

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

17 January 1999 CE
Volume 3 No. 1

John Koonz -Editor

Contents:

The Glorification of Ignorance by Jeff Dee
A Quote to put on Your Refrigerator
And the Survey Says. . .
Freethought Roundup
Atheist Alliance Convention registration form
In-Your-Face Atheism: Condemnation Or Compliment? Why Use That
A-Word Anyway? by Julie Fisher
The Positive Atheist by Jon Pool
Invasion T-Shirts by Julie Fisher
Book Review by John Rush
Announcements
Your Board of Directors
ACA membership application

The Glorification of Ignorance

It seems to me that religious faith amounts to the glorification of ignorance. The sort of faith I'm talking about is summed up in the Bible (Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 1). In the New International Version, it reads: "No faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see".

Religious faith is the Christian explanation for their claim to know certain things about the universe which reason and evidence alone don't justify. They generally admit that these things can't be established through reason alone, and so they invoke faith to carry them over the gap between what they can honestly claim to know through reason and evidence, and what they wish to believe is true nonetheless.

Of course, some Christians may argue that some of the beliefs they've arrived at through religious faith can nevertheless be justified using reason and examining the evidence. But I'm not here to talk about reason-based defenses of these claims; I'm here to discuss the nature of faith-based belief. To the extent that a belief arrived at through faith can be justified through reason, faith in that belief was unnecessary in the first place.

Let's look at that quote again: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see". It's important to notice that evidence and reasoning aren't mentioned anywhere in this Biblical definition of faith. In fact, evidence is excluded by the reference to "what we do not see". Evidence is, by definition, what we do see. Reasoning isn't specifically prohibited, but by excluding the possibility of evidence on which to apply the power of reason, reasoning is certainly crippled.

This is what I mean by equating religious faith with ignorance. It deals with drawing conclusions about things when there's really little or no way of knowing.

So religious faith is used to justify belief in things that lack sufficient evidence to be justified by reason. Reasoning can't justify these things because reasoning involves the examination of arguments based on evidence. If the evidence is insufficient, reason dictates that belief is unwarranted - no matter how much people may want to believe. Religious faith, on the other hand, can be used to justify belief in anything. Thus we encounter attacks on the very idea of reason, by those who have found religious faith to be the only support for their cherished beliefs.

A fine example of this religious faith-based view of the value of reasoning comes from Martin Luther. He said, "Reason must be deluded, blinded, and destroyed. Faith must trample underfoot all reason, sense, and understanding, and whatever it sees must be put out of sight and ... know nothing but the word of God."

When we listen to stories of conversion to Christianity, we don't hear about people using reasoning to arrive at religious faith - at least, none where that reasoning holds up under scrutiny.

Much more common are stories such as one I found in the July 20, 1998 issue of Newsweek, in the cover story "Science Finds God." They told of astronomer Alan Sandage, who "was nagged by mysteries whose answers were not to be found in the glittering panoply of supernovas. Among them, why is there something rather than nothing? Sandage began to despair of

answering such questions through reason alone, and so, at the age of 50, he willed himself to accept God."

Now think about that. When rational thought and honest scientific inquiry hadn't yielded the answers he wanted, he took his ignorance (the gap between what he could honestly claim to know and what he personally wanted to believe), and labelled it "God".

It's quite understandable that at the age of 50 the man might have been feeling a little pressured by his impending mortality, and desperate to overcome his fear of the unknown. But I'm not here to talk about whether such a move is understandable or not - I'm here to talk about what is actually going on when somebody takes that step. Do they really learn anything about the nature of the universe, as Christians would have it? Or are they merely comforting themselves with a psychological band-aid? Of course, there are all kinds of situations in which one might find oneself forced to act on little or no information. If you're lost in a cave without a light, you may as well get moving and take your chances if the only alternative is sitting there and starving to death. But to conclude that whatever way you choose to go is the way out, merely because you chose to go that way, is unjustified. A guess is still just a guess, even if you have no choice but to make one. Guessing is not the same as knowing.

The best argument I've heard from Christians about why it's okay to have faith in things that aren't justified by reason goes something like this: "No knowledge is 100% conclusive, but we still need to be able to make decisions about things. The act of reaching a decision on less than 100% conclusive evidence is an act of faith, and we all have to do this all the time, so what's the big deal?"

The big deal is this. Every time we decide to make a decision on less than 100% conclusive evidence, we risk being wrong. It may be unavoidable, but it's still risky. The less conclusive the evidence is, the bigger the risk. So this argument only supports "faith" when it's based on very strong (if not 100% conclusive) evidence. It does not justify belief in things which lack sufficient evidence to be justified through reason.

Furthermore, because of the inherent risk of error, even the weak sort of "faith" this argument justifies ought to be viewed as a distasteful necessity - not something glorious and wonderful that we should embrace joyfully. We should use it with caution, and always seek to minimize the need for it.

But Christians exercise an extreme sort of faith, far beyond anything practical or necessary - and they think this is a wonderful thing. Again, from the Bible (Matthew chapter 17, verse 20 this time): "And Jesus said unto them, ... If he have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you." Even if Jesus was only being metaphorical, this is an extraordinarily strong statement. Jesus is saying that if you are sure of what you hope for and certain of what you do not see, you gain (at least metaphorically) the equivalent of omnipotence: NOTHING will be impossible for you. Wow.

That's what I mean when I say that religious faith is the glorification of ignorance. Now, there are undoubtedly things that are true despite our lack of sufficient evidence to establish their truth through reason. The question is whether or not religious faith is a reliable means of acquiring accurate information about those things.

The answer is no. We can only determine the accuracy of a claim through evidence and reason. So, when evidence in support of a claim is lacking, the claim cannot be said to be reliable.

Christians seem to realize this, and continually attempt to support their religious faith by invoking reason. The problem with this is that having started out by adopting religious faith, and then applying reason afterward, their reasoning is tainted by the bias of their religious faith. Remember that biblical definition of faith. How can you be objective about things you're already certain of?

It's honest to admit that one does not know what one does not know. In their deeply emotional conviction that many things which they cannot prove to be true are true nonetheless, Christians fail this test of honesty and treat their ignorance as if it were a virtue.

~Jeff Dee

A Quote to put on your refrigerator

"It is an established maxim and moral that he who makes an assertion without knowing whether it is true or false is guilty of falsehood, and the accidental truth of the assertion does not justify or excuse him." Abraham Lincoln

And The Survey Says:

Q. What would you like to tell middle school kids about atheism?:

A. I would like to tell them to look into their religion, and NOT just in religious books and DON'T ask your pastor/priest. Look for alternative sources but also try reading the Bible with an open-mind. Read it like a story from the Grimm Brothers and then decide just how much of that story you are ready to base your entire worldly beliefs on. Also look into what Christians themselves do and have done. What religion is the KKK and other militias? What religion were the Nazis, the fascists, and the conquistadors? Did their faith make them good people, or even temper their evil?

1999 Freethought Roundup!

On Easter weekend, (April 2-4, 1999), all atheists and other freethinkers are invited to Austin, Texas for the 1999 Freethought Roundup!, the national convention of the Atheist Alliance. The Atheist Community of Austin, host for the event, is working hard to make this a thoroughly enjoyable and informative gathering of non-theists. Convention speakers will include some of the best known and most influential thinkers in atheism today.

Dan Barker, Public Relations Director of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, tells a fascinating personal story in his book *Losing Faith in Faith*. As a former fundamentalist minister and evangelist converted to atheism, he has truly seen both sides. He has appeared several times on national TV and represents atheism with a sincere positive attitude and fine sense of humor. Also a talented musician and singer, Dan has promised to perform a "Freethought Concert" for the convention.

Douglas E. Krueger, author of a wonderful work entitled *What is Atheism; A Short Introduction*, will speak on his experience of atheism. Convention-goers will also hear from prolific writer Dr. Arthur F. Ide, author of hundreds of titles including *Tomorrow's Tyrants : The Radical Right & the Politics of Hate*, *Unholy Rollers : Televangelism and the Selling of Jesus*, and *Unzipped : The Popes Bare All : A Frank Study of Sex and Corruption in the Vatican*.

Journalist and author James A Haught will speak on "The Trillion Dollar Fraud", and Ben Akerley, author of *The X-Rated Bible*, will discuss "The Bible in the Bedroom", a look at how biblical ideas have influenced our current sensibilities. Those who attended last year's convention in St. Louis and enjoyed Ray Romano's "Judas" will be happy to hear that he will treat us to another dramatic performance this year. Something by Twain, perhaps? Adam Butler, FFRF's 1998 Student Activist of the Year, will tell us of his experiences as an Alabama Freethinker, and atheist schoolteacher John Koonz will talk about "Teaching Evolution to a Hostile Audience".

Workshops and panel discussions will seek to stimulate, entertain, and educate. The folks from OABITAR (Objectivity and Balance in Teaching About Religion) will give a presentation on teaching about atheism in those public schools where overview classes "about religion" are taught -- classes which frequently leave out the contributions of freethinkers. Richard Russell will teach us about "Parliamentary Procedure for Small Groups", and is also organizing a dramatic reading of a work by noted atheist author Harlan Ellison. A panel discussion on Sunday will cover issues related to "Positive Atheism."

A lunch has been planned for Saturday and a banquet for Saturday evening. Both meals will feature the flavorful fare for which Austin is widely known. Plans are also being made for a Friday night visit to Esther's Follies for some irreverent hilarity. Expect the weather to be fair and the wildflowers to be in bloom.

The 1999 Freethought Roundup will be held at Austin's Downtown OMNI Hotel at 700 San Jacinto. The OMNI is built on the site once occupied by the official residence of the President of the Republic of Texas, and is only a block away from 6th Street's collection of restaurants, live music venues, and the hottest night life in Texas. The Capitol Building is only a short walk away, and most of Austin can be seen from the OMNI's rooftop pool. For hotel reservations, please contact the Omni Hotel at (512) 476-3700 or 1-800-THE OMNI or on the web at www.omnihotels.com. Please tell them you are with the 1999 Freethought Roundup! (or Atheist Alliance Convention) to get the special room rate of \$73, single or double.

Convention Registration

___ Regular Registration(s) @ \$50 per person..... \$ _____
(There is no registration fee for minor children accompanied by a parent or guardian.)

___ Student Registration(s) @ \$25 per person..... \$ _____
(Include Photocopy of Student ID)

___ Saturday luncheon(s) @ \$25 per person..... \$ _____

___ Saturday night banquet(s) @ \$35 per person..... \$ _____

___ Vegetarian meals, please!

___ Friday night "Esther's Follies" @ \$16 per person. \$ _____

Total..... \$ _____

Name..... _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip..... _____

Contact Phone Number

or E-mail Address..... _____

• Please copy this form, fill it out completely, and send it along with check or money order (no cash please) to:

Roundup Registration

P.O. Box 3798

Austin, TX 78764

• Please include the names of all persons in your party so that we may make name tags. Print plainly and use an extra sheet if necessary.

• Make checks payable to "Freethought Roundup Committee".

In-Your-Face Atheism: Condemnation Or Compliment? Why Use That A-Word Anyway?

Among my freethinker friends, I've been hearing a lot of questioning of and condemnation of what people are calling in-your-face atheism. Some of our group having noticed that Howard Thompson, to name one, uses the word "atheist" pointedly, to provoke a response. He forces people to be aware of his atheism. "Wearing your atheism on your sleeve" is one way this characteristic has been described.

Oddly enough, in our society, a nonbeliever can be perceived by believers and nonbelievers alike as being a zealot simply for failing to hide or downplay her lack of belief. A bigoted society has conditioned us to consider a high level of overt religious activity and messages as a respectable, above criticism, inherent right. The same society considers virtually any display or statement of atheism, whether public or private, as sinister and outrageous. Even to other nonbelievers, an atheist simply using the worded "atheist" can seem like "in-your-face atheism." A double standard exists.

Life can certainly be easier if an atheist keeps his lack of belief to himself. Probably most atheists stay in the closet to avoid criticism and ostracism. You can use some euphemism or inaccurate label to hide the fact that one is actually a member of a hated minority. The advantages are many. The cost varies. Some people are comfortable with this approach. Others feel cheapened, dirtied, dishonest, and hypocritical.

Another approach atheists often take is delayed, limited disclosure. You hide your atheism until you feel that your new friend respects and cares for you. You feel sure that your friend recognizes that you are a good, moral, responsible person. Then you carefully expose yourself to be a nonbeliever, avoiding the word atheist if possible. After the announcement, you wait anxiously to see if you are still accepted. If the friendship continues, you carefully never mention the subject again. There are lots of variations of this approach. Maybe you announce that you do not believe. Maybe when your friend mentions God, you just roll your eyes. It depends on the friend. Maybe, you sort of make fun of your disbelief, soften it by calling yourself just a crotchety old cynic (its just you, its not that God really may not be there). Maybe, too, the friendship is over. Seldom is your atheism discussed openly and respected. But life can go on.

If the relationship doesn't end, you may feel a great deal of relief that you don't have to be so dishonest and hypocritical. But you probably better still be careful! Just saying a little too much can sour the deal! Walk on that tightrope.

What if you are just a more open and direct person? If you are as open about your atheism as believers are about their faiths, you will be regarded as an in-your-face atheist. If you mention your lack of belief as casually and often as your friend mentions her beliefs in ordinary conversation, she's a regular acceptable person while you are a fanatic. It is natural that basic philosophy will show up routinely in normal conversation. No one is condemned for expressing theirs but atheists. Then it is called "evangelizing."

There is another important aspect to the "in-your-face" atheist's behavior. Years of experience using the other two methods of being an atheist (staying in the closet or delayed, limited disclosure) indicate that although these two techniques may ease an atheist through life in a religious society, they will have no effect on society's acceptance of atheists. Friends of the disclosed atheist usually regard the atheist as a nice person "in spite of" her atheism. Atheism remains a dirty word.

The point of wearing atheism on your sleeve is to change society's stance toward atheists. It is a civil rights issue, a matter of freedom. The atheist who takes this tack is willing to be uncomfortable and to take a lot of criticism in order to push the envelope of what is tolerated in our society. It is not about trying to make atheism or atheists popular or liked. It has nothing to do with trying to convince others that atheism is true or good or the philosophy for them. The point is just to get people to tolerate atheists as citizens with the rights and freedoms of other citizens. And this can only be done by using the pointed words "atheist," "nonbeliever" or "unbeliever." Negative as these words seem to some people, they are the only words that will set us free. Atheists are ostracized for what we don't believe. We have received less hatred when we call ourselves freethinkers or secular humanists or agnostics or whatever only because people haven't always realized those terms indicated that we didn't believe in gods. You can't fight for the acceptance of something without naming what that thing is. It is important to each of us whether we are rationalists or humanists or objectivists or whatever, but religious people have no real interest in what our positive philosophies are. The defining characteristics that causes their hatred and therefore sets up us as second class citizens is our atheism.

Well, there is another point to being open about being an atheist. It is to show other atheists that they too can come out of the closet. Or rather to show when they can and when they can't. It makes it clear when atheists are tolerated and when they are not. It brings the issue out into the open to be inspected. We will find out which of our fears are warranted (yes, we really can get fired from jobs) and which may not be. Religious leaders have worked hard and successfully to get atheists to restrain themselves. Are our fears blown out of proportion? Sometimes, yes!

But, back to society's tolerance of open atheism. Society is always hard on those who first try to bring another group of outsiders in. After enough people stick out their necks, society comes around to, no, not approval of the group, but acceptance of them as people with rights. Remember when no one talked about cancer? People with cancer were shunned! People in racially mixed marriages were scandalous. People with all sorts of disabilities were supposed to live their lives in the basement out of sight so as not to offend "normal" people! I'm just talking about things I have seen in my lifetime, here. (And for those who haven't met me, I'm 52.) Oh, there is another one! Women over 29 might as well be dead (or tending to the children). In just a few short years, attitudes have changed so much! But what did it take? People who took a lot of flack for bringing these issues out in the open when society wanted, oh so badly, to ignore them! Was it hard? You bet! Did it work? You bet! Were those civil rights workers (for any of these causes) condemned and hated by some? Yes. Even by some of their own.

~Julie Fisher

The Positive Atheist

For several months now, I have been thinking of including a regular feature promoting "positive atheism". There has been much talk about what a positive atheist culture would look like. I don't pretend to have all the answers. I do, however, consider the following article by Jon Pool, to be an excellent way to begin this feature. Julie Fisher's Atheist Invasion announcement also fits in with this new feature. The Hill Country Freethinkers are considering invading Comfort with the express purpose of picking up trash in the city park and having fun. Now that's positive!

~John Koonz, Editor

Recently at the Furr's meeting the topic of discussion was "Can atheists have Morals." I had anticipated a very interesting forum led by the speaker. The guest speaker gave a very good speech and raised a number of very good points but I felt he was somehow missing the point. I was an agnostic for most of my earlier years and have been an atheist for the last eight. Morals and morality have been thrown into my face by those who hold religious beliefs more often than I care to remember and I've had ample opportunity to think, reflect, and come to some very startling conclusions.

1.) For those who would have morals and be good people, I define being good as having a deep love and respect for ones self and the world around you, religion is not necessary to achieve goodness. Those who will be good will be good regardless of their religious beliefs or lack thereof. Those who would be bad will be bad no matter what they believe. History has born this out. Review the history of christianity and you will see horrifying atrocities committed in the name of god and you will see very good people doing what they can to live good lives. As atheists we should realize that goodness and badness are very individualistic. Just like everything else. Christians always attempt to distance themselves and their religion from those among them who do evil. They want everyone to blame the initial and not the religion, a survival trait that has served them well for almost 2000 years and has become ingrained in the everyday practises of believers.

2.) Christians say that they have the market cornered on morality because they are answerable to their god whom they claim is the supreme ruler of the universe (all hail the almighty dollar.....) nevertheless they leave for themselves a huge glaring ridiculous loop hole, no matter how rotten you've been, no matter how evil, hateful, malicious, vile, murderous, and utterly contemptuous you have lived the entirety of your life all you have to do is ask for forgiveness and it's all made better, it's all forgiven, the slate is wiped clean. Think about that for a moment, let it really sink in. No matter what you do you can get away with it. The supreme ruler of the universe will forgive anything. In the final analysis it means a get out of jail free card to do whatever evil you care to do. It's truly monstrous and vile isn't it?

We as atheists do not have that get out of jail free card. That carte-blanche to do evil, we realize that we are responsible for our actions and must take responsibility for them. No one is going to make it all go away. I put forth to you that a rational, thinking person who realizes the consequences of their actions will be the most moral of all. I'm not saying that the morals of the atheist will always mesh with what christians think morality should be, (an ideal that is very unrealistic and for which they set themselves up to fail) or even that the morals of one atheist will agree completely with the morals of another atheist. I'm saying that atheists are perhaps the most moral where it counts, we take responsibility for ourselves and our world. We work to preserve the world and the liberties of our fellow human beings. We are not as christians who take no reasonability for the world (by their own words they are in the world but not of the world) and have a history of tyranny, oppression, and destruction. We know who we are and what our responsibilities are. What higher morals could there be?

~Jon Pool

Invasion T-Shirts

It won't be long until area atheists will be invading the town of Comfort as predicted by the present day prophet Roy Perkins (petitioner extraordinaire). Come as part of the invading forces (dressed in handsome T-shirts announcing the 1999 atheist invasion of Comfort) or as a FOA (Friend of Atheists) in plain clothes. Contact Julie Fisher of the Hill Country Freethinkers (zoe@a-omega.net) to order your "Atheist Invasion" T-shirt. These elegant navy T-shirts will cost about \$14. The invasion date will be announced later and will include antiquing, shopping, dining, and stopping by the Cenotaph.

~Julie Fisher

Book Review

I really wanted to like this book. Its title is provocative, its subject is the inherent racism in Christianity throughout American history, and it's written from a freethought perspective. There's even a note on the origins of the Janson type it was set in.

However, a history book should be written in some sort of chronological order. The Arrogance of Faith makes no attempt to follow events and trends as they happened over the years. Instead, it haphazardly skips across various eras with no sense of continuity. In an early example of what the reader will encounter throughout the book, it jumps from 1637 to 1677 to 1441 to 1924 to 1972 in just two pages.

Also, the index is incomplete. A reader wishing to refer to the WPA or the Moors won't find these topics (and many others) in the index. Several people who are quoted at least twice in the book are listed only once in the index.

Then there's the text, filled with far too much useless prose. For example: "It is not uncharacteristic in the study of race

relations that the catechisms, as instruments of control, revealed more about the thinking of the slaveholding society and its clerical leaders than they did about the slaves."

This could easily be shortened to, "Catechisms revealed more about the slaveholders and their apologists than they did about the slaves." A professional editor could probably condense it even further.

Why do some writers insist on showing off their vocabulary at the expense of concision? Are they indulging in some kind of therapeutic outlet? Or do they get paid by the word? In this case, a quick look at the inside flap provides the answer: the author is a college professor. Which may be why *Arrogance* reads more like a collection of term papers than a cohesive book. This is not to say that all college professors are bad writers, but too many of them choose to bore readers with their verbosity rather than simply share the knowledge they've gained.

That's unfortunate, because the book contains some good information. It explodes the myth that most slaves became Christians: figures were closer to 10%, roughly the same percentage of the free population that attended church regularly. In fact, most slaveholders preferred not to let their slaves be converted because giving them Sunday off meant less work being done, allowing them a meeting forum could lead to rebellion, and English common law held that once a slave accepted Christianity, that slave should be set free. Another false legend exposed here is that northern churches aided and encouraged efforts to free the slaves: many abolitionists broke away from the mainstream churches because they wouldn't provide assistance to escaped slaves. Northern churches considered slavery a political issue rather than a moral one so as not to offend their southern affiliates. "Spiritual" music was anything but: allowed to sing only religious music, slaves often composed songs that were outwardly biblical, but that were actually coded messages for the underground railroad. Subjugation of all "inferior" races was an integral part of Manifest Destiny. And the Christian bible provides numerous arguments for both sides of the slavery issue.

But too much of the material in this book is just plain gratuitous. In addition to the needless wordiness, many of the points raised are repeated later, sometimes more than once. The major Christian sects are overanalyzed. Discussion of sexual customs in various cultures is always an interesting subject, but one that seems out of place here.

And the omissions are as glaring as the excesses. The author contends that since the few freethinkers were not organized, they had no say in the slavery issue. His research is incomplete: Thomas Paine almost single-handedly abolished slavery in Pennsylvania, the first state where it was outlawed, in 1780. In fact, when did the other northern churches abolish slavery? You won't find that answer in this book. He spends an entire chapter discussing politics within the Methodist, Baptist and Presbyterian churches without noting any differences between the three (except that Baptists are more emotional). He often refers to historical events without bothering to explain them, apparently assuming that the reader already knows the details.

Most of the material deals with slavery in the United States during the antebellum period, which is probably the author's special field of study. He spends only a few pages on the genocide of the Native Americans, and almost totally ignores slavery in the Spanish settlements.

Ultimately, the author fails to make this book interesting. The inherent racism in Christianity is one more reason why this bloodthirsty religion should be universally condemned, but the definitive book on this subject has yet to be written.

The Arrogance Of Faith, by Forrest G. Wood. Knopf hardcover, copyright 1990, 517 pages.

~Reviewed by John Rush

Announcements

New Board Members At the January 3rd meeting, Jim Hallamek was elected to fill a vacancy on the ACA board of directors. At the January 10th ACA Board Meeting meeting, David Kent and Vic Farrow were selected by the board to fill the seats vacated by Ralph Shirley and Joe Zamecki. At the meeting at Furr's on February 7th, members will have the opportunity to confirm or reject their appointments. ACA Board meetings are on the second Sunday of the month at 12:00. Board meetings are open to all members.

- Our next Blood Drive is on Saturday January 23rd at the Texas Regional Blood Center, North Lamar. They're open 8am-2pm. Please consider donating, especially if you have a rare blood type .
- Humanist & Freethought Conference on Saturday, January 23, 1999, in Arlington, Texas. If you are interested, contact Frank Prah (281) 479-6829; or Dick Nelson (972) 980-7706 Email frankprahl@earthlink.net
- On Feb 7th, our Lecture Series will continue with Steve Bratteng speaking on "Co-Evolution." Lectures are held at Furr's Cafeteria in Northcross Mall, 11:00 am.
- Secular Humanist group in Houston Saturday, February 20, 1999. 12:00-about 6:00pm: Darwin Day Celebration: An all-day event to be held at BORDER's Books & Music (9633A Westheimer, Houston, TX 77063). While still in planning, the Event will likely feature four speakers. John Koonz heads the science department at Westview Middle School in the Pflugerville ISD. He regularly gives presentations on teaching evolution. Gregory Brown is the Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Houston. Robert Dennison is a Houston school teacher and the Texas Biology Teacher Association newsletter editor. Keith Parsons is a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Houston, Clear Lake. Each will

discuss something about Darwin, his Theories, and/or modern evolution theory. In addition we will have a booth or booths set up and will be giving out flyers, suggested reading lists, and selling decals, bumper stickers, and the like. Please join us! For more information contact Events Director Keith Irish at: keith.irish@lmco.com.

- Products There are 21 t-shirts left. Our ACA t-shirts come in two types. One lists a number of famous atheists, the other lists 10 reasons why beer is better than jeeezuss. See Don Rhoades for more information. Godless dollars will be available soon. Cost will be about \$1.50. See Sue Osborne for more information on this and other exciting atheist products.
- 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.

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
 - Jim Hallamek
 - John Koonz
 - Arval Bohn
 - Arlo Pignotti

For more information about any of these coming events, call (512) 371-2911 or e-mail atheist@atheist-community.org

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