

New York City Atheists Inc. March 2006

Serving the Tri-State area • An affiliate of American Atheists and Center For Atheism Vol. III Issue No. 3

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.

MARCH

Mar.	2*	Thursday	6:00 / 7:30 P.M.	NYCA Dinner & Movie Nite
Mar.	2**	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Mar.	9**	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Mar.	12***	Sunday	12:00 P.M.	NYCA Brunch, Library, Book Club
Mar.	16**	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Mar.	21****	Tuesday	7:00 P.M.	NYCA Meet-Up
Mar.	22	Wednesday	7:00 P.M.	NYCA Volunteer Workshop (see page 3)
Mar.	23**	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Mar.	26***	Sunday	12:00 P.M.	NYCA Monthly Meeting
Mar.	30**	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show

APRIL

Apr.	6*	Thursday	6:00 / 7:30 P.M.	NYCA Dinner & Movie Nite
Apr.	6**	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Apr.	9***	Sunday	12:00 P.M.	NYCA Brunch, Library, Book Club
Apr.	13****	Thursday	7:00 P.M.	Madalyn Murray O'Hair Birthday Party
Apr.	13**	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Apr.	18****	Tuesday	7:00 P.M.	NYCA Meet-Up
Apr.	20**	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Apr.	27**	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Apr.	30***	Sunday	12:00 P.M.	NYCA Monthly Meeting

* **Dinner: Southbridge Towers – 80 Beekman St. – Squires Diner (NEW LOCATION)**

* **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.)**

***** **Hunan 5th Ave. – 401 Fifth Ave. (36/37th St.)**

Movie Info:

Time: 7:30 P.M.

Movie: CSPAN Show - *Darwin's Four Great Books: The Voyage of the Beagle; The Origins of Species; The Descent of Man; The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals.*

Harvard Professor and two time Pulitzer-prize winner Edward O. Wilson discusses Charles Darwin's four great books.

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.

Mar. 12 Sunday 12:00 P.M.

NYCA Brunch, Library, Book Club

Location: Garden Restaurant @ 145 East 60th St. (Between Lexington and Third)

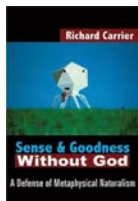
Reservations: Not Required

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.

March – 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 119-134, *What Everything Is Made Of*.

Mar. 21 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)

Mar. 22 Wednesday 7:00 P.M.

NYCA Volunteer Workshop

Open to all who want to get involved and lend a helping hand!

Rich Sander will conduct a workshop on how to be a successful volunteer.

Registration: **rich_sander@yahoo.com**

Details will be emailed back after registration.

Together we will go through goal setting, planning and the evaluation process to get all working toward the same goal.

Optimize your experience while helping others.

We will also discuss why we are helping and what kind of experience we want to have.

After two hours we should know who we will be working with, reporting to, what tools we will need, what resources we will get and how to give an effective evaluation.

Mar. 26 Sunday 12:00 P.M.

Monthly Meeting

**Location: Garden Restaurant
145 East 60th St (Between Lexington and Third)**

Reservations: Not required

Cost: Individual checks

**Guest Speaker: Donald Phillips,
Professor of experimental and physiological psychology, physical anthropology, paleontology at Polytechnic University, Brooklyn, N.Y. and president of the New York Paleontological Society.**

Subject: *DATING THE EVOLUTION OF LIFE ON EARTH.*

Professor Phillips will describe how a paleontologist can find the age of plants and fossils from the present evidence and can date a fossil back to the beginning of life on earth about 3.5 billion years ago. Examples of techniques used are tree rings, radiocarbon, stratigraphy and radiometric.

god – free zone

NYC ATHEISTS ESSAY CONTEST

NYC Atheists has established two \$500-award essay contests--one for high school students, the second for college students.

The essay subject this year is: "WHAT SHOULD BE YOUR RIGHT-TO-DIE LEGAL OPTIONS?" (i.e. Terri Schiavo case, Oregon State assisted-suicide law)

For questions: Call Ken Bronstein –
NYCATHEISTS@AOL.COM - 212-535-7425

The student does not have to be an Atheist.
(Both non-believers and believers are eligible.)
Only one entry per student. The essay must be the sole, unpublished, original work of the entrant and must not violate or infringe upon the rights of any third parties.

High School Student Requirements:

- * Must be a full time student enrolled in a NYC high school (public or private).
- * Should be not less than 500 words (excluding bibliography), typed (double-spaced).
- * Must include a cover sheet that includes the student's name, complete address, telephone number, email address, date of birth, name of the teacher, school name, school address, name of parent or legal guardian.

College Student Requirements

- * Must be a full time undergraduate student enrolled in a metro-New York City (25 mile radius) college/university.
- * Should be not less than 1,000 words (excluding bibliography), typed (double-spaced).
- * Must include a cover sheet that includes the student's name, complete address, telephone number, email address, school name and address, number of hours completed and program major.

Decision

Essays will be judged on style, content and writing that is clear, articulate, and logically organized. The decision of the NYC Atheists Inc. Board of Directors is final. The NYC Atheists Board of Directors may choose not to select a winner if they deem no entry meets its criteria.

Submit:

NYC Atheists Inc./Awards Committee / Cooper Station PO Box 93 / NY, NY 10276-0093

Deadline:

Entry must be postmarked no later than May 31, 2006.

Other:

- * All entries become the property of NYC Atheists Inc. and will not be returned.
- * Acceptance of the prize constitutes permission to use the winner's name and to publish in whole or in part the winning essay.
- * NYC Atheists Inc. is not responsible for lost, misdirected, illegible, damaged, postage due, or late entries.

Notification:

- * Winners will be notified by US Mail
- * Name will be posted on the NYC-ATHEISTS.ORG web site on June 30, 2006.



By Sam Harris - From: www.truthdig.com

“Religion is our only source of morality. Without it, we would be plunged into a secular moral chaos.”

This concern is so widespread that I have responded to it at some length. A version of this response will soon be published in the magazine Free Inquiry (www.secularhumanism.org) as “The Myth of Secular Moral Chaos.” One cannot criticize religious dogmatism for long without encountering the following claim,

advanced as though it were a self-evident fact of nature: There is no secular basis for morality. Raping and killing children can only be really wrong, the thinking goes, if there is a god who says it is. Otherwise, right and wrong would be mere matters of social construction, and any society will be at liberty to decide that raping and killing children is actually a wholesome form of family fun. In the absence of god, John Wayne Gacy would be a better person than Albert Schweitzer, if only more people agreed with him. It is simply amazing how widespread this fear of secular moral chaos is, given how many misconceptions about morality and human nature are required to set it whirling in a person's brain. There is undoubtedly much to be said against the spurious linkage between faith and morality, but the following three points should suffice.

Bible's Immorality

If a book like the bible were the only reliable blueprint for human decency that we have, it would be impossible (both practically and logically) to criticize it in moral terms. But it is extraordinarily easy to criticize the morality one finds in bible, as most of it is simply odious and incompatible with a civil society.

The notion that the bible is a perfect guide to morality is really quite amazing, given the contents of the book. Human sacrifice, genocide, slaveholding, and misogyny are consistently celebrated. Of course, god's counsel to parents is refreshingly straightforward: whenever children get out of line, we should beat them with a rod (Proverbs 13: 24, 20:30, and 23:13-14). If they are shameless enough to talk back to us, we should kill them (Exodus 21:15, Leviticus 20:9, Deuteronomy 21:18-21, Mark.7:9-13 and Matthew 15:4-7). We must also stone people to death for heresy, adultery, homosexuality, working on the Sabbath, worshipping graven images, practicing sorcery, and for a wide variety of other imaginary crimes.

Most Christians imagine that Jesus did away with all this barbarism and delivered a doctrine of pure love and toleration. He didn't (Matthew 5:18-19, Luke 16:17, 2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 20-21, John 7:19). Anyone who believes that Jesus only taught the Golden Rule and love of one's neighbor should go back and read the New Testament. And pay particular attention to the

morality that will be on display if he ever returns to Earth trailing clouds of glory (e.g. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9, 2:8; Hebrews 10:28-29; 2 Peter 3:7; and all of Revelation). It is not an accident that St. Thomas Aquinas thought heretics should be killed and that St. Augustine thought they should be tortured. (Ask yourself, what are the chances that these good doctors of the Church hadn't read the New Testament closely enough to discover the error of their ways?) As a source of objective morality, the bible is one of the worst books we have. It might have been the very worst, in fact, if we didn't also happen to have the Koran.

Good Book Not So Good

It is important to point out that we decide what is good in the Good Book. We read the Golden Rule and judge it to be a brilliant distillation of many of our ethical impulses; we read that a woman found not to be a virgin on her wedding night should be stoned to death, and we (if we are civilized) decide that this is the most vile lunacy imaginable. Our own ethical intuitions are, therefore, primary. So the choice before us is simple: we can either have a 21st century conversation about ethics—availing ourselves of all the arguments and scientific insights that have accumulated in the last 2,000 years of human discourse—or we can confine ourselves to a first century conversation as it is preserved in the bible.

Religion Causes Immorality

If religion were necessary for morality, there should be some evidence that atheists are less moral than believers. But evidence for this is in short supply, and there is much evidence to the contrary.

People of faith regularly allege that atheism is responsible for some of the most appalling crimes of the 20th century. Are atheists really less moral than believers? While it is true that the regimes of Hitler, Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot were irreligious to varying degrees, they were not especially rational. In fact, their public pronouncements were little more than litanies of delusion—delusions about race, economics, national identity, the march of history or the moral dangers of intellectualism. In many respects, religion was directly culpable even

here. Consider the Holocaust: the anti-Semitism that built the Nazi crematoria brick by brick was a direct inheritance from medieval Christianity. For centuries, Christian Europeans had viewed the Jews as the worst species of heretics and attributed every societal ill to their continued presence among the faithful. While the hatred of Jews in Germany expressed itself in a predominately secular way, its roots were undoubtedly religious—and the explicitly religious demonization of the Jews of Europe continued throughout the period. (The Vatican itself perpetuated the blood libel in its newspapers as late as 1914.) Auschwitz, the gulag and the killing fields are not examples of what happens when people become too critical of unjustified beliefs; to the contrary, these horrors testify to the dangers of not thinking critically enough about specific secular ideologies.

Needless to say, a rational argument against religious faith is not an argument for the blind embrace of atheism as a dogma. The problem that the atheist exposes is none other than the problem of dogma itself—of which every religion has more than its fair share. I know of no society in recorded history that ever suffered because its people became too reasonable.

Atheism Is Healthy

According to the United Nations' Human Development Report (2005), the most atheistic societies—countries like Norway, Iceland, Australia, Canada, Sweden, Switzerland, Belgium, Japan, the Netherlands, Denmark and the United Kingdom—are actually the healthiest, as indicated by measures of life expectancy, adult literacy, per capita income, educational attainment, gender equality, homicide rate and infant mortality.

Conversely, the 50 nations now ranked lowest by the U.N. in terms of human development are unwaveringly religious. Of course, correlational data of this sort do not resolve questions of causality—belief in God may lead to societal dysfunction; societal dysfunction may foster a belief in God; each factor may enable the other; or both may spring from some deeper source of mischief. Leaving aside the issue of cause and effect, these facts prove that atheism is perfectly compatible with the basic aspirations of a civil society; they also prove, conclusively, that

religious faith does nothing to ensure a society's health.

If religion really provided the only conceivable, objective basis for morality, it should be impossible to posit a non-theistic, objective basis for morality. But it is not impossible; it is rather easy.

No god Necessary

Clearly, we can think of objective sources of moral order that do not require the existence of a law-giving god. In "*The End of Faith*," I argued that questions of morality are really questions about happiness and suffering. If there were objectively better and worse ways to live so as to maximize happiness in this world, these would be objective moral truths worth knowing. Whether we will ever be in a position to discover these truths and agree about them cannot be known in advance (and this is the case for all questions of scientific fact). But if there are psychophysical laws that underwrite human well-being—and why wouldn't there be? - then these laws are potentially discoverable. Knowledge of these laws would provide an enduring basis for an objective morality. In the meantime, everything about human experience suggests that love is better than hate for the purposes of living happily in this world. This is an objective claim about the human mind, the dynamics of social relations, and the moral order of our world. While we do not have anything like a final, scientific approach to maximizing human happiness, it seems safe to say that raping and killing children will not be one of its primary constituents.

Religions Cause Conflicts

One of the greatest challenges facing civilization in the 21st century is for human beings to learn to speak about their deepest personal concerns--about ethics, spiritual experience and the inevitability of human suffering--in ways that are not flagrantly irrational. Nothing stands in the way of this project more than the respect we accord religious faith. Incompatible religious doctrines have balkanized our world into separate moral communities, and these divisions have become a continuous source of human conflict. The idea that there is a necessary link between religious faith and morality is one of the

principal myths keeping religion in good standing among otherwise reasonable men and women. And yet, it is a myth that is easily dispelled.

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**REQUEST
A BIBLE-FREE
ROOM**

**ATHEISM
IS A CONCLUSION
NOT A BELIEF**

**A LIFE OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY
IS A REWARDING LIFE**

**YOU ARE ENTITLED
TO YOUR OWN BELIEFS,
BUT YOU ARE NOT ENTITLED
TO YOUR OWN FACTS.**

QUESTION ?

Why is it that when most folks hear someone talking to himself, they think that guy's crazy?

But when they hear someone talking to god, they think that's normal?

But when god talks back to that person, they think that person is crazy?

Science will replace religion.

Knowledge will replace faith.

Understanding will eliminate fear

**Question religion!
No free pass for faith**

**STOP
FAITH-BASED SUBSIDIES
THAT WILL BECOME
FAITH-BASED ENTITLEMENTS!**

TWO NEW NYCA BOARD MEMBERS

At the January 29, 2006 annual meeting two new NYCA board members were elected, Jay Gumbiner and Suzy Lanza.

Jay Gumbiner was born in Long Beach, California and moved to New York in 1994. He was educated at the University of Utah, California State University at Long Beach and George Washington University in Washington D.C., earning B.A. in Psychology, a Master's degree in Research in Management and a Post-Master's Certificate in Health Services Administration. He worked for many years in health care, focusing on research in management. For the past 16 years, he has been an independent investor.

Jay says he became an atheist in his early teenage years when he came to the decision that he would base his beliefs and conclusions on scientifically proven, factual evidence and not on word of mouth claims, assumptions or old traditions. Jay has been a NYCA member since its inception.

New board member Suzy Lanza was born in Porto Alegre, Brazil, into a family of career diplomats. She was educated at the Beaux Arts Institute in Rio de Janeiro, where she earned a B.A. in Art History. In 1959, she moved to New York City, married a New Yorker and became a mother and homemaker. Raised as a Catholic in Brazil, Suzy says she found Catholicism's answers to the big questions of life "illogical and inadequate." She became a member of NYCA after searching for "a community of like-minded people with goals similar to mine."



**NYCA Members
stuffing newsletter envelopes
before the Feb. 2, 2006 Movie Nite**



**Richard Milner portrays Charles
Darwin in his one-person show
Feb. 10-12, 2006**



January Brunch



**Richard Milner
in *Charles Darwin: Live in Concert*
Feb. 10-12, 2006**

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 is 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