several years ago, and have been pushing for, and it's happening. And I like to see that.

But also...what do Hispanic or black or Filipino atheists want to discuss with the wider atheist community? What issues might they want to get the atheist community to help them with? I want to know. I'm interested. And I have to tell you, when I saw the lineup, the speaker's lineup, for the American Atheists convention this year, I was amazed to see the most diverse speaking lineup that I've seen at any conference. Having several black groups represented, several Hispanic groups represented, lots of women speakers. That's amazing. And I want to see that continue. I want to see that become, like, the norm at conferences everywhere.

So, I think atheist organizations should take note of this (and many already have, I think American Atheists already gets it). This will grow your membership and financial support.

And let me give a little aside on this.

I've traveled the country. I've spoken to community groups, atheist community groups, all over the country and in Canada. More than I can count. For many years. And I find that in those groups, and among friends of those groups and family of those groups, there are more actual and potential atheists who don't join our organizations or go to our meetings, because they are bored. They're bored with constantly hearing about God or religion all of the time. Or church-state separation all the time. Or pseudoscience all the time. Like I said before, those things are fine, we can talk about them, but there are people who don't want to come to the conferences, because, you know, they became an atheist so they wouldn't have to talk about those things anymore. [Audience laughter]

I know, personally, family members and friends that I can include in that category. Yet they just aren't part of our community and our organizing, even though they're atheists and would totally be assets for our community if we brought them in. And those three subjects again are fine, I talk about them myself, but it's not all I talk about...it's not even all that I talk about, and it's not what atheists want every speech at every conference and meetup to be about.

And again, this conference and others over the past few years are starting to see our point on that, I think. But especially there have been several conferences I've gone to, atheist conferences, that have done this, in spades. And I really like that. There are a great many atheists who have other interests, that would attract them to conferences and events, and motivate them to join and support our organizations. I've spoken to lots of, for example, significant others of organized atheists, who would come to meetings and be more active if we were going to talk about social justice issues. I know lots of people who would be here right now if we talked about that more. So that's an example of where I think there is a market demographic out there that we're not tapping. And we could be tapping it.

Most of us, I think, I think it's probably true, I don't know, but most of us want to learn and hear about other issues as well, that we, as atheists, could get involved in. Like, for example, economics, or the ethics of future technologies—there's a lot of future technologies that are rolling down the pipe that are going to pose religious

and ethical problems; we, as a community, as the atheist community, should be as informed about those things and thinking about those things already.

But there are ways that we could then better understand economics and therefore as a community be better voters, be smarter atheists, and so forth. There there are questions like whether we should legalize drugs, or how to reduce gun violence, where there are many competing views on this—where is the evidence, what does the evidence point to. I, as an atheist, would love to see a good, informed expert debate by two sides of [any such] issue, by two people who really have the facts on hand, and who respect logical reasoning, and to see what kind of information I can learn from those things. And I think that would make me a better atheist. And I think we should all agree that it would make us a better atheist community. If we were doing those kinds of things. I want to see more of that.

And [we] want to hear about such things from experts who can speak from an atheist perspective. And that's important. Because that means a perspective divorced from religious premises and rooted in the traditions of empiricism, rationality, and skepticism. Which you don't always get at other venues and other institutions. We are big on that. We do that really well. Which means if we kept doing that on all issues, we could really kick ass as a community.

In fact, just a sort of straw poll from my own past experience, for every organized atheist I know, I know at least one other atheist who would join our organizations and attend our events if only we did things, or talked about things, they cared about, like them. It could even be other things, too. I went to a conference where there was a woman who gave a lecture on the history of werewolves. I thought that was totally awesome. But anyway. [Audience laughter.] And she even tied it into religious hysteria and atheism anyway. So, lots of ways to do that.

Far more atheists, of all demographics, want to talk about how atheists, as atheists, and as an organized and networked community would solve social problems, or make a difference in the world. What are we as a community going to do. We know what the Christians say they're going to do, or are trying to do. They often don't actually do it. But nonetheless they claim to be doing it or talk about it a lot. Are we going to talk about it? Are we going to do things like that? Are we going to represent ourselves as a community, so that people recognize that atheists, as atheists, have values and interests and want to solve problems in the world.

Or others who want atheists, as atheists, and as an organized and networked community, to question other things. Like claims being made in the political and

moral domain, not just in biology and theology for example. We all very much depend on philosophy. As atheists we don't truck with religious dogmas. We root our beliefs usually in some kind of philosophy or worldview. We could do that better. We could be educated on things, making us all, as a community, better philosophers. Because philosophy is really our bread and butter. It's part of how we build the worldview that we rely on, through reason and evidence.

Or there are others who just want to drink or go bowling. Or knit. Or march in gay rights rallies. All as atheists, with fellow atheists, to socialize and recharge their sanity, by enjoying the company of like-minded people. And I think we could definitely do a lot more of that. And it's happened.

So basically those people I'm talking about, you could be appealing to them, as an organization. Some organizations already are starting to do that. We can do it more.

So that's what I mean. I'm talking about atheism plus: atheism plus humanism plus skepticism. The whole package. And the way to do that is not just to be atheists anymore. Well, let me put it to you this way. For organized atheists generally, you are organized atheists, you're part of [these] organizations or come to events run by [these] organizations. All of you here, you can tell the atheist organizations that you support, that you support their doing some or all of the things I've talked about. If they're already doing them, you can still write to them and say, "Yes, that was a great idea! Keep doing that!" Give them feedback. Let them know that's happening. If you want them to do more of these things, talk about it.

And together as a community, we can make atheism, as a public identity, as an active and organized and networked community, mean something more than just belief in nothing. We can work to make atheists better people, more informed people, more morally conscientious people, and improve the public image of atheism to all other faith communities. And the way to do that is to not just be atheists anymore, but also good humanists, and committed skeptics as well. And then work together for a better atheism, and a better world.

Thank you.

[Long audience applause]