

New York City Atheists Inc.

Serving the Tri-State area

An affiliate of American Atheists, Atheist Alliance International & Center For Atheism

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

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KENNETH BRONSTEIN

PRESIDENT'S "SERMON"

WHO IS AN ATHEIST?

People have asked me, how do you know if you are an Atheist? Just because you have doubts or are skeptical—does that make you an Atheist? And almost in the same breath, they ask, what is the point of being an Atheist—can't one just be nothing? My answer is the same to both questions, and it is one word: Emancipation.

Look up the word "emancipation" in Webster's dictionary and you will immediately understand what I mean. Webster's says the meaning of "emancipation" is:

- To be free from restraint, control, or the power of another; esp. to free from bondage
- To be released from paternal care and responsibility and made *sui juris* (in his or her own right)
- To be freed from any controlling influence (as traditional mores or beliefs); *syn.* see FREE.

So: You know you are an Atheist when you have freed yourself from the restraints, control and power of religion and when you have emancipated yourself from the bondage of deities, churches, priests and codes that have bound you to archaic 5,000-year-old rules and credos.

The Point of Atheism

And you know you are an Atheist when you have freed yourself from "paternal" oversight by gods ("Our father, who art in heaven," Christians routinely pray), as well as from the angels, saints and other such mythical creatures that religion tries to convince you have some personal interest in you and—despite their many responsibilities, such as moving the sun around the earth—actually know, and care, if you and some 400 billion of your brethren, are behaving well.

In short, Atheists are people who have emancipated themselves through rational analysis, scientific evidence, freethinking and skepticism, and have concluded that there is no supernatural world, no all-powerful being in the sky who controls their destiny and no heaven or hell. As an Atheist, I stand to benefit in many ways: I have gained the freedom to think, to investigate, to explore, to form my own opinions, to form my own sense of what is ethical and what is moral. All that is *my* choice, and *my* responsibility now, not dependent on the ethics imposed on me by priests, ministers and rabbis whose morals are inherited from scribes of the Bronze Age.

No Supervisor in the Sky

For comparison of how religion and Atheism deal with things, let's take the issue of morality. Religion's morality is all black or white, right or wrong, pass/fail judgments. My Atheist morality, on the other hand, is based upon principles that are much more comprehensive, and I have the right and freedom to continually update and expand them to reflect the ever-changing human conditions. There is no need in my moral principles for a "deity supervisor."

Cont. next page

ATHEISM IS A CONCLUSION
NOT A BELIEF

Let's examine the difference between religion's morality versus my Atheist ethical standards on the issue of killing a human being: murder. Religion's moral position is extremely restricted: Murder is limited to an overt lethal action and is considered immoral except in self-defense.

My Atheist morality expands beyond this limited definition of murder to include, in the "Thou Shalt Not Kill" category, long-term quality-of-life issues that lead to the destruction of human beings—such as the lack of medical care or medicines, not enough food, deprivation of education, inadequate housing, poor work conditions, and pillaging the environment. All of these things will lead to the destruction of innocent human beings, maybe not as fast as a bullet in the brain—but still, fast or slow, malnutrition will kill a baby, and therefore, my Atheist morality classes it as murder.

Religion is trapped in its own liturgy: "My way or the highway," it says, unbending to the issues of a new age. But being an Atheist/freethinker/skeptic and a lifelong inquirer lets me explore and use the wisdom and ideas of a wide spectrum of philosophies and cultures unhampered by the restrictions and rules of an oppressive religion, and empowers me to be more compassionate, humane and tolerant than is possible in the rigid, one-note, outdated manifestos prescribed by religions. Isn't that reason enough to declare yourself an Atheist? I hope you do it—proudly. ☐



PROUD TO BE AN ATHEIST

ATHEISM: THE RIGHT STUFF

**ATHEISM
THE REAL REVELATION**

**SOME DAY
YOU TOO WILL BE AN ATHEIST**

ATHEISM: PRO-PEOPLE

POLY ==> MONO ==> ATHEISM

Is War Necessary?

Dear Editor,

You wrote in last month's Q & A that "Chances are, if Atheists were in charge, there would be no more warfare." I think war is a fact of life and is not wholly due to religious differences. If Atheists were in charge, or had a majority, we would need armed services just as much to protect us from belligerent nations. Please remember, not all atheists are pacifists and some are even, dare I say it—conservative politically.

--Warrior in West Orange

Dear Warrior,

While Atheists do indeed run the gamut politically, there seems to be broad agreement among nonbelievers that war is not the answer to *any* problem of humanity. I think Madalyn Murray O'Hair put it well when she said that some ideas are just intrinsically "bad"—that is, certain ideas have redounded against the human community, against nature, against natural laws. Foremost of the ideas O'Hair judged "insane" is the idea that differences of opinion can be settled by physical force.

O'Hair pointed out that "all wars are a form of 'force settlement' of opinion differences..." and she added, "It is obvious that the time has come that we must eschew this resort to violence. Ideas must be accepted or rejected on their intrinsic merit and not based on coercive force that can be utilized to obtain acceptance of the idea..."

Can't Kill an Idea

"In fact," she continues, "if force is at all necessary, it is probably an indication that the idea was so bad that it could not be maintained logically, and resorting to force was necessary. Although there are still adherents to the force theory, by and large more and more of the people of the earth are having an understanding that it was never really a good alternative, and it is being abandoned."

O'Hair also points out that though you can kill a person who holds an idea, you cannot kill the idea itself, which lives on in history, in books, in philosophy, in folklore and in people's memory.

And today, of course, the "idea-you-cannot-kill" can be spread in a moment on the Internet.

But, you may ask, what about fighting back when attacked by a belligerent nation? It is my opinion that in this day and age, we cannot even do that effectively. For one thing, nuclear weapons have made it impossible to "fight back" because, with retaliation, both nations end up destroying each other and quite possibly, the rest of the world.

But even ordinary, non-nuclear warfare has changed. Why maintain an expensive army and sophisticated weaponry when on 9/11 it took only 19 men to destroy the Twin Towers using our own aircraft as weapons against us? And how do you fight back against an enemy you don't know, can't find, can't reach and don't understand?

War Is Passé

It is obvious to me that ordinary warfare is dead, that amassing armaments and building an army is an archaic idea, as old-fashioned and outdated as Paul Revere fighting with his musket. It appears that the only "fighting" we must do now will use our minds and diplomacy and compromise.

What's amazing to me is that religion, with all its pious rhetoric, has not come to that conclusion yet. Not a single religion, not Catholicism, not Judaism, not Islam, not Protestant Evangelism, has come out and said simply, "Let us stop killing each other."

I can't think of a single religion that doesn't support war in some way, from the Muslim's suicide bombers to American Fundamentalists' support of the invasion of Iraq to the Sunnis fighting the Shiites to the Vatican's backing the Nazis because the Nazis were anti-communist to Protestants' destruction of native cultures in the name of conversion to Christianity. All this while paying lip service to peace and respect for human life. So, it appears that it remains for us Atheists to save humanity from itself with logic and science and common sense. Ploughshares, anyone?

--Jane Everhart, Editor

It's Now Operating on NYCA Web Site

For all you commentators, debaters and curmudgeons out there, now there is a soapbox where you can spout your opinions on everything under the sun. The New York City Atheists Blog is now in operation on our web site. It is accessible by going to www.nyc-atheists.org and clicking on the thumbnail icon at the top of the page that says: "This way to the NYCA blog!"

Our new blog, moderated and written by NYCA member Michael Dorian and designed by Webmaster Martin Heinsdorf, will be, says Dorian, "an appropriately irreverent take on religion-related current events. You can browse posts on news stories and feel free to put up your own comments."

Moderator Dorian is a writer, documentary filmmaker and performance artist. His film, *Pizza! The Movie*, has sold to The Documentary Channel and Latin American Pay TV. His first book, *The Nektonic Facteur: A Collection of Poems and a Play*, is available through Amazon.com. Some of his performance material can be seen at <http://www.youtube.com/michaelsnob>. He is a graduate of Fordham University and says he has been a proud Atheist since puberty. We caught Dorian between his performances recently and asked him some questions:

WHAT IS A BLOG ANYWAY?

DORIAN: It's an Open Discussion Forum for people interested in a particular topic, such as atheism and religion. As blog moderator, I pick the most interesting or unusual stories about religion, politics, faith, churches and such, and post an abbreviated version of the story on the blog along with my commentary. Within my commentary, I put a link to the original story in case people want more information.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY "POST?"

DORIAN: When you write something in a blog, it's called a post. The commentary I write is called a post and any comment a visitor puts on the blog is also called a post. My commentary is often my irreverent, sometimes comical, take on

the crazy things that happen in the news and the things committed by religious fanatics.

WHAT DOES A NEWS POSTING ON THE BLOG LOOK LIKE?

DORIAN: It looks like a news article. There's a headline and my commentary and a picture or two imbedded in the article itself. It's not intimidating. The blog itself is long; you can scroll up and down to see what news items were covered in the past.

HOW DO VISITORS POST THEIR COMMENTS ON THE BLOG?

DORIAN: It's simple. At the bottom of each story entry, there's something called "Comments." When you hit the Comments link, it opens a box directly below. Visitors to the blog can then enter their email address and post whatever comment they want. That's all. You don't need any other ID except the email address.

CAN VISITORS POST ANY COMMENT THEY LIKE?

DORIAN: People should feel they can say anything. That's the essence of a blog. However, when someone posts a comment, it does not immediately get posted to the blog. It has to get approved by the moderator. It's a safety measure because otherwise thousands of people could show up at the blog and post things like, "You should all go back to church." As moderator, I have one of three options: I can either approve the comment as it is, I can delete the comment if it's really inappropriate, or I can edit it for brevity.

HOW EXTENSIVE SHOULD A BLOG COMMENT BE?

DORIAN: There's no limit to the words you type in. But most people understand the unwritten rule is, you keep your comments short. You can say whatever you like but it shouldn't be longer than the article itself!

DOES CLEVERNESS COUNT?

DORIAN: Of course. People love reading clever, funny, irreverent comments. Anything goes. Just don't tell us we should all go back to church. □

Taxing the Churches

Re Kenneth Bronstein's "Sermon," *Religion is a Business; It Should Be Taxed* (Nov. 2007, Page 1), one way to redress this problem would be to grant Atheists a deduction on their taxes that is equal to the amount that they are forced to "contribute" to religion. Although it might be argued that this is tantamount to giving a tax break to people who resent paying taxes for school or war because they have no children or are anti-war, it is not analogous because religion is not a function of our government—as is education and warfare.

Some may argue that everyone would claim to be an Atheist to get the deduction, but I would argue that it is everyone's right to choose their identity in a democracy. For example, many convicts in prison are believed to claim religious conversion and identification to get more favorable treatment and there is no law forbidding them to do so. If anything, this is encouraged.

-- Eric Stone
Chappaqua

U.N. Morality Code

Ken Bronstein's February "Sermon," (*Why We Need an Atheist Movement: Religion's Morality Has Failed*) concludes with an appeal to replace religion's "so-called morality" with modern, scientific, logical Atheist and humanist morality codes such as those outlined in the U.N.'s Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Good luck! While it might be unfair to compare the failures of a doctrine that has had only 60 years to take root with the failures of one that has had closer to 6,000 years, I can't help but note that the recent violations of religious codes that the

"Sermon" cites—Iraq, decimating populations, genocide, hunger and suffering—were all violations of the U.N. Declaration as well. And "restoring human rights" can be used as an excuse for brutality and barbarity as easily as any religion's commandments.

I'm afraid that society can use its tools for humane or inhumane purposes, and setting that right will be a long hard struggle.

--Steve Seltzer
Manhattan

Prayer in the Workplace

The following Letter to the Editor, written by our letter-writing champ, Dennis Middlebrooks, was published on Feb. 18, 2008, in Crain's New York Business.

SEPARATION BETWEEN BELIEF AND WORK

The Business Lives story on religion [in the workplace] in the Jan. 28 issue neglected to devote any attention to the possible adverse effects of this development on nonreligious employees, especially when the boss is the one holding "voluntary" prayer or religious discussion meetings.

There is ample documented precedent in both the public and private sphere for retaliatory action against employees who fail to genuflect or bow their heads in accordance with the wishes of superiors who actively seek to proselytize their underlings.

--Dennis Middlebrooks
Brooklyn

**Man invented god
god did not create man**

March 3, 2008 (Monday)
Atheists Lifestyle Discussion Group

POSTPONED

Next Lifestyle Discussion Meeting:
APRIL 7, 2008

March 9, 2008 (Sunday) 12:00 PM
NYC Atheists Brunch / Book Club / Library

EVENT SUMMARY

WHAT: Brunch, Speaker, Book Club and Library
WHERE: Kennedy's Restaurant
327 West 57th St. (8th/9th Ave.)
COST: \$20 (includes brunch, tax and tip)

BRUNCH

Speaker: Dr. Massimo Pigliucci



Subject: *"Is Science Objective or One Fairy Tale After Another?"*

Dr. Pigliucci will give us a preview of his new book, *"Nonsense On Stilts: How to Tell the Difference Between Science and Bunk."*

Dr. Pigliucci, a member of the NYC Atheists Board of Directors and a professor of Ecology and Evolution at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, is known as an outspoken critic of creationism and advocate of science education. He received his doctorate in genetics at the University of Ferrara, Italy, a Ph.D. in botany from the University of Connecticut, and a Ph.D. in philosophy at the University of Tennessee.

He received the Dobzhansky Prize from the Society for the Study of Evolution, and has three times been awarded the Oak Ridge National Laboratories Science Alliance Faculty Research

Award. He is a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal.

Dr. Pigliucci's research in science focuses on genotype environment interactions, natural selection, and on the constraints imposed on the latter by the genetic and developmental makeup of organisms. As a philosopher, he is interested in epistemological issues in the philosophy of science and in the conceptual examination of fundamental ideas underlying evolutionary theory.

Dr. Pigliucci writes regularly for *Skeptical Inquirer* and *Philosophy Now*, and has occasionally debated creationists.

Dr. Pigliucci considers that many problems are caused by a failure on the part of scientists and science educators to appreciate the distinction between methodological and philosophical naturalism and the distinction between matters of fact and value judgments, suggesting that whereas Atheism is a perfectly respectable metaphysical position, science does not necessarily demand atheism.

BOOK CLUB / LIBRARY

After brunch we move to the NYC Atheists Library located on East 79th Street. We continue discussing Christopher Hitchens' *god is not Great*. Chapter 4-5. Need not have read the assignment to participate.

March 18, 2008 (Tuesday) 7:00 PM
NYC Atheists Discussion Meetup
Location: Stone Creek Bar and Lounge
140 East 27th St. (3rd/Lex)

If you are into lively discussions, interesting people, provocative ideas, challenging conversation; if you like people who make you think and let you talk, if you'd like to get to know your fellow atheists better, what they're really like with no pretensions, no censorship, no affectations, this is the place for you.
Cost: Free (cash food and bar)
Register: <http://atheists.meetup.com>

EVENT SUMMARY

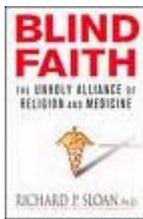
By Ron Widelec

WHAT: NYC Atheists Monthly Meeting
WHERE: SLC Conference Center
352 Seventh Ave. (Bet. 29th & 30th St.) 16th Floor
COST: We would appreciate a \$5 contribution toward room rental cost.

Speaker: Richard P. Sloan



Book: *Blind Faith: The Unholy Alliance of Religion and Medicine* (St. Martin's Press).



Dr. Sloan is Professor of Behavioral Medicine (in Psychiatry) at the New York-Presbyterian Hospital at the Columbia University Medical Center, and Chief of the Division of Behavioral Medicine, New York State Psychiatric Institute.

Dr. Sloan cautions physicians not to prescribe religion as medicine. In addition, Dr. Sloan and his colleagues have explored and criticized the purported links between religion, spirituality, and health that have appeared in popular and medical publications. They have examined the empirical basis of the claim that religious activity promotes health and identified significant ethical, practical, and even theological problems associated with making religious activity an adjunctive medical procedure. □

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

Recently, former presidential candidate John Kerry made some interesting comments about Atheism and politics in America. Kerry stated that Americans would not get excited about voting for someone who is an Atheist because an Atheist “doesn’t believe in anything.” Kerry is 100 percent right about the likelihood of an open Atheist winning a major nationwide election. Recent surveys have shown that Atheists may be the most disliked people in the nation.

Many Atheists were upset at John Kerry, claiming that he misrepresented what an Atheist really is. I think Kerry’s description of an Atheist is accurate and I take it as a compliment and a badge of honor. I do not “BELIEVE IN” anything, but that does not mean that I do not have BELIEFS.

I do not believe in invisible sky gods that created the world and control all that happens here. I do not believe in ghosts; I do not believe in Zeus, Thor, Fairies, bogeymen, trolls under bridges, tooth hungry fairies with money to spare, or gift-giving fat men guilty of breaking and entering. I do not believe in superstitions. I do not believe that dipping one’s head in water or throwing breadcrumbs in a pond, or simply confessing can clean away the wrongs we commit. I do not believe that opening an umbrella inside or breaking a mirror will cause me to have bad luck in the future. I do not believe in those things that cannot be supported by evidence, that defy all logic and experience and contradict everything we know about the world.

I believe that the processes of science are the greatest tool in the quest for understanding. I believe that claims, natural or supernatural, can and must be debated and require evidence before accepted. I believe that the more extraordinary the claim, the more extraordinary the evidence must be to support that claim. I believe that the compassion that humans can occasionally show for one another is our greatest quality. I believe that freedom, such as the right to free speech, assembly, and the ability to practice (or not to practice) religion, are the cornerstone of a just society. I am an Atheist and I believe many things about the world. I simply do not “BELIEVE IN” certain things that are held true by their very nature. I “BELIEVE THAT” certain things are correct based on logic, critical thinking, and evidence. □

Ron Widelec is an educator and writer based in Long Island. He has been writing articles about Atheism for NYCA since the very inception of this newsletter.

UPCOMING EVENTS AND MEETINGS

MARCH 2008

Mar. 3 Mon. POSTPONED NYCA Lifestyle Discussion Group
Mar. 9** Sun. 12:00 PM NYCA Brunch and Book Club
Mar. 18*** Tue. 7:00 PM NYCA Discussion Meet-Up
Mar. 27**** Thu. 6:30 PM NYCA Monthly Meeting

APRIL 2008

Apr. 6* Mon. 7:00 PM NYCA Atheist Lifestyle Discussion Group
Apr. 13** Sun. 12:00 PM NYCA Brunch / Madalyn Murray O'Hair
Birthday Party
Apr. 15*** Tue. 7:00 PM NYCA Discussion Meet-Up
Apr. 24* Thu. 6:30 PM NYCA Monthly Meeting

* Location: Call Ken Bronstein 212-535-7425
** Kennedy's Restaurant – 327 West 57th St. (8th/9th) – Rear Room
*** Stone Creek Bar and Lounge – 140 East 27th St. (3rd/Lex)
Register at <http://atheists.meetup.com>
**** SLC Conference Center – 352 Seventh Ave. / 16th Floor - (29/30th St.)

WEDNESDAYS

THIS WEEK IN ATHEISM

6:30 PM (Manhattan Cable # 57)
Live Streaming: WWW.MNN.ORG

THURSDAYS

NYC ATHEISTS CABLE SHOW

7:00 PM (Manhattan Cable # 67)
Live Streaming: WWW.MNN.ORG

THURSDAYS

ATHEISTS BOOK CLUB

7:30 PM (Manhattan Cable # 67)
Live Streaming: WWW.MNN.ORG

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