



A Humanist's Invitation to Peaceful Science

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<https://peacefulscience.org/articles/stephen-matheson-humanists-invitation/>



Does the world need another site for debates about creationism? No.

Does the world need more places to announce that “Darwinism” has been felled by using algebra and a paperback book by Richard Dawkins? Heavens no.

Does the world need more online forums for Christian apologists to wrangle over the meaning of ‘yom’? Please, no.

What about a place where scientists can answer questions from laypeople, about evolution and genetics and maybe even climate change? Yeah, maybe.

Or how about a place where people can hear about the ins and outs of Adam and Eve, the Garden of Eden, evolutionary genetics, and how genetics can be reconciled with Ancient Near Eastern accounts of the beginning of the world? That’s not for me.

Peaceful Science is all of the things I listed above, only one of which is of slight interest to me. Still, I believe that Peaceful Science is uniquely interesting and valuable.

First, I want to clear up some confusion about the purpose and mission of Peaceful Science. It is common for people on the forum to assume that we exist for the sole purpose of addressing science-faith interactions in the context of evolution, but they are mistaken. A look at the [mission of the organization](#) and at its leadership reveals something bigger, better, and different.

This confusion is understandable. Peaceful Science was founded by an evangelical scientist (the smart and kind Joshua Swamidass) who recently wrote a [book](#) that explores genetic and genealogical evidence for recent common ancestry of present-day humans. His book and its ideas are a big focus of the site. The discussion forum is decidedly not the only activity of the organization, but for now its focus is mostly on evolution and religion.

Still, it is the larger mission that attracts me to Peaceful Science and why I think that more secular humanists like me should have a look. Two things stand out to me.

First, the overarching goal is to foster dialogue built on trust. In my opinion, that is a bigger and more challenging goal than any attempt

to bridge genetics and Genesis. But especially in 2020, it is one of the most important endeavors that a human can undertake.

Disagreement and distrust are vastly different things, and we should not need a shared religion to share mutual human respect. I take this to be a bedrock humanist commitment: what another human believes about gods or magic is immaterial to their value as a human and unrelated to whether they are worthy of trust and respect.

This mission of dialogue with trust is based on [principles published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science \(AAAS\)](#). This is important, not so much because the principles are deep or revolutionary but because the AAAS is a reliable touchstone for scientists and especially for unbelievers. The principles weren’t dreamed up by Dr. Swamidass or paraphrased from an ancient text; they were hammered out by diverse experts who were focused on helping science serve society.

Second, Peaceful Science’s [mission](#) is explicitly humanistic: “...encouraging conversation around the grand question: *what does it mean to be human?*”

This is an inspiring goal that should sell itself to any secular (or religious) humanist. I’m drawn to it, and I want to be a part of that grand conversation.

Fellow unbelievers might still have some hesitation. Is this “dialogue” tainted by the ethos of evangelicalism? Will we be treated as projects? Is dialogue just a means to a religious end?

Well, I’ve been hanging around Peaceful Science for more than a year. At least on the forum, there’s no way to avoid hearing about the demise of “Darwinism” from overconfident non-biologists with scant knowledge of evolutionary theory. True, there are regular conversations devoted to “theology.” But *Peaceful Science* is much bigger, and dare I say better, than all that. I also find challenging and interesting conversations, and dialogues that change people’s minds.

So, here I am, way outside any humanist or atheist “bubble.” I hope more secular humanists will participate, because we are welcome here, and this is a chance to help conversation about the grand questions of life grow.

References

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