

New York City Atheists Inc.

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WEB: NYC-ATHEISTS.ORG COOPER STATION - Box 93, NY, NY 10276-0093 212-330-6794

Celebrating the lives of NYC Atheists members
Bob Curci and Lyle Stuart

AUGUST

Aug.	3*	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Aug.	10*	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Aug.	13**	Sunday	12:00 P.M.	NYCA Brunch, Library, Book Club
Aug.	17*	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Aug.	15***	Tuesday	7:00 P.M.	NYCA Meet-Up (NEW LOCATION)
Aug.	24*	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Aug.	31*	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Aug.	31**	Thursday	6:30 P.M.	NYCA Monthly Meeting

SEPTEMBER

Sept.	7*	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Sept.	10**	Sunday	12:00 P.M.	NYCA Brunch, Library, Book Club
Sept.	14*	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Sept.	19***	Tuesday	7:00 P.M.	NYCA Meet-Up (NEW LOCATION)
Sept.	21*	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Sept.	24**	Sunday	12:00 P.M.	NYCA Monthly Meeting
Sept.	28*	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Sept.	29****	Friday	6:30 P.M.	NYCA Annual Harbor Cruise

* Manhattan Cable Channel 67 / RNN Cable Channel 110

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

Brunch Cost: Individual Checks plus \$5 suggested donation — Reservations not required.

*** Chill Lounge -329 Lexington Ave. (39th) – Cost: Free – (Cash Bar / Drinks)

**** Contact K. Bronstein: NYCATHEISTS@AOL.COM / 212-535-7425 FOR DETAILS

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PRESIDENT'S SERMON
Celebrating the Lives of NYC Atheists Members
Bob Curci and Lyle Stuart

NYC Atheists sadly reports the deaths of two of our members: Bob Curci and Lyle Stuart, both longtime Atheists. On July 30th, NYCA celebrated their lives with a Sunday brunch that included videos of Bob Curci and Lyle Stuart.

KEN BRONSTEIN

Bob, an Atheist since his early teens, worked at the Einstein College of Medicine in the Bronx, New York as a research biologist and a medical computer specialist for about forty years until his retirement about four months ago. Many times I met Bob when I visited other Secular group meetings throughout the NYC Metropolitan area. Bob, who was interested in informing younger people about atheism, proposed that NYC Atheists have an essay contest for high school and college students. Bob not only worked to notify schools and universities about our essay contest, but he contributed to monies for our awards.

NYC Atheists placed the following obituary in the NYC Times:

CURCI--Robert. Died on June 27. A lifelong Atheist, Bob rejected prayer and asked that no one pray for him. Bob often said, "I'm not afraid of dying," and "My fate is based on medical science and my genes." New York City Atheists will miss him.

--Ken Bronstein, President - New York City Atheists

Lyle Stuart was a life-long atheist, described by the *New York Times* as a renegade journalist and publisher whose picaresque life included clashes with Walter Winchell, the publication of "Naked Came the Stranger," "The Anarchist Cookbook," "The Rich and the Super-Rich," "Inside The FBI," "The Sensuous Woman" and "Jackie Oh!" He was a strong advocate of freedom of the press, and believed it was important for people to be able to read and make up their own minds.

In 1951 Lyle launched a monthly tabloid named *Exposé* (name later changed to *The Independent*) designed to publish those stories and articles that others wouldn't dare publish because they might offend subscribers or advertisers. Contributors included Upton Sinclair, Norman Mailer, George Seldes, Ted O. Thackrey and John Steinbeck. In 1956, with \$8,000 of the money he collected from libel actions against Walter Winchell, *Confidential*, ABC-TV and *Editor & Publisher*, he began his book publishing company, Lyle Stuart Inc.

NYC Atheists placed the following obituary in the *New York Times*:

STUART--Lyle. Died June 24. We mourn the death and celebrate the life of our member Lyle Stewart, courageous and controversial publisher and a staunch atheist.

--Ken Bronstein, President - New York City Atheists

NYC Atheists strongly recommends that its members have health proxies, living wills, funeral and burial instructions (see www.nyc-atheists.org for sample forms). It is extremely important that you appoint someone who will carry out and make sure your wishes are followed. NYC Atheists is considering setting up a Buddy System to keep track of our members and make sure they are not in need.

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

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UPCOMING AUGUST EVENTS

Aug. 3, 10, 17, 24, 31 Thursday 8:00 P.M.
NYCA Cable Show -Manhattan Cable # 67

Aug. 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 plus \$5 donation

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.

August Book Club Readings
Our NYCA Librarian, Pat Berger, has picked our current Book Club selection: *Sense & Goodness Without god* by Richard Carrier. We will be reading and discussing Pages 161-176, *The Meaning of Life; How Did We Get Here?*



PAT BERGER – NYCA LIBRARIAN
NYCA'S GERTUDE STEIN

The NYCA library includes approximately 500 books as well as numerous CDs, DVDs, cassettes, video tapes, newsletters, newspapers and magazines.

Aug. 15 Tuesday 7:00 P.M.
NYCA Meet-Up
Casual conversation and drinks with your fellow freethinkers.
Register at <http://atheists.meetup.com>

Location: Chill Lounge–329 Lexington Ave.
(39th) www.chillloungeNYC.com
Cost: Cash bar and food

Aug. 31 Thursday 6:30 P.M.

NYCA Monthly Meeting

Location: Garden Restaurant
145 East 60th St. (Lex / 3rd)
Reservations: Not required
Cost: Individual Checks plus suggested \$5 donation

Subject: *I am mad as H... and I am not going to take it anymore.* See President's Sermon (NYCA Newsletter – June 2006)

We will discuss how Atheists can respond to theists' remarks such as "god bless you," "without god you are immoral," etc.

The Top 10 Atheist Myths

By Dave Silverman
(American Atheists Communication Director)



My purpose in this piece is not to promote the "us vs. them" mentality against theists, but rather, to promote understanding and tolerance.

However, we all know that many theists are so closed-minded about us that they won't even talk to us, let alone try to understand us. This is usually not their fault, as they are told terrible things about us by people they trust, such as their preachers, whose whole livelihood depends on their parishioners staying in the flock.

It is this prejudice and conflict that is one of the main factors keeping atheists in the closet and theists in ignorance. With dialogue, not prejudice, both sides will benefit and the country will become a freer place. In this article I will mention many of the myths about atheists that are popular among theists, as well as my usual responses to them. With any luck, this will prepare atheists for future confrontations and make them more confident to announce themselves, as well as help theist readers to better understand the atheist mentality.

Myth 1: "Atheists are all the same."

You can understand why theists believe this, after being told this over and over by their preachers. This belief is reinforced by the fact that believers are often bound by much more than a simple belief in god. For example, all Catholics are required to have the same stances on abortion, contraception, and homosexuality in order to be called a "good Catholic." It only goes to follow that atheism must be similar.

However, atheism is not a religion, but the absence of religion. As such, we are bound only by our atheism. We are Republicans and Democrats, men and women, gays and straights, blacks and whites. We accept every person as they are, as equals, and delight in our diversity (not many religions can say that). We disagree with each other on many issues, and discussion is encouraged and common. Above all, atheists demand the right to disagree, even if it means with each other.

Myth 2: "Atheists have no morals, since they don't believe in god."

What a sad world it is when people can seriously say that humans need to fear eternal damnation in order to do good. It is the one statement that stirs both anger and pity in most atheists; anger because it is a bigoted, prejudicial statement which serves no purpose except to promote intolerance, and pity because it highlights the speaker's ignorance and willingness to accept such crap without question.

A reply needs to be made in order to expose the theist to the idea that what they've heard is wrong on so many dimensions. It must not be answered with anger, but with compassion.

Humans have the idea of right and wrong imbedded in them by their own brains, as well as their upbringing and society. Atheists do good, not out of fear of reprisal, but because it's the right thing to do. We value family, society, culture and, of course, freedom. Many of us

will--and have--defended these values with our lives. Examples:

1) Many Catholics make judgment calls that are against their church on moral decisions. For example, some use birth control or have abortions, despite what their church preaches. If these people can make moral decisions despite what their church preaches, then atheists can make similar choices without any church.

2) Slavery was not only acceptable 200 years ago, it was considered a good deed by many, and defended by using the bible. The bible was also used to justify the Holocaust, the Crusades, and the Spanish Inquisition.

Why is this relevant? Because it shows that the bible can be used to defend even the most immoral and unethical ideals, and it is therefore not an adequate yardstick to measure moral or ethical behavior.

3) Finally, bring up to the theists the prevalence of bad religious people. Remember that Hitler was a religious Catholic, and that Jeffrey Dahmer said grace before he ate his victims. Mention also that one need only open a newspaper to find yet another story about allegations against priests for sexual misconduct, often with children. Don't forget our good friends Jim Baker (who swindled millions from his flock) and Jimmy Swaggart (asked for forgiveness only after being caught using prostitutes).

4) Couple these statements with the fact that, while atheists make up 8-10% of the population at large, we only make up 1% of the population in prison. These figures will serve to prove that religion and ethical behavior are not even slightly related. Expect these statements to piss off the theists, and this is where you must mention that what you said is verifiable and that the theist's statement is prejudicial against 25 million people. This is the opportunity to open their eyes to the fact that just because we're different from them doesn't make us immoral.

Myth 3: "Atheists believe in evolution, but that doesn't answer as many questions as creationism."

Atheism is not a scientific theory, but rather, a lack of religion. We do believe in science, and that all questions will eventually be answered through science if they are not answered today. It's gone well so far, with science giving us theories regarding evolution, geological movement, and the Big Bang, all supported by evidence, but not necessarily endorsed by all atheists.

Creationism does not give all the answers, either. Furthermore, it goes so far as to choose which questions to answer, and discourages the asking of the rest. Believers are loath to discuss where god came from, or what he was doing before the creation. They refuse to give good answers for the many biblical inconsistencies or for the terrible injustices in the world, because they know that no such answers exist. They merely answer with "there are things which we mere humans cannot fully understand" or "the lord works in mysterious ways." In the end, religion doesn't answer as many questions as it raises.

Myth 4: "Atheists cannot know there is no god, since you cannot prove he doesn't exist."

Again, this is a two-sided coin, but theists are loath to admit the other side. Atheists don't need to prove the non-existence of god, any more we need to prove the nonexistence of Zeus or Jupiter. Can theists prove god over any alternatives? Of course not. Nobody can prove god exists yet they will stand on their heads saying they're sure. Well, if they can be sure despite evidence to the contrary, we can be sure in light of evidence in support of atheism.

Myth 5: "Atheists seek to remove religion from society, and to force all people to be atheists."

Absolutely wrong. We seek only freedom for people to make their choice on their own, free of intervention from the government or public school system. We seek the freedom to not support religion through taxes, forced participation or special privileges of any kind.

That being said, your thoughts are your rights, and none of our business. Wear your jewelry, celebrate your holidays, and pray in your house, church or in public if you like. Just don't force your religion on other people. That's what we're all about.

This is in direct contrast to many of the world's religions, including Christianity, which include worldwide expansion as one of their central objectives. Isn't it amazing that they falsely accuse us of doing what they do openly--only with atheism it's evil?

To try to force atheism would be hypocritical, since we would be placing pressure from the state on people to believe a certain way. But let me give a good analogy to our objectives and at the same time answer this charge with the example of the money we use every day.

"In god We Trust," is the government actively promoting religion.

"In god We Do Not Trust," would be the government promoting atheism.

We advocate the complete omission of the statement, thereby rendering the money neutral.

We feel the same way about the rest of the government. It should be the "Switzerland of the religious debate,"—i.e., neutral—while at the same time being the protectorate of the individual.

Myth 6: "Atheists are so closed-minded, they can't see that miracles happen every day!"

Some people look for miracles where none exist (they never do). Allow me to put things in perspective: Someone's cancer going into remission is no miracle, but we can talk when disease suddenly disappears from the face of the

earth overnight without help from medical science. Food getting through to a hungry village: human perseverance. Starvation vanishing from earth without a reason overnight: Miracle. One more time: A child is born: science; the spontaneous end of birth defects - Miracle. Got it?

Note: only good things are miracles, so volcanoes, tornadoes, and hurricanes don't count.

Myth 7: "Atheists are pushing a negative sentiment, and have a dreary life."

Wrong. We are "pushing" a very positive statement: that living without dependence on a false deity is easy, fulfilling, and positive. We strive to be a positive influence in the world, and think each person can—and must—find their own meaning of life. We are thinkers, philosophers, and we thrive on discussion and diversity. We are proud, happy, and most of all, free. Compare that to original sin and hell.

Myth 8: " If atheists are right, then religious people are wasting their time, but at least they're happy. If religious people are right, then atheists are going to hell. Atheists should become religious just to be safe."

I like getting this question. I sense another list coming:

1) Drug addicts go through life happy, so would theists suggest we all use drugs? We would be happy, and not hurting anybody, so where's the harm?

The harm is the same for believers. They go through life happy, but it's a false, wasteful happiness. Atheists get happiness from family, contribution to society, charity and truth.

2) Religious people should not be lumped into one category for this question. Remember, religions are also biased against each other (Jews vs. Catholics vs. Protestants, etc), so no matter what religion the theist follows, he or she thinks the others are going to hell (or other

punishment), just like atheists. Ask them which religion has the worst punishment, and whether they would convert to that religion, just in case they are right. When they tell you how absurd that question is, remind them that they asked it first.

3) To convert and practice a specific religion just to ingratiate yourself with god and avoid going to hell is pure, self-serving greed, which is one of the seven deadly sins. Therefore, by theists' own thinking, if they are right and I do convert, I'd go to hell anyway, along with everyone else in the flock whose actions are motivated by greed.

Myth 9: "There are no such things as atheists," a.k.a. "There are no atheists in foxholes."

This is more fantasy from the believers, that there could never exist a single human whose reason and logical abilities surpass the pressure from society to believe in a deity. This is especially true in a situation of imminent death, where theists believe all atheists would drop to our knees and beg god for forgiveness.

Wouldn't it be nice if we could somehow be sure that those who currently disagree with us would come around in the end and know we were right? Just like most other parts of religion, this is blatant fantasy.

There are 25 million atheists in the country, more than Jews and Blacks combined. Many atheists became atheists not because they were born into it (like most theists), but because we contemplated god in its many forms and decided it just doesn't make an ounce of sense. We are simply too logical to believe god is anything more than fantasy.

As far as foxholes go, when I face death, as we all do sooner or later, I will use the last few remaining seconds of my life to remember my favorite moments, and evaluate my contribution to my family and society. I would definitely not waste precious time praying to a deity "just in case I'm wrong." I'm not.

Myth 10: "This country was founded by Christians, on Christian values, and should therefore be a Christian country."

True, some of the founding fathers were Christian, but some were Deists (generally believed in god), and some were outright atheists. But a more important point needs to be made: the founding fathers went out of their way to specify that church and state be separate. They believed that their religion was just that: theirs and theirs alone.

They also remembered that they were their trying to be free of the state church of England, and recognized from their first-hand experience that true religious freedom can only come when belief is left to the individual. It is this ideal, among others, for which our forefathers fought and died.

Individual religious choice—including the right not to practice any religion—is still under assault in this country. Those who would prefer to make the choice for you have labeled us criminal, evil ne'er-do-wells and launched a massive campaign to keep freethinkers subdued. They have been successful to some extent, because atheism is fragmented and closeted. They continue to be successful, but we can reverse the trend. Atheists must make themselves known. If you are reading this, and you are a closet atheist, you owe it to your country, your fellow atheists and yourself to let people know how you feel. Start by coming to our conventions and meeting other people like yourself. You'll be amazed at how good it feels to speak, listen and party with people who openly agree with you. Bring a friend.

 An Atheist Farewell to Bob Curci
 By Jane Everhart

On that beautiful day in mid-June, Ken Bronstein and I found Bob Curci in his house, wrapped in a blanket on a sofa chair in his stripped-down living room, where some well-meaning people had apparently tried to make it easier for him to convalesce at home.

Ken had phoned Bob that afternoon, asking if we could visit to continue our taped interviews of

Bob's courageous fight against cancer. But Bob sounded urgent and despairing on the phone. Please come, he said. He didn't know if he could conduct an interview, but come anyway.

Bob had recently decided to discontinue the radiation and chemotherapy that had done nothing to arrest the cancer that was invading his brain. He had evidently given up the hope he'd had just four months before when Ken had accompanied him to his first chemo treatment.

When we got to the two-story house in the Bronx where Bob had lived all his life, we discovered that he had dismissed his male attendant and shooed out the neighborhood cronies who, according to Bob, weren't listening to him when he said he felt confined in the house. It was hard for Bob to communicate his wishes because the cancer was affecting some cognitive parts of his brain. The cronies were shouting at him and issuing orders about what he should or shouldn't do. They meant well, but they weren't taking into consideration that Bob was intelligent and he just couldn't easily communicate his fears and concerns to them.

Alone in the house

Ken and I listened patiently to Bob and we soon realized that though he had dismissed the attendant, he didn't want to stay in the house alone. He was afraid that the neighborhood cronies were going to lock him in the house (and they were—so he wouldn't wander outside unclothed. They apparently didn't know what else to do). They didn't understand that Bob feared, for one thing, that if they locked him in, he couldn't get out if there was a fire—a legitimate worry.

I touched Bob's foot and found, even through the blanket, that he was burning up with fever. (Why hadn't the attendant discovered that?) It was obvious to us that Bob needed to be someplace where he would get the medical help he needed and feel secure and comfortable.

I gently broached the idea of a hospice to Bob; there was one not far away, The Calvary. Yes, Bob said, but it was hard to get into. Calvary,

which is on the cutting edge not only of cancer treatment but also in dealing with the final days, has the reputation of being the best cancer hospice in the Metropolitan area.

Ken called 911 for an ambulance and we got Bob into the Albert Einstein Emergency room. From there, it would be easier to transfer Bob into Calvary without going through a long application process and being put on a waiting list. I accompanied Bob in the ambulance to the Emergency Room at his request. Ken followed us in his car and once Emergency Room personnel stabilized Bob, Ken and I went to Calvary to speak to the Director of the hospice.

No religious symbolism

Ken explained to the Director of Calvary that Bob was adamant that there be no religious symbolism in or around his bed. The Director assured us that despite the institution’s name, it took in patients from all religious and nonreligious viewpoints, from Jewish to Muslim to nonbelievers. I was especially impressed by Calvary’s commitment to non-abandonment of the patient. Even if the patient ran out of money (as for instance, if, with the expert care at Calvary, the patient is there for a year or more),

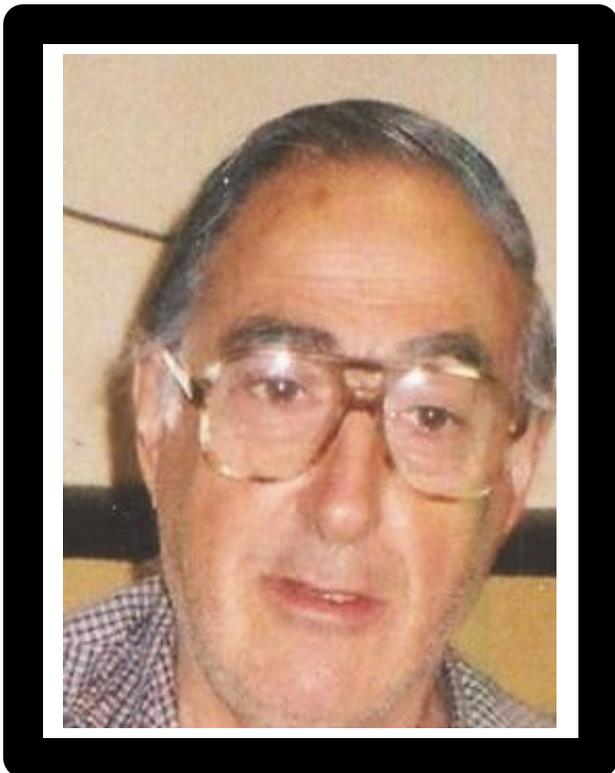
they do not discharge the patient for lack of funds. (I suspect that the money for this comes from the Hospice’s benefactors.) It was, we felt, the “Harvard” of hospices and we were glad that we were able to get Bob into Calvary. But in the end, we had to recognize that this is a cancer hospice. People go there to die. I’m glad they can die with dignity; I’m glad that on the last mile of their journey, they can feel protected, and that their wishes will be respected.

Bob died at Calvary on June 27, surrounded by people who made the last leg of his journey serene.

We’re richer for having known Bob. I will never forget Bob saying to me, “I’m not afraid of dying.” Brave, because life is so ephemeral, so temporary. It pains me to realize that we barely learn to live before it is gone. I want to say to all my friends before it is too late: Love, give, hold one another, be kind, understand, forgive. Tomorrow we will all be a handful of dust.

This I know, Bob left us peacefully. He knew he was going to die and it was OK. We can learn from that.

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Bob Curci (1939– 2006)



Lyle Stuart (1922 -2006)