

# New York City Atheists Inc.

**JUNE 2007**

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

Vol. IV Issue No. 6

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

#### JUNE

June 10*	Sunday	12:00 P.M.	NYCA Picnic, Library, Book Club
June 19**	Tuesday	7:00 P.M.	NYCA Meet-Up
June 28***	Thursday	6:30 P.M.	NYCA Monthly Meeting

#### JULY

July 4****	Wednesday	11:30 A.M.	NYCA JULY 4 <sup>TH</sup> BARBEQUE / FIREWORKS
July 8*****	Sunday	12:00 P.M.	NYCA Brunch, Library, Book Club
July 17**	Tuesday	7:00 P.M.	NYCA Meet-Up
July 26*****	Thursday	6:30 P.M.	NYCA Monthly Meeting

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- \* Central Park – 59<sup>th</sup> St. - North West Corner (Columbus Circle / Central Park West)  
Enter far left entrance – keep left for about 100 yard.
- \*\* Village Pourhouse – 64 Third Ave. (11<sup>th</sup> St.)
- \*\*\* Evergreen Chinese Restaurant – 1288 First Ave. (69<sup>th</sup> St.)  
Cost: Individual Checks / \$5 Donation – Reservations: Not required
- \*\*\*\* Grand Central Station (Main Waiting Room – Round Kiosk)
- \*\*\*\*\* To Be Announced

#### WEDNESDAYS

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

#### THURSDAYS

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

**INVITING CABLE SHOW GUESTS**  
**CALL: KEN BRONSTEIN / 212-535-7425**

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



KENNETH BRONSTEIN

## Moving On

It's time for us, as Atheists, to move on, I recently decided. It was a moment of inspiration that came to me while we were Tabling one Saturday on Columbus Circle. A particularly obtuse and inaccessible Religionist was arguing with me about the age of the earth when it suddenly came to me: We ought to stop wasting our time debating these people. There is no reason or logic in faith, so we cannot reach them with reason or logic. We should declare victory and move on.

The Obtuse Religionist experience is not new to me. Usually he (or, less often, she) saunters up to our Table, engages me in casual conversation and asks a few questions about my "beliefs." I tell them that Atheism is a conclusion, not a belief, and that my conclusion is based upon scientific evidence and rational reasoning.

If the visitor continues (and I'm sometimes not sure if they are interested in Atheism or want to convert me to *their* belief) I ask them, *How old is the earth?* They too often answer, *I do not know.* I say, *Is it a day, a thousand years, five thousand, 10 thousand, a million years, a billion?* They will often answer, 10 to 25 thousand years, and I realize that they have been coached or brainwashed. I can see in their faces and body English that they really know the earth is *not* 10 to 25 thousand years old. The age of the earth, presented in many high school courses, is common knowledge except to deluded religionists; the earth is 4.5 billion years old. I can see their frustration; I see their dilemma. Sometimes they excuse themselves and leave quickly, and I am left shaking my head at the strength and persistence of erroneous and contradictory ideas, planted by duplicitous clergy, which leaves some believers resisting or even denying scientific facts. I want to say to these people: Stop wasting our time in intellectual discussion.

### Victorious Science

So let us declare victory and move on! We are entitled to declare victory: the evolutionary origin of animals and plants is now a scientific conclusion beyond reasonable doubt. And it has become accepted among enlightened scholars, scientists, teachers and philosophers that man invented god and god did not invent man.

We move on by adapting our goals and strategy to what I call the R.E.A.L. (Realistic, Ethical, Analytical Life). Our new strategy should focus our membership efforts on seculars and non-affiliated people as these are most receptive to the science-and-reality-based way of life.

Secondly, we must focus on establishing, for those who live the Atheist way of life, alternatives to the ancillary services that churches, temples and mosques provide to their members—the rites and rituals of passages in life.

### Get R.E.A.L.

Organized religion has had thousands of years to develop their customs, rites, rituals, ceremonies and sacraments. It is time that Atheists attended to the need for memorable rites of passage for our constituency: the celebration of weddings as the beginning of a new family; the memorials honoring the lives of those Atheist members who have died; the tradition of dedicating a newborn Atheist child to humanity (called baptism by some religions), or a rededication of a pubescent child to humanity and science in an Un-BarMitzvah or Un-Confirmation ceremony. Think of it: a whole new joyous way of marking life's events that is totally Atheistic and, well, R.E.A.L. That is where our new efforts should be aimed. □

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

UPCOMING JUNE EVENTS

June 10 Sunday 12:00 P.M.  
NYCA Picnic / Library / Book Club

Location: Central Park -- 59<sup>th</sup> St . NW Corner  
(Columbus Circle / Central Park West)  
Enter far left entrance, keep left for about 100 yards.

Bring your own lunch, blanket, drinks, etc.  
For dessert, bring something to share: Cookies, chips, cake, whatever.

Reservations: Not required

Subject: *Our Secular Wedding*

Speaker: Rich Cotter and Tina Madden Cotter



June, the month of weddings, is an appropriate time for us to discuss *secular* weddings. Rich and Tina will describe how they met, decided to get married, and how they handled and resolved the issues they encountered in having a non-traditional secular wedding.

Rich has also recently earned certification from the American Humanist Association as a Humanist Celebrant. (Humanist Celebrants are certified to conduct Humanist, nonreligious, and interreligious weddings, memorials, commitment/same-sex unions, baby namings, and other passages-of-life ceremonies.) Two weeks ago, Rich officiated his first secular wedding ceremony.

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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  
LIBRARY@AOL.COM / 212-489-5644

This newsletter is published by  
New York City Atheists Inc.  
Publisher – Kenneth Bronstein  
Editor- Jane Everhart

June 19 Tuesday 7:00 P.M.  
NYCA Meet-Up  
Location: Village Pourhouse  
64 Third Ave. (11<sup>th</sup> Street)  
Casual conversation and drinks with your fellow freethinkers.  
Cost: Free (cash food and bar)  
Register at <http://atheists.meetup.com>

June 28 Thursday 6:30 P.M.  
NYCA Monthly Meeting  
Location: Evergreen Chinese Restaurant  
1288 First Ave. (69<sup>th</sup> St.)  
Reservations: Not required  
Cost: Individual checks plus \$5 donation

Discussion Leader: Ken Bronstein  
Topics: (1) Dennis Horvitz’s interview of Julie Sweeney at the recent American Atheists Convention.  
(2) NYC Atheists Mid-Year Review  
We will review and discuss our current NYC Atheists’ programs, future plans and objectives. Come prepared with ideas, questions and suggestions.

July 4 Wednesday 11:30 A.M.  
NYCA BARBEQUE / FIREWORKS

Meeting Location: Grand Central Station  
Main Waiting room – Round Info Kiosk  
Cost: \$10 donation

We meet in Grand Central Station (main hall – round info kiosk) to take the Metro North train to Chappaqua. Round Trip Fare: \$ 14.50 / Seniors \$ 9.50.

Eric and Elaine Stone (76 Devoe Rd., Chappaqua – 914-238-4803) will be our hosts. Individuals driving, please call Ken Bronstein (212-535-7425) for directions.

Around 4:15 P.M., we return to NYC.  
We find a restaurant for dinner before we attend the Macy’s fireworks display on the East River at dusk.  
8:15 P.M., we will meet at the northeast corner of 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave. / 34<sup>th</sup> Street. Then we walk to the section where we traditionally view the fireworks display along the East River.

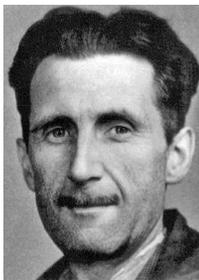
**ATHEISTS  
BORN IN THE MONTH OF JUNE**



**JEAN-PAUL SARTRE  
JUNE 21, 1905 – APRIL 19, 1980**



**ALFRED KINSEY  
JUNE 23, 1894 – AUGUST 25, 1956**



**GEORGE ORWELL  
JUNE 25, 1903 – JUNE 21, 1950**



**EMMA GOLDMAN  
JUNE 27, 1869 – MAY 14, 1940**

**STATEMENT FROM AMERICAN ATHEISTS  
CONCERNING THE DEATH OF  
REV. JERRY FALWELL**

*ELLEN JOHNSON, president of American Atheists, issued the following statement regarding the recent death of televangelist Jerry Falwell:*

While we recognize and respect the grief of friends and relatives, it must be acknowledged, in the wake of Rev. Falwell's death—that he and the organizations he founded, especially the so-called Moral Majority, were serious threats to our Constitution and, specifically, to the separation of church and state.

Jerry Falwell was instrumental in galvanizing millions of American Evangelicals into an intolerant, sectarian and authoritarian political movement. Gays, women, secularists, civil-libertarians and other groups who did not fit in to his plan to construct “One Nation Under god” were stigmatized and attacked. Civil liberties were in jeopardy. Falwell and other religious right leaders advanced their brand of Christianity, while demonizing their opponents.

Perhaps the most ignominious moment in Falwell's career was his appearance with Rev. Pat Robertson on a television program which blamed the terrorist attacks of September 11 not on Islamic fundamentalist fanatics, but on a wide swath of the American people -- women (because of their support for abortion), gay and lesbian Americans, and individuals and organizations like American Atheists that labor for the separation of church and state.

We cannot and must not lionize Rev. Jerry Falwell because he is now dead. We expect that some politicians beholden to the religious right, who perhaps owe their political careers in part to Falwell, will praise him for his religiosity or avuncular style. The truth is, however, that the Rev. Jerry Falwell was a dangerous man who opposed and worked against many of the key values underpinning our secular American democracy.

**Ellen Johnson, President  
AMERICAN ATHEISTS**

**Don't Miss the Boat!  
Deposit date extended to June 22<sup>nd</sup>**

**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 and 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 6/22-Refundable 'til 6/22**

**Contact: Gloria Kingsley  
[Gloria@SolarTravelinc.com](mailto:Gloria@SolarTravelinc.com)  
212-601-2775**

**Editor's Q and A**

Dear Editor,

What is *The Blasphemy Challenge*? I attended the ABC Nightline debate at the Calvary Church in May, and the two Atheist debaters, whom I had never seen before, were introduced as having started *The Blasphemy Challenge*. Why were they chosen to represent us?

Longtime Member, NYCA  
Brooklyn

Dear Longtime:

*The Blasphemy Challenge* is an internet-based project started by Brian Sapient and Kelly [no last name] who were the two Atheist debaters on ABC Nightline show that aired on May 9. Brian and Kelly, and their group, challenge viewers to submit videos to the *YouTube* website in which they record themselves blaspheming the holy spirit. Supposedly, blasphemy is the worst, the most unforgivable, sin a Christian can commit.

So far, more than 1,200 people have committed that sin publicly on *YouTube*. In each video, a person speaks the line, "I deny the Holy Spirit," plus whatever else they want to add. So far, we have not heard of anyone being struck by lightning. We have heard, however, that someone has now set up a *MySpace* page with the name, "I Deny Brian Sapient."

Brian and Kelly are also two of the founders of *The Rational Response Squad*, which *The New York Times* calls "a furtive organization devoted to curing theism." Actually, it is not furtive; it is out there on the Internet and open to anybody who accesses [www.rationalresponders.com](http://www.rationalresponders.com). It was founded by a group of young Atheists in the Philadelphia area who have taken on the mission of debunking irrational claims made by religion. The site also sells Atheist T-shirts, bumper stickers, coffee mugs, posters and calendars. Why not? Someone has to do it.

The team of Brian and Kelly first appeared on ABC Nightline earlier this year when Nightline got wind of *The Blasphemy Challenge*. After seeing the couple on TV, evangelical fundamentalists Kirk Cameron (the former child actor) and Ray Comfort challenged them to a debate, and ABC Nightline went for it. Thus, New York City Atheists did not choose Brian and Kelly to "represent us," as you put it, though

we do support them and encourage them as fellow Atheists.

Brian and Kelly have in turn supported NYCA in our efforts to rally a strong outpouring nationwide for our Blood Donation Program on the so-called National Day of Prayer. *The Rational Response* web site kept a log of blood units donated nationwide that day. That's how we know that at least 1,002 units were donated by Atheists—and those were just the units reported on the web site.

Dear Editor,

I was at the taping of ABC Nightline debate between Atheists and evangelical fundamentalists in the Calvary church in May. I don't think that Brian and Kelly were strong voices for science because Kelly was not dressed professionally or appropriately for a debate of this nature at a church. Also, I felt the Atheist team was not properly prepared and thus not a strong defense against the religious ministers, who, lies or not, seemed better prepared.

Strong-minded Observer  
Manhattan

Dear Strong,

The religious pair at the debate, Kirk Cameron and Ray Comfort, are professionals in presenting their scam. They have given their snake-oil sales pitch over and over and perfected it. Their delivery was practiced, polished and canned. Even their gestures seemed orchestrated. Our duo, Brian and Kelly, were unperfected but sincere. Atheists don't have 2,000 years of practice in unctuous sophistry.

As for Kelly's attire, why would an *Atheist* abide by old-time religious conventions regarding what to wear in church? If you don't respect the whole premise of church, why kowtow to its customs? I thought Kelly's flowered sundress made a joyful statement of life and springtime and pretty girls in summer dresses. If right-wing fundamentalists can flaunt the alleged pulchritude of an Ann Coulter, we Atheists can surely match them and let the world see that Atheist women can be beautiful, glamorous and well-endowed. Brian and Kelly are what young people are like today. Get used to it; they are our future.

Atheists fight on many fronts. We need to engage the youths who are out there, not the ones we *wish* were out there. Brian and Kelly have a following of young people who respect them because they openly flaunt religious maxims and rules. We need to let the world see that not all Atheists are older white men who wear wire-rimmed spectacles and speak with a British accent. There is room in the Atheist movement for people of all ages, all races, all colors, all economic classes, all nationalities, all sexual orientations and all ways of presenting themselves to the public. □

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## Odes to Chaplains Past and Present Mark Harvard Humanist Talkfest

By Harry Graber

At least eight members of NYCA attended the Harvard Humanist Chaplaincy's conference on *The New Humanism* over the April 20-22 weekend. As the event drew nearer, a question that burned in my mind was, "What the hell is a 'humanist chaplaincy,' and why would the annual meeting of this or any other sort of 'chaplaincy' be of interest to an Atheist?" The enlightening back-story was revealed to us over the course of the weekend:

Decades ago, a man named Tom Ferrick was ordained a Roman Catholic priest, and began to work as a student chaplain at a number of academic institutions in New England. In time, he grew increasingly skeptical of his received theology, and eventually concluded that he basically believed none of it. More remarkably, Ferrick actually possessed the courage of his own lack of convictions, and decided that he could not in good conscience preach messages that he disagreed with. He resigned from the priesthood, and began the search for an alternative means of earning a living.

Aware that many colleges and universities support chaplains associated with any number of religious denominations, he asked who provides corresponding services to the irreligious students—the answer, of course, was "nobody." Eventually he succeeded in persuading the administrators of Harvard University to name him as its first humanist chaplain, and for the next three decades he provided a non-spiritual

alternative for students who were seeking ethical guidance.

#### Rabbi Succeeds Priest

Recently, Ferrick was succeeded as Harvard's humanist chaplain by Greg Epstein: A no-longer-believing priest has passed the torch to a never-believing rabbi. Epstein organized the April conference, which had the honoring of his predecessor as one of its major goals, a way of saying "Well done and thank you, Tom; you made all of this possible."

Given the backgrounds of the once and present chaplains, it is unsurprising that the conference did not count any resolute anti-theists among its speakers and panelists. Precisely the sort of event that gives fits to the likes of Sam Harris, this definitely was a conclave of, by, and for the "Oh, why can't we all just link arms together and sing *Kumbayah*?" crowd.

Thus did Salman Rushdie on Friday evening receive his First Annual Award for Outstanding Lifetime Achievement in Cultural Humanism at a ceremony that took place in Harvard's *Memorial Church*; and thus the first Saturday morning session begin with an *invocation* led by Robert Barr, the rabbi of Cincinnati's Congregation Beth Adam. And thus did that day's events include a second appearance by Rabbi Barr, with a PowerPoint presentation showing off his brand new synagogue, with its stained glass windows that depict (he claimed, although I personally had difficulty seeing it) the Big Bang and subsequent evolution of the universe.

#### Linkup to Believers

And thus, also, did the afternoon's activities include a video linkup to a symposium taking place at Samford University (a Baptist school in Birmingham, Alabama), during which Chaplain Epstein unctuously praised their dedication to environmental causes and implored us all to put aside our doctrinal differences and work together for the sake of the planet and of all humanity. And thus did the afternoon's tabling session include delegations from both the Secular Web ([www.infidels.org](http://www.infidels.org)) and the Unitarian Universalist Association ([www.humanists.org](http://www.humanists.org)), as well as from other organizations all across the irreligiosity spectrum.

On Sunday morning, *The New Humanism* concluded with a breakfast-and-chat session featuring Professor Edward O. Wilson.

He gave us a thoroughly utilitarian answer to the question of why all this emphasis on outreach and finding common ground and putting aside differences: There's a lot more of Them than there are of Us. This is a viewpoint to which I am not unsympathetic, even if my tone in the preceding paragraphs conveys a different impression.

I think no members of the NYCA contingent went away disappointed, and there was general agreement that some of the speakers we'd heard could even be approached for upcoming NYCA events. The hands-down winner was Rabbi Sherwin Wine, who established the Society for Humanistic Judaism, and whose speaking style clearly suggested that he once had, or wished he could have had, a career as a Borscht Belt stand-up comic. □

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*Notwithstanding Graber's cheerfully witty description, at least one member who attended the Harvard Humanist conference had another point of view:*

### Harvard Humanists Offer Hope For a Reality-Based World

By Elaine Lynn

The success of a humanist chaplaincy at Harvard and the enthusiastic conference participation of the secular student groups should be very encouraging to all of us who wonder about the future of a reality-based community in America.

The rabbi mentioned above is a forthright atheist with the courage of his convictions, who has built a community that omits all references to god in its ceremonies. His presentation was in the service of a campaign to get the Harvard Humanist Chaplaincy its own building.

In the brief internet hook-up we had with the symposium at a religious college, I think our gracious outreach to them helps them become aware of the humanist community and the role of secular institutions, such as Harvard has become. □

## GIFT OF LIFE DAY

Preliminary reports estimate that Secular Americans donated over 1,000 pints of blood in the Center For Atheism's response to the National Day of Prayer. Thanks to all the individuals and groups that participated. Thanks go to Brian Sapient's *Rational Response Squad* for publicizing the event and collecting donor input.



Some NYCA members who participated in the *Gift Of Life Day*: L-R: (bottom) Jay Gumbiner, Bill, Edith Amster, (Top): Howard Charcofsky, Harvey Osgood, Helen Kisic.

### 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 to the community. 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