

# Another Voice for Non-believers

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In mid-2009, several colleagues and friends here in Montreal met with a dual purpose in mind. The immediate reason for our meeting was the news that Atheist Alliance International (AAI) was considering holding a convention in our city in the autumn of 2010, and AAI needed a local committee to help organize the event. However, we were also motivated by a desire that secularism, philosophical materialism, atheism and critical thought in general be better defended.

Although Montreal has several humanist, secular and skeptical organizations, they have in common a strong reluctance to face the issue of religion in a forthright manner. All have failed to take a consistently critical attitude towards the essential irrationality of religious beliefs and practices and the resulting dangers to society which religion thus constitutes. These local groups continue nevertheless to do some valuable work, and several of us may remain individual members of one or more of them. But we all agreed that a new voice was needed, a resolutely pro-materialist and unapologetically anti-religious voice. Beyond local organizations, many of us are also members of groups such as Humanist Canada, Centre for Inquiry and AAI.

Starting from a rough draft, we met several times over a period of months to discuss, revise and hone our position. After considerable hard work (facilitated by some pizza and chicken wings) we agreed on the “Atheist Manifesto”

which Humanist Perspectives has kindly agreed to publish here. The document might more accurately be called a Materialist Manifesto, although that title could cause the naive to think we are a Madonna fan club. On the other hand, the term “Atheist” incurs the risk that the ill-informed (or the dishonest) might identify us with Lenin.

We identify with neither.

We have adopted the name Atheist Freethinkers (“Libres penseurs athées” in French) for our new organization. Although we have discussed various issues of importance to any group promoting secularism in Canada or in any other country – removal of “God” from the constitution, repeal of anti-blasphemy legislation, opposition to religious misogyny and homophobia, etc. – and will take a position on these questions and others, the Manifesto remains the core of our principles. We are proud of this small but significant first step, because it is a unique and necessary addition to the voices of nonbelievers. Further, it sums up our convictions in a balanced manner, stating both what we are for and what we are against, as any coherent statement of principles must do.

If you agree with the principles put forward in this Manifesto, we hope that you will visit <http://aft.atheisme.ca> and add your signature to it using the on-line form. We plan a formal launch of the new group in the near future, and signers of the Manifesto will receive advance news of that event. We also hope to see you at

the AAI convention here in Montreal during the first weekend of October 2010!

## MANIFESTO

- Atheism is the natural state of human beings once they have freed themselves of all mythologies, hoaxes, religions and supernatural spiritualities which may have previously encumbered their minds. Atheism favours our reconciliation with our own humanity by rejecting the alienation caused by baseless and dangerous beliefs. Despite its negative grammatical form, atheism is a positive force.

- We value reason, critical thinking, science and knowledge. We value the material, intellectual and moral advancement of humanity. Reason and cooperation are essential to meeting the challenges that confront humankind. We value the evidence of our senses and rely on what we can sense and measure in this natural world. We draw our conclusions based on the best evidence, and change our conclusions accordingly as new data become known. Our ethics and values are evidence-based. Ethics and morality evolve over time as we better understand our world and the consequences of our actions.

- Science is the best tool we have for seeking truth and understanding our world. We value knowledge and we hold the endeavor to increase it as best we can to be one of the noblest efforts one can make. We consider unethical any and all efforts to stifle or denigrate knowledge and learning. We believe in modernity and progress and the ability of humanity to develop a better world based on reason.

- We are convinced that human compassion and empathy are crucial to improving the human condition. Life is precious, as it is the only life we know that we and our fellow living beings will have. We hold that all people have the inalienable right to life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness and freedom of conscience. Freedom of conscience includes not only freedom of belief but also the right to have no religion and freedom of non-belief.

- We reject all magical thinking, all superstition, all infantile hopes in a salvation provided by gods or spirits originating in any illusory supernatural realm. We know that we human beings of this small planet must survive by our own wits and resources, however modest these may be. We are responsible for humane interaction with other people and other animals in order to preserve the natural environment necessary to sustain life.

- We detest obscurantism and the ignorance which it causes. We reject censorship and the prohibition of free speech. We deplore the duplicity and credulity which many people display in their response to supernatural allegations. We reject narrow-mindedness and dogmatism which are antagonistic towards progress and new knowledge.

- We are materialists. We are monists, not dualists. We do not recognize a spiritual plane separate from material reality. Spirituality, if that term has any meaning, is simply an aspect of our material existence: it is the life of the mind, which is itself material. There is no soul separate from the body. We are our bodies. We reject all belief in one or various gods or goddesses, in demons or angels, or in any other supernatural nonsense. We reject all belief in agents whose alleged acts would be incompatible with our painstakingly acquired scientific knowledge. Indeed, the so-called supernatural is a non-sensical concept, because if a “supernatural” phenomenon were in fact observed, it would thus be natural, i.e. part of the natural world and subject to scientific inquiry.

- We are atheists. We also call ourselves humanists, freethinkers, skeptics or secularists, but we do not use these labels as cowardly euphemisms to mask our atheism. Atheism is not a system of beliefs, but rather the rejection of theistic systems. Atheism is the result of the rigorous application of critical thought to supernatural beliefs.

- We are not agnostics. We know that the various theisms are baseless prescientific mythologies, inherited from antiquity, and that their falsehood is a certainty beyond all reasonable doubt.

- We are especially not deists. We know that the hypothesis of a creator, even one who never intervenes in the natural world after his/her/its hypothetical act of creation, is superfluous and has no scientific or moral value.

- We are moral and constantly evolving beings, responsible for ourselves, as is the humanity of which we are a part. We know that our moral sense is innate, a product of our biological and cultural evolution as human animals. We know too that to assign moral authority to a fictional deity alienates us from our own humanity, compromises our freedom, and renders us irresponsible. We know that any religious authority which has the pretention to speak for an illusory god exploits the credulity of its followers.

- We are antitheist, antideist and antireligious. We are convinced that the free expression of ideas is necessary. To criticize religions is not only a right, but a necessity. Of all supernatural or paranormal beliefs which infect human thought, the various theisms are among the most widespread and the most dangerous. We do not limit our criticism to fundamentalists or extremists. We also criticize religious tendencies considered “moderate” or “liberal” . All supernatural beliefs are irrational, whether they are considered “moderate” or “fundamentalist” . All forms of religion have in common moral arrogance, the arbitrary nature of their supernatural beliefs, and a pernicious attachment to religious authority and tradition at the expense of reason.

- We promote secularism, that is, the complete separation between religion and State, and the expulsion of all religious influence from public institutions. We are willing to work in coalition with any other association, even a religious one, which shares with us a clearly secular objective. But we will not curtail our antireligious criticism in an effort to avoid offending whomever. We respect freedom of belief and non-belief, and we do so by promoting legal measures to guarantee that freedom, but we are not bound by any obligation to respect beliefs themselves.

- We are not religious, and we will not imitate those who are religious. We make no claim

to be morally superior to believers, nor are we morally inferior. Most importantly, the religious prejudice which associates atheism with immorality or amorality is nothing but a fallacy promoted, self-servingly, by religious institutions and their allies. We know that atheism is beneficial and in no way harmful. Unlike fundamentalists, we have no inclination to criminalize behaviour simply because we may find it morally dubious. The various theisms are morally reprehensible ideologies, but we have neither the ability nor the desire to forbid their practice—provided that such practice remains compatible with fundamental human rights and with secular values, including freedom of speech, equality of the sexes, and the right of children to be free from religious indoctrination. Rather, we wish only to minimize the damage they do, so that the religious practice of some does not compromise the freedom of others.

- What we know above all, is that all knowledge is incomplete and subject to revision. If a new phenomenon or a new technology or new data incompatible with our worldview should present itself, then we will study that novel discovery with an appropriate balance of open-mindedness and skepticism, and change our conception of the world if modification is justified.

Founding members of Atheist Freethinkers:

Brahim Abdenbi  
Rachel Clarke-Sagos  
René Girard  
Daniel Laprès  
David Rand  
Nick Sagos  
David Éric Simard

You are invited to sign The Manifesto online. [aft.atheisme.ca](http://aft.atheisme.ca)

*David Rand is an active member of several atheist and humanist organizations. In particular, he is on the council of the Mouvement laïque québécois in Montréal.*