

The Atheist

Newsletter of the Atheist Community of Austin, a Nonprophet Organization

P.O. Box 3798, Austin, Texas 78764 512-371-2911

www.atheist-community.org

15 November 1998 CE Volume2 No. 6

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I'll Pray For You

"I'll pray for you" is a Christian's defense mechanism. It is an assertion that the person addressed is comprehended in the belief system of that Christian. It is often a rejection of the nonbeliever's assertion that the entire belief system is a fantasy. To the extent the Christian is referencing "pray for them which despitefully use you" (Matthew 5:44), his assertion of compassion is an insult to the nonbeliever.

But replace the Christian's ritualized hypocrisy with a brain for a moment. He will instantly know that the word blasphemy is defined as "the act of insulting or claiming the attributes of deity." And he will know that the word pray means to ask or supplicate, and that supplicate means to ask urgently, or beg. Celebrating his new-found cerebral power, he will apply the word pray to his notion of deity and discover that pasting the two together will inevitably produce blasphemy. He claims to believe in a deity that is omniscient and omnipotent, one possessing ultimate wisdom and power. He cannot commune, negotiate, manipulate, persuade, coerce, or otherwise induce his deity to treat his nonbelieving acquaintances differently, without indicating to that deity that he knows better than the deity what should be done with that nonbeliever. Doing that, he commits blasphemy.

Suddenly the Christian will find that he cannot pray even for himself, much less for a nonbeliever. His options are reduced to taking voice and harp lessons, in preparation for billions and billions of years of cloudwork. Non-directional mystical meditation, formerly known as omphaloskepsis, or navel-gazing, becomes the Christian's fall-back or default system when he finally realizes his deity construct is about as real as Mother Goose or Father Time.

~ David Kent

Affiliation Meeting

- The affiliation meeting will be at the Austin History Center at 12:00pm on November 29th.
- We decided to limit comments to 3 minutes per speaker.
- Anyone may speak but only members may vote.
- The affiliation motion will pass if 3/4 of those voting approve it.
- Those unable to attend may vote by mail. To do this, Detach and mail

the following ballot to:

ACA, P.O. Box 3798, Austin, TX 78764.

For your vote to count, it must be mailed in time to reach ACA's PO box by November 28th. (Remember the holidays.)

I am a paid member of the Atheist Community of Austin and I am unable to attend the scheduled vote on the affiliation issue.

My vote is....

_____ YES, ACA SHOULD affiliate with American Atheists.

_____ NO, ACA SHOULD NOT affiliate with American Atheists.

Signed, _____

Stream of Halloween-Anthropoc Consciousness

Well, John Koonz asked for it. Giving me an opportunity to ramble on is a mistake few stay awake long enough to regret. Welcome to my stream of consciousness; in the event of an emergency, your seat cushion can be used as a flotation device.

First off, I went to 6th Street for Halloween with the express goal of pissing off the stupid xians who have nothing better to do than try to ruin a perfectly good party. This year's pair was particularly vile. Both wore sandwich boards: one plastered with a list of "sins" (among them adultery, homosexuality, masturbation--fascinating how an omni-omni-omni deity can be so fascinated with penises), the other with a quote from what I refer to as "that book:" "The wages of sin is death," with the letters A I D S picked out in red capitals.

I'm sure you've heard all the rhetoric before, but there are a few high points I want to touch on. When asked why he was preaching such hatred, the more vocal one replied, "Because the BIBLE preaches hate!!" When I asked one (whom I mentally referred to as "Twerp") a question, he habitually opened his bible to find the answer. So I asked whether a cogent thought could actually be produced in his head without recourse to that book (not that any were being produced WITH the book), to which his reply was a rather undignified splutter. Later, Twerp told me that he was having trouble maintaining eye contact with me, claiming that my makeup was unsettling him. When I asked what was so frightening about gold glitter, he stuttered for a few moments and finally said that it was really my STARE that was bothering him. He claimed I was staring at him too much. Naturally, my reply was, "It says something to me about a man's character when he can't look me in the eye." He puffed out his chest a bit and met my gaze for all of three seconds before weaselly glancing away.

Enough of Halloween. I don't know if this edition of The Atheist will be out in time, but I would like to announce a debate sponsored by the University Skeptical Society on "The Evidence For and Against the Existence of God." The debate will be on November 20 at 7 PM on campus (in Welch 2.224). The public is invited to attend, and I would encourage any ACA member to come support us Skeptics. Our opponents for the debate will be headed by Robert Koonz (UT philosophy prof) of the Faculty/Student/Staff Christian Fellowship.

Dr. Koonz has discovered the Anthropic Principle (more below on AP) and has been braying about it around campus incessantly. The xians are sure to be there in force (Koonz is rather popular despite being a total scumbag--he has been shamelessly promoting his paper on the AP without submitting it for any sort of peer review), so we need your support.

The Anthropic Principle in a Nutshell: I don't know if this has been covered before, so I'll throw it out. The AP rests on the fact that the physical universe we live in is characterized by a number of "constants"--among them, Newton's gravitational constant G, the magnitudes of the nuclear forces, and the speed of light, to name a few. AP creationist proponents take these coincidental numbers and run with them. They claim that these constants are fine-tuned by a Creator (invariably the one they happen to worship) and that any minute variations in these constants would prevent life from existing.

Problems with the AP: Where to begin? First of all, there could easily be non-supernatural circumstances at work that make the universal constants what they are; maybe we just haven't discovered them yet. The AP assumes that all possible values of a constant are equally probable; this assumption is unfounded. It's also difficult to know for sure that changes in the constants would prevent life from forming--maybe life would still exist, just not as US. The AP's case for the existence of any old generic universal creator is extremely shaky, but the extremes to which its proponents are so eager to push it (i.e., a proof of a specifically christian god) are simply ludicrous.

Essentially, the AP is merely a glorification of the old "we're here, so somebody must have created us" argument--bigger words hiding the same small idea. It's also a good example of the God of the Gaps fallacy: just because we don't understand exactly why something happened, there is no obligation to stick a god in there to explain it.

~ Tom Moore

Book Review

While I didn't expect much from Madalyn Murray O'Hair: Most Hated Woman In America, by John Rappoport, it was disappointing even by that standard. This \$7 paperback is padded by too many pages that are almost totally blank. The author meanders diary-style from topic to topic, as if he's writing just enough to keep himself occupied until a better offer comes along. The book is billed as an investigation of why the American Atheist founder, her son Jon, and her granddaughter Robin, have been missing since September, 1995, but it can't decide exactly what it wants to be:

~ A sketchy recounting of events, drawn mostly from previously published media reports. The author reminds readers that the current American Atheist officials had maintained that no organization money was missing, until a San Antonio Express story revealed that their own 1995 tax statement listed an "unexplained loss of \$625,000 from their treasuries", and that the IRS revoked the tax-exempt status from Society of Seperationists and the American Atheist Library in December, 1996. He also recounts Madalyn's attempt to wrest control of the Truth Seeker estate. While generally factual, this long section is quite biased, since the Truth Seeker is this book's publisher.

~ Interviews with former American Atheists employees and members. Most of hem have been similarly quoted elsewhere.

~ Reports from various "psychics" on where the missing trio may be. Trees died for this? As you can probably guess, no two psychics agreed.

~ Different scenarios on what may have happened to the Murray O'Hairs, usually based on an article the author just read, or a discussion he recently engaged in. The epilogue is dominated by a conversation with an anonymous "reliable" source who claims that the Murray O'Hairs were brutally murdered by a member (or an employee) of American Atheists. There: now that you know the ending, you needn't waste your time or money on this book.

The author has written a few other books: one of them is called, The Oklahoma Bombing: The Suppressed Truth. If his investigative efforts rely this much on rumor, second-hand information, and "remote viewing", he doesn't have the truth about the Oklahoma bombing, either. ~ John Rush

Editor's Note

The article "Freethinker Cenotaph" that I included in The Atheist p.5, 18 October ,was, in fact, a combination of what Julie Fisher and Howard Thompson had put in their own newsletters.

I apologize for the skimpiness of this months newsletter. I have been very busy trying to get ready for CAST, the annual science teacher convention. Every year I get a booth for my business, Geoblox. There, I sell the paper-model books that I design.

A big thank you to everyone who sent in articles, ideas, thoughts and book reviews! I will be including all of them sooner or later. I do want The Atheist to be your newsletter, so keep sending those articles to me at jknz@hotmail.com.

~ John Koonz

Announcements

- TV Committee Meeting Vic has come on board as one of our producers!
- ACA Board meeting Board meetings are open to all members. The next one is at 12:30 on December 13.
- August 30 T-shirt designs will be considered at our Hot Jumbo Bagelry meeting. Sue Osborne has a design in mind already. If you have any ideas, bring them to this meeting. We want to have something to wear to Comfort!
- Next Blood Drive Sat, Jan 23, 1999, at the Texas Regional Blood Center, North Lamar. They're open 8am -2pm. Please consider donating, especially if you have a rare blood type .
- December 6 Lecture Series will be at Furr's Cafeteria, Northcross Mall, 11:00. Guest speaker to be announced
- Randalls Donations Randalls will donate a percentage of the money you spend there to the Atheist Community of Austin. To take advantage of this offer, contact the customer service department of your nearest Randalls. The ACA number is 5158.
- Weekly Meetings Sunday Mornings at Hot Jumbo Bagelry, 307 West 5th Street at 10:30 a.m. on Sunday mornings when lectures are not scheduled at Furr's Cafeteria.

For more information about any of these coming events, call (512)

371-2911 or e-mail atheist@atheist-community.org

Your ACA board of directors:

Co-chairs:

Don Rhoades

Kellen Von Houser

Treasurer:

Ray Blevins

Secretary:

Ray Blevins

Board members:

Keith Berka

Sue Osborne

Rodney Florence

Arlo Pignotti

Earle Beach

John Koonz

Arval Bohn

Ralph Shirley

Joe Zamecki

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FOR THE ATHEIST COMMUNITY OF AUSTIN, INC.

Last name: _____

First name: _____

Companion's name (if family or couple membership)

Last name: _____

First name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Telephone : (____) _____

e-mail address: _____

This is to certify that I am a non-theist, that I have read the "Purpose" of the Atheist Community of Austin, Inc. as stated in the Constitution (below), and that I am in agreement with the principles stated herein. I understand that membership is open only to non-theists.

Purpose

The Atheist Community of Austin is organized as a nonprofit educational corporation to develop and support atheist community; to provide opportunities for socializing and friendship, to promote atheist viewpoints, to encourage positive atheist culture, to defend the First Amendment principle of state/church separation, to oppose discrimination against atheists, and to work with other organizations in pursuit of common goals.

This organization shall operate in an open, democratic manner, without discrimination as to gender, race, age, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, nationality, or disability.

The Bylaws to this Constitution are intended to further define and explain the operating procedure of this organization. Changes may be made to the Bylaws when necessary to improve the operation of this organization. Changes to the Bylaws shall not alter the purpose of this organization as set forth in its Constitution.

Check all that apply

§ I wish to become a member of the Atheist Community of Austin, Inc.

Membership fees are \$24.00 per year, but our membership year does not begin until the 1st of March. My prorated membership fee, at \$2.00 per month until next March, is enclosed.

§ I wish to make a tax exempt donation to ACA .

§ I only wish to participate in the e-mail group. My e-mail address is above. No fee is required.

§ I wish to help ACA save money by receiving The Atheist by e-mail. No fee is required.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Please return this form to:

Atheist Community of Austin, Inc.,
P.O. Box 3798, Austin, Texas 78764