

New York City Atheists Inc.

January 2006

Serving the Tri-State area • An affiliate of American Atheists and Center For Atheism Vol. III Issue No. 1

WEB: NYC-ATHEISTS.ORG

COOPER STATION - Box 93, NY, NY 10276-0093

212-330-6794

!!! SPECIAL !!!

\$10 – 2006 NYCA MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL - \$10
USE MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION PAGE 8

NYC Atheists Inc. is a non-profit, non-partisan educational association. Our meetings and membership are open and all are welcome (both non-believers and believers) atheists, agnostics, humanists, freethinkers, skeptics, secularists, separation-of-church/state advocates and individuals who are questioning and searching beliefs.

JANUARY

Jan.	5*	Thursday	6:00 / 7:30 P.M.	NYCA Dinner & Movie Nite
Jan.	5**	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Jan.	8***	Sunday	12:00 P.M.	NYCA Brunch, Library, Book Club
Jan.	12**	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Jan.	17****	Tuesday	7:00 P.M.	NYCA Meet-Up
Jan.	19**	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Jan.	21 *****	Saturday	1:45 P.M.	NYCA – Guided tour of Darwin Museum Exhibit
Jan.	26**	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Jan.	29****	Sunday	12:00 P.M.	NYCA Annual Meeting

FEBRUARY

Feb.	2*	Thursday	6:00 / 7:30 P.M.	NYCA Dinner & Movie Nite
Feb.	2**	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Feb.	9**	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Feb.	10-12	Fri. – Sun.	8:00 P.M.	Charles Darwin Broadway Show (see page 3)
Feb.	12***	Sunday	12:00 P.M.	NYCA Brunch, Library, Book Club
Feb.	16**	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Feb.	21****	Tuesday	7:00 P.M.	NYCA Meet-Up
Feb.	23**	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Feb.	26***	Sunday	12:00 P.M.	NYCA Monthly Meeting

* Dinner: China 99 – 64 Fulton St. (second floor)

* Movie: Southbridge Towers – 66 Frankfort St. - Community Room

** Manhattan Cable Channel 67 / RNN Cable Channel 109

*** Garden Restaurant – 145 East 60th St. (Lexington / Third)

Brunch Cost: Order from Menu — Reservations not required.

**** Manhattan Lounge - 1720 2nd Ave. (89 / 90th St.)

***** Museum of Natural History – 81st Entrance - Cost: Museum and guided tour = \$ 23
Reservations: not required



PRESIDENT’S SERMON
DOVER PA. COURT DECISION

NYC Atheists applaud the recent court decision that teaching intelligent design violates the separation of church and state. Judge John E. Jones – an appointee of President George W. Bush -- concluded that “Intelligent Design is not science and, moreover, it cannot uncouple itself from creationism, and thus its religious antecedents.”

NYC Atheists laud Judge John E. Jones, who said that though he personally believes in the teaching of intelligent design, he did not allow his personal beliefs to mandate his decision.

Whereas Supreme Court Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas are making decisions based upon their religious beliefs, not the constitution. Both of them publicly express their fundamentalist Christian beliefs at every opportunity. They also criticize all Supreme Court opinions that do not agree with their fundamentalist Christian beliefs both in their Supreme Court opinions and during their public appearances.

Both Scalia and Thomas should recuse themselves in all cases involving the separation of church and state. Scalia did recuse himself in Newdow’s “under god” pledge case. Newdow claimed that he could not be impartial because he publicly stated that he was opposed taking out “under god” from the pledge in a public forum.

I would appreciate your comments. Ken Bronstein at NYCATHEISTS@AOL.COM or 212-535-7425.

PAST DECEMBER EVENTS

Dec. 1 Thursday
NYCA Dinner & Movie Nite
Feature: Penn & Teller

Dec. 1, 8, 15, 22, 29 Thursday
NYCA Cable Show

Dec. 11 Sunday
NYCA Brunch, Library, Book Club

Dec. 20 Tuesday
NYCA Meet-Up

Dec. 21 Wednesday
Solstice Dinner
Our Solstice dinner took place during the New York City transit strike. Many of our attendees had to walk quite long distances to attend our event. Even so, twenty six dedicated Atheists attended our third Solstice Dinner.

UPCOMING JANUARY EVENTS

Jan. 5, 12, 19, 26 8:00 PM Thursday
NYCA Cable Show
Manhattan Cable # 67

Jan. 5 NYCA Dinner & Movie Nite
Dinner Info:
Time: 6:00 - 7:15pm
Location: China 99 – 64 Fulton Street (2nd floor)
Across the street from the Foot Locker store.

Movie Info:
Movie: Judgment at Nuremberg
Starring: Spencer Tracy, Burt Lancaster, Richard Widmark, Marlene Dietrich, Judy Garland
Time: 7:30 P.M.

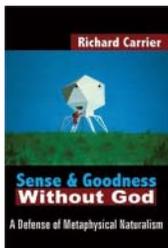
Where: Southbridge Tower - 66 Frankfort
Located between Water/Pearl and Fulton Street near the South Street Seaport.

Directions:
Subway: Fulton St. Station – A,C, J, M, Z,3, 4, 5;
City Hall Sta. 6. Buses: B51, M1, M15, M22, M103

Walk east along Fulton Street (towards the South Street Seaport), then through the walkway on Fulton Street by the side of the Foot Locker store, straight through two courtyards, to 66 Frankfort. The Community Room is located on the first floor.

Jan. 8 Sunday 12:00 P.M.
NYCA Brunch, Library, Book Club
Location: Garden Restaurant @ 145 East 60th St (Between Lexington and Third)
Reservations: Not Required
Cost: Individual Checks
After brunch, we will go to the NYC Atheists' Library on West 48th Street. You will have an opportunity to borrow and return books, followed by the book club meeting.

January – Book Club Readings
Our NYCA Librarian, Pat Berger, has selected our next book club selection: *Sense & Goodness Without god* by Richard Carrier.



We will be reading and discussing Pages 97-117, *The Fixed Universe and Freedom of the Will*.

Jan. 17 Tuesday 7:00 P.M.
NYCA Meet-Up
Casual conversation and drinks with your fellow freethinkers. Register at <http://atheists.meetup.com>
Location: Manhattan Lounge, 1720 Second Avenue (Between 89 and 90th Street)

Jan. 29 Sunday 12:00 P.M.
NYCA Annual Meeting

Agenda: Election of 2006 Board of Directors
Year 2006 Objectives
Videos of Atheism Subjects

Feb. 10-12 Friday – Sunday 8:00 P.M.

CHARLES DARWIN SHOW



Anthropologist-songwriter Richard Milner, formerly of the American Museum of Natural History in New York, performs his witty one-man musical *Charles Darwin: Live & In Concert* in New York on February 10, 11, 12, 2006.

" My favorite Darwin show. " - Stephen Jay Gould

" Performed with skill and panache. "
Tony Randall

" Smartest show in NY. " - Time Out New York

Date: February 10 - 12, 2006 (Friday - Sunday)

Location: Producers Club – Royal Theatre 358 West 44th St. (8th/9th)

DIRECTIONS: Subway: A, C, E to 42nd Street. Exit 44th Street. Walk west to the theatre.

Admission: \$20. (email: rmilner@nyc.rr.com to reserve seats and follow up with check)

Interview by Laura Sheahen
Senior Religion Editor at Beliefnet

The Problem with god:
Interview with Richard Dawkins



The renowned biologist talks about intelligent design, dishonest Christians, and why god is no better than an imaginary friend.

British biologist Richard Dawkins has made a name for himself by defending evolution and fighting what he sees as religiously motivated attacks on science.

Q: You're concerned about the state of education, especially science education. If you were able to teach every person, what would you want people to believe?

A: I would want them to believe whatever evidence leads them to; I would want them to look at the evidence, judge it on its merits and not accept things because of internal revelation or faith but purely on the basis of evidence.

Not everybody can evaluate all evidence; we can't evaluate the evidence for quantum physics. So it does have to be a certain amount of taking things on trust. I have to take what physicists say on trust, for example, because I'm a biologist. But science [has] a system of appraisal, of peer review, so I trust the physics community to get their act together in a way that I know from the inside. I wish people would put their trust in evidence, not in faith, revelation, tradition, or authority.

Q: What do you wish people knew about evolution?

A. They need to understand what evolution is about. Many of them don't. I was truly shocked to be told by two separate religious leaders in this country [the U.S.] a few weeks ago something to the effect that, "I'll believe in evolution when I see a tailed monkey give birth to a human." That is staggering ignorance of what evolutionary science is about. If they think that's what evolutionists believe, no wonder they're skeptical of it. How can a civilized country have adult people in positions of leadership who know so stunningly little about the leading biological concept?

Q. You said in a recent speech that design was not the only alternative to chance. A lot of people think that evolution is all about random chance.

A. That's ludicrous. That's ridiculous. Mutation is random in the sense that it's not anticipatory of what's needed. Natural selection is anything but random. Natural selection is a guided process, guided *not by any higher power*, but simply by which genes survive and which genes don't survive. That's a non-random process. The animals that are best at whatever they do—hunting, flying, fishing, swimming, digging—whatever the species does, the individuals that are best at it are the ones that pass on the genes. It's because of this non-random

process that lions are so good at hunting, antelopes so good at running away from lions, and fish are so good at swimming.

Q. There are intelligent people who have been taught good science and evolution, and who may choose to believe in something religious that may seem to fly in the face of science. What do you make of that?

A. It's certainly hard to know what to make of it. I think it's a betrayal of science. I think they have a religious agenda which, for reasons best known to themselves, they elevate above science.

Q. What are your thoughts about the despair some people feel when they ponder natural selection and random mutation? The idea of evolution and natural selection makes some people feel that everything is meaningless--people's individual lives and life in general.

A. If it's true that it causes people to feel despair, that's tough. It's still the truth. The universe doesn't owe us condolence or consolation; it doesn't owe us a nice warm feeling inside. If it's true, it's true, and you'd better live with it.

However, I don't think it should make one feel depressed. I don't feel depressed. I feel elated. My book, *Unweaving the Rainbow*, is an attempt to elevate science to the level of poetry and to show how one can be—in a funny sort of way—rather spiritual about science. Not in a supernatural sense, but there are uplifting mysteries to be solved. The contemplation of the size and scale of the universe, of the depth of geological time, of the complexity of life--these all, to me, have an inspirational quality. It makes my life worthwhile to study them.

Q. You criticize intelligent design, saying that "the theistic answer"--pointing to god as designer--"is deeply unsatisfying"--presumably you mean on a logical, scientific level.

A. Yes, because it doesn't explain where the designer comes from. If they're going to emphasize the statistical improbability of biological organs—"these are so complicated, how could they have evolved?"--well, if they're so complicated, how could they possibly have been designed? Because the designer would have to be even more complicated.

Q. Obviously, a lot of people find the theistic answer satisfying on another level. What do you see as the problem with that level?

A. What other level?

Q. At whatever level where people say the idea of god is very satisfying.

A. Well, of course it is. Wouldn't it be lovely to believe in an imaginary friend who listens to your thoughts, listens to your prayers, comforts you, consoles you, gives you life after death, can give you advice? Of course it's satisfying, if you can believe it. But who wants to believe a lie?

Q. Is atheism the logical extension of believing in evolution?

They clearly can't be irrevocably linked because a very large number of theologians believe in evolution. In fact, any respectable theologian of the Catholic or Anglican or any other sensible church believes in evolution. Similarly, a very large number of evolutionary scientists are also religious. My personal feeling is that understanding evolution led me to atheism.

Q. How would you respond to people who say the most interesting or worthwhile aspect of human beings is behavior that natural selection would not promote? I'm thinking of behavior like adopting children who aren't family members, voluntary celibacy, or people deciding to spend their whole life praying.

A. Adopting children that are not your own or a close relative's is an interesting question. Why do not just humans, but other species, do what on the face of it is the wrong thing to do from a selfish gene point of view? Cuckoos play upon this and actually engineer it so that other species raise [baby cuckoos]. This is a mistake on the part of the foster parents, which have been "forced" to adopt the cuckoos.

So that's sort of a wild analogy to adopting children, in this case ones who are not your own species.

By the way, I would hate this to be taken as any sort of suggestion that adoptive parents don't love their adopted children; of course they do. But you could think of it as a kind of genetic mistake, in that

human adults have strong parental instincts which make them long for a child. If they can't have a child of their own, they can then satisfy those parental instincts by adopting a child.

In the same way, we have sexual instincts; we long for sex and it doesn't matter that we use contraception. That's, as it were, separating the natural function of sex, which is reproduction. But we still enjoy sex in the same way that we enjoy being a parent even if it is not our own child that we're looking after.

Q. You've said, "don't name our present ignorance god"—which you said is what intelligent design proponents are doing. They're taking an area where we're ignorant and naming that god. Do you think science will eventually explain everything we wonder about now?

A. I don't know the answer. I'm equally excited by both in a way. I rather like the idea of understanding everything and I also quite like the idea of science being a never-ending, open-ended quest.

Q. If you had to name top sources for optimism and hope in a naturalistic or materialistic world view, what would they be?

A. I think there is something glorious in the universe, in contemplating the Milky Way galaxy, in contemplating the fact that this is only one in billions of galaxies, contemplating the fact that at the beginning of the 21st century, humanity really has gone a very long way toward understanding the universe in which we live and the life form of which we are a part. I find that a truly inspirational thought.

Obviously, there are other things having nothing to do with science—music, poetry, sex, love. These are all things that make life, to me, extremely worth living.

Then there's the added fact that it is the only life we're ever going to get. Don't kid yourself that you're going to live again after you're dead; you're not. Make the most of the one life you've got. Live it to the full.

Q. You've criticized the idea of the afterlife. What do you see as the problem with a terminally ill cancer patient believing in an afterlife?

A. Oh, no problem at all. I would never wish to disabuse or disillusion somebody who believed that. I care about what's true for myself, but I don't want to go around telling people who are afraid of dying that their hopes are unreal.

If I could have a word with a would-be suicide bomber or plane hijacker who thinks he's going to paradise, I would like to disabuse him. I wouldn't say to him, "Don't you see what you're doing is wrong?" I would say, "Don't imagine for one second you're going to paradise. You're not. You're going to rot in the ground."

Q. How would you feel if your daughter became religious in the future?

A. Well, that would be her decision and obviously she's her own person, she's free to do whatever she likes. I think she's much too intelligent to do that, but that's her decision.

Q. You talk about how your words have been twisted by religious people in the past. Which words of yours have been twisted?

A. Whenever I begin an argument by saying something that sounds as though it's creationist, something like "the Cambrian Explosion is a sudden explosion of fossils almost as though they had no history," I'm obviously saying that as a prelude to explaining why. But these people quote selectively. It's a demonstration of their fundamental dishonesty. They're not actually interested in truth, they're interested in propaganda.

Q. Are there one or two phrases you've heard repeatedly quoted out of context that you'd like to set the record straight about?

Well, that's one of them, about the Cambrian Explosion. Another one is Darwin's famous phrase, to suppose that "the eye, with all its inimitable contrivances"—he goes on about the complications of the eye—"could have been formed by natural selection, seems, I freely confess, absurd in the highest degree." He then goes on to explain it, and they never quote that.

**FAITH
FAILS**



Peter Watson

From *The New York Times*
December 11, 2005

Questions for
What's the Big Idea?
Interview by DEBORAH SOLOMON

Q: Your ambitious new book, "Ideas: A History of Thought and Invention, From Fire to Freud," claims to chronicle all the major ideas in the world since the invention of the hand ax two million years ago. Are you trying to be a polymath?

A: My wife says I am the know-it-all from hell.

Q. How does one go about deciding which ideas to put in and which to leave out? As they say, even taxi drivers have ideas.

A. Yes, taxi drivers have ideas. They have ideas about how to get from Eighth Street to 81st Street by missing the Midtown traffic. But what we are talking about here - let's be sensible - are ideas that have an impact on the lives of many people. We're not talking about just little ideas, are we?

Q. On the other hand, not all big ideas are good ideas. In fact, most big ideas are probably terrible ideas. What do you think is the single worst idea in history?

A. Without question, ethical monotheism. The idea of one true god. The idea that our life and ethical conduct on earth determines how we will go in the next world. This has been responsible for most of the wars and bigotry in history.

Q. But religion has also been responsible for investing countless lives with meaning and inner richness.

A. I lead a perfectly healthy, satisfactory life without being religious. And I think more people should try it.

Q. It sounds as if you're starting your own church.

A. Not at all. I do not believe in the inner world. I think that the inner world comes from the exploration of the outer world - reading, traveling, talking. I do not believe that meditation or cogitation leads to wisdom or peace or the truth.

Q. Then I don't understand why you would want to write a history of ideas, since inner reflection and dreaminess surely count at least as much as scientific experiment in the formation of new ideas.

A. To paraphrase the philosopher John Gray, it is more sensible to look out on the world from a zoo than from a monastery. Science, or looking out, is better than contemplation, or looking in.

Q. If that were true, how would you explain a novelist like Virginia Woolf, whose achievement was based on the rejection of the panoramic outward view in favor of inner sensibility?

A. The rise of the novel generally is a great turning in. But I don't think it has given a lot of satisfaction to people. It has not achieved anything collective. It's a lot of little personal turnings that lots of people love to connect with. But these are fugitive, evanescent truths. They don't stay with you very long or help you do much.

Q. You strike me as deeply unanalyzed. Have you ever considered seeing a psychiatrist?

A. I was a psychiatrist. I left because I thought Freud was rubbish.

Q. Where did you train?

A. The Tavistock Clinic in London. I left in the late 60's because I thought Freudian therapy was a waste of time. I don't believe there is any such thing as the unconscious or the id.

Q. In that case, where do you think ideas come from?

A. I don't think they come out of daydreaming. Everybody who has had a great idea or made a great realization has been working very hard at it, and

they often have failed many times. You don't go from nothing to a great idea without doing a lot of work.

Q. I find I seldom have ideas away from my desk.

A. That is because ideas come from other ideas. I used to sleep with a piece of paper by my bed. But I never had an idea in bed. The other thing I noticed is that when you are out to dinner and you have a good idea and write it down, the next day when you're sober, it's terrible.

Q. Perhaps if you went out less, you would have better ideas.

A. I think the interesting thing in life is not having an idea, but realizing it.

Christmas Traditions Shift

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The sending of Christmas cards has fallen off.

Singing carolers seldom are heard anymore.

And sales of real Christmas trees are on a long-term decline.

What does all this mean?

At least one Christmas-oriented organization believes the traditional spirit of Christmas is waning. The National Christmas Tree Association, a group of tree growers based in St. Louis, this year conducted a poll that shows fewer people participate in family customs such as caroling and baking treats than a decade ago.

"We've lost the real meaning of Christmas," said Beth Walterscheidt, a Texas tree grower who leads the new Christmas Spirit Foundation established by the tree association to promote family-oriented holiday activities. "We're a family-oriented country, and we want to preserve that."

ATHEISM IS A CONCLUSION NOT A BELIEF



**NYCA CABLE SHOW
TOP: DENNIS HORVITZ (HOST)
BOTTOM: RICH SANDER (EDITOR)**



**NYCA BRUNCH
DECEMBER 11, 2005**



**NYCA ATTENDEES
AT AMERICAN ATHEISTS SOLSTICE
DECEMBER 17, 2005 BRUNCH**



**AMERICAN ATHEISTS SOLSTICE
BRUNCH - DEC 17, 2005
ELLEN JOHNSON - PRESIDENT**

NYC ATHEISTS — 2006 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 2006 MEMBERSHIP DUES ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE
SPECIAL - \$ 10**

Basic – \$ 25 Supporter – \$ 100 Founder – \$ 250 Patron – \$ 500 Life – \$ 1000

Senior (Age 65 or greater) – \$ 20 Full Time Student – \$ 10 Military (Active) – \$ 15

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

CHECK PAYABLE TO: NYC ATHEISTS INC. - SEND APPLICATION TO:

NYC ATHEISTS INC. MEMBERSHIP - COOPER STATION P.O. Box 93 NY, NY 10276-0093