

Atheists Don't Know Shit By [Caleb Lack](#) • Sep 13, 2013 •

A few days ago, the following joke showed up on my Facebook feed:



An atheist was seated next to a little girl on an airplane and he turned to her and said, “Do you want to talk? Flights go quicker if you strike up a conversation with your fellow passenger.”

The little girl, who had just started to read her book,

replied to the total stranger, “What would you want to talk about?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said the atheist. “How about why there is no God, or no Heaven or Hell, or no life after death?” as he smiled smugly.

“Okay,” she said. “Those could be interesting topics but let me ask you a question first. A horse, a cow, and a deer all eat the same stuff – grass. Yet a deer excretes little pellets, while a cow turns out a flat patty, but a horse produces clumps. Why do you suppose that is?”

The atheist, visibly surprised by the little girl’s intelligence, thinks about it and says, “Hmmm, I have no idea.” To which the little girl replies, “Do you really feel qualified to discuss God, Heaven and Hell, or life after death, when you don’t know shit?”

And then she went back to reading her book.

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Now, I like a good [joke](#). I even love [puns](#), and the [worse](#) they are the more I love them. I use large amounts of humor and sarcasm when both teaching classes and doing therapy. I sometimes refer to my style of teaching as edutainment, for pete’s sake (if you don’t believe me, you can watch one of my [lectures](#)). One type of humor that I don’t enjoy, though, is humor with the sole purpose of belittling and insulting others. Such jokes often rely on negative stereotypes and are frequently used against

minorities or outsiders. Let's deconstruct the unpleasant stereotypes in the above joke, as an example.

1. Atheists target those least likely to be able to defend themselves.
2. Atheists are not socially skilled.
3. Atheists are smug.
4. Atheists think most people are dumber than they are.

I'm relatively sure not all of these are accurate of your typical atheist. Certainly, I have met non-theistic people who have displayed these traits. But, I've also met theists who think or behave in this way. And whites. And blacks. And basically people from every group you can think of.



The joke also contains a fairly major logical fallacy. While the atheist did not know why animals shit in various shapes (but [this lady does!](#)), this has absolutely no bearing on any other potential knowledge that he may or may not have. It's the equivalent of me starting to talk to someone about the the optimal [treatment for obsessive-compulsive disorder in youth](#), but then he or ignores me after finding out that I don't know anything about [cellular mitosis](#). This is

called [strawmanning](#) (or for those in the UK, an Aunt Sally).

Now, interestingly enough, atheists are one of the few groups in the United States that it is still okay to hate and (openly) discriminate against. From state constitutions that outright [ban atheists from holding public office](#) to the majority of Americans saying they [would not vote for an atheistic political candidate](#) to being one of the [most distrusted groups](#) of "religious" minorities (although things are actually [getting better compared to 50 years ago!](#)).

What if we took this joke, and just changed a few words? How would that be received? Would the new joke be deemed shareable and likable across your favorite social networking site? Let's do a little experiment.

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A Christian was seated next to a little girl on an airplane and he turned to her and said, “Do you want to talk? Flights go quicker if you strike up a conversation with your fellow passenger.”

The little girl, who had just started to read her book, replied to the total stranger, “What would you want to talk about?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said the Christian. “How about why there is a God, and if you don’t accept Jesus as your savior you will be condemned to an eternity of hellfire and pain?” as he smiled smugly.

“Okay,” she said. “Those could be interesting topics but let me ask you a question first. A horse, a cow, and a deer all eat the same stuff – grass. Yet a deer excretes little pellets, while a cow turns out a flat patty, but a horse produces clumps. Why do you suppose that is?”

The Christian, visibly surprised by the little girl’s intelligence, thinks about it and says, “Hmmm, I have no idea.” To which the little girl replies, “Do you really feel qualified to discuss God, Heaven and Hell, or life after death, when you don’t know shit?”

And then she went back to reading her book.

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Or maybe we substitute a different, often [discriminated](#) against religious group, perhaps?

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A Muslim was seated next to a little girl on an airplane and he turned to her and said, “Do you want to talk? Flights go quicker if you strike up a conversation with your fellow passenger.”

The little girl, who had just started to read her book, replied to the total stranger, “What would you want to talk about?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said the Muslim. “How about why there is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet? Or how you as a female must wear a burqa and show obedience to your husband in all matters?” as he smiled smugly.

“Okay,” she said. “Those could be interesting topics but let me ask you a question first. A horse, a cow, and a deer all eat the same stuff – grass. Yet a deer excretes little pellets, while a cow turns out a flat patty, but a horse produces clumps. Why do you suppose that is?”

The Muslim, visibly surprised by the little girl’s intelligence, thinks about it and says, “Hmmm, I have no idea.” To which the little girl replies, “Do you really feel qualified to discuss God and women’s role in society, when you don’t know shit?”

And then she went back to reading her book.

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I am guessing that the “Christians don’t know shit” joke would be seen as insulting and not funny to most, provoking outrage and cries of “stop trying to oppress my faith!” As for the “Muslims don’t know shit” version, I would think it would be unlikely to be shared much at all, since it would be seen as denigrating to an entire culture or at least purposefully trying to start a fight.

So why, I wonder, is it okay to instead insult and denigrate an ever-growing percentage of the population? A percentage of the population that includes [many of the key figures](#) who made possible the sharing of such a joke online via a computer in the first place? A percentage of the population who [go to prison at a much lower rate than believers](#), despite theists repeatedly accusing them of being [amoral](#)?

Your thoughts?

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Having also received this “joke” by email, sent anonymously of course, I traced it back at least to this particular blog. The author seems interested in receiving comments. Here is the address.

<http://www.skepticink.com/gps/2013/09/13/atheists-dont-know-shit/>