

THE ATHEIST

Newsletter of the Atheist Community of Austin, a Nonprophet Organization
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July - August 2003 - Volume 7.8



Biology textbook hearings update

Now is your chance to stand up against the teaching of creationism in Texas Public Schools. The Texas State Board of Education's second public textbook adoption hearing will take place Wednesday, September 10 at 1:00 PM in Austin. The first hearing took place on July 9. Since biology textbooks are under consideration this year, much of the debate at the first hearing focused on the teaching of evolution vs. "Intelligent Design".

Members of the public are invited to speak at the next hearing and/or submit written comments to the Board. The deadline to register to speak at the hearing or submit written comments is **August 21**. For more information, see the State Board of Education's website at:

<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/textbooks/announcements/publichearing9-03.html>

or get in touch with the Texas Freedom Network:

www.tfn.org / tfn@tfn.org / 512-322-0545

THE ATHEIST

A publication of the
Atheist Community of Austin.

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Articles, reports, and letters to the
editor are always welcomed.

Please write to jillf@austin.rr.com.

Opinions expressed in *The Atheist* are those of
the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the
views of the Atheist Community of Austin.

Godless Gamers / Happy Hour News

Godless Gamers is still going strong on Monday evenings at the home of Russell and Ginny Glasser. Last week there was something for everyone with three games being played simultaneously and lots of lively conversation among those on the sidelines. Last week's games included "Puerto Rico" - a strategy game where players play the part of 16th century landholders in the Caribbean; "Apples to Apples" - a card game of logical associations; and "Anagrams" a word game played with Scrabble tiles. If you've never been to Gamers or haven't been there in a while, come check it out!

Thursday Happy Hour at Antonio's Tex-Mex is back on track after a few slow weeks during the busy weeks of summer. We've had a fairly large turnout (about ten people) for the past couple of weeks. If you're new to Happy Hour, you'll find the ACA group seated in Antonios' indoor restaurant section (not the bar section). Look for Keith Berka's Darwin Fish ornament on the table. What better way to wind up your work week than enjoying Tex-Mex food, a plethora of drinks (try the "alien secretion"), and the company of a bunch of atheists?

See "**Regularly Scheduled ACA Activities**" on page 4 for more details on **Godless Gamers and Happy Hour**.

Welcome to the world, Olive Lawson!

Congratulations to Kyle and Charlotte Lawson on the birth of their first child, a girl named Olive. Olive was born on July 31, weighed 6 pounds, 9 ounces and was 19 inches long.



Congratulations & Good Luck, Andi!

Our friend and ACA member Andi Roberts graduated from the University of Texas this month with a bachelor's degree in psychology. Andi will be moving back to Arkansas where her family lives and plans to attend law school there after taking a year off. Andi was active on the ACA board of directors and also volunteered frequently on "The Atheist Experience", screening calls and sometimes appearing on the air. We'll miss you, Andi - don't be a stranger!

The ACA Files: Member Profile of the Month

by Jeff Jones



Name: Jill Ford
ACA Member Since: 2000

ACA Activities: Newsletter editor, board member, occasional happy hour and Godless Gamers participant.

Where From Originally: Bloomington, Illinois. Jill has lived in Austin since 1978, except for a four-year stint in Fresno, California.

Occupation: Recently laid off marketing/proposals coordinator for an engineering firm (any leads, anyone?)

Hobbies/Interests: Music - all kinds, cooking, paper crafts, computer graphic design

Little-Known Facts: Jill was a purple-haired punk rock girl in high school, a French major in college and lived in France for six months. She also has a particular affinity for observing wildlife - especially sea otters and monkeys.

The Atheist Community of Austin is a member of Atheist Alliance, International (AAI), an organization of independent religion-free groups and individuals in the United States and around the world. The following is an update from AAI.

The Route to Get You There

by Mynga Futrell

The "AAI/Amazon Route" sounds a bit like a railroad, or perhaps a designated pathway across a continent or mountain range. It isn't. It's the route you should think about taking (no, make that the route you definitely should take) if you are of a mind to purchase, via the Web, items from **Amazon.com** or from any of the various vendors to be mentioned below. Read on.

Ever go to **EvolveFISH** to purchase their goodies (bumper stickers, buttons, T-shirts, and such)? If so, The Route can take you there. If you go, take it. Expect an easy trip.

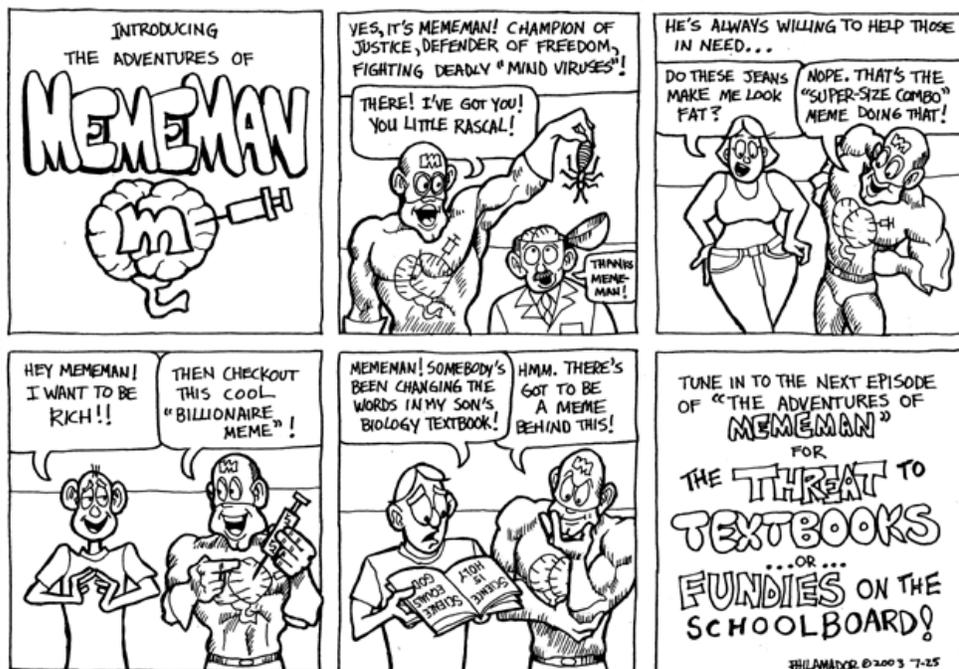
Going for ink cartridges or toner or pens or staplers or reams of paper? If you are ordering your office supplies from **Office Depot**, take The Route to arrive there.

Need something to pleasure the youngsters in your life? Taking The Route to **Toys R Us** is a great way to Web-shop with that company. You can see a huge line of products, and your purchase will benefit AAI.

That's right. Benefit AAI. That's why we're recommending "The Route."

Each time you use the AAI-Amazon link to reach a vendor, the Atheist Alliance will benefit from all the purchases you make at the time.

Cartoon by Phil Amador



How do you get onto the Route? You go to the AAI website *first* and then click on Amazon at the right hand side of the AAI home page. That will take you to Amazon and then, if you wish, onward to additional vendors. AAI will reap benefits at no extra cost to you. The AAI/Amazon route even recognizes any Amazon cookies you may have established.

If you already order from Amazon, it is within your power to benefit a good cause if you go to the Atheist Alliance International (www.atheistalliance.org) web site *first*. It's the recommended route to certain destinations.

The Art of Recreational Debating #4 Escaping the argument from authority, continued

With your guide, Russell Glasser
rglasser@apollowebworks.com

Last month, I challenged readers to research this quote that a creationist might use:

“The well known evolutionist Francis Hitching wrote: **‘If we find fossils, and if Darwin’s theory was right, we can predict what the rock should contain; finely graduated fossils leading from one group of creatures to another group of creatures at a higher level of complexity. ...But this is hardly ever the case. In fact, the opposite holds true, as Darwin himself complained.’**”

I supplied six questions you should ask as you search for this quote:

1. Did the source really say it?
2. Is the quote out of context?
3. If you take the quote in context, does it actually say the opposite?
4. Is the source an authority?
5. Is the source an authority on the subject being talked about?
6. Is the source expressing an accepted fact, or an opinion?

I was disappointed not to get much response to this challenge, but I hope more readers will participate next time, or chat about the answer when you see me in the bagel shop. My intent, of course, is not to discredit one single quote, but to demonstrate proper methods for doing research.

There are several things to notice about the quote right away. First, the presence of the **ellipses** (...). Remember, this means that part of the full quote was left out. Second, we note that Francis Hitching is described as a “well known evolutionist”, but we don’t know why he is well known or what his credentials are. Both of these are good things to keep in mind.

There are several approaches to take, but the most obvious thing to do is go to www.google.com, then type this in the search field: **francis hitching “finely graduated fossils”**

Pay attention to the words I focused on. A Google search reads ten words at most, so you have to be creative about

which words to pick. In this case, I put “finely graduated fossils” in quotes, because they are a combination of words that are unlikely to appear in that exact order unless they are part of this quote. I did not put “francis hitching” in quotes, because I would also like to catch pages that refer to him as “hitching, francis”.

Sometimes one search is enough to solve the puzzle for you... but not this time. I only got two hits from my search, and both are creationist web sites. These sites certainly won’t make your argument for you. They are not completely useless, however. For one thing, they restore the full quote. Let’s look at one of the pages returned:

http://www.darwinismrefuted.com/origin_of_species_04.html

In place of the ellipses we find this sentence: **“...higher level of complexity. The ‘minor improvements’ in successive generations should be as readily preserved as the species themselves. But this is hardly ever the case.”**

This is no help to us, because it doesn’t substantially change the meaning of the sentence. If it did, you could quote the whole thing, and show that your opponent lied about the content, then he goes down in flames.

It didn’t work out that way, but we learned something else. We learned that this quote comes from a book called “The Neck of the Giraffe: Where Darwin Went Wrong”. Interesting title for a book by a “well known evolutionist”. Let’s see what we can find out about this book. Back to Google, we’ll type in: **francis hitching “neck of the giraffe”**

The first link returned by the search is a page at talkorigins.org. If you have experience with this site, you’ll realize that this is likely to be helpful. Sure enough, take a look at what we got:

<http://www.talkorigins.org/faqs/hitching.html>

According to this page, claims that Hitching is a “well known evolutionist” are greatly exaggerated. Not only is he a creationist, but he “is basically a sensational TV script writer and has no scientific credentials.”

So we’ve found our answer: number four, Francis Hitching is no authority, especially not the kind he was supposed to be. You can read the page yourself for further details.

- continued on page 4 -

The Last Word

There are other ways we could have found this out. Knowing that talkorigins.org is always a valuable resource on these matters, we could have used this for our initial search:

francis hitching site:talkorigins.org

This would give us all hits for those words which occur only at the talkorigins site. You should develop a library of reference bookmarks for the various issues that you're interested in, so you can quickly locate arguments.

Another approach would be to do your search on groups.google.com, rather than www.google.com. Remember that this brings you to newsgroups, which are an invaluable resource because they are posts by people who are actively discussing such things. The first few search results may be from creationists, but by clicking on "view thread", you can instantly see all the ways that people responded to the post, and this can give you an idea for where to go next.

Just because you found a link that seems to discredit the quote doesn't mean that you're done, however. If you rely on a single source to prove your case, then you are guilty of making an argument from authority yourself. Next month, I'll talk about online standards of evidence. For now, I'll leave you with another challenge.

"We have staked the future of all our political institutions upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves, to control ourselves, to sustain ourselves according to the Ten Commandments of God."
— James Madison

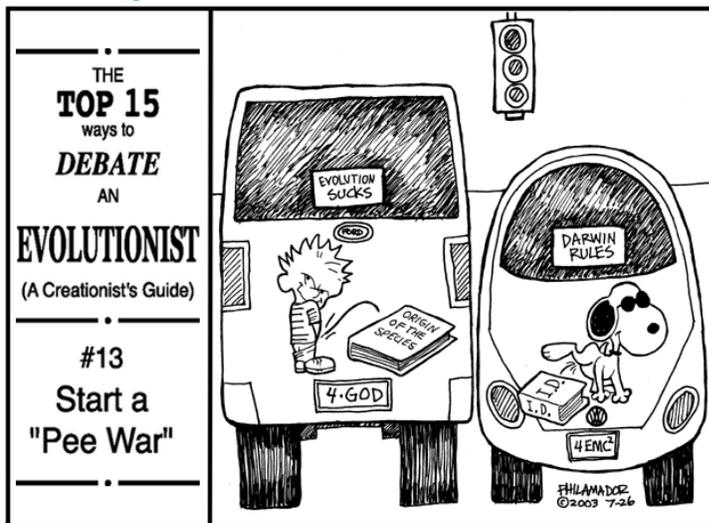
What do you make of this quote? Email rglasser@apollowebworks.com with the answer, and I'll credit you in the next column. Happy searching! See you next month.

Harry's Poetry Corner

by Harry Quinlan

"Dear boy," said Father O'Flynn,
"Sex with girls is a terrible sin,"
"Let's try pederasty,"
"It's thrilling and nasty,"
"Undress, and we can begin!"

Cartoon by Phil Amador



Regularly Scheduled ACA Activities:

Saturdays:

"The Non-Prophets" Internet radio show airs biweekly from 2:00 - 3:30 PM at www.atheistnetwork.com. The next episode will air **August 23**. Archives can be played at www.atheist-community.org.

Sundays:

Bagel Shop Meetings take place every Sunday except the first Sunday of the month at 10:30 AM at the Hot Jumbo Bagelry (307 W. 5th Street).

Monthly Lecture Meetings take place the first Sunday of every month at 12:30 PM in the Mayor's Room of the Austin History Center, which is located at 9th Street and Guadalupe. Watch your e-mail for announcements of pre- or post-lecture get-togethers at local restaurants.

"The Atheist Experience" Live Call-in TV Show: 4:30 - 6:00 PM, on Austin Access Channel 10.

Mondays: Godless Gamers takes place at 7:00 PM at the home of Russell and Ginny Glasser. Contact Russell (rglasser@apollowebworks.com) for directions.

Tuesdays: "The Atheist Experience" is replayed from 4:30 - 6:00 PM on Austin Access Channel 10.

Thursdays: Atheist Happy Hour takes place at 7:30 PM at Antonio's Tex-Mex restaurant near the intersection of IH 35 and US 183.

E-Mail Discussion/Announcement Lists: Lists include a general discussion list, an "ask an atheist" list, a gamers' list, a social announcements list, and a singles' list www.atheist-community.org/email.htm