

Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières > English > Issues > Faith, religious authorities, secularism > Blasphemy (Faith, religious authorities, secularism) > **Ireland: Comedian Stephen Fry investigated for blasphemy on a TV show**

# **Ireland: Comedian Stephen Fry investigated for blasphemy on a TV show**

Sunday 7 May 2017, by [McMAHON Cathal](#), [MEHTA Hemant](#) (Date first published: 6 May 2017).

## **Gardaí launch blasphemy probe into Stephen Fry comments on 'The Meaning of Life'**

GARDAI have launched an investigation after a TV viewer claimed comments made by Stephen Fry on an RTE show were blasphemous.

Independent.ie can reveal that a member of the public reported the allegation to Ennis garda Station following a broadcast of 'The Meaning of Life', hosted by Gay Byrne, in February 2015.

Gardaí in Donnybrook have recently contacted the man who made the report and a senior source revealed a full investigation is now due to be carried out.

Under the Defamation Act 2009 a person who publishes or utters blasphemous material "shall be guilty of an offence". They are liable upon conviction on indictment to a fine not exceeding €25,000.

The specific complaint relates to an interview conducted on 'The Meaning of Life' with Mr Fry. During the show the comedian and writer was questioned about what he might say to God at the pearly gates.

Mr Fry replied: "How dare you create a world in which there is such misery? It's not our fault? It's not right. It's utterly, utterly evil. Why should I respect a capricious, mean-minded, stupid god who creates a world which is so full of injustice and pain?"

He went on to say that if he was met by the Greek gods he would accept them quicker because, "they didn't present themselves as being all seeing, all wise, all beneficent."

He added: "Because the god who created this universe, if it was created by god, is quite clearly a maniac, an utter maniac, totally selfish." "We have to spend our lives on our knees thanking him. What kind of god would do that?"

A clip of the interview was posted online and it has since been viewed over seven million times.

A member of the public, who asked not to be identified, told Independent.ie he travelled to Ennis Garda station, Co Clare that month to report the alleged blasphemy.

"I told the Garda I wanted to report Fry for uttering blasphemy and RTE for publishing/broadcasting it and that I believed these were criminal offences under the Defamation Act 2009." "The garda then took a formal written statement from me in which I quoted Fry's comments in detail. This written statement mentioned both Fry and RTÉ specifically." "He said he was asked by the garda if he had been personally offended by the programme and if he wished to include this in the written statement." "I told the Garda that I did not want to include this as I had not personally been offended by Fry's comments - I added that I simply believed that the comments made by Fry on RTÉ were

criminal blasphemy and that I was doing my civic duty by reporting a crime. "The complainant was told that the the garda would "look into it" and report the matter to his superiors." In late 2016 I wrote to the Garda Commissioner Noirín O'Sullivan asking if the crime I reported was being followed up - a few weeks later I got a standard 'we have received your letter' from her secretary. "A number of weeks ago the complainant was called by a detective from Donnybrook garda station to say they were looking into the report he made about blasphemy on RTÉ." He said he might have to meet me to take a new more detailed statement."

The viewer insisted that he wasn't offended by the remarks but stressed that he believed Mr Fry's comments qualified as blasphemy under the law.

A garda source said the matter is being investigated.

"A complaint has been received and it is currently being investigated. Detectives will speak to those involved if they are available and a file will be sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP)."

A well-placed source said it was "highly unlikely" that a prosecution would take place.

A spokesman for Mr Fry said: "[There is] nothing for us to say while this is under investigation."

Atheist Ireland said it welcomed the garda investigation into Mr Fry for blasphemy, saying it "highlights a law that is silly, silencing, and dangerous".

"On 1 January 2010, the day the new Irish blasphemy law became operational, Atheist Ireland published a list of 25 blasphemous quotes in order to challenge the law," it said in a statement on its website, [atheist.ie](http://atheist.ie).

"Today, in solidarity with Stephen Fry, we are republishing those 25 blasphemous quotes, and adding in the quotation that has caused the Irish police to investigate Stephen Fry." If we are prosecuted, we will challenge the constitutionality of the blasphemy law. If we are not prosecuted, it will again highlight the absurdity of this law, which should be repealed immediately. We again call on the Irish Government to honour its commitment to hold a referendum to remove the ban on blasphemy from our Constitution."

Ireland is the only country in the developed world to have introduced a blasphemy law this century.

Pakistan and other repressive states pointed to our law as an example of a law they wished to pursue, Ivana Bacik

The law passed in 2009 and was introduced in January 2010 and it carries a maximum fine of €25,000.

It prohibits the "publishing or uttering [of] matter that is grossly abusive or insulting in relation to matters sacred by any religion, thereby intentionally causing outrage among a substantial number of adherents of that religion".

There have been no publicised cases of blasphemy brought before Irish courts.

Labour Senator Ivana Bacik, a qualified barrister who campaigned against the introduction of the law in 2009, said this was a "most unusual" case.

She said then Justice Minister Dermot Ahern made a grave error introducing the blasphemy law in 2009 and while criminal prosecutions haven't been pursued in Ireland the law has been used as a

model by other less democratic states.

"Pakistan and other repressive states pointed to our law as an example of a law they wished to pursue." It is being used as a model by these regimes and this is not what Ireland should aspire to."

**Cathal McMahon**, May 6 2017 11:12 AM

\*

<http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/news/garda-launch-blasphemy-probe-into-stephen-fry-comments-on-the-meaning-of-life-35684262.html>

---

## **Comedian Stephen Fry Is Being Investigated for Violating Ireland's Blasphemy Law After Mocking God**

In February of 2015, comedian Stephen Fry sat down for an interview with host Gay Byrne for (Irish) RTÉ One's The Meaning of Life.

It produced one of the most memorable exchanges about religion in recent memory:

BYRNE: ... Suppose it's all true, and you walk up to the Pearly Gates, and you are confronted by God. What will Stephen Fry say to Him, Her, or It?

FRY: ... I'll say, "Bone cancer in children? What's that about? How dare you! How dare you create a world in which there is such misery that is not our fault? It's not right. It's utterly, utterly evil." Why should I respect a capricious, mean-minded, stupid God who creates a world which is so full of injustice and pain? That's what I would say.

BYRNE: And you think you're going to get in?

FRY: No, but I wouldn't want to. I wouldn't want to get in on His terms. They're wrong. Now, if I died and it was Pluto, Hades, and if it was the 12 Greek gods, then I would have more truck with it. Because the [Greeks] were — they didn't pretend not to be human in their appetites, and in their capriciousness, and in their unreasonableness. They didn't present themselves as being all-seeing, all-wise, all-kind, all-beneficent. Because the God who created this universe, if it was created by God, is quite clearly a maniac. An utter maniac. Totally selfish. We have to spend our life on our knees, thanking Him? What kind of God would do that?

Yes, the world is very splendid, but it also has in it insects whose whole life-cycle is to burrow into the eyes of children and make them blind. That eat outwards from the eyes. Why? Why did he do that to us? He could easily have made a creation in which that didn't exist. It is simply not acceptable.

... Atheism is not just about not believing there's a God, but on the assumption that, [if] there is one, what kind of God is He? It's perfectly apparent: He is monstrous, utterly monstrous, and deserves no respect whatsoever. The moment you banish him, your life becomes simpler, purer, cleaner, and more worth living, in my opinion.

BYRNE: That sure is the longest answer to that question that I've ever got in this entire series.

Because this was state-run TV in Ireland, where a blasphemy law is still on the books, Fry is now being investigated over whether his comments violated the rules based on a complaint by a citizen. The Independent has the story:

Under the Defamation Act 2009 a person who publishes or utters blasphemous material “shall be guilty of an offence”. They are liable upon conviction on indictment to a fine not exceeding €25,000.

...

A member of the public, who asked not to be identified, told *Independent.ie* he travelled to Ennis Garda station, Co Clare that month to report the alleged blasphemy.

“I told the Garda I wanted to report Fry for uttering blasphemy and RTE for publishing/broadcasting it and that I believed these were criminal offences under the Defamation Act 2009.

...

“I told the Garda that I did not want to include this as I had not personally been offended by Fry’s comments — I added that I simply believed that the comments made by Fry on RTÉ were criminal blasphemy and that I was doing my civic duty by reporting a crime.”

A couple of things about this investigation:

First, there’s a good chance nothing will come of it. As we speak, Stephen Colbert is being “investigated” by the FCC for saying of Donald Trump: “The only thing your mouth is good for is being Vladimir Putin’s cock holster.” But as many people have noted, the FCC is obligated to launch an investigation anytime someone complains to them. It doesn’t mean he’s guilty of anything beyond satire (or unintentional homophobia). Similarly, the Irish government will look into the Fry matter, but it doesn’t mean they’ll necessarily take action against him.

Second, if they don’t take action against him... what the hell is the point of the law? Just to scare off critics of the religion? If you have a law but refuse to enforce it, wouldn’t it be better to get rid of it?

The fact that we’re even having this conversation tells you how messed up Ireland’s blasphemy law is and why it needs to be repealed immediately.

The group Atheist Ireland actually welcomed the blasphemy probe because it showcases “a law that is silly, silencing, and dangerous.” And in solidarity with Fry, they published a list of 25 other “blasphemous” quotations — the same list they published in 2010 when the blasphemy law went into effect (and for which they were never punished).

If we are prosecuted, we will challenge the constitutionality of the blasphemy law. If we are not prosecuted, it will again highlight the absurdity of this law, which should be repealed immediately. We again call on the Irish Government to honour its commitment to hold a referendum to remove the ban on blasphemy from our Constitution.

It really would be glorious if Fry’s brilliant quotation ended up defeating the blasphemy law that never should have been enacted in the first place.

**Hemant Mehta**, May 6, 2017

\*

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2017/05/06/comedian-stephen-fry-is-being-investigated-for-violating-irelands-blasphemy-law-after-mocking-god/?utm>

---

---

**P.S.**

\* <http://www.siawi.org/article14454.html>