



# TEST THE NATION: IQ

Sunday, January 24, 2010

## Participant Questionnaire – “Atheists”

For use by all individuals who submit forms by mail or email and whose information could be used for the CBC program ‘Test the Nation: IQ’ and for program publicity.

AFFIX PHOTO HERE OR ATTACH AS FILE IN EMAIL	<p>I am available on Sunday, January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2010:</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
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<b>Title:</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mr. <input type="checkbox"/> Mrs. <input type="checkbox"/> Ms. <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)			
<b>Name:</b> Geoffrey Falk			
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**Thank you for answering the following questions:**

<p><b>Are you...?</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female</p>
<p><b>Which age group do you belong to?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Under 20 <input type="checkbox"/> 20-29 * <input type="checkbox"/> 30-39 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 40-49 <input type="checkbox"/> 50-59 <input type="checkbox"/> 60+</p> <p>*if you answered 20-29, please confirm your actual age _____</p>
<p><b>What Province/Territory were you born in?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Alberta <input type="checkbox"/> British Columbia <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Manitoba <input type="checkbox"/> New Brunswick <input type="checkbox"/> Newfoundland and Labrador <input type="checkbox"/> Northwest Territories <input type="checkbox"/> Nova Scotia <input type="checkbox"/> Nunavut <input type="checkbox"/> Ontario <input type="checkbox"/> Prince Edward Island <input type="checkbox"/> Quebec <input type="checkbox"/> Saskatchewan <input type="checkbox"/> Yukon <input type="checkbox"/> Outside of Canada</p>
<p><b>What is your natural hair colour?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Black <input type="checkbox"/> Blonde <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Brown <input type="checkbox"/> Red</p>
<p><b>In birth order, which of the following are you?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Only Child <input type="checkbox"/> Youngest <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Eldest <input type="checkbox"/> Other</p>

<p><b>Do you have a twin sibling?</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Identical</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Fraternal</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p><b>Which of the following descriptions best defines where you live?</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Rural (population of less than 50 thousand)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Small Town (population from 50 thousand to just under 250 thousand)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Large City (population from 250 thousand to just under 1 million)</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Metropolitan (population of 1 million or greater)</p>
<p><b>What are you more likely to read? Please select one.</b></p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Non-fiction</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Fiction</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Literature</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Horror</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Romance</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Science Fiction / Fantasy</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Crime / Detective</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Comedy</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Any other Genres</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I don't like to read</p>
<p><b>Marital Status?</b></p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Single/Not Married</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Married/Common Law</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Divorced</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Widowed</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other</p>
<p><b>What is your shoe size?</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 3 - 5</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 6 - 8</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 9 - 10</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 11 - 12</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 13+</p>
<p><b>Which of the following Federal political parties do you identify with most closely?</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Bloc Québécois</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Conservative</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Green</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Liberal</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> NDP</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (i.e., classical liberal or libertarian-ish)</p>
<p><b>Are you...?</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Religious</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Agnostic</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Atheist</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other</p>

**How many concussions have you had?**

- None  
 One  
 Two  
 Three  
 Four or more

**Estimate your own IQ.**

**This test will give you a score between 70 and 150. The average IQ is 100.**

130+. I've written the Mensa preliminary (home) IQ test and scored 99<sup>th</sup> percentile on that, but wasn't rigidly adhering to the time limits when I wrote it. So call it 98<sup>th</sup> percentile.

**Have you always been an atheist? If not, was there a moment when you became an atheist? Tell us about it.**

I grew up in a fundamentalist Christian household with a wonderful mother who was a missionary in Europe prior to her marriage. Even into my university years, I was surrounded by a Mennonite community where dancing was regarded as being from the Devil.

Even in those surroundings, though, the idea of accepting Jesus as my personal savior, for the reward of heaven against the penalty of eternal damnation, as part of an Eternal In-Group, never made enough sense to me to ever seriously consider doing it.

Instead, I made a mistake just as big as turning my life over to Jesus and the Christian churches: I turned it over enthusiastically at age twenty to a "God-realized" East-Indian guru who was (I later learned) included on the cover of the Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper's* album, and whose other admirers have included Peter Gabriel, Van Morrison, and Madonna.

After a decade of following that late but highly respected spiritual leader from afar—i.e., knowing him and his living followers just through his well-edited books—I spent the worst nine months of my life at an ashram (i.e., male monastery) of his in southern California, in the late '90s. It took me a good part of the following year to decompress from the daily emotional abuse and thought-constriction I had experienced there. Half a dozen viewings of the South Park movie helped a lot.

In the months and years following that, I started to think about how badly my divine guru's disciples had screwed his organization up. And then, I got really angry at that "omniscient, God-realized" leader, for allowing that abuse to take place. And then I discovered an Internet bulletin board on which other members of the same organization were posting their experiences, and I realized that what I had gone through was a *regular experience*, in that spiritual church.

A couple of years later, after getting laid off from my first I.T. job, I started systematically researching the reported abuses in New Age cults, for writing a book. Through that, I discovered that the abuse I had experienced at that ashram was a regular experience in *all* spiritual organizations, regardless of their holy public faces and claimed high ideals.

Also through that same research, and the related reading into explicitly skeptical writings, I found that none of the paranormal claims and/or miracles claimed by holy figures (including my former guru) stand up to rational scrutiny. From "walking on fire" (i.e., hot coals with a low specific heat) to being able to stop the pulse in one wrist while it still beats in the other (via a rubber ball placed in one's armpit and squeezed against), to manifestations of "sacred ash" (cow dung), it's all either the product of self-delusion, the laws of physics, or of outright trickery.

Even having rejected a Big Daddy in the Sky and a Guru-Savior on Earth, however, you can still very well continue to believe that meditative experiences of higher levels of reality are real, and/or that your witnessing self-awareness is "Transcendent Spirit looking through you." (Many "atheist Buddhists," likely including the renowned atheist Sam Harris and certainly the "atheist New Age philosopher" Ken Wilber—whom I have extensively debunked—would fall into this category.) To think your way out of *that*, you need to research it to the point of realizing that chakras and subtle energies don't exist—i.e., that they inevitably fail double-blind testing—and that meditative experiences are just the product of human neurology, i.e., the wiring of our brains and nervous systems. That's what my *next* book will be about.

We're still left with the question about "why Something exists, rather than Nothing." Anyone who makes the effort to do the research can be certain, beyond a reasonable doubt, that neither "revealed" religion nor meditative experiences can provide any insight at all into that question. If there is an answer, it's not something that any human mind has had ever had access to, or likely ever *will* have access to.

<p><b>Are you applying with anyone else? If so, who?</b></p> <p>No</p>
<p><b>Have you ever appeared on other TV shows? If so, which shows?</b></p> <p>No</p>
<p><b>Do you have any special needs / disabilities / dietary requirements?</b></p> <p>No</p>
<p><b>What is a stereotype that you often get as an atheist?</b></p> <p>There's certainly a widespread belief that atheists are dour, humorless people. In his book-reading at the U of Toronto in September, Richard Dawkins addressed that notion, quoting the response of Julia Sweeney's mom, on the formerly-Catholic Julia's "coming out" as an atheist: "I wouldn't mind if you just didn't believe in God; but an <i>atheist!</i>"</p> <p>But more serious than that, I think, is the mistaken idea that atheists haven't bothered to try and understand what we're rejecting—and especially that young people who don't believe in God are just following a fad, as a Christian musician suggested to me last spring. Also, especially for militant atheists, that we're not merely rude but guilty of caricaturing the positions we're criticizing, rather than responding to what theists "really believe."</p> <p>Well. My Christian mother believed well into her adulthood in a literal, bodily Resurrection from the grave, at the (literal) Second Coming of Christ. It was only at the very end of her life (and ordeal with cancer) that she began to question whether accepting Jesus as your personal savior was necessary in order to get into heaven. Pretty much her entire side of the family, in fact, are missionaries, having ministered at various times in places as remote as Brazil, the Honduras, and Panama—thus accounting for my furloughed Aunt Helen once asking me out of the blue, over a 7-Up float, whether I was doing drugs! Even weird cousin Perry got "scared straight" from his rebellious, drug-taking teenage years into doing missionary work, by a (drug-induced) vision of Satan Himself. On the other side of the family, a cousin who picked up a Juno a couple of years ago for her first (gospel) CD wonders/blogs out loud about what Jesus wore and ate, and can't wait to meet him in the afterlife, to ask him personally.</p> <p>I know very well what I'm rejecting, from fundamentalist Christianity straight through to the flakiest New Age, expansion-of-consciousness, meditation-based spirituality. And if you spend any time at all at skeptics' meetups, you'll be surprised to find how many of them can say the same thing—e.g., ex-Muslims who had planned to raise their children in that faith, until they started really thinking and reading into skeptical/debunking thought ... at which point everything you used to believe about religion, spirituality, and paranormal phenomena, will inevitably fall apart, if you just keep researching.</p>
<p><b>Do you have another occupation? If so, what?</b></p> <p>Software Developer</p>
<p><b>Do you belong to any professional organizations? Please specify.</b></p> <p>No</p>

**Why did you decide to do this?**

Is “fifteen minutes of fame” an acceptable answer?

If not, is “two hours”?

If not, then “Ask not what atheism, rational thought, and science can do to promote me, but what I can do to promote atheism, rational thought, and the best thing civilization has ever produced to keep us from fooling ourselves: science.”

**Which team will have the lowest IQ and why? Which team do you most want to beat and why?**

Lowest: You’d figure the (concussed) athletes, since they had no “intelligence barrier” to surmount for getting into that profession in the first place ... and have suffered brain injuries since then, oy. I say that as someone who was MVP of my small-town Peewee hockey team back in grade seven (goalie: a few pucks to the head, but no concussions).

Most want to beat: Either the religious leaders or the politicians, whichever one fudges the truth or outright-lies more in trying to get me to believe that they have all the answers ... or even that they have *any* answers at all.

**What is your favorite joke about atheists?**

"Knock, knock."  
"Who's there?"  
"Atheist."  
"Which one?"  
"Huh? No, *atheist*."  
"Yeah, you already said that. Which theist are you?"  
"I'm not a theist, I'm *atheist*."  
"Look, I don't know what you're selling, but I can't go letting everyone who claims to believe in God into my house. They'd rob me blind!"  
"But I don't believe in God. I'm *atheist*."  
"Yeah, yeah. 'Third base.'"

Or maybe this instead:

Two atheists walk into a bar.  
Christopher Hitchens is already there, pounding back shots of scotch, and railing drunkenly against the horrific abuses and unconscionable cover-ups of the Catholic Church.  
They both join him, agreeing with everything he says—except maybe the parts about the War in Iraq. He drinks them both under the table, and they all wake up the next morning with pounding headaches, wishing they were dead.  
God and heaven still don't exist. But that's okay, because alcohol *does*.  
And so do Catholic schoolgirls. Cor!

I had make both of those up. I do have a favorite Christian-related joke, though:

"Jesus walks into a hotel, puts three large nails down on the counter, and says, 'Can you put me up for the night?'"

**Have you ever made the papers or won any interesting awards?**

Got interviewed by the *New York Times* back in 2001 (Feb. 15), just for being such an unusually generous person (for donating \$10 to an online humour site at the start of Amazon's Honor System, as a way of saying "Thanks" to the brilliant author of satirewire.com, for the very high caliber of his material).

Also received the Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Manitoba Open Scholarship (4 years x \$1000) back in the mid-'80s, for being the top (rural) student entering science or engineering from high school at the University of Manitoba.

**Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about?**

In my spare time, I'm a folk/roots musician who's just released a CD.

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If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me

- by telephone at **416-205-6744**
- by FAX at **416-205-3895** (*please put documents to my attention prominently*)
- or by email **shannon.mckinnon @cbc.ca**

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Thank you for your time and interest in 'Test the Nation: IQ.' If we are able to invite you to take part in the program, we will be in touch with more details very soon.

I declare all the information I have given is correct to the best of my knowledge.

<b>Print/Type name:</b> Geoffrey Falk	<b>Dated:</b> November 16, 2009
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