

New York City Atheists Inc .

MAY 2007

Serving the Tri-State area • An affiliate of American Atheists & Center For Atheism Vol. IV Issue No. 5

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

ATHEISM IS A CONCLUSION NOT A BELIEF

UPCOMING EVENTS AND MEETINGS

MAY

May 3*	Thursday	4:00 – 6:30 P.M.	NYCA Gift of Life Day
May 13**	Sunday	12:00 P.M.	NYCA Brunch, Library, Book Club
May 15***	Tuesday	7:00 P.M.	NYCA Meet-Up
May 31****	Thursday	6:30 P.M.	NYCA Monthly Meeting (NEW LOCATION)

JUNE

June 7	Thursday	TBA	NYCA Movie Nite - First Thursday of Month
June 10**	Sunday	12:00 P.M.	NYCA Brunch, Library, Book Club
June 19***	Tuesday	7:00 P.M.	NYCA Meet-Up
June 28**	Thursday	6:30 P.M.	NYCA Monthly Meeting

* NY Blood Bank – 310 East 67th St. (2nd Ave.)

** To Be Announced

Cost: Individual checks plus \$5 suggested donation — Reservations not required

*** Village Pourhouse – 64 Third Ave. (11th St.)

**** Bamiyan Afghan Restaurant – 358 Third ave. (26th St.)

WEDNESDAYS

THIS WEEK IN ATHEISM CABLE SHOW
6:30 PM-CH 57 (MANHATTAN CABLE)
LIVE STREAMING: WWW.MNN.ORG

SEEKING CABLE SHOW GUESTS

CALL: KEN BRONSTEIN / 212-535-7425

THURSDAYS

NYC ATHEISTS CABLE SHOW
7:00 PM-CH 67 (MANHATTAN CABLE)
LIVE STREAMING: WWW.MNN.ORG

ATHEISTS BOOK CLUB CABLE SHOW
7:30 PM – CH 67 (MANHATTAN CABLE)
LIVE STREAMING: WWW.MNN.ORG

2007

NEW YORK CITY ATHEISTS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

SEE PAGE 8

NYC Atheists Inc. is a 501-C3, 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.



This is the first in a series of editorials in which I will try to describe how Atheists deal with life's problems and how it differs from the way religious people deal with these issues.

KENNETH BRONSTEIN

Proactive Instead of Prayer

My *Atheists' Way* decision-making model uses critical thinking and scientific analysis instead of prayer, superstition or dependence on the guidance of a priest, minister or other so-called "spiritual leader." For example, when faced with a health issue, I am proactive. I do not engage in prayer, which I consider just talking to oneself. I depend on science and medicine instead of pleading with some unknown spiritual entity to intervene with nature on my behalf. For more detailed examples, I describe below how two exemplary Atheists handled their serious illnesses.

Stephen Jay Gould – Paleontologist, Evolutionary Biologist

In July of 1982, Gould was diagnosed with peritoneal mesothelioma, a terminal form of cancer affecting the abdominal lining. His research and analysis uncovered the fact that mesothelioma patients had a median life span of only eight months upon diagnosis. He realized that averages are just useful abstractions and do not encompass the full range of variation. The median is the halfway point, which means that 50 percent of patients will die before eight months, but the other half will live longer, potentially much longer. He then found out where his personal characteristics place him within this range. Considering the cancer was caught early, the fact that he was young, optimistic, and had the best treatments available, Gould figured that he should be in the favorable half of the upper statistical range. After an experimental treatment of radiation, chemotherapy and surgery—without any prayer—Gould made a full recovery.

Andy Grove – Founder of Intel

When Grove was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 1995, he found himself in the position of most patients: frightened, disoriented and entirely reliant on the advice of doctors. Their advice was straightforward: Surgery was the best option, and that was pretty much all there was to it. Grove soon determined that the doctors' opinions were just that—opinions, based on little if any hard data. Data did exist. What Grove found most shocking is that no one had done the hard work of pulling it together. Plainly, Grove would have to do it himself. Grove, in effect, became his own doctor. It was a massive research undertaking. What did the data tell him? That he would be better off with an alternative procedure known as radiation seeding. That was the treatment he selected. Grove—without any prayer—made a full recovery.

Conclusion

The *Atheists Way* solution for health issues has five steps: (1) Define the problem, (2) Become an expert in the problem, (3) Define your alternatives, (4) Calculate your alternative's success probabilities, (5) Select your proactive action solution. The Atheists Way of proactivism is superior to the passive, undependable, defeatist, religious solution of prayer. □

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

UPCOMING MAY EVENTS

May 3 Thursday 4:00 – 6:30 PM
NYCA Gift of Life Day

Location: NY Blood Bank
310 East 67th St. (2nd Ave.)

Reservations: Not required

Join NYC Atheists' *Lifesaving Action, Not Passive Prayer* response to counter 'National Day of Prayer' with donations of blood.

May 13 Sunday 12:00 P.M.
NYCA Brunch, Library, Book Club

Location: To Be Announced

Reservations: Not required
Cost: Individual checks plus \$5 donation

Speaker: Henry Miller
Subject: *Clarence Darrow*



Mr. Miller is a Senior Member of Clark, Gagliardi & Miller, P.C., a law firm located in White Plains, New York.

He has written and appeared in Off-Broadway (usually way Off) productions. His latest production, *Clarence Darrow: All Too Human*, is a one-man play about Clarence Darrow. At our meeting, Mr. Miller will portray Clarence Darrow during the Scopes (monkey) Trial followed by a Q&A.

The "Scopes Trial" pitted lawyers William Jennings Bryan against Clarence Darrow (the latter representing teacher John Thomas Scopes), testing a law passed on March 13, 1925, which forbade the teaching in any state-funded educational establishment in Tennessee of "any theory that denies the story of the Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible, and to teach instead that man has descended

from a lower order of animals." This is often interpreted as meaning that the law forbade the teaching of any aspect of the theory of evolution. John Scopes, a high school teacher, was arrested for teaching evolution from a chapter in a textbook that showed ideas developed from those set out in Charles Darwin's book, *The Origin of Species*. The famous trial was made infamous by the fictionalized accounts given in the 1955 play *Inherit the Wind* and the 1960 Hollywood motion picture of the same name.

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The NYCA library includes over 600 books as well as numerous CDs, DVDs, cassettes, videotapes, newsletters and magazines. Contact: Pat Berger – NYCA Librarian PGBNYC@AOL.COM / 212-489-5644

May 15 Tuesday 7:00 P.M.
NYCA Meet-Up

Location: Village Pourhouse
64 Third Ave. (11th Street)
Casual conversation and drinks with your fellow freethinkers.
Cost: Free (cash food and bar)
Register at <http://atheists.meetup.com>

May 31 Thursday 6:30 P.M.
NYCA Monthly Meeting

Location: To Be Announced
Reservations: Not required
Cost: Individual checks plus \$5 donation

Speaker: Dr. Michael Pratt, Elmira College

Topic: *Mark Twain: Satirist, Collector and Atheist.*

Professor Pratt will speak on Mark Twain's interest in paleontology and in science (did you know that Twain made a fossil collection from a quarry in Elmira, New York?). In particular, he will discuss an essay Twain wrote in 1903 entitled, "Was the World Made for Man?" in which Twain satirized the belief that the universe, the earth, and all its flora and fauna (extinct and living) had been created by design for humankind's benefit.

**ATHEISTS
BORN IN THE MONTH OF MAY**



Sigmund Freud
May 6, 1856 – September 23, 1939
Neurologist and Psychiatrist



Richard Feynman
May 11, 1918 – February 15, 1988
Nobel Prize in Physics in 1965



Katharine Hepburn
May 12, 1918 – June 29, 2003
Academy Award – four times



Bertrand Russell
May 18, 1872 – February 2, 1970
Philosopher, Logician & Mathematician

Surprise Visitor: Jesus...

**Seattle Convention Highlights
Atheist Humor, Pride**

By Jane Everhart

Seattle—The souvenir T-shirts given out at the 2007 American Atheist convention had the tenor of the event emblazoned on them: *“Atheist... and proud of it!”*

There was excitement in the air in this Northwest city as some 250 Atheists from all over the country descended on the Renaissance Seattle Hotel on April 6 to 8 for the 33rd annual convention-and-talkfest of America’s best-known Atheist organization.

The high energy was buoyed by corridor buzz about the new in-your-face Atheism, the legal successes American Atheists have had in the previous year in holding back the nation’s tsunami wave of religious fundamentalism, and the presence at the convention of major media (both C-SPAN and 20/20 were taping virtually the whole three-day program). The fact that major media outlets had invested in the expense

of dispatching camera crews to the convention indicated to some that the nation was paying attention to us at last.

Keynoter: Julia Sweeney

The *piece de resistance* of the convention was, perhaps, the keynote speech of comedienne Julia Sweeney, best known for her roles on Saturday Night Live, who told the gathering how she became an Atheist. Like most people, Sweeney’s atheism had been dormant inside her for years before a casual comment from a friend that she was an Atheist brought it to the fore. Luckily, our NYCA videotaping crew was on the ready and arranged an exclusive half-hour-long interview with Sweeney, hosted by our own Dennis Horvitz. Look for the airing of the Sweeney interview soon on our Thursday night Channel 67 Cable TV show.

Another highlight of the convention was the introductory speech of Ellen Johnson, president of American Atheists, who noted a new interest in Atheism among U.S. citizens and the media across the nation. “Other people have been saying for decades what Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris are saying,” she noted, but only

recently have these books excited the interest of a mass audience.

Religion Declining

“Our government props religion,” Johnson observed, but there has evidently been a backlash: “Theology is on the defensive,” she declared, citing a 9.5 percent decline in religious attendance. “They [religious fundamentalists] are now fighting to maintain control of our nation.”

Johnson pointed out that “Religion is about sociological issues. If you can control sexuality, you can control the people.” Early Atheist authors knew this and had written reams about how the church controls and forms the sexuality of its believers. “We have a whole section of books in our library on this topic which, I’ve often joked, should perhaps be behind a curtain.” The bottom line, Johnson noted, is that “people are not going to be religious without religious indoctrination.”

Ed Kagin, a constitutional attorney who is American Atheists’ national legal director and a co-founder with his wife Helen of Camp Quest, a summer camp for Atheist children, told the convention about the legal battles waged—and won—this year by Atheists. Among them was the forcing of the town of Stark, Florida, to remove a 10-foot tall Christian cross from a water tower (the town’s lawyers claimed it was really a T that stood for the name of the local football team) and the resolution of the Smalkowski family’s fight against the Hardesty, Oklahoma Public School system after it suspended the teenage Nicole Smalkowski for refusing to recite the Lord’s Prayer. Kagin’s repeated litany, “*What part of ‘No’ don’t they understand?*” expressed his exasperation with the recurring breaches of our constitutional rights all over the country.

**Man invented god;
god did not invent man**

The Atheist teenager Nicole Smalkowski, who had rebelled against the Lord’s Prayer, was also a well-spoken young star of the panel discussion titled “*Does It Really Matter If the Public Doesn’t Like Atheists?*” A piquant question came up: Is it better for atheists to give hugs or to engage in activism?—i.e., what works better, for Atheists to project a positive image or to fight, belligerently, if necessary, for our rights? The panel concluded: Atheists should do both. “Hugs and votes!” summed up one panelist.

If Julia Sweeney brought humor and wisdom to the convention, so did someone else: At the Friday night banquet, President Ellen Johnson announced a Mystery Guest. From the back of the room, seemingly floating in (or so it appeared if you had enjoyed a few glasses of wine), was an ethereal figure, dressed in robes, sporting long hair and a beard, who left Easter eggs on some tables. None other than, yes, Jesus! Jesus had come, it appeared, to honor the least likely members of his potential flock.

It turned out that Jesus speaks like a rock band member. When asked how he would sum up his 10 Commandments, which, someone noted, were somewhat out of date anyway, Jesus’s response was, “I’d say, just don’t be a dick.” It seemed like good advice, even for Atheists, so Jesus got a round of applause. □



L-R: Dennis Horvitz, Jesus

**Stem Cell Research
Is
Pro-Life**

NYC Atheists End-of-Summer Cruise

5-Day Canada Cruise
Aboard The Carnival *Victory*
August 25-30, 2007



Join Massimo Pigliucci, Evolutionary Biologist, on our 5-day Cruise—a time for wisdom, friendship and sharing adventure with people of like minds.

Escape the everyday world for a while; ply the waters of the northern Atlantic drinking in the vistas that our Viking ancestors first saw.

Enjoy the smell of salt air, the vivid sunsets over the ocean, the gourmet buffets, the fresh air in your lungs, the romantic moonlight dances, the deck chair tête-à-têtes, making new friends, docking at charming little fishing villages peopled by hospitable locals.

Itinerary

Sat.: Depart NYC: 5:00 PM
Sun.: "Fun Day at Sea"
Mon.: St. John/Bay of Fundy
Tue.: Halifax, Nova Scotia
Wed.: "Fun Day at Sea"
Thur.: Arrive NYC: 8:00 AM

Cost: \$575 - \$775 (includes port charges & taxes) (Double Occupancy)

Deposit: \$200 by 4/31-Refundable 'til 6/20

Contact: Gloria Kingsley
Gloria@SolarTravelinc.com
212-601-2775

We are searching for:

Monthly Meeting Room
Thursday Nites: 6:00 – 9:00 P.M.
Seating 35-50
Cost: FREE OR INEXPENSIVE
Call: Ken Bronstein – 212-535-7425

The Evidence Available Shows That god Really Does Not Exist

By Eddie Tabash

Eddie Tabash is a constitutional lawyer in the Los Angeles area. The son of an orthodox rabbi and an Auschwitz survivor, he is now on the board of directors of the Center for Inquiry/Council for Secular Humanism. Eddie says, "After a lifetime of spiritual searching, I have concluded that the best evidence we have points to a universe in which there are no supernatural beings and no god or gods." He has become a skillful and gifted debater for the Atheist cause on campuses all over the country. Below are points made during Eddie's speech at the Seattle American Atheists convention.

1. **The Supernatural Does Not Exist.**
It's not just that cows don't jump over skyscrapers, it's that they physically can't. Many believers say that science does not rule out the supernatural. Science applies an empirical method of looking at the evidence in our physical world. The scientific method rejects the supernatural claims of religion the same as it rules out all other paranormal claims. The supposed miracles of the bible do not have any greater claim on reality than do the claims of UFO abductions. In fact, UFO abductions may be more believable because a visitation from another planet may not require violation of the laws of nature.

2. **Miracles Didn't Happen Then and They Don't Happen Now.**

If miracles occurred in Biblical times, why don't they occur now? It is highly suspect to claim that all the shock and awe stuff was performed for the benefit of ancient people but denied to us today. Claims of miracles bear witness against themselves, as they violate the very laws of nature that are inviolable.

3. Dependence of Consciousness on the Physical Brain Makes Life After Death Unlikely.

If Alzheimer's Disease or an anesthetic can totally eclipse consciousness, how much more will self awareness be annihilated by death? Everything we know, all of our fields of awareness, come about by sensory input into a physical brain. How can this persist when there is no longer a physical body and brain?

4. Existence of Evil in the World Is More Likely in a godless World.

An all-powerful god would be able to get points across, teach lessons and improve our character without placing us in a world of such tremendous suffering. What benefit is there to the Ebola virus that eats away at people's flesh? Why did humans need Auschwitz? Couldn't something less horrendous have gotten across whatever point god was trying to make? For god's existence to be compatible with the evil in the world, there would have to be no occurrence of evil that is gratuitous and beyond justification.

5. Evolution is More Likely in a godless World.

While one can conceivably believe in Darwinian evolution and in god, evolution is more likely in a godless world. Evolution by natural selection is sloppy and wasteful. Some 99% of all species that ever existed on earth are now extinct. Matches of DNA sequence show that humans and gorillas shared a common ancestor.

6. Divine Hiddenness: A Personal god Who Wanted a Loving Relationship with Human Beings Wouldn't Be So Hidden.

Why is god so stingy with direct evidence? A loving god would not erect such barriers to belief and then further compound the difficulty in believing by providing us with such strong evidential circumstances against the supernatural such as the inviolable laws of nature.

7. The Religious Confusion in the World is Incompatible with a god That Wants Us to Get It Right.

If god wants us to choose the best mode of worship, why is there so much confusion in the world about the teachings of different religions? Why do the yogis of India and the Dalai Lama bring from their meditations a sense of all-loving cosmic soup and yet many Christians believe that anyone who tries to approach god other than through Jesus will burn in hell? Biblical contradictions also bring confusion. A loving god should have commissioned a clearer and less confusing bible.

8. The Existence of god Cannot Be Rescued by Claiming the Need for a First Cause.

As best as we can determine, time and space began with a Big Bang. Prior to that, there was no time or space in which sequential causation could have occurred. So we cannot speak of the universe's inception as needing a "cause."

9. The Existence of god Cannot Be Proven by Claiming That Life Is So Improbable that Only a Supernatural Force could bring it about.

Believers claim that the constants in the universe that made it possible for life to emerge are so unlikely that only a divine being could have set the stage. But we have nothing to compare our universe to. We cannot point to other universes, note that they are lifeless and thus affirm that the appearance of life in our universe was so unlikely that a supernatural force had to jumpstart it.

10. The Existence of god Cannot Be Rescued by Claiming that the Emergence of Life on Earth Demonstrates an Underlying Intelligent Design.

The claim that the existence of complex organisms demonstrates the need for an intelligent designer fails because these complexities can be accounted for by the mutations of natural selection. □



NYCA March Monthly Meeting
L-R: Margaret Downey (President-Atheists Alliance, guest speaker), Dennis Horvitz-(Host NYCA cable show).



NYCA member attendees at American Atheists convention (Seattle, Washington)
L-R: Eric & Elaine Stone, Dennis Horvitz, Jane Everhart, Ken Bronstein.

RENEW / JOIN NYC ATHEISTS

Through our programs and activities, we work to bring awareness of our principles, our vision and, above all, of our existence as atheists. We do it through our website, our meetings and events, our cable shows, our library and book club, our street tabling and our newsletters --all of which are funded by your membership.

With the continued growth of our membership, we gather strength in numbers and will more effectively counteract the threat of a looming theocracy.



NYC ATHEISTS — 2007 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

First Name: _____ Last Name _____

Street Address: _____ Apt No.: _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email: _____@_____ Phone: (____) _____ - _____

NYC Atheists Inc. is a non-profit (501-C3), 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 Friend __ \$ 100 Sustainer __ \$ 250 Patron __ \$ 500 Benefactor __ \$ 1000

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**