

# New York City Atheists Inc.

SEPTEMBER 2006

Serving the Tri-State area • An affiliate of American Atheists & Center For Atheism

Vol. III Issue No. 9

WEB: NYC-ATHEISTS.ORG

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

212-330-6794

## ATHEISM IS A CONCLUSION NOT A BELIEF

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.

### 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 ( <a href="#">NEW LOCATION</a> )
Sept.	21*	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Sept.	28**	Thursday	6:30 P.M.	NYCA Monthly Meeting
Sept.	28*	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Sept.	29****	Friday	6:00 P.M.	NYCA Annual Harbor Cruise

### OCTOBER

Oct.	5*	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Oct.	8**	Sunday	12:00 P.M.	NYCA Brunch, Library, Book Club
Oct.	12*	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Oct.	17***	Tuesday	7:00 P.M.	NYCA Meet-Up ( <a href="#">NEW LOCATION</a> )
Oct.	19*	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Oct.	29**	Sunday	12:00 P.M.	NYCA Monthly Meeting
Oct.	26*	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Oct.	31*****	Tuesday	6:00 P.M.	Halloween Day Parade

\* 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. (39<sup>th</sup>) – Cost: Free – (Cash Bar / Drinks)

\*\*\*\* Contact K. Bronstein: [NYCATHEISTS@AOL.COM](mailto:NYCATHEISTS@AOL.COM) / 212-535-7425 FOR DETAILS

\*\*\*\*\* Details: TBA

[JOIN](#)  
[NEW YORK CITY ATHEISTS](#)  
[SEE PAGE 8](#)



**KEN BRONSTEIN**

**PRESIDENT'S SERMON**  
**HOPE DOES NOT MAKE IT HAPPEN – YOU DO...**

Page 2 of 2

NYC Atheists has been a non-profit (501C) educational association for only two and a half years. Starting with twenty-five dues-paying members, we have increased our membership into the hundreds and have become a vibrant community for atheists, agnostics and free thinkers.

To this end, we hold scientific meetings, discussions, panels and seminars. We have meet-ups, tours, and produce stage plays. (We've produced two Off-Broadway musicals about Darwin in our mere 3 years of existence.) Our outreach and educational activities include weekly street tabling, two Cable TV shows per week, a monthly newsletter. We conduct an annual essay-writing contest for New York's high school and college students. We picket, we march and we look out for our elderly. We've been written about by the *New York Times* (twice) and *Time-Out* magazine. Less obviously, we work behind the scenes and have been successful in negotiating with the City of New York to stop prayer meetings of city employees at work, remove religious symbols and displays on public property and curb public announcement speeches of government employees that praise god.

To continue and expand our efforts is expensive. Costs are rising.

The NYC Atheists Board of Directors has initiated a fund-raising target of \$10,000. As an incentive, NYCA board members have pledged \$5000 (they will match dollar for dollar up to \$5000) as a challenge.

Donations can be timed: one-time donation, weekly, monthly or annually, and can be designated for a specific activity:

- Monthly newsletter (printing and mailing) : \$400 / month = \$4,800 / year
- Facility rental: \$250 / month = \$3000 /year
- Website: \$50 / month = \$600 / year
- Answering service = \$50 / year
- Promotional materials: \$800 - \$1000 / year

Also, consider remembering NYC Atheists in your will so that your work will go on even if you don't.

NYC Atheists must become financially solvent. Without your support:

- We will be forced to cut down our current activities
- We will be unable to expand our activities and grow.

The average Christian Fundamentalist donates about \$4000 each year to his or her church. They are winning at present because of their personal and financial dedication.

We cannot allow them victory, we must turn the tide and move our country from fundamentalism to a secular nation. I am confident we can do it.

**HOPE DOES NOT MAKE IT HAPPEN**  
**WE CAN ONLY DO IT WITH YOUR PERSONAL AND FINANCIAL INVOLVMENT**

I would appreciate your comments. Ken Bronstein at [NYCATHEISTS@AOL.COM](mailto:NYCATHEISTS@AOL.COM) or 212-535-7425.

Sept. 6, 13, 20, 27 - Wednesday 6:30 P.M.  
 CENTER FOR ATHEISM Cable Show  
 Channel 57 (Manhattan Cable)  
 Live Streaming: [www.mnn.org](http://www.mnn.org)

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Sept. 7, 14, 21, 28 -Thursday 8:00 P.M.  
 NYCA Cable Show  
 Channel 67 (Manhattan Cable)  
 Live Streaming: [www.mnn.org](http://www.mnn.org)

Sept. 28  
 NYCA Monthly Meeting  
 Location: Garden Restaurant  
 145 East 60th St (Between Lexington and Third)  
 Reservations: Not required  
 Cost: Individual checks plus \$5 donation  
 Speaker: Bethany Moore - Project Manager  
 Americans United for Separation of Church and State.  
 Subject: The new First Freedom First campaign of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, a joint project of Americans United and The Interfaith Alliance Foundation. Ms. Moore has previously worked as a project coordinator at the National Foreign Language Center at the University of Maryland, as well as at Radio Free Asia. She leads an open-mike poetry community based in Washington, D.C., and is strongly focused on Pagan activism and interfaith awareness.

Sept. 10 Sunday 12:00 P.M.  
 NYCA Brunch, Library, Book Club  
 Location: Garden Restaurant @ 145 East 60<sup>th</sup> 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.

September Book Club Readings  
 Our NYCA Librarian, Pat Berger will distribute the reading at the Sunday brunch.  
 The NYCA library includes approximately 500 books as well as numerous CDs, DVDs, cassettes, videotapes, newsletters, newspapers and magazines.

Sept. 19 Tuesday 7:00 P.M.  
 NYCA Meet-Up  
 Location: Chill Lounge  
 329 Lexington Ave. (39th)

Casual conversation and drinks with your fellow freethinkers.  
 Cost: FREE (cash food and bar)  
 Register at <http://atheists.meetup.com>

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

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**THE BIBLE:  
 BRONZE AGE MYTHS**

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 Sept. 29 Friday 6:00 PM  
 NYCA HARBOR CRUISE  
 Contact: Ken Bronstein – 212-535-7425  
 FOR DETAILS

**Common Misconceptions  
 About Atheists and Atheism**



By David Gleeson  
*American Chronicle* – August 10, 2006

After watching Morgan Spurlock's "30 Days" episode on FX last night, about an atheist mother who agrees to live with a wealthy Christian family for a month, it became painfully obvious to me that most people have glaring misconceptions about what it means to be an atheist, and about atheism in general. In this article, I'd like to highlight some of the most common errors and offer a levelheaded response to these misunderstandings.

**1. Atheism is the belief that no gods exist.**

This statement's ubiquity is exceeded only by its utter falseness; not only is it misleading, but it is the complete opposite of the truth.

The word 'atheism' comes from the Greek prefix 'a,' meaning without, and 'theist,' meaning having a belief in a supernatural deity. Atheism, therefore, literally means "without theistic belief." Atheism does not positively assert anything; rather, it is a statement of withheld belief.

Atheists, therefore, do not positively assert that gods do not exist. Atheists simply withhold belief in said gods because the evidence is not sufficient to warrant the belief.

**2. Atheism requires just as much faith as theism.**

This misconception arises because of the misunderstanding of the term 'atheism', as described above.

If atheism were indeed a positive assertion that no gods exist, then this criticism would be valid. After all, it would take just as much faith to claim that no gods exist as it would to claim that one god or many gods exist. But atheism makes no such claim.

Atheism, as noted above, is nothing but withheld belief. It does not take faith to have a non-belief. If I don't believe that Elvis is still alive, I am not practicing an anti-Elvis faith. If I withhold belief in Santa Claus, I am not a member of a Santa-less church. When an atheist says, "I don't believe in the Christian god," she is merely saying that the evidence for belief is insufficient. It is the same type of withheld belief that a Christian practices with regard to the beliefs of Muslims, Jews and other non-Christians.

**3. Atheists' lives are meaningless and devoid of hope and purpose.**

This is nothing but the believer projecting his own feelings onto the atheist about how his life might be different in the absence of god. It says nothing about the true feelings of atheists.

Atheists' lives are not tied up in the remote possibility of an afterlife. My life is meaningful, simply because it is meaningful to me and to those who love me. My life has purpose every time I strive toward a worthy goal. I do not need the promise of an afterlife to find meaning and purpose in this life.

Indeed, my life is more precious and more meaningful simply because I know it is short and fleeting. Because I expect no eternal reward or damnation after death, I treat each day as a gift. Compare this to the thought processes of an Islamic fundamentalist, who is willing to give up his earthly life for the promise of eternal bliss in the arms of 72 sex-starved virgins. Whose life has more hope and meaning and purpose, I wonder?

**4. Atheists have no morals because they reject belief in an eternal moral-giver (i.e. god).**

When you think about it, this is a preposterous statement. Ethics and morals, after all, preceded Jesus by thousands of years. Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, while inspiring, was basically just a rehash of the same Golden Rule that had been around for three millennia. But let's look at the issue a little more critically.

If god is the source of all morals, then god, presumably, could change the rules at any time. Since no one is writing new Bibles or talking to god behind burning bushes, how are we to know what's right now, today? What's to stop god from deciding that moral behavior now includes the option of intentionally starving millions of innocent children, and then demonstrating this new morality by inflicting famine on the world's poorest nations? How would we ever know right from wrong under such circumstances? Doesn't this lead to the same sort of moral relativism that theists accuse atheists of practicing?

If, on the other hand, moral laws are independent of god, then humans are free to

**\$\$\$ NYCA INVESTMENT CLUB \$\$\$**

**INTERESTED?**

**CONTACT KEN BRONSTEIN  
212-535-7425**

discover those laws on their own. Either way, it seems god is unnecessary with regard to moral behavior. Atheists simply follow the moral agenda that has been refined by the evolution of advanced civilizations over the past few centuries. We've learned how to be nice to each other. It's not that hard, really.

### 5. Atheists must have had a bad childhood experience to cause them to give up on religion and hate god.

Some atheists may have had such experiences, but I can assure you this is not the case in most situations. For me and for most atheists, the journey from belief to non-belief is simply a gradual process of discovery that eventually leads to god/gods becoming unnecessary.

I don't need god to explain the origin or evolution of life on Earth; evolution provides a naturalistic and awe-inspiring explanation that's backed by mountains of evidence. I don't need god to comfort me against the fear of death and the unknown; I do not fear death. I don't need god to account for human selfishness or altruism; my understanding of human nature accomplishes that.

In short, as my knowledge has increased, the gaps that god may have filled have become progressively smaller, to the point that god is no longer necessary. I am no angrier with "god" than Christians are angry with the gods of Mount Olympus. Christians simply have no investment in the belief in said gods; they lose nothing by rejecting them. The same is true for "god" and me.

In summary, then, an atheist rejects belief in god or gods because the evidence does not compel such belief. This does not lead to a lonely and terrifying universe; in fact, it gives life more meaning and more purpose. Atheists aren't angry and resentful; they are thoughtful and caring and respectful of the inherent dignity in all of us. They deserve none of the vitriol that is constantly leveled at them.

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**THE PERSON OF FAITH  
IS  
REALITY CHALLENGED**

## Charles Darwin House

### Ken Bronstein's Visit June 22, 2006



On June 22, I took a twenty-five minute train ride from London's Victoria train station and then a twenty-minute bus ride to arrive at the Charles Darwin Home (Down House) in Downe, Kent.

The Down House was originally built as a farmhouse around 1650, and was expanded in 1778. Darwin moved from London to the suburbs in the midst of labor riots, moving in on the 14th September, 1842.

The Down House was the family home of Charles Darwin for forty years until his death in 1882. A girls' boarding school was established at the house in 1907 by a Miss Olive Willis (1877-1953), but moved away in 1922.

The house was bought in 1927 by the surgeon Sir George Buckston Browne (1850-1945), who presented it to the *British Association for the Advancement of Science* together with an endowment to ensure its preservation in perpetuity as a memorial to Darwin. Down House was formally opened as a museum on the 7th June, 1929. Buckston Browne's endowment proved insufficient and the expense of maintenance led to the British Association in turn donating the house to the Royal College of Surgeons of England in October 1953, which administered the adjacent Surgical Research Station. In 1962 Sir Hedley Atkins (1905-1983), later president of the Royal College of Surgeons, moved into the house together with his wife and assumed the role of honorary curator.

Down House was acquired in 1996 by English Heritage, with a grant from the Wellcome Trust. It was restored with funds raised by the Natural History Museum from many trusts, and from a

grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, and reopened to the public in April 1998.

The property has been restored to how it looked in circa 1880. The first floor reflects how the Darwin family lived, the second floor consists of display rooms describing Darwin's work, and the outside grounds (garden, meadow, woods and green house), where Darwin did much of his experiments, are as they were in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.



The highlight of my visit was being in the same room (his first floor study) where Darwin wrote "*On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection.*"  
— Kenneth Bronstein

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#### One Atheist's Answer to an Important Question



**EDWIN KAGAN**  
American Atheists Legal Director

- Q. Some of my friends and I have wondered: When you go to a public event--dinner, wedding reception, retirement party, award ceremony-- or you go to a private house--dinner, lunch, baby shower, etc-- and someone wants to lead the group in prayer, do you:
- A. Go along with it and not make a scene
  - B. Quietly leave the room
  - C. Sit there but don't close your eyes or fold your hands
  - D. None of the above

Page 6 of 8 1) If you are in another person's home and they want to do a prayer, the best thing to do is to simply sit quietly. It is, after all, their home. Do not close eyes, fold hands, or say anything. Just be quiet. Once I happened to be in church with three of my children. During the prayer, we all quietly looked around and found we were the only ones who did not have closed eyes. It occurred to me, how could the believers possibly know if you don't have your eyes shut? Aren't they sitting there with their eyes closed? I have also discovered that this is a good way to meet fellow travelers. You quietly meet each others' eyes, look around, smile, and meet each other in person at the break. A more complex situation arises in my relatives' homes where the custom is to hold hands around the table while saying the prayer before the meal. I hold hands, but nothing else. I have no serious objections to holding hands with my relatives, and they do not insist that I participate otherwise. I do not close my eyes or say "Amen" or anything. Decent, civilized, and, if you will, moral, people will honor your wishes in this matter. If they do not, it might be a good time to discuss the "Golden Rule."

2) If you are at another person's home and they ask you to lead a prayer, you may politely but firmly refuse to do so. If they insist, this is rude behavior on their part, and you would be justified in leaving. While they may have the right to have the prayer in their own home, they do not have the right to make a guest participate. You aren't being rude by refusing to permit them to make you do something it is important to you not to do. They are attempting to manipulate you and to gain power over you. Under no circumstances can they make you do it if you don't want to do so. I have actually had this baiting scenario come up at meetings of Bar Associations full of lawyers, where some wit, knowing full well my views, says something like "Perhaps Mr. Kagan would like to lead us in prayer." Depending on the circumstances, and the intensity of the hostility, I politely shake my head "No," or say something like "No thank you," or, in extreme cases, something like "Mr. Kagan does not attempt to obtain solutions to real problems in the real world by superstitious appeals to imaginary friends in imaginary places."

3) If the event is at your home and someone asks if they can say a prayer, I think you have every right to refuse this request. It is manipulative and an attempt to control you, especially if they know your views. Everyone has the absolute right to pray silently at any time they want, in school or elsewhere. No power can stop them from doing so. But they do not have the right to impose this need on your time and on you or other guests. To do so would be a violation of generally accepted rules of etiquette. If they were at table in a Muslim home, would they insist that everyone stop what they are doing and let them say a Christian prayer, no matter how offensive this might be to their hosts? If they were in an Orthodox Jewish home, would they ask their hosts for a ham and cheese sandwich? If they persist and start praying in your home anyway, after you have denied them permission to do so, this might be a good time to play that new Heavy Metal CD you had wanted to share with them.

4) If it is a public meeting conducted by the state (meaning some subdivision of National or State government), you can either do as in # 1 above and sit with eyes open, or this might be a good time, if you are with others, to practice reciting the First Amendment, "Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of a religion..." If you do this, you must accept the possibility of being kicked out of the meeting, of being arrested, or both. Some things are worth getting arrested for. Some hills are not worth dying on. If the event is put on by private parties, I think they have the right to have a prayer, and a protest is not in order, so you should proceed as in #1 above. They do not, of course, as in #2, have the right to make you play in their sandbox.



Samuel Clemens "Mark Twain"

"It ain't the parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand."



Bill Gates

"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."

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**NATURAL SELECTION  
 IS REQUIRED  
 BECAUSE OF THE LACK OF A DESIGNER**  
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**MORALITY / ETHICS  
 RESULT FROM THE  
 EVOLUTION OF COOPERATION**  
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**A SOCIETY  
 THAT TEACHES CREATIONISM  
 IS A  
 CIVILIZATION OF IGNORANCE**  
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**QUESTION FAITH  
 NO MORE FREE PASS  
 MAKE  
 THEM  
 PROVE  
 IT**

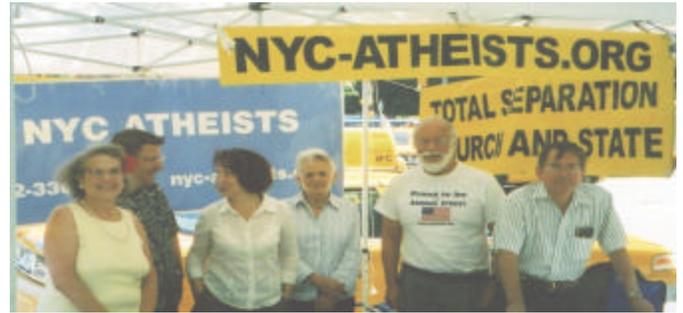
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**A PERSON OF FAITH  
 IS  
 THOUGHTLESS**  
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**FASCIST FUNDAMENTALISTS**  
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**FAITH HAS MISSING LINKS**  
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**FAITH  
 IS A  
 FALSE POSITIVE**  
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**THE BIBLE:  
 WRITTEN BY GHOST WRITERS**



**AUGUST 15, 2006  
RICH SANDER  
MEETUP MEETING COORDINATOR**

**AUGUST 19, 2006  
TABLING CREW: L-R: AMSTER, CHARCOFSKY,  
KASHIS, BERGER, KRAMER, GUMBINER.**



**JUNE 29, 2006  
NYCA MONTHLY MEETING  
SPEAKER: JOHN K. CHAPIN, PHD.**

**JUNE 29, 2006  
NYCA MONTHLY MEETING**



**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, educational association with these 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 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**

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**