

New York City Atheists Inc.

Serving the Tri-State area • An affiliate of American Atheists

June 2004

Vol. I Issue No. 6

WEB: NYC-ATHEISTS.ORG

P.O. Box 1187, New York, NY 10013

212-330-6794

FUTURE MEETINGS AND EVENTS

JUNE

June 6	Sunday	9 A.M. – 6 P.M.	Street Fair Tabling on Columbus between 93 and 94 TH Street.
June 13*	Sunday	12:30 P.M.	NYC Atheists Sunday Brunch.
June 15**	Tuesday	7 P.M.	NYC Atheists Meetup.
June 27***	Sunday	1 P.M.	Gerry Dantone, Long Island Secular Humanists. “ <i>Morality (Religion versus Humanism)</i> ”

JULY

July 4	Sunday	12 P.M. – 5 P.M.	NYC Atheists Barbeque in the country Will be in Chappaqua/Westchester County New York — See page 2 for details.
July 11*	Sunday	12:30 P.M.	NYC Atheists Sunday Brunch.
July 18	Sunday	1 P.M.	NYC Harbor Cruise at Pier 63. West 24 TH Street on the Hudson River. — See page 3 for details.
July 20**	Tuesday	7 P.M.	NYC Atheists Meetup.

AUGUST

August 8*	Sunday	12:30 P.M.	NYC Atheists Sunday Brunch.
August 17**	Tuesday	7 P.M.	NYC Atheists Meetup.
August 29***	Sunday	1 P.M.	Bob Morgan — Forum of Atheist Issues.

SEPTEMBER

September 12*	Sunday	12:30 P.M.	NYC Atheists Sunday Brunch.
September 21**	Tuesday	7 P.M.	NYC Atheists Meetup.
September 26***	Sunday	6 P.M.	Ed Stephens. “ <i>Psychiatrist’s perspective: Why Atheism Is a Tough Sell.</i> ”

* **Brunch Location:** EURO Diner at 126 East 28TH Street. (Between Lexington and Park Avenue.)

Brunch Cost: Order from Menu — Reservations not required.

** **Meetup Location:** Call 212-330-6794, 2 Days Before the Event.

*** **Meeting Location:** 352 7TH Avenue (Between 29 and 30TH Street at the *Source of Life Center* on the 16TH Floor.)

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NYC Atheists Inc. is a nonprofit, nonpartisan educational association. Its meetings and membership are open and all are welcomed (both nonbelievers and believers), *i.e.* atheists, agnostics, humanists, free thinkers, skeptics, humanists, separation-of-church/state advocates, and individuals who are questioning and searching beliefs.

STARTING JUNE 24 — THURSDAYS AT 8 P.M.
MANHATTAN CABLE CHANNEL 67 — NYC ATHEISTS “LIVE”!



PRESIDENT’S SERMON

It is About Time to be Noticed

The time has arrived that we must begin to be noticed. I am suggesting two potential opportunities:

- (1) Republican Convention
- (2) Sunday at St. Patrick’s Cathedral protesting the church telling its membership how to vote or else.

I would appreciate your comments:

- (1) Shall we demonstrate? Where, How, When, etc.
- (2) Slogans?
- (3) Will you volunteer to write/prepare signs, handouts, etc.
- (4) Will you participate in demonstrations?

Potential NYC Atheists Sign Slogans

ATHEISTS HAVE MORE FUN	MAKE YOUR OWN VOTING DECISIONS!	CHURCHES THAT TELL YOU HOW TO VOTE SHOULD NOT BE TAX-EXEMPT	HAVE FAITH IN YOUR SELF	TOTAL SEPARATION CHURCH/STATE
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SEE NYC ATHEISTS WEBSITE: NYC-ATHEISTS.ORG FOR ADDITIONAL SIGN SLOGANS

You may directly contact me with your comments:
Ken Bronstein at NYCATHEISTS@AOL.COM or 212-535-7425.

MAY EVENTS/MEETINGS

May 2 — Street Fair Tabling

We had a very successful day, Our fourteen volunteer members distributed more than 300 newsletters and obtained more than 50 new email addresses.

May 6 — Day Of Reason Dinner

Twenty one and three potential members attended our first “Day of Reason Dinner.” After Dinner, we saw a video which Michael Newdow and *Christian Legal Society* attorney Steven Aden debated whether “under god” should be removed from the pledge of allegiance. We completed the evening discussing the debate.

May 9 — Sunday Brunch

Nine members attended our first Sunday brunch which competed with mothers’ day. All said that they had a good time and look forward to the next Sunday Brunch on June 13th.

May 18 — Meetup

This month, our Meetup meeting was at the V Bar which is located in the Greenwich Village area. Over drinks we had a lively discussion about the catholic church denying communion to politicians and individuals who support abortion and gay marriage. Another hot topic was Massachusetts allowing “gay marriages.” Later, seven of us went to a Vietnamese Restaurant for a late dinner.

May 27 — Monthly Meeting

Bob Simon and Carolyn Monroe of *End of Life Choices* discussed with our group; living wills, health care proxies, caring friends and assisted suicide issues. In addition to supporting appropriate pain and palliative care, *End of Life Choices* is actively promoting legislation that enables the individual’s right to hasten their death under careful safeguards.

“God, you gave us insufficient evidence.” *Bertrand Russell*

FUTURE EVENTS

July 4TH Barbecue (Sunday)

Eric and Elaine Stone (American Atheists Members) have invited our group to their home in Chappaqua (Westchester County) to be their guests for a July 4th Atheists Barbecue.

Our special guest will be Joe Dixon, an Atheist Comic, describing his road to Atheism. We will meet at 11:30 A.M. at the round information booth in the great hall of Grand Central Station.

Train schedule: Leave Grand Central 11:48 A.M.

Arrive back in NYC: 6:35 P.M.

Fare: On board train \$17 (\$9 – senior) Grand Central – \$14 (\$9 senior) Web – \$13.30 (\$8.56 senior)

<http://as0.mta.info/mnr/tickets/choosestation.cfm>

Members: Free Non-Members **Guests:** \$10 (can apply to new membership)

Driving Directions: 212-535-7425

NYC Harbor Cruise and Picnic
Sun., July 18, 2004, 12:30 P.M.

The July Monthly Meeting will be about a three hour NYC Harbor Cruise and Picnic on the retired New York City Fireboat Harvey. Be on board and experience the Fireboat Harvey's eight water monitors pumping 18,000 gallons of water per minute. A once in an lifetime opportunity.



Location: West 24th Street/Hudson River (PIER 63)

Directions: Take the M23 or M14 Bus straight to Chelsea Piers OR take the C, E to 23rd Street. Walk west and cross West Side Highway at 22nd Street. Head around the northern corner of Basketball City for Pier 63.

Paid parking lot — Southbound on West Side Highway — right at 24th Street.

Cost: \$25 Members and Member Guests
\$35 for Non-Members (Save \$10 by becoming a member)

A member of NYC Atheists (Jay Gumbiner) has suggested a compromise to the “under god” controversy in the pledge of allegiance. He has proposed instead of eliminating the two words “under god” we should add one word and it would read: “formerly under god.”

On a Mission: Bush's Soul Saving Plan

By Ron Widelec

President Bush has assigned himself a pretty lofty goal: to save Americans, ONE SOUL AT A TIME. What a peculiar mission for a leader of a government. Of course, this all rests upon the assumption that the ‘soul’ exists. But even with this aside, this seems more like a spiritual mission, one for which a religious leader would be more apt. Not to mention that each religious sect sees the ‘path to salvation’ differently. How can a president of a secular government and a nation with a multitude of different religions save everyone’s ‘soul’?

President Bush is a Born-Again Christian, an evangelical branch of Protestantism. Since becoming President, he has pushed for a program known as the Faith-Based initiative, which would use federal money to support religious organizations that take part in some secular activities. After failing to convince Congress, he forced his plan through with executive orders. In order to get around the issue of Church and State separation, Bush stated that the monies would be open to all religious affiliations. However, there is a great deal of disagreement over whether this does actually meet the requirements of the “Wall of Separation.”

This program however has one hitch: it doesn't fit in with the Bush rhetoric. Bush is supporting this program claiming a desire to save American souls. Bush has also stated that he believes that

only people who have a personal relationship with christ can go to heaven, and have their soul saved. So how can he use federal monies to support non-christian groups? At first, it appeared that he was willing to do this to appease other religious groups just so he could get some, or most, of the monies to groups he supports. However, recent reports publicized on PBS have shone some light on Bush's real plan. Over a billion dollars have been filtered through faith based programs. PBS examined the distribution of money and found that nearly 100% of the money has gone to Christian groups, despite numerous Jewish and Muslim applicants.

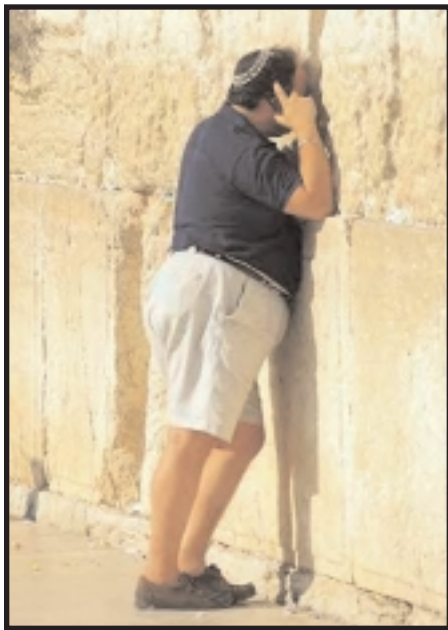
Bush wants to save America's Souls. He thinks that only those with a personal relationship with christ can be saved, and his brain-child, the Faith Based Initiative, has funded almost entirely Christian groups. Bush and his theocrats claim that by not supporting a single religion over others, they are not violating the First Amendment's establishment clause. This by itself is dubious at best, but irrelevant; Bush is giving preferential treatment to Christian groups, and is clearly violating the Constitution. And despite the public claims of Bush, the Constitution is the highest law of this land, not a bible or any other religions holy book! Bush is on a mission; a christian mission. This is a dangerous step towards destroying the Wall of Separation and the beginning of religious discrimination in the guise of religious freedom.

Questions or comments...
Email me at Beowolf88@aol.com

My Road To Atheism

By Peter Kramer

I was always a bit of an agnostic, but didn't think much about it until I started teaching at an Episcopal school many years ago. There was a chaplain at the school whom I frequently asked religious-type questions. Although he knew much more about the bible than I did, I often thought that he didn't really answer my questions. I then realized that just because someone knows much more about a subject, that doesn't mean that the subject has validity [e.g. I have not read Mein Kampf yet still can oppose Nazism]. I then became a full fledged Atheist.



GOD...???

Can You Hear Me Now?

**ANSWER: SORRY, EARTH IS
IN A DEAD SPOT**

**STARTING JUNE 24 —
THURSDAYS AT 8 P.M.
MANHATTAN CABLE
CHANNEL 67 — NYC
ATHEISTS "LIVE"!**

My Path to Atheism

By Ron Widelec

I was raised in a Jewish household, the middle son of two Israeli immigrants. We were not particularly religious, but did celebrate the high-holidays and practice a Jewish 'culture.' I had attended Hebrew school for most of my life, and never really questioned what I was told. But as I got a bit older, some of the stories sounded more and more outrageous. When I reached 12, I was moved into the highest grade of Hebrew school, which culminated with Bar-Mitzvah preparation. My Rabbi often pushed us to actively discuss the Torah. As the year went on, and more questions and discussions ended without any real answers, I developed a real cynicism about Judaism. I couldn't believe that people took these stories seriously, while denying the truth of the stories told by other religions, despite the complete lack of evidence for any of them.

By the time of my Bar-Mitzvah I already had no faith in Judaism, but I still had no idea what I did believe. Unfortunately, and I have yet to forgive myself, I went through with the Bar-Mitzvah anyway, not that I really had a choice in the matter and I wanted my first computer, which the Bar-Mitzvah gifts paid for (Hey, I was 13!). Christianity and Islam both developed out of Judaism, and if I didn't believe what Judaism told me, it didn't make much sense to follow those religions either. As I learned more about science, I began to question the existence of a god in general: what about proof? If someone says the boogiemans is behind me, I can neither prove it nor disprove it, so should I simply 'play it safe' and assume its there?

For a while I leaned toward agnosticism. Much like the example of the Boogiemans, I can neither prove nor disprove the fact that he is behind me as I write this very instant. Thus, it cannot be known. Then my studies took a new turn that provided me with enlightenment just as potent as any that a 'believer' may claim to have in their search for faith. To understand the development of god, one must first understand human nature and the origins of religion.

Part of human nature is the inclination to be inquisitive. Like a child that always asks "why" we see the world around us and wonder "why." Why does the sun go up and the rain fall and we eventually die? Why are we here and how did we get here? Today, with the development of modern science we can answer some of these questions, but that took thousands of years to develop. Religion was the original science. It was man's way of answering the questions above, regardless of whether they were true or could be proven. That is why early religions and current ones (most of which developed in ancient, pre-scientific times) are full of stories that try to explain these things. Adam and Eve story is only one of an innumerable amount of fascinating Creation tales. All over the world, societies wrestled with these questions and each group came up with an answer to feed their curiosity. Thus gods were invented. Gods that make the earth shake, rain fall, night turn to day, and create all life; so we must worship them. Oddly enough, many Monotheists perfectly understand this idea, and use it to disprove the old polytheistic religions, but never turn that critical theory on their own beliefs. It was with this last 'eureka!' that I finally developed into an Atheist.

Typical Expenses:

Monthly meeting:	\$ 250
Street fair tabling:	\$ 150
Monthly newsletter:	\$ 125

Any and all donations are greatly appreciated. send a check to New York City Atheists, P.O. Box 1187, New York, NY 10013.

GOAL 3 COMMITTEE REPORT **“Morality” Drafts for Membership Vote**

By Bob Morgan (Chair)

The question at our April Forum was: What is the incentive to be moral if there is to be no divine or other transcendent retribution? Deceptively simple, this question directed our attention to more pragmatic questions: “What is morality?” and “Do we need morality?” This article is an introduction to the 4-page Forum Report (to be mailed to members in a special mailing).

The speakers emphasized various points:

- Harvey Osgood urged consideration of “enlightened self-interest” as the most rational type of behavior. Despite his doubts about being possessed of free will, he finds that he acts as if he has free will.
- Ben Forman stated that the incentive to be ethical is founded in a self-interest concern: we must balance the way we wish to be treated with the restrictions to which we are willing to submit.
- Allen Gardner, citing his reaction to 9/11, opened with the Rodney King question: Why can’t we all get along? He

cited the need to compromise in partnerships, even between just two people. [Full texts are on page 2 of the report.]

Voting to maintain a formally structured discussion, the audience contributed several ideas, including the suggestion that moral issues should be restricted to those areas of behavior that actually hurt others (such as, murder, rape, theft, etc).

Steve Seltzer seemed to wrap up the general mood of the room when he suggested that evolution favors those groups with a “morality” formed as a result of social experience. But what happens to morality when no one is around to enforce the group’s standards? Steve suggested that maybe one way religion gained power, as the “unseen enforcer” in the eyes of the group, a concept some thought we should uncover and study further.

Moderator Bob Morgan added his support for the concept of cultural evolution.

FOLLOW-UP: the panel feels we have found some points of basic agreement, which are outlined as the proposed Working Theory on Morality (Report page 3). It is important to note the definition of Working Theory as the “current basic consensus,” rather than dogma.

We sensed no consensus AT THIS TIME to these questions: Is morality innate? Is there any reason we feel some acts are innately good/evil? Do we have any free will? We remain open to new scientific discoveries, especially in the field of genetics. If there comes a time that someone convinces us that

they have found a “do-not-murder” gene, we will use our working-theory model to re-evaluate our assumptions and revise our views.

THE Q&A format (page 4 of the report) Here, we included points made in the Forum that were not easily included in the Working Theory but were excellently phrased. The Q&A is also useful for indicating differences of opinion: Answers can be phrased as “most think...., but others maintain....”

At the May meeting, Bob reported that the drafts will be submitted for a vote at the June 27th Meeting. Only members can vote.

All are invited to join Goal 3’s next Forum at the June 13th Brunch.

RANDOM QUOTES

Just in terms of allocation of time resources, religion is not very efficient. There’s a lot more I could be doing on a Sunday morning. — *Bill Gates, TIME Magazine, January 13, 1996*

I could prove God statistically. — *George Gallup (1901 - 1984)*

Call on God, but row away from the rocks. — *Indian proverb*

If only God would give me some clear sign! Like making a large deposit in my name in a Swiss bank. — *Woody Allen*

I’m a born-again atheist. — *Gore Vidal*

I once wanted to become an atheist, but I gave up — they have no holidays. — *Henny Youngman*

If you are sick would you go to a Minister, Priest, a Rabbi or a Doctor ?

RECENT NYC-ATHEIST ACTIVITIES



Mar. 24 — U.S. Supreme Court

Horvitz, Bronstein and Kramer at Newdow’s “Delete ‘under god’ Support” rally.



April 17 — Street Fair (Broadway/102 St.)

Charles Rangel is serving his 17th term as the 15th District Congressman. He is the ranking Democrat on the House Ways and Means Committee.



Apr 25 — Atheism Forum

Goal 3 Panel: Gardner, Osgood, Forman, Morgan



May 2 — Street Fair Tabling

Our group being interviewed by an Irish reporter doing a feature about American non-believers.

NYC ATHEISTS INC. 2004 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

First Name: _____ **Last Name** _____

Street Address: _____ **Apt No.:** _____

City _____ **State** _____ **Zip** _____

Email: _____@_____ **Phone:** (____) _____ - _____

NYC Atheists Inc. is a non-profit (501c), non-partisan, and educational association with the purposes and goals:

1. To promote the total and absolute separation of church and state
2. To educate and inform the public about Atheism
3. To provide a forum for examination and discussion about Atheism
4. To develop and engage in educational, cultural, charitable, and social activities that are beneficial to the members of NYC Atheists Inc., the Atheist community, and the community at large.

YOUR 2004 MEMBERSHIP DUES ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE

- Basic – \$ 25 Supporter – \$ 100 Founder – \$ 250 Patron – \$ 500 Fellow – \$ 1000
 Senior (Age 65 or greater) – \$ 20 Full Time Student – \$ 10 Military (Active) – \$ 15

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

**SEND APPLICATION AND ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES TO:
 NYC ATHEIST INC. — MEMBERSHIP P.O. Box 1187 — NY, NY 10013**