

New York City Atheists Inc.

OCTOBER 2006

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

Vol. III Issue No. 10

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.

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
Oct.	19*	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Oct.	26*	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Oct.	26*****	Thursday	6:30 P.M.	NYCA Monthly Meeting (NEW LOCATION)
Oct.	31****	Tuesday	6:00 P.M.	Halloween Day Parade

NOVEMBER

Nov.	2*	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Nov.	7****	Tuesday	5:00 – 6:30 P.M.	NYCA Election - Blood Donation Day
Nov.	9*	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Nov.	12**	Sunday	12:00 P.M.	NYCA Brunch, Library, Book Club
Nov.	15***	Tuesday	7:00 P.M.	NYCA Meet-Up
Nov.	16*	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Nov.	23*	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show
Nov.	30**	Thursday	6:30 P.M.	NYCA Monthly Meeting
Nov.	30*	Thursday	8:00 P.M.	NYCA Cable Show

* 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

***** Editorial Freelancers Association – Room 1910 - 71 West 23rd Street - (6th Ave.)

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



KEN BRONSTEIN

PRESIDENT'S SERMON
WHY I AM PROUD TO BE AN ATHEIST

Page 2 of 8

On my thirteenth birthday, I made the decision not to become a Rabbi and became an Atheist instead. My decision was the result of my Hebrew School education and the preparation for my Bar Mitzvah, the day a Jewish boy becomes an adult. I am proud that I had the courage to become an Atheist at this young age. (Surprise, Max and Ethel Bronstein).

As an Atheist, I am proud that I do not have the gullible gene. My intellectual curiosity questioned the Old Testament. No one was able (not parents, relatives or teachers) to defend biblical myths with scientific or historical evidence. My skepticism also resulted in the conclusion that a deity did not exist. During my subsequent years, my Atheism has been reinforced by further study and important scientific evidence in the evolution and the cosmic models.

As an Atheist, I am proud that as an officer in the U.S. Army I was an Atheist in a foxhole. I knew that the survival of my troops primarily dependent upon my leadership and skills. I informed them that keeping their heads down will save you, not prayer.

As an Atheist, I am proud that my ethical and moral behavior and standards are based upon contemporary universal rights and not upon bronze-age mythology and fear.

As an Atheist, I am proud that I do not oppose scientific and medical advancement based upon unsubstantiated faith-based claims.

As an Atheist, I am proud that I lead a truth/common sense-based life, not a faith/spiritual-based life. By concluding that my destiny is not pre-determined or controlled by the supernatural, I had to develop my own self assurance and confidence. This allows me to experience, enjoy and control my life as a rational being and not as one who is restricted by superstition and dogma.

As an Atheist, I am proud that I am a realist and do not delude myself with faith, religion or prayer but use rational and scientific analysis for real problem resolution.

As an Atheist, I am proud that I belong to a community of individuals who are lifelong freethinkers and skeptics. Whereas faith-based individuals are rigid, Atheists continually adjust and change their conclusions upon rational analysis and scientific evidence.

As an Atheist, I am proud to publicly express my Atheism. It is time for us Atheists everywhere to reclaim the word atheism and use it with pride!

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

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

Oct. , 4, 11, 18, 25 - Wednesday 6:30 P.M.
 CENTER FOR ATHEISM Cable Show
 Channel 57 (Manhattan Cable)
 Live Streaming: www.mnn.org

Oct. 5, 12, 19, 26 - Thursday 8:00 P.M.
 NYCA Cable Show
 Channel 67 (Manhattan Cable)
 Live Streaming: www.mnn.org

Oct. 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 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.

October 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 and magazines.

Oct. 17 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>

Oct. 26 Thursday 6:30 P.M.
 NYCA Monthly Meeting
 Location: [Editorial Freelancers Association](#)
 71 West 23rd St. (6th Ave) – Room 1910
 Reservations: Not required

Speaker: Kenneth Bronstein, NYCA President
 Subject: Why I Am Proud To Be an Atheist
 See: President's Sermon - October newsletter.
 Group discussion: Why I am proud to be an Atheist.

**An Atheist Antidote
 to Religious Fanaticism**

**Interview of NYC Atheists Member
 Pat Berger by National Public Radio
 September 10, 2006**



Pat Berger in her Hell's Kitchen apartment. Behind her is a small library of atheist literature she is slowly assembling.

Listen:
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5744876>

Weekend Edition Sunday: September 10, 2006:
 Brought up as a Methodist, Pat Berger, 78, had never been particularly religious. But, for the resident of Manhattan's Hell's kitchen, the attacks of Sept. 11 served as a wake-up call about the dangers of violence in the name of god.

"I realized that it is all chance, and it is all random," she says. She remembers learning that a woman in her son's apartment building died in the Twin Towers because she happened to walk into a meeting at the wrong time. "There is no one watching out for anybody," Berger says. Berger says she'd had a passing knowledge of the history of wars and violence engendered by religious differences: the Crusades, the Protestant Reformation, the Spanish Inquisition. But the terrorist attacks brought that history into focus.

"And I thought, all of this for some -- you know, the imaginary Harvey, the imaginary rabbit," Berger says. "That is how I started to think of this supposed person who held our fate in his hands. Well, I didn't buy it."

On most Saturdays, Berger can be found with other members of the New York City Atheists at a stand in Columbus Circle, in front of the Time-Warner building.

She engages passers-by, hoping to interest them in the group's literature promoting atheist thought. Many seem receptive to Berger's message, though she occasionally gets hassled or lectured.

She says the hardest conversation about atheism she's ever had was with a dear, dying friend, who begged her to believe so they could be together in heaven.

All she could say, Berger says, was, "Roseanne, I love you."



Berger talks to a passerby who stopped by the New York City Atheists' tent in Columbus Circle in Manhattan. She spends most Saturday afternoons at the table and tent set up by the group.

NATURAL SELECTION

IS REQUIRED

BECAUSE OF THE LACK OF

A DESIGNER



Ashley Montague [Israel Ehrenberg] (1905-1999)
English anthropologist

"Science has proof without any certainty.
Creationists have certainty without any proof."



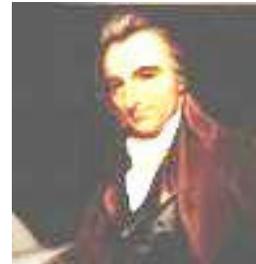
**See the Secular Coalition For America
U.S. Congressional Scorecards for the 109th
Congress.**

How did your legislators rate?

<http://secular.org/scorecard/2006/>

The success of our system of government depends on an educated citizenry. The roll call votes used by the Secular Coalition for America in these scorecards are designed to illustrate the commitment of our elected officials to the secular character of our government and the protection of freedom for all Americans.

The House and Senate Scorecards of the 109th Congress cover votes taken from January 2005 until August 2006. The SCA used ten key votes in both the House and Senate to make the scorecards. Votes include: Allowing organizations to discriminate based on religion while using federal funds for secular programs; promoting narrow religious beliefs over secular needs in science, marriage contracts and the military; the confirmation of judicial appointees who seek to weaken the protections provided by the Establishment Clause; and stripping Federal Courts of their ability to decide constitutional issues.



Thomas Paine (1737-1809)
US Founding father, pamphleteer, author

"All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian, or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions set up to terrify and enslave mankind and monopolize power and profit."

Our other account comes from those who attended Paine. Dying in ulcerated agony, he was imposed upon by two Presbyterian ministers who pushed past his housekeeper and urged him to avoid damnation by accepting Jesus Christ. "Let me have none of your Popish stuff," Paine responded. "Get away with you, good morning, good morning." The same demand was made of him as his eyes were closing: "Do you wish to believe that Jesus Christ is the son of god?" He answered quite distinctly: "I have no wish to believe on that subject." Thus he expired with his reason, and his rights, both still staunchly defended until the very last.

Pascal's Wager:

A Faith-Based Sucker's Bet

David Gleeson - American Chronicle

August 23, 2006 - If you are skeptical of the supernatural, as I am, you will sooner or later be confronted with an "argument" sometimes referred to as Pascal's Wager. Blaise Pascal was a 17th century French mathematician who formulated this rationale for taking belief in god seriously:

"If atheism is right, we [Biblical literalists] have nothing to lose by believing. But if we're right, you [the atheist/agnostic/skeptic/heathen] have everything to lose." (Nudge, nudge, wink, wink.)

This rationale is a favorite among present-day Christian fundamentalists, although, as with most Christian apologetics, it is difficult to understand why. I'll briefly document four reasons why I think this is such a poor argument.

Spiritual Laziness

Pascal's Wager, taken literally, paints the religious in an extremely unflattering light. It reduces faith to nothing more than an insurance policy, a cosmic hedging of the bets. It is spiritual laziness taken to the nth degree. "I believe in [insert your god here] because I'm taking no chances." If the religious community is populated mainly by believers of this caliber, then theism is definitely on the road to oblivion.

This is a common logical fallacy. President Bush commits it twice weekly, at least. "Either it's moral to take a human life or it isn't." Or, "You're either with me or against me." Such black-and-white arguments fail to take into account the middle ground, a middle ground that often dwarfs the extremes. Pascal's Wager assumes either atheism is the truth or Fire-and-Brimstone-Christianity is the truth. But there are other possibilities.

Consider this perfectly valid alternative: god exists, but it is a god that rewards persons of intellectual fortitude, people who desire knowledge over dogma and reason over blind faith. Those who spend their lives wrapped in a cocoon of fear, who never bother or are too stubborn to use their "god-given" intellect, are summarily punished. In this view of the world, certainly one that is as possible as the fundamentalist Christian view, Pascal's Wager is flipped on its ear. The skeptic is suddenly the one with nothing to fear.

As a matter of fact, skeptics have nothing to fear in any world view save one. Whereas Pascal's Wager paints us as reckless gamblers counting on "heads" rather than "tails," we are in reality assuming we haven't picked the one tainted grain of sand in the Sahara or the one poisonous drop of water in the Pacific. Regardless, if it turns out that the universe is governed by a deity who would eternally torture someone for an honest intellectual error, then no one is safe from this psychopath. Which leads me to ...

Malevolent Theology

I have a hard time understanding why anyone would believe in, let alone worship, a god who would damn to hell those who have the audacity to use their intellect to come to the conclusion that he doesn't exist. Is this god so petty, so jealous, so desperately in need of exaltation that rejecting him brings a sentence of eternal torture? I simply refuse to entertain the notion of such a malevolent theology, and I can't imagine why anyone else would, either.

It is far more likely, of course, that this unjust god is a human invention, one that serves a dual purpose: reassuring true believers that they will spend eternity in heaven (of course) while their

enemies (conveniently) are sent off to hell. While I find it difficult imagining a universe governed by this type of malicious deity, I have no trouble at all believing that flawed humans, driven by fear, intolerance and hate, are capable of inventing such rot.

Intellectual Bankruptcy

Or, drawing the wrong conclusion. Or, counting the hits and forgetting the misses. The statement “If atheism is true, I have nothing to lose by believing” is all those things and more. Consider: If atheism is true, there is no god, no heaven, no hell, no life before birth or after death, no soul, no spirit – no human essence at all other than the living entity contained within body and brain. Life is now, this reality, and nothing more. You’ve got 70 years plus or minus a few to enjoy it, and then it’s over for good.

Given this, what could possibly be worse than spending this precious little time wallowing in intellectual stagnation and succumbing to wishful thinking? Skeptics (and, incidentally, many mainstream theists) are freed of a ton of baggage. We enjoy life rather than obsess about death. We see the world as it truly is, not how we wish it to be. We accept rather than reject the evidence nature reveals to us, even if that evidence makes a mockery of our conceits. Our world, our universe, is boundless, alive, infinite in majesty and scope. It is a world far more spectacular and awe-inspiring than the one inhabited by the small and petty god of Pascal’s Wager.

“Faith,” says Dan Barker in *Losing Faith in Faith: From Preacher to Atheist*, is “intellectual bankruptcy.” I cannot imagine anything worse. Nothing to lose? When you’ve chosen the path of ignorance over knowledge, hatred over love, fear over tolerance, guilt and sin over joy, and blind-faith irrationality over reason, you’ve lost everything.

**QUESTION FAITH
NO MORE FREE PASS
MAKE THEM
PROVE IT**



Lucius Annaeus Seneca
Roman stoic philosopher, writer, and politician

"Religion is regarded by the common people as true, by the wise as false, and by rulers as useful."

Q & A with Sam Harris



<http://www.samharris.org>

1. In your book you seem to argue for a kind of religious intolerance. Do you mean to suggest that we need not respect a person’s religious beliefs?

Yes. Our history of religious conflict had led us to be very cautious about criticizing the religious beliefs of others. We are right to be wary of religious intolerance, but it is time we recognized that our religious identities have themselves become an increasingly potent source of human conflict. The notion that god wrote one or another book has always been a source of dangerous and unnecessary divisions in our world. Given the spread of modern weapons and other disruptive technology, these divisions are fast becoming antithetical to civilization itself. Notice that no one is ever faulted in our culture for not “respecting” another person’s beliefs about mathematics or history. When people have reasons for what they believe, we consider those reasons, and when they are good, we find ourselves believing likewise. When they have no reasons, or bad ones, we dismiss their beliefs as a symptom of ignorance, delusion, or stupidity. Except on matters of religion.

2. Yes, but isn't religion different?

Only in so far as we treat it differently. We have been lulled into ignoring just how strange and insupportable many of our religious beliefs are. How comforting would it be to hear the President of the United States assure us that almighty Zeus is on our side in our war on terrorism? The mere change of a single word in his speech—from god to Zeus—would precipitate a national emergency. If I believe that Christ was born of a virgin, resurrected bodily after death, and is now literally transformed into a wafer at the Mass, I can still function as a respected member of society. I can believe these propositions because millions of others believe them, and we have all been taught to overlook how irrational this picture of reality is. If, on the other hand, I wake up tomorrow morning believing that god is communicating with me through my hairdryer, I'll be considered a nut, even in church. The beliefs themselves are more or less on a par—in so far as they are in flagrant violation of the most basic principles of reason. The perversity of religion is that it allows sane people to believe the unbelievable en masse.

3. And what is the link, as you see it, between religion and violence?

It's quite simple and direct. And inevitable. If you truly believe that your neighbor is going to hell for his unbelief, and you believe that his ideas about the world are putting the souls of your children in peril, it is quite sensible to drive him from your community, or kill him. Religion, by promising an eternity of supernatural rewards and punishments, raises the stakes enormously. Which is worse, a child molester or a heretic? If you really believe that the heretic can endanger your child for all time, there's simply no contest.

A SOCIETY

THAT TEACHES CREATIONISM

IS A

CIVILIZATION OF IGNORANCE

Richard Dawkins Page 7 of 8 New York Academy Of Science Lecture

Date: October 18, 2006

Time: 6:00PM

Location: New York Academy of Science
7 World Trade Center (40th Floor)
250 Greenwich Street

Cost: \$20

Reservations Required: 212-838-0230

Richard Dawkins will discuss his latest book *The God Delusion* (Houghton Mifflin). *Discover* magazine recently called Richard Dawkins "Darwin's Rottweiler" for his fierce and effective defense of evolution. Now Dawkins turns his intellect on religion.

Dawkins denounces religion's faulty logic and the suffering it causes. He critiques god in all his forms, from the sex-obsessed tyrant of the Old Testament to the more benign (but still illogical) Celestial Watchmaker favored by some Enlightenment thinkers. He eviscerates the major arguments for religion and demonstrates the supreme improbability of a supreme being.

Dawkins has fashioned an impassioned, rigorous rebuttal to religion, to be embraced by anyone who sputters at the inconsistencies and cruelties that riddle the Bible, bristles at the inanity of "intelligent design," or agonizes over fundamentalism in the Middle East—or Middle America.

Richard Dawkins is an eminent evolutionary theorist and popular science writer. The *New York Times Book Review* has hailed him as a writer who "understands the issues so clearly that he forces his reader to understand them too." He was educated at Oxford University and has taught zoology at the universities of California and Oxford. He is the Charles Simonyi Professor of the Public Understanding of Science at Oxford University.

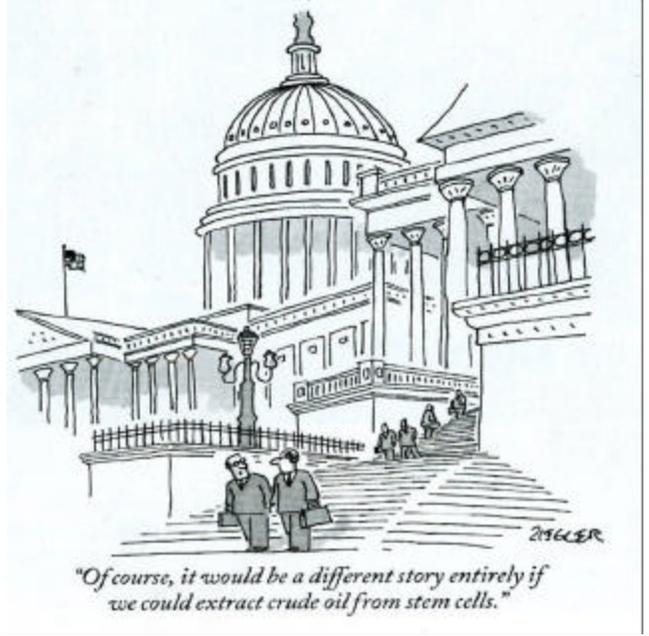
Dawkins first came to prominence with his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*, which popularized the gene-centric view of evolution. In 1982, he made a major original contribution to the science of evolution with the theory, presented in his book *The Extended Phenotype*, that

phenotypic effects are not limited to an organism's body but can stretch far into the environment, including the bodies of other organisms. His other books about evolution and science include *The Blind Watchmaker*, *Climbing Mount Improbable*, *Unweaving the Rainbow*, and *A Devil's Chaplain*.

AN EVENING WITH SALMAN RUSHDIE
Secular Values, Human Rights and Islamism

October 11, 2006, 6:30pm
 Ethical Culture Society
 2 West 64th St. (CPW)
 Cost: \$20

Rushdie will explore the reasons why westerners and secular liberals have, in many instances, failed to respond effectively to the threat to human rights posed by radical Islam. He will also discuss the roots of artistic inspiration and the responsibility of a writer who stands at the crossroads of what has been described as a "clash of civilizations." His most recent novel, *Shalimar the Clown*, delves into the roots of terrorism as it plays out in the life of a Hindu wife and a Muslim husband living at just such a crossroads. Rushdie will be introduced by Ibn Warraq, author of *Why I Am Not a Muslim*. The lecture will be followed by a question-and-answer period and book signing.



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**