

New York City Atheists

Serving the tri-state area • An affiliate of American Atheists

May 2003

(212) 330-6794 PO Box 1187, New York, NY 10013
<http://nyc-atheists.org> info@nyc-atheists.org

Events

May Atheist Meetup

Casual dining or drinks with your fellow freethinkers.

Tuesday, May 20, 2003, 7–9 P.M.
Expected location: Mustang Harry's bar/restaurant. Call (212) 330-6794 to confirm.

352 7th Ave. (Between West 29th–30th Sts.; just south of Penn Station)
Location chosen by registering and voting at <http://atheists.meetup.com>. Atheist Meetups in Westchester, Long Island, and northern NJ will be promoted in e-mail if enough people register.

Street Fair Tabling

Sunday, May 11, 2003
Mother's Day Festival
Lexington Ave. btwn 42d & 57th Sts. (exact location to come)
Visit our table, or e-mail atheist@foody.org or call (212) 330-6794 to help volunteer

"May" Meeting

Sunday, June 1, 2003, 1–5 P.M.
(Held a week after Labor Day weekend)
Speaker: Ron Barrier, national spokesperson, American Atheists, on "Can World Religions Form International Norms of Morality? The Fossils Say No!"
Source of Life Conference Center
352 7th Ave., 16th flr.
(Between West 29th and 30th Sts., just south of Penn Station)
Donation requested

June Atheist Café Night

Thursday, June 12, 2003, 7–9 P.M.
Java & Jazz
868 Broadway between West 17th–18th Sts., north of Union Square

June Atheist Meetup

Casual dining or drinks with your fellow freethinkers.

Tuesday, June 17, 2003, 7–9 P.M.
Expected location: Mustang Harry's bar/restaurant. Call (212) 330-6794 to confirm.

352 7th Ave. (Between West 29th–30th Sts.; just south of Penn Station)
Location chosen by registering and voting at <http://atheists.meetup.com>. Atheist Meetups in Westchester, Long Island, and northern NJ will be promoted in e-mail if enough people register.

June Meeting

Sunday, June 29, 2003, 1–5 P.M.
Speaker: Ellen Johnson, president, American Atheists, on "Is Atheist Activism Right For You?"
Source of Life Conference Center
352 7th Ave., 16th flr.
(Between West 29th and 30th Sts., just south of Penn Station)
Donation requested

Tabling a Hit with Public, Thanks to Members

Friendly crowds and hardworking volunteers made NYC Atheists' first street-fair tabling, on Waverly Place near New York University on April 19 and on Broadway near Columbia University on April 27, a rare combination: a success *and* fun.

There were always enough volunteers to talk to visitors. There were only a few argumentative discussions with religious people. Most who stopped to read and talk ranged from polite to enthusiastic. Almost one hundred people



signed up. Hundreds more took our newsletters, handouts, and books/bumper stickers/buttons. Many said "I'm glad you're here" or "I didn't know you existed."

Thanks to Dan, Dennis, Don, Harold, Harvey, Howard, Ileen, Jake, Joe, Josh, Ken, Kirsten, Linda, Mario, Mason, and Peter for making such a big project possible.

Special thanks for Frank for chairs, Jake for printing, Dan for envelopes, Mason for ringbinders of quotes, Kirsten for T-shirts, and to Ken for the canopy and banners and for spearheading the whole tabling effort.

Some NYC Atheists members visited to cheer us on -- so many at the second tabling that it seemed a meeting in itself.

Our next tabling will be at the Sunday, May 11, Mother's Day festival on Lexington Avenue in midtown, between 42nd and 57th Streets (exact location to come), 10 A.M. to 6 P.M.

E-mail info@nyc-atheists.org if you'd like to help volunteer in the morning or afternoon shifts. See several photos of the first two tablings at <http://nyc-atheists.org/tabling.html>.



Internet Infidel Richard Carrier at April Meeting; Ron Barrier to Return at This Month's Meeting

April's weekend meeting starred Richard Carrier, Ph.D. candidate in ancient history at Columbia and longtime editor at the Secular Web (<http://www.infidels.org>), where he experienced nearly every possible argument, atheistic and theistic, and dealt with many leading figures on both sides.

Carrier, spoke to NYC Atheists on short notice only days before moving from NYC, presented "The Best Case for Atheism," based on his book *Sense and Goodness without God: A Defense of Metaphysical Naturalism*, currently in review at Prometheus Books.

Carrier's witty "seven most convincing reasons to be an atheist," ranging from the sensibility of naturalism to the ridiculousness of religion, earned belly laughs from members, who also enjoyed challenging Carrier's tenets during an extensive question-and-answer period.

Director Josh Karpf then announced that he would from now on only "coordinate" New York City Atheists, and suggested several volunteer opportunities for members. (See "Volunteer with NYC Atheists.")

Afterward, most attendees went downstairs to

Mustang Harry's for drinks and an early dinner.

Carrier leaves New York this month, but we hope for him to visit us in February. For more of our guest's wisdom and wit, visit the Web page http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/richard_carrier/index.shtml.

***Atheist Viewpoint* Again to Air in Manhattan**

Thanks to NYC Atheists member Dennis, the cable public-access program *Atheist Viewpoint* -- starring hosts Ellen Johnson and Ron Barrier, the speakers at NYC Atheists' next two weekend meetings -- has been accepted by Manhattan Neighborhood Network for broadcast during the summer quarter, June 22 through September 20. Manhattan Neighborhood Network will inform us next month of the scheduled day and time for the *Atheist Viewpoint*, whose Web site is <http://atheistviewpoint.tv>.



Treasury Report

Early April's treasury balance was \$297.20. We spent \$49.73 on the April newsletter, \$80.10 to rent phone voicemail for another year (till May 1, 2004), \$48 to rent our PO box for another year (till April 30, 2004), \$7.75 to purchase the domain name nyc-atheists.org, \$276.80 on a large banner, \$45 to upgrade the "May" (June 1) meeting room rental, \$250 for the "June" (June 29) room rental, \$180 for the July room rental, \$180 for the August room rental, \$220 for the September room rental, \$114 for miscellaneous tabling expenses, \$10 for April meeting Xeroxes, and \$26.21 for April meeting refreshments. Members donated \$164 at the April meeting and \$1,110 via mail. As of early May, the treasury balance is \$83.61, excluding the cost of this newsletter.

Please consider donating to New York City Atheists. Membership and our monthly newsletter are free, but we depend on donations to maintain meetings and mailings. We now rent larger rooms further in advance, and have lost our source for free printing. Donations, which are non-tax-deductible, are reported in this monthly Treasury report, anonymously unless requested otherwise. Make your check payable to "Josh Karpf" and send it New York City Atheists, PO Box 1187, New York, NY 10013.

National Day of Reason, not Prayer

For yet another year, by federal law, the first Thursday in May, May 1, was known as the National Day of Prayer. Each year, the president signs a proclamation encouraging all Americans to pray on this day. Last year, President Bush said that prayer is a vital part of our national life, and that, quote, "a great people must spend time on bended knee, in humility, searching for wisdom in the presence of the Almighty," unquote.

In response to this annual abuse of the constitution, secular groups, chiefly the American Humanist Association and their D.C. affiliate, Washington Area Secular Humanists, declared that the first Thursday in May, May 1st, is an Annual Day of Reason. The goal was to celebrate reason and to raise public awareness about the constant threat to religious liberty from government mingling of church and state. In New York City, the Secular Humanist Society of New York led a postering effort, taping up National Day of Reason flyers in public spaces and e-mailing notices to friends and family.

The National Day of Reason's Web site is <http://nationaldayofreason.org>.



Despite Strong Individualistic Tendencies, Atheists Seek Community for Comfort

By Keely Savoie
Special to *New York Resident*

[Editor's note: This article ran in the April 7, 2003 issue of the Upper West Side weekly newspaper the New York Resident. Minor corrections are in brackets.]

According to Josh Karpf, leader of the New York City Atheists (NYCA), his co-non-religionists are not "joiners." Getting them together, he says, "is like herding cats."

And yet he succeeds in scheduling monthly dinners and cafe nights to which many local atheists gravitate, if only to agree to disagree on a wide range of topics, from conspiracy theories to cults to evolutionary biology.

At a recent drinks-and-dinner meetup at Mustang Harry's, a Seventh Avenue bar, the group conversed under a Mark Twain quote on the wall that read, "It is by the goodness of God that in our country we have those three unspeakably precious things: freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and the prudence never to practice either of them."

The group happily rejected their God-given prudence and debated politics with gusto. There was little agreement but a congenial acceptance of differences. A gathering of atheists felt less like a group of like-minded individuals than a collection of committed iconoclasts.

According to a City University of New York survey, atheists, agnostics, secularists, and others who claim no religion numbered 29.4 million in 2001, more than doubling the 14.1 million of 1990. Thirteen

percent of New Yorkers are not religious, putting the state just below the national average of 14.1 percent.

Most atheists describe coming to their belief that there is no God as a long process of serious thought and intellectual inquiry. Stacy Irwin, a 25-year-old graphic designer, remembers a moment of epiphany that started her down the road to nonbelief after finding out that there was no Santa Claus.

"My mother told me to reason it out," she says. "Was there any evidence of Santa Claus? Did I ever see him? Then I took that logic and applied it to every area of my life."

Harvey Osgood, 62, also describes a theological impasse. "When I was 13, I had my bar mitzvah, and I realized I had three choices regarding God - to be a theist, a nontheist, or an agnostic. After a great deal of thought, I realized I just did not believe there was a God," he remembers.

Many atheists attest to a kind of unavoidability about their belief and a sense that religious people have access to a source of comfort and solace that atheists are simply unable to grasp.

"I tried to make that leap of faith, but I'm just not capable of it," says Osgood, whose wife died recently.

"I'm sorry I can't bring that to bear on my emotions." It's a sentiment also expressed by Nick Sizow, who has been in chemotherapy for more than a year. "I've envied people who can give themselves over to something like that," he says. "Religion relieves people of their mortality. To let go of that is not easy -- the light goes



off and that's it."

Despite the strength of their personal convictions, most atheists also profess a strict policy of laissez-faire. "To disabuse people of their belief in God is immoral," says Osgood. "It's a nasty, nasty thing to do."

And despite their individualistic natures, atheists in Manhattan do seek each other's company, finding comfort in community, as many others do through religion.

"We have nothing in common except this one thing," says Ileen Zovluck, an NYCA member. "But I've met a lot of great friends here -- friendships based largely on our differences."

That seems to be the point, because the very nature of atheism makes it difficult to define a unifying goal. "It would be nice to find something for atheists to gather around," muses Sizow. "The only thing that comes up is love - we have to project our love on humanity. That's where it's needed," he says. "Let's make that a kind of religion."

There are half a dozen [freethought] in New York City, which can be found on the NYCA Web site, [<http://nyc-atheists.org>] (212-330-6794). Karpf, who runs the 250-strong group entirely on voluntary contributions, schedules monthly meetups along with other special events that are also posted on the site.

Catholics Fight Reproductive Rights, Again

The Institute for Humanist Studies asks for help urging New York State legislators to support the Emergency Contraception Act. The Institute supports a number of legislative bills that would require hospitals to provide emergency contraception to victims of sexual assault and allow certain health professionals to prescribe emergency contraception without a physician's patient-specific order. Roman Catholic hospitals oppose providing services associated with birth control even for non-Catholic patients, even when such hospitals may be the only available health-care provider. Church lobbyists work hard for exemptions to public health policy, as they did last year in opposing the state Women's Health and Wellness Act (see "Catholic Church Loses Most of State Health Care War" in the April 2002 newsletter or at <http://nyc-atheists.org/insanity0402.html#healthcare>).

Commonly called the "morning after pill," this contraception is essential in preventing pregnancy following such assaults and other unwanted sexual encounters. Currently a hospital in New York State is not required to provide contraception, information about contraception, or even a referral to those institutions that might provide both. The religious administrators of such hospitals

often regard this form of contraception as an abortifacient, because in some cases it prevents implantation of the fertilized egg in the wall of the uterus in the very early stages of embryonic development. Most medical authorities regard implantation as the beginning of pregnancy, not fertilization.

While in most instances emergency contraception simply prevents fertilization or ovulation of the ova, the Institute feels that the reproductive freedoms obtained under *Roe v. Wade* and other court decisions make these objections outdated and irrelevant. We believe that religiously-affiliated entities that operate emergency facilities and deliver general emergency services should not be able to use the rationale of religious freedom in a reproductive crisis situation where an individual's mental and physical well-being is at stake. Hospitals are public entities that deliver secular services. Many religious healthcare facilities receive government funding. Hence, they should be guided by sound public policy, not outdated religious views that put an individual's health in jeopardy.

To learn the name and address of the State Assembly and Senate members who represents you, call the League of Women Voters of the City of New York at (212) 213-5286. E-mail the Institute at tim@humaniststudies.org to receive a prewritten letter on this issue, addressed to the appropriate representative for

your district. You must provide the full bill name or number (the Emergency Contraception Act is numbered A015 in the Assembly and S888 in the Senate), your name, street address, city, and New York ZIP code. The letter will be sent to you by U.S. mail. To read a sample letter online, point your Web browser to: <http://humaniststudies.org/nylegislation.html?id=1&letter=yes>

The Word of God

By Steve Seltzer

During the antiwar demonstrations, amid all the "Not in My Name" signs, I thought it might be appropriate, given the Bush religiosity, to say "Not in *Thy* Name."

But for an atheist to imply the existence of a god is sort of embarrassing.

Now, when a religious person hears god denied, he calls that sacrilege. What is the comparable epithet for an atheist's statement implying an affirmation of god?

The closest I can get is "superstitious," but it just doesn't have the same bite. Any ideas?





EQUAL TIME FOR FREETHOUGHT

The *Equal Time for Freethought* radio program airs on Sundays at 6:30 P.M. on member-supported WBAI, 99.5 FM. Every three or four shows features call-ins; you can call at (212) 209-2900.

To listen online to the show via WBAI's live Webcast, see the show's Web site, <http://foody.org/freethoughtradio.html>,

which also has audio of most past programs and text notes on all past programs, including:

- Michael Martin, atheist philosopher
- Tariq Ali, historian, on Islam and on secularity in Islamic culture
- Ed Kagin, director of Camp Quest, the secular summer camp
- Beth Lamont and Mary Beaty, both of the Humanist Society of Metropolitan New York and the Council of Ethics-Based

Organizations, on the United Nations

- Ted Schick, author of "How to Think About Weird Things: Critical Thinking for a New Age"

- Steve DeVries, journalist and playwright; author of "Steve DeVries Goes to Fundamentalist Islam Heaven"

- Barbara Ehrenreich, political essayist and social critic

- Paul Kurtz, of the Council for Secular Humanism, on humanism

- Beth Lamont, of the Humanist Society of Metropolitan New York, on humanism, peace, Corliss Lamont, etc.

- Arnell Dowret, of the Secular Journey

- Michael Newdow, winning plaintiff in the "under God" pledge case - Norm Allen, Jr., on African-American humanism

- Wendy Kaminer, agnostic author

- Michael Shermer, editor of *Skeptic* magazine and author of "Why People Believe Weird Things"

- Dan Barker, of the Freedom from Religion Foundation, on music
- Tom Flynn, editor of *Free Inquiry* magazine, on Christianity and Christmas
- James Haught, author of "Holy Horrors," and "Holy Hatred," and "2000 Years of Disbelief," on religion-based wars and atrocities
- Ibn Warraq, author of "Why I Am Not a Muslim"
- Taslima Nasrin, fatwa-sentenced, former Muslim, Bangladeshi feminist/human rights activist, author of "Myebela: My Bengali Girlhood"
- Ellen Johnson, of American Atheists, on the Godless Americans March on Washington
- Bill London, of the National Council against Health Fraud, on alternative medicine
- D. J. Grothe, of Gay and Lesbian Atheists and Humanists, on gays and freethought
- Margaret Downey, of the Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia, on Tom Paine, Supreme Court cases, etc.
- Ed Buckner, of the Council for Secular Humanism, on the Godless Americans March, the Christianity of America, and the Center for Inquiry
- Richard Dawkins on childhood religious "programming," genetics, etc.
- Ron Barrier, of American Atheists, on atheism
- Annie Laurie Gaylor, of the Freedom from Religion Foundation, on the pledge, priestly pedophilia, and women in freethought
- Call-in discussions

Volunteer with NYC Atheists

Try one of the many new opportunities to help New York City Atheists grow! The director, no longer able to devote several hours a week to the group, is now only serving as a coordinator. Divided among members, organizational work should take little effort for any individual. Some tasks require Internet access and experience. Others do not. Tasks for which members don't volunteer may be suspended until volunteers are found for them.

EVENT PROMOTION

Where to promote:

- E-mail, derived from NYC Atheists mailing list
- Print newsletter (vital for members without e-mail), derived from NYC Atheists mailing list
- Secular Web events page (<http://www.infidels.org/events/Newyork.shtml>)
- Web site (<http://nyc-atheists.org>)
- Usenet newsgroups: alt.atheism, alt.atheism.moderated
- Yahoo newsgroups: <http://groups.yahoo.com/groups/atheist-talk>, http://groups.yahoo.com/groups/atheist_only, http://groups.yahoo.com/groups/Atheist_Singles, <http://groups.yahoo.com/groups/GAM-Org>, <http://groups.yahoo.com/groups/atheistmoms>
- Ya-Ya bulletin (Youth Activists Youth Allies) YaYaEditor@youthlink.org, <http://www.youthlink.org/yaya>

What to promote:

- Monthly meetings: held on weekend afternoons at conference center; suitable for guest speakers and non-Manhattan members.
- Atheist Meetups: Third Tuesday of each month, 7 P.M. Meetup.com, via <http://atheists.meetup.com>, offers venue (out of three to four choices) and independent promotion on its site. We have co-opted this event. Encourage members to register at <http://atheists.meetup.com> to vote for location, and after location has been chosen, to confirm attendance at <http://atheists.meetup.com>. Urge Westchester/Long Island/NJ members to try to start Atheists Meetups in their areas.
- Atheist Café Nights: Second Tuesday of each month, 7 P.M., Java & Jazz. meetings; upcoming NYC Atheists events; upcoming and recent appropriate events of other local freethought groups
- Edit/revise/reject member contributions; proofread articles reprinted (with permission) from other freethought groups' newsletters

OUTGOING MAIL

- Organize mailings, especially of newsletter and publicity list (approx. 400 contacts) for group folding/labeling/stamping, perhaps at Atheist Café Nights or in the noon-1:00 hour before weekend meetings.

WEB SITE (nyc-atheists.org)

- Maintains, updates Web pages. Previous HTML experience needed.

- Official group events (picnics, tablings)
- Other groups' events of interest to members, if appropriate (movies, lectures, hikes, etc.)

MAILING LIST MANAGER

- Updates mailing list with new or corrected information

LITERATURE

- Store, and distribute at gatherings, newsletters and other literature

EQUIPMENT

- Store and distribute street-fair gear, banners, etc.

HOSPITALITY

- Atheist Cafe Nights (second Tuesday of month, 7 P.M.): Call Java & Jazz in the afternoon to remind them we're coming. Arrive half hour early to monopolize table/couch space.
- Atheist Meetups (third Tuesday of month, 7 P.M.): Call venue in the afternoon to let them know of us, especially if reserving tables (Meetups do not require deposits or minimums.) Predict attendance by counting confirmations at <http://atheists.meetup.com>, though we also promote it to our members via e-mail and newsletter. Arrive 15 minutes early to remind host/gather heretics.
- Outings (picnics, field trips): Bring/coordinate refreshments. Gather members.

CURRENT EVENTS

- Monitor local news for church-state separation issues, or anecdotes about religion. Newspaper/TV/radio Web sites are ideal (see <http://foody.org/home/links.html#nyc> for links to most local news)

MEDIA

- Represents group to press

NEWSLETTER WRITING/EDITING

- Write articles on church-state separation or religious/irreligious issues, preferably with a state or local focus and with tips on how to get involved; recent NYC Atheists events, especially

YAHOO DISCUSSION GROUP ([nyc-atheists](http://nyc-atheists.org))

- Moderates discussion, admits members

PRESIDENT

- Moderates weekend meetings
- Arranges guest speakers
- Sets policy

TREASURER

- Establish organizational bank account
- Nonprofit/community group experience needed for future tax ID (for sales) and nonprofit incorporation

COORDINATOR

- Maintains central contact information for organizers