

▼ This I Believe describes itself as “a public dialogue about belief—one essay at a time.” Broadcast since 2005 on the National Public Radio programs All Things Considered, Tell Me More, and Weekend Edition Sunday, the series challenges listeners to write and read aloud three-minute essays analyzing the core values that shape their ways of seeing the world and living in it. The program is produced by Dan Gediman and hosted by Jay Allison. (A Canadian version, hosted by Preston Manning and broadcast since 2007, can be heard on CBC Radio One.) In some cases, contributors refer directly or indirectly to their religious beliefs; in others, they do not. The program thus provides a public forum where religion can but does not necessarily play a role, a situation that reminds us of the complex relationship between religious belief and other kinds of beliefs that influence moral behavior.

This I Believe is modeled on the radio series of the same name from the 1950s. Created by journalist Edward R. Murrow, the earlier series was a response to events of the time—the U.S. propaganda battle against the Soviet Union during the Cold War and some Americans’ paranoia about the spread of “godless” communism. (It was during this period that the phrase “under God” was added to the Pledge of Allegiance.) The program’s Web site (<http://thisibelieve.org>) provides this information about the purposes of This I Believe:

“As in the 1950s, this is a time when belief is dividing the nation and the world,” says Allison about life today. “We are not listening well, not understanding each other—we are simply disagreeing, or worse. . . .” In reviving This I Believe, Allison and Gediman say their goal is not to persuade Americans to agree on the same beliefs. Rather, they hope to encourage people to begin the much more difficult task of developing respect for beliefs different from their own.

Here, we present three essays, one from the 1950s and two recent ones. All three mention God, though they are written by a Jew, a Muslim, and an atheist. Albert Einstein (1879–1955), whose essay dates from the original program in the 1950s, was a German-born American theoretical physicist whose heritage was Jewish and who won the Nobel Prize in 1921. Eboo Patel (b. 1967), whose essay was broadcast in November 2005, is the founder and executive director of the Chicago-based Interfaith Youth Core, an international nonprofit that helps young people from different faiths work together helping others. He is author of Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation, and he blogs on The Faith Divide. Penn Jillette (b. 1955), whose essay was also broadcast in November 2005, is half of the team Penn & Teller; he is a comedian, a juggler, an illusionist, a writer, and a fellow at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank. He has appeared in films, music videos, and television programs, including Dancing with the Stars.

An Ideal of Service to Our Fellow Man

ALBERT EINSTEIN

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious—the knowledge of the existence of something unfathomable to us, the manifestation of the most profound reason coupled with the most brilliant beauty. I cannot

imagine a god who rewards and punishes the objects of his creation, or who has a will of the kind we experience in ourselves. I am satisfied with the mystery of life's eternity and with the awareness of—and glimpse into—the marvelous construction of the existing world together with the steadfast determination to comprehend a portion, be it ever so tiny, of the reason that manifests itself in nature. This is the basis of cosmic religiosity, and it appears to me that the most important function of art and science is to awaken this feeling among the receptive and keep it alive.

I sense that it is not the State^o that has intrinsic value in the machinery of humankind, but rather the creative, feeling individual, the personality alone that creates the noble and sublime.

Man's ethical behavior should be effectively grounded on: compassion, nurture, and social bonds. What is moral is not of the divine, but rather a purely human matter, albeit the most important of all human matters. In the course of history, the ideals pertaining to human beings' behavior toward each other and pertaining to the preferred organization of their communities have been espoused and taught by enlightened individuals. These ideals and convictions—results of historical experience, empathy, and the need for beauty and harmony—have usually been willingly recognized by human beings, at least in theory.

The highest principles for our aspirations and judgments are given to us westerners in the Jewish-Christian religious tradition. It is a very high goal: free and responsible development of the individual, so that he may place his powers freely and gladly in the service of all mankind.

The pursuit of recognition for its own sake, an almost fanatical love of justice, and the quest for personal independence form the traditional themes of the Jewish people, of which I am a member.

But if one holds these high principles clearly before one's eyes and compares them with the life and spirit of our times, then it is glaringly apparent that mankind finds itself at present in grave danger. I see the nature of the current crises in the juxtaposition of the individual to society. The individual feels more than ever dependent on society, but he feels this dependence not in the positive sense, cradled, connected as part of an organic^o whole; he sees it as a threat to his natural rights and even his economic existence. His position in society, then, is such that that which drives his ego is encouraged and developed, and that which would drive him toward other men—a weak impulse to begin with—is left to atrophy.^o

It is my belief that there is only one way to eliminate these evils, namely, the establishment of a planned economy coupled with an education geared toward social goals. Alongside the development of individual abilities, the

education of the individual aspires to revive an ideal that is geared toward the service of our fellow man, and that needs to take the place of the glorification of power and outer success.

We Are Each Other's Business

EBOO PATEL

I am an American Muslim. I believe in pluralism.^o In the Holy Quran, God tells us, "I created you into diverse nations and tribes that you may come to know one another." I believe America is humanity's best opportunity to make God's wish that we come to know one another a reality.

In my office hangs Norman Rockwell's^o illustration *Freedom of Worship*. A Muslim holding a Quran in his hands stands near a Catholic woman fingering her rosary. Other figures have their hands folded in prayer and their eyes filled with piety. They stand shoulder-to-shoulder facing the same direction, comfortable with the presence of one another and yet apart. It is a vivid depiction of a group living in peace with its diversity, yet not exploring it.

We live in a world where the forces that seek to divide us are strong. To overcome them, we must do more than simply stand next to one another in silence.

I attended high school in the western suburbs of Chicago. The group I ate lunch with included a Jew, a Mormon, a Hindu, a Catholic and a Lutheran. We were all devout to a degree, but we almost never talked about religion. Somebody would announce at the table that they couldn't eat a certain kind of food, or any food at all, for a period of time. We all knew religion hovered behind this, but nobody ever offered any explanation deeper than "my mom said," and nobody ever asked for one.

A few years after we graduated, my Jewish friend from the lunchroom reminded me of an experience we both wish had never happened. A group of thugs in our high school had taken to scrawling anti-Semitic slurs on classroom desks and shouting them in the hallway.

I did not confront them. I did not comfort my Jewish friend. Instead I averted my eyes from their bigotry, and I avoided my friend because I couldn't stand to face him.

My friend told me he feared coming to school those days, and he felt abandoned as he watched his close friends do nothing. Hearing him tell me



Norman Rockwell's
Worship

pluralism: a value and value other than o

Norman Rockwell's
American illustration
Much loved title, Rockwell covers for the Post for over illustration in *Freedom of Worship*
Rockwell's 1940s; the other are *Freedom from Want*, a *Fear*. This list from President Roosevelt's 1941 Union Address

of his suffering and my complicity is the single most humiliating experience of my life.

My friend needed more than my silent presence at the lunch table. I realize now that to believe in pluralism means I need the courage to act on it. Action is what separates a belief from an opinion. Beliefs are imprinted through actions.

In the words of the great American poet Gwendolyn Brooks: "We are each other's business; we are each other's harvest; we are each other's magnitude and bond."

I cannot go back in time and take away the suffering of my Jewish friend, 10 but through action I can prevent it from happening to others.

There Is No God

PENN JILLETTE

I believe that there is no God. I'm beyond atheism. Atheism is not believing in God. Not believing in God is easy—you can't prove a negative, so there's no work to do. You can't prove that there isn't an elephant inside the trunk of my car. You sure? How about now? Maybe he was just hiding before. Check again. Did I mention that my personal heartfelt definition of the word "elephant" includes mystery, order, goodness, love and a spare tire?

So, anyone with a love for truth outside of herself has to start with no belief in God and then look for evidence of God. She needs to search for some objective evidence of a supernatural power. All the people I write e-mails to often are still stuck at this searching stage. The atheism part is easy.

But, this *This I Believe* thing seems to demand something more personal, some leap of faith that helps one see life's big picture, some rules to live by. So, I'm saying, "This I believe: I believe there is no God."

Having taken that step, it informs every moment of my life. I'm not greedy. I have love, blue skies, rainbows and Hallmark cards, and that has to be enough. It has to be enough, but it's everything in the world and everything in the world is plenty for me. It seems just rude to beg the invisible for more. Just the love of my family that raised me and the family I'm raising now is enough that I don't need heaven. I won the huge genetic lottery and I get joy every day.

Believing there's no God means I can't really be forgiven except by kindness and faulty memories. That's good; it makes me want to be more thoughtful. I have to try to treat people right the first time around.

Believing there's no God stops me from being solipsistic. I can read ideas from all different people from all different cultures. Without God, we can agree on reality, and I can keep learning where I'm wrong. We can all keep adjusting, so we can really communicate. I don't travel in circles where people say, "I have faith, I believe this in my heart and nothing you can say or do can shake my faith." That's just a long-winded religious way to say, "shut up, or another two words that the FCC likes less. But all obscenity is less insulting than anything you can ever say or do." So, believing there is no God lets me be proven wrong and that's always fun. It means I'm learning something.

Believing there is no God means the suffering I've seen in my family, and indeed all the suffering in the world, isn't caused by an omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent force that isn't bothered to help or is just testing us, but rather something we all may be able to help others with in the future. No God means the possibility of less suffering in the future.

Believing there is no God gives me more room for belief in family, people, love, truth, beauty, sex, Jell-O and all the other things I can prove and that make this life the best life I will ever have.

RESPOND

1. Which of these three arguments do you find most effective? Why? Seeking to put aside whatever religious beliefs you might have, which writer do you think makes the strongest case for his beliefs? Why?
2. Choose the essay that you believe is strongest, and characterize it. Is it an argument of fact? Of definition? Of evaluation? Is it causal? Is it a proposal? What role does religious belief—or the lack of it—play in structuring the argument?
3. How is the essay by Einstein like the essays by Patel and Jillette? How is it different? In considering this question, pay attention to all aspects of the essays, but especially language, formality, the ways in which personal experiences are used, and the ways in which personal beliefs are expressed. What might account for the differences?
4. Visit the Web site for *This I Believe* (<http://thisibelieve.org>), and listen to several of the essays that you find there. You may wish to listen to essays from the 1950s or to contemporary ones. You may wish to examine the most frequently viewed or listened-to essays, or you may wish

Jillette knows that members of his audience are suspicious of his attempts to insert humor into his argument. He tries to build bridges by using the argument of humor.

LINK TO P. 48

solipsistic: self-absorbed; egotistical.

FCC: the Federal Communications Commission, which enforces rules that use of indecent language in the broadcast (indecent, but not obscene) gauge can be used 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. are assumed not

to search for essays that treat a specific topic. Choose three essays that you find especially effective (perhaps even moving), and write a rhetorical analysis of them, paying special attention to the kinds of arguments used. (For a discussion of rhetorical analyses, see Chapter 5.)

5. Write an essay for the *This I Believe* series. One section of the program's Web site (<http://thisibelieve.org/essaywritingtips>) provides tips for creating a successful submission. Essays are generally 350 to 500 words in length, and they need to discuss a value—motivated by religion or not—that you believe in. You will be writing an essay to be read aloud. (Recall that Chapter 15 discusses arguments to be heard.) We encourage you to submit your essay to the series if it is still being broadcast at the time you are using this textbook. If you are successful, let us know. Perhaps we'll use your essay in the sixth edition of *Everything's an Argument*, with Readings.