

## 404 Mage Not Found

Kris King – October 9<sup>th</sup> 2011

<http://www.rantinaminor.co.uk/2011/10/404-mage-not-found/>

My first thought upon hearing the news this week that Apple CEO, and co-founder, Steve Jobs had died was not that the world had lost an inspirational thinker and visionary who fundamentally changed our relationship with technology (that thought was in there – it just wasn't my first); I didn't even leap, as I ordinarily would, straight to the cynical and anti-corporate, "Oh no, who's going to come up with ideas for what Chinese children should build next?" (although that was in there too). No, my first thought was, given Jobs' extraordinarily high-profile as CEO of the biggest tech company on earth, how long would it be before the Westboro Baptist Church crawled out of the festering gutter they lurk in to announce that they were going to protest his funeral? As it turned out "less than a day" was the correct answer and, when their infamous tweet came rather ironically via an iPhone (prompting a torrent of amused derision), I started to wonder why on earth theists ever bother to go anywhere near the internet when they so regularly, and completely, get their arses handed to them every time they do.

Obviously I'm not talking about those people who happen to have a belief in god and have bought a laptop in order to buy tea towels of the virgin mary, or coffee mugs with "Fill me up ... WITH GOD'S LOVE!" as gifts to put under their pagan, entirely forbidden by the bible, trees at christmas. I'm referring instead to those who clearly mark out a place for themselves on the internet as theists (or proponents of other forms of superstition and woo); I'm talking about the muslim bloggers, the christian vloggers, the psychic frauds, and the reiki-loving joggers (although, to be fair, I'm probably not going to necessarily deal with the last two of those specifically in this post, it's just that the temptation of a Dr. Seuss-esque rhyme like that was too great to ignore, so please forgive my tiny little deception – normal, truthful vociferousness will be resumed as soon as possible). Regardless of how they present themselves, and what particular kind of shop they set up on the world wide web, they invariably find that it was nothing quite like the easy-pickings they imagined.

For a large number of theists, especially those with a fondness for preaching, the internet must have seemed like a gift from above; suddenly, instead of trying to convince the handful of trusting nitwits they knew personally, and who already agreed with everything they said anyway, the cost of a cheap PC and a monthly phone bill could buy them the most enormous audience – hundreds of millions of fresh minds in twinkling, shiny heads, all waiting to be emptied of every last drop of reason in order that a large quantity of mental faeces could be pumped straight in to their brains through the intertubes. As a platform for proselytizing the world wide web must seem rather like the chance to play Wembley Stadium would to a band that's more used to performing Daniel O'Donnell covers in a local community centre (invariably to an appreciative audience of deaf pensioners who were grateful just to be out of the house). It doesn't matter that they'd be lowest on a bill that features the biggest rock bands on the planet, they're going to go for it ... and they're going to fail miserably.

The insurmountable problem faced by anyone wishing to preach dogma on the internet is that it represents probably the most open form of communication ever devised by our species; a free forum for questions and discussion, something which is fundamentally incompatible with religion. It is, as has been expressed elsewhere, a "marketplace of ideas" where any and all opinions or points of view can be expressed without hindrance. Unlike mainstream media there are no real gatekeepers to getting "on the air" with the internet; radio, TV, print, and the more traditional forms of publishing all subject the contributor to a vetting process before they'll let them utter a single word – not so with the web; *anyone* with a few coins in their pocket can be their own publisher or broadcaster, allowing them to promulgate ideas, no matter how trivial, profound, insane, offensive, or just plain silly, to a world hungry for information. The only caveat here is that as the size of the audience increases so too does the number of potential critics.

It's like the world's biggest peer-review system – ideas are thrown in to the arena where they are scrutinised, analysed, and generally taken apart in much the same way as the inhabitants of the lion enclosure at London Zoo would take apart a large steak. The process is completely merciless, and

this is as it should be because the point is to put every idea under the microscope and subject it to the most intense scrutiny; if it survives, then it has merit – it has *worth*. If it falls apart under examination it is abandoned where it lies bleeding and left to rot. It might seem harsh but this is the only reliable way we've found over the centuries to weed out bad ideas, and our entire civilisation is borne of a scientific method which utterly depends on it. It's not enough to simply say that you've got an idea, you have to *show* it, you have to **prove** it, and you have to give everyone else the opportunity to prove you wrong.

As you can imagine religion doesn't work terribly well within this particular format – in truth, it doesn't work *at all* because it is simply incapable of standing up to that kind of scrutiny. Faith depends on unprovable, unsupported assertions; revealed "truths" for which there can be no questions and no doubt – you just have to accept that they're true because an authority claims that they are. This sort of thing might be fairly easy to get away with in a church because you're dealing with a much smaller audience, most of whom have come willingly to the arena because they already agree with every idea being expressed; this is so not true of the internet. Spend more than five minutes on *any* internet forum and you'll see that people disagree on pretty much everything, and the only thing they seem to have in common is that they can recognise, and will gleefully shoot down, a crap idea the moment they see it – returning to the Wembley Stadium analogy, if you were to turn up to play granny music at a rock festival then you're going to get bottled off half-way through your first song.

All of this is something that YouTube vlogger Thunderf00t expressed far better than I could in his excellent video, "[The Internet: Where Religions Come To Die](#)" (apologies if, in covering some of the same ground, I've expressed it in similar ways). If you aren't familiar with Thunderf00t, and in particular his series "[Why Do People Laugh At Creationists?](#)", you should check out his channel immediately. He's a top bloke, switched on, and demolishes the arguments of theists (one of whom we will get on to in a moment) in the same way that a toddler demolishes a boiled egg and toasty soldiers; in a matter of moments, and without really trying. Just as the internet in general, and YouTube in particular, plays host to intelligent communicators like Thunderf00t it is also the home of some of the most delusional, frothing-at-the-mouth shite-hawks and purveyors of cerebral (and, in some cases, moral) bankruptcy you'll ever have the misfortune of scraping off of the underside of your shoes.

The first that springs to mind is NephilimFree, aka Evan Philips; a YouTube user who looks rather like a cross between an over-zealous radio ham who refuses to acknowledge that the technology has been superseded, and that creepy uncle who's always trying to ply his young niece with alcohol at family parties (before becoming strangely absent from any such future family gatherings having been fitted with an ankle tag by the local authorities and legally restrained from coming within 500-yards of school playgrounds). Completely lacking in scientific training (although, having seen his videos one might reasonably suggest he lacks even the most basic scientific education, often simply throwing out whatever clever-sounding nonsense he mined from other ignorant creationists), he is not only a fundamentalist, a young earth creationist, and a believer in end-times prophecy, but he's also a geocentrist believing, as he does, that the earth is the centre of the universe.

Given the remarkable ease with which these ideas can be debunked it should come as no surprise to learn that Philips gets pasted in any discussion he has engaged in (although you'd never get that impression if you only listened to his side). He has thrown down a number of debate challenges to sceptics (the best example being that with DonExodus2) with every intention of using it solely as an opportunity to declare his superiority over atheist "cowards" by insisting on so many unreasonable conditions to the debate that any rational-thinking person would refuse to participate. Like many religious apologists he is incapable of tolerating opinions that differ from his and, in addition to issuing impossible demands for debates, he would regularly block those who disagreed with him from commenting on his channel (in some cases, he even sent legal threats to users who posted videos that criticised him). It appears, however, that Philips is no longer making videos because, it is rumoured, his disabled room-mate (off of whose benefits he appeared to be sponging) has finally given him the elbow.

ShockOfGod, aka Rich Garcia, another YouTuber and associate of Philips (insofar as he was asked by NephilimFree to moderate his debate with DonExodus2), is an arrogant, cocky, pseudo-macho prick who seems unable to make videos "debunking atheism" unless he happens to be doing it while riding around on his motorbike in a desperate and obvious attempt to impress upon everyone how much of god-damned MAN he is (as opposed to a tiny, infinitesimal penis who can't string a sentence together unless he's got a high-powered machine throbbing directly underneath his arsehole). Having

expressed a desire to be the next Rush Limbaugh he also runs an internet radio show from his website, although I would have thought that piling on a few hundred pounds, developing an Oxycontin habit, and gassing out his few remaining brain cells by sucking on an exhaust pipe would achieve the same result. Like Philips, he's also a proponent of some deeply ludicrous, and easily-refuted, ideas.

He believes, for example, that evolution is a lie, America is a christian country (and the founders all believers instead of deists), christianity is the greatest force for freedom in the world (including the idea that it ended slavery and emancipated women), and that the bible is the infallible word of god (although it's not entirely clear whether he believes, like NephilimFree, that the water from the great flood had erupted through the earth's crust due to pressure, launched into space, froze solid, and then impacted with the moon, causing its craters – this is known on YouTube as the "Lunar Bukkake Theory"). He is also an atrocious bigot who despises homosexuals and believes he has the absolute right to beat the shit out of any man who dares to come on to him (don't hold your breath, "Shock" – most of us prefer a REAL man, not a ball-less child). He was also banned from YouTube initially for having created a fake mirror page to steal user's passwords in a phishing attempt.

Famously, Garcia has only one argument, and it's not even an argument; it's a vacuous and nonsensical statement that he plasters on his website, as well as calling in to atheist shows in order that he can repeat it over and over so no-one can get a word in to point out what a fatuous, steaming pile of donkey droppings it really is. He claims that no atheist can answer the question, "What proof or evidence do you have that atheism is true and correct?" In fairness he is technically correct in saying we can't answer that question, but that's only because it's not actually a proper question, Garcia, you fucking spastic; it's a piece of vapid nonsense that is entirely logically bollocks **and** shows not only a complete disregard for where the burden of proof lies in any given argument but also total ignorance of what atheism actually *is*. The thing is, though, there **is** a response to this supposed argument but, like so many theists, Garcia is too busy going "la la la can't hear you la la la god rules" with his fingers in his ears to ever hear it.

Leaving both of these muppets flailing around in the muck of the internet's "intellectual midgets" compost heap, hogging the spotlight and, surely, rightfully wearing the crown that denotes his status as undeniable king of the dirt-pile, is [VenomFangX](#), also known as Shawn Karon. The colourful history of PCS, the "Poster-boy for Creationist Stupidity" (as Thunderf00t dubbed him), is far too dense to go into in any great detail here, so I would highly recommend you watch The Peach's excellent Youtubementary, "[A Boy Named Shawn](#)". Whereas many internet apologists have a narcissistic streak that drives them time and time again towards an arena where they're given a thorough intellectual bum-raping, Karon is driven by what can only be described as borderline sociopathy. Featuring, as he does, very heavily in Thunderf00t's video series on creationists he demonstrates not just a complete absence of original thought (most of his videos involve him parroting, almost verbatim, the work of convicted fraudster and holder of fake academic credentials, Kent Hovind), but also a propensity to lie, cheat, commit perjury, steal, abuse the law, and regard the whole of humanity as a vile, filthy abomination that deserves every evil that can possibly befall it (he once genuinely asked, "what was really so bad about the holocaust?").

Immoral and unethical, Karon is a rich kid from Ontario who put out videos begging for money to help with his online "ministry", as well as *stealing* money from a charity he promised he would be forwarding donations on to. And when I say "rich kid" I'm not just exaggerating for effect, or expressing some kind of latent jealousy toward anyone with a few more quid in their pockets than me – one of his videos shows the home he shared with his parents as being nothing short of palatial. He has suggested that the biblical attitude towards rape is appropriate for today and that a rapist should be compelled by law to marry his victim. He also believes that god doesn't heal amputees because they don't deserve their limbs. Like NephilimFree and ShockOfGod he is a fundamentalist christian, deeply anti-science, anti-abortion, anti-homosexuality, and believes that most, if not all, of the bible should be taken literally (subject to massive amounts of "interpretation" in order to get around the contradictions, obviously).

Karon is also a fervent proponent of censorship, blocking or deleting comments that disagree with, contradict, or criticise him, even going so far as to delete his own videos after repeated smack-downs by atheists (and, in some cases, christians) made keeping them utterly untenable. He has even gone so far as to issue a large number of false DMCA take-down requests, committing perjury in the process, against videos that he claims were in breach of his copyright but that had merely included clips of his videos in order to criticise him (permitted under fair use). Most foolishly of all he once attempted to have YouTube lawyer Dprjones falsely arrested for paedophilia. This, along with his

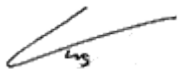
increasingly unhinged videos (especially his terrifyingly disturbed outing as Heath Ledger's incarnation of The Joker), provoked a number of users to intervene and, with the help of Karon's parents, got his website shut down, his YouTube channel closed, and made sure he would get the psychological help he clearly needed. Sadly, however, it didn't last, and Shawn is back, still barking, and still getting his arse kicked.

So why, if the internet is such poison to dogmatic ideologies like religious faith, do people like Philips, Garcia, and Karon persist in spite of all reason? Why do they continue to live in such an enormous state of denial? Why do they keep repeating arguments that have been so thoroughly trashed in the arena before hundreds of millions of people? Is it because they are so fervent in their beliefs, so secure in their faith, that they simply will not rest until the world hears their important message? In a way, yes, but that's a tiny consideration compared to what really motivates them – attention. Many of the more devoted religious apologists (especially those above) desperately crave the kind of ceaseless attention that a worldwide, always-on medium can bring, to the point where even an armchair psychiatrist like myself (qualifications from Comfy Chair and a Nice Cup Of Tea University) would start to think there's more than a little Narcissistic Personality Disorder about them.

They have a constant need for praise and attention, believing themselves to be special, and that they deserve to be treated as such. They carry a sense of entitlement, consider themselves unique, and that they should only associate with people who hold a similar status. They can't tolerate criticism, dissent, or anything that could potentially suggest that they might be wrong about something. They are *always* right, and when the world says otherwise they will flirt with the paranoid notion of a conspiracy against them. Power and success are high on their list of priorities, they fantasise about it, they yearn for it, and often have an inflated sense of their own abilities as though they had somehow already achieved it; anyone who disagrees is considered to be simply envious of their achievements. They will also generally display a fundamental lack of empathy for others.

If you're a religious apologist and the above sounds anything like yourself (although I sincerely doubt that you'd ever admit it) then it's probably fair to say that you need help, rather than a YouTube or Blogger account. If it doesn't sound like you, but you're still a religious apologist, let Evan, Rich, and Shawn serve as a reminder to the fact that the you're not going to find your sky wizard on the internet, nor are you likely to find an enormous audience of people willing to hang on your every word and follow you as you preach about your invisible friend. What you *will* find, however, are people who will challenge you, and your ideas; they will dissect and dismantle your opinions, your whole world view, and they will only stop once it falls to pieces in their hands, or if it can prove itself resilient to intense examination. It is crucial to our survival as a species that we root out the bad ideas and preserve only the good.

And, let's face it, religion is a fucking rubbish idea ...

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Karon' or similar, with a stylized flourish.