

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

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The Problem with Holy-Book Morality

"You can have a society based on some set of moral rules that you pick out of the bible, but are the ones you talk about, while you sort of brush the other ones under the carpet. You can do that, and have a whole society based on that and have the society function, because everybody is operating by the same set of moral rules. You can do that as long as that society is insulated from the rest of the universe, you never meet anybody who disagrees, and as long as you never encounter a challenge to the existence of the supernatural being who is supposed to have made up those moral rules in the first place.

The problem is, in today's world, we cannot have a society like that. We have too much contact with people who have different ideas. You can't have an authoritarian holy-book source of morality and expect to have a society that functions smoothly. And that's what's happening now. The problem in our country is not that the biblical source of morality is being undermined, that it is being taken out of school and so forth. That's not the problem. The problem is that it *has* to be taken out of schools because we can look at the source and say, 'boy, you just can't prove that it's true, we are never going to get everybody to agree this is true.'

We need to have a source of morality that everyone can agree is valid. And that's going to come from common experience based on our past discoveries of what works and what doesn't."

~Jeff Dee, co-host of The Atheist Experience

Ed. note. This was taken from The Atheist Experience episode that aired on May 9th. I am including it because I think that we need to take a stand on this issue of morality. Since the school shooting tragedy in Colorado, many religious people have been calling for a return to "Christian Values" in America. We need to demonstrate that non-theistic systems of ethics are viable. Rejecting religion is no excuse for unethical behavior. 

"Rejecting Religion" Essay Contest

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has announced their annual Rosamond M. Austin Memorial Awards for Austin area high school seniors. The first prize is \$1000, the second prize is \$500, and the third prize is \$250. Graduating college-bound Austin area (this includes districts surrounding Austin ISD) high school seniors are eligible.

The topic of this essay is "Rejecting Religion". Students may write about what caused them to reject religion or make the case for non-theism. Anecdotal essays describing personal observations and experiences are welcome, or a student may wish to use a historical approach in dealing with this general theme. Essays should be 3-4 typed, double-spaced pages with standard margins and an original title. A paragraph long biography should include the high school attended and the college/university to be attended in Fall, 1999. Include major and other interests. Essay deadline is July 15, 1999. Winners will be announced in September 1999. All eligible contestants will receive a school-year subscription to *Freethought Today*, the Foundation's monthly newspaper. Winning essays will be printed in full or in part in *Freethought Today*. Send essay and biography postmarked no later than July 15, 1999 to:

Austin High School Essay Contest,
FFRF, Inc.
PO Box 750
Madison, WI 53701

A Tale of Two Letters; How Some Christians Have Deceived Me (Part 2)

What I Found in 1 Thessalonians: The Second Coming. This book is dominated by the 2nd Coming. An imminent second coming. It closes all of the first 4 (of 5) chapters: . .1:10: "and to await his Son from heaven, whom he raised from [the]dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the coming wrath." 2:18-20: "We decided to go to you--I, Paul, not only once but more than once--yet Satan thwarted us. For what is our hope or joy or crown to boast of in the presence of our Lord Jesus at his coming if not you yourselves? For you are our glory and joy." 3:11-13: Now may God himself, our Father, and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you, and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we have for you, so as to strengthen your hearts, to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones. 4:17-18: "Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore, console one another with these words." .

So Paul wanted to make it back to Thessalonika, his favorite of all the early churches, to enjoy the Second Coming with them. But of course it didn't happen. The Second Coming is yet to happen.

All I was taught of this epistle in my church youth was from the 5th chapter, verse 2 of which reads "For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief at night." The disclaimer as to the exact date and hour of an event expected by the early church to occur within their lifetimes was thus presented to me out of context and as if it meant instead that the year, century or millennia of the 2nd Coming was not to be known. Thus another false conclusion in a Sunday School lesson caused by leaving out significant parts of the whole biblical story. In this case, practically all of it!

What I Found in 11 Thessalonians: The Second Coming. This book is dominated by the Second Coming. But it presents quite a different version of it than 1 Thessalonians. In fact it appears to deny the authenticity of the earlier letter: 2:2: "not to be shaken out of your minds suddenly, or to be alarmed either by a 'spirit,' or by an oral statement or by a letter allegedly from us to the effect that the day of the Lord is at hand."

At this later date, when the Second Coming hasn't happened and it can no longer be considered to be imminent, its failure had to be explained away. This outright denial of the earlier letter seems like an extreme form. Equally extreme is the claim laid to its own authenticity in the letter's penultimate verse: "This greeting is in my own hand, Paul's. This is the sign in every letter; this is how I write." What's that line of Shakespeare's? Something about "the lady doth protest too much?" II Thessalonians itself is generally considered a forgery, or in Christian fuzzy talk, a "pseudepigraph."

Pseudo-Paul offers some enhancement to the Second Coming prophecy, perhaps a salve for having to remove the "at hand" element from it. He also adds enough ambiguity which would serve to keep any specific part from failing so miserably again. Immediately after the denial verse, in chapter 2, verse 3, he writes "Let no one deceive you in any way. For unless the apostasy comes first and the lawless one is revealed....."

What I Found of an Imminent Second Coming in Other Epistles: Well, 1 Thessalonians didn't exactly have pseudo-P's phrase "at hand." Of course what it did have was the equivalent in other language and I wouldn't consider a defense of it on that ground to have merit. But I thought it would be interesting to look and see if that particular language showed up elsewhere. James 5:8c. "...the coming of the Lord is at hand." No II James to refute this, as his lack of movement and early death were well known so that it would be hard for him to forge his name. 1 Peter 4:7a. "The end of all things is at hand...." Peter also traveled around and is believed to have lived a fairly long life, so we find: II Peter 3:8: "But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day." 9a: "The Lord does not delay his promise, as some regard 'delay'...." 10: "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a mighty roar and the elements will be dissolved in fire, and the earth and everything done on it will be found out."

II Peter, like II Thessalonians, is widely considered to be a forgery, i.e., "pseudonymous work", despite excessive claims to authenticity (3:1a: This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you"), and serves to explain away the previous letter's claim of an imminent 2nd Coming. What I Knew of an Imminent Second Coming in the Gospels In Jerusalem, "The Mini-Apocalypse." Mark 13, Matthew 24, Luke 21. "Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled." (Matthew 24:34) [But could also be cited Mark 13:30 or Luke 21:32.]

The usual Christian attempt to explain this away is by equivocating on the word 'generation,' claiming that it refers to an "age" of man rather than to the usual range meanings that are so closely associated with the human regenerative cycle. Yet when I research the history of that word, I learn that the first known usage of the word that way occurs in describing the stages in the descent of man. Imagine that! Christian apologists forced to adopt Darwinian terminology.

In Caesarea Philippi: The "Taste of Death" Prophecy. Mark 8:38-9:1, Matt. 16:27-28, Luke 9:27. From Matthew's account: "For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father's glory, and then he will repay everyone according to his conduct. Amen, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his the kingdom." Christians often equivocate over the 'kingdom' phrasing, wrongly equating it to their so-called 'Age of Grace.' But as we see, the immediately preceding verse ties this to the coming "with his angels in his Father's glory" rhetoric of the Second Coming.

A Refutation stuck into John? After having a resurrected Jesus make three appearances, John has what appears to be an ending to his gospel in the last verse of the 20th chapter: "But these things are written so that you may believe, that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name."

But, strangely enough! the gospel goes on for another chapter. It doesn't add the only element missing from John's story, an ascension account. It has yet another post-resurrection narrative and something rather strange: an explanation for some sort of failed event that the author seems unwilling to fully explain.

John 21:22-23.: "Jesus said to him, 'What if I want him to remain until I come? What concern is it of yours? You follow me.' So the word spread among the brothers that that disciple would not die. But Jesus had not told him that he would not die, just 'What if I want him to remain until I come?' **To be continued.** 

~~Earle Beach

Book Review

Although *The Flight of Peter Fromm* by Martin Gardner is over twenty years old, it is well worth reading. This fictional account of a young divinity school student delves into theology in a very entertaining way. The author certainly created some sympathetic characters. Many of us who were raised in a religion will be able to relate to Peter Fromm.

The story is narrated by an atheist divinity school professor who mentored Peter Fromm. Peter had come to divinity school as part of his life-long plan to take part in a new Pentecostal revival. Unfortunately for Peter, his own intellectual integrity gets in the way. The story builds to its climax when Peter is to give his first sermon on the 'mystery of Easter'. I had expected this part to be somewhat anticlimactic. It doesn't take a genius to figure out what is going to happen, but when the big day arrives, Peter's doubts come out in a rather unexpected way. I found this part to be very humorous and just had to reread it.

~Reviewed by John Koonz

The Flight of Peter Fromm by Martin Gardner was published by Prometheus Books

Notes From the Board

On May 9th, we had a combined meeting of both the old 98-99 board and the new 99-00 board. Our main purpose was to hand over the tasks to the newly elected members. We also spent some time reflecting on all the wonderful things ACA has accomplished in the last year and discussing possible future directions for this organization. It was pointed out that everything we have attempted so far has worked out extremely well.

In order to better serve the needs of Austin atheists, we will be putting together a survey for our members. If you would like to have some input on this, or any other project, please speak up.

We also presented Don and Kellen with thank you cards for all of their hard work as co-chairs for the last two years.

~John Koonz jknz@hotmail.com

A Quote to Put on Your Refrigerator

"Religion is based, I think, primarily and mainly upon fear. It is partly the terror of the unknown, and partly the wish to feel that you have a kind of elder brother who will stand by you in all your troubles and disputes. Fear is the basis of the whole thing - fear of the mysterious, fear of defeat, fear of death. Fear is the parent of cruelty, and therefore it is no wonder if cruelty and religion have gone hand-in-hand"

Bertrand Russell

Welcome to the Texas Cow Patty Throwing Contest

On May 1, 1999, I attended a creationist seminar given at Raye Allen Elementary School in Temple Texas. The space was legally leased by a church group for its regular worship service as well as this day for the seminar. Mr. Jeff Jackson is the leader of this group. I simply forgot to get the name of the congregation. Due to circumstances, I missed the first 45 minutes or so of the presentation. I would like to thank Mr. Jackson and his people for their kindness and civility. It was quite a surprise when they knew they had a skeptic a'comin.

Mr. Heffner, the "Professor" of Mathematics from Kilgore High School, was giving this seminar. He had a slick slide show with 300 or so slides alternating between readings from the Protestant Christian Bible, prayers, and amens. He is an energetic volunteer in archaeological digs but is not an archaeologist. Interspersed between "Speculating" (Mr. Heffners word) were excerpts carefully selected from various journals and papers chosen to support his position. Mr. Heffner also carefully pointed out that this was a not for profit ministry. He was not paid anything to be there. He did one thing new. He admitted that he was speculating and could be wrong on some of the things he presented. Therefore, I was not surprised either from a psychological viewpoint or a scientific one with his presentation. You fill the launcher with as many fresh cow patties as you can find and fire. It was difficult to tie down to any one point and give due consideration to any point made during the presentation. It is not an uncommon method of presentation involving emotion and appeal to authority.

The work of the questionable PhD. Carl Baugh of the Creation Evidence Museum in Glen Rose Texas figured prominently in this portion of the presentation. ([Http://www.creationevidence.org/diss/disv1fr.htm](http://www.creationevidence.org/diss/disv1fr.htm)) The Fake Man/Dino Tracks, the Mummified Human Finger, and the Pre-Flood Hammer were all discussed.

These are all dealt with at <http://www.talkorigins.org/faqs/paluxy/whatbau.html>. There you will find that other creationists trash Dr.(?) Baughs work. These creationists also point out the honorary only and questionable degrees of others in this field. They have been burned by Baughs Fake Man/Fish Teeth, Fake Man/Tracks, and a few other things along the way. To reiterate the point, other creationists are pointing out his, and others, questionable credentials and work. Additional material can be obtained from the National Council for Science Education at <http://www.natcensci.org>. For some nice pictures of Mr. Baugh and company go to the dig site of nasa mike. They are good dig pictures. Digs are hot messy work. (<http://www.coolspace.gsfc.nasa.gov/nasamike/whatcool/dinodig/dino2/dino2-b.htm>)

Mr. Baughs lack of accepted accreditation could not change any physical evidence he might have found for his creationist views. However, when I contacted him through his site manager, I received an e-mail back saying that the address is on the web site, and to check it for yourself. He has let challenges to his credibility stand, without challenge or corrective action, all the way back to an NSCE report in 1989. I would welcome Mr. Baugh presenting any kind of credential accepted by the State of Texas.

Mr. Heffner introduced Mitochondrial Eve supposedly showing that mankind is less than 10,000 years old, the decaying magnetic field of earth, and the depth of dust on the moon as evidence for creation. These last two issues are discussed on the Talk Origins website. Again, the interesting thing is how many creationists disagree with these positions.

In short, the show was long on glitz and short on substance. There was not one peer reviewed research article, one astounding new discovery, or anything like that. Peer reviewed material was not this presenters watchword. Again, I do not want to be accused of attacking the messenger. Method of presentation, sources, and qualifications are part of any scientific peer review process. The slide show did not shake my personal position in support of evolutionary thought. Paraphrasing Dr. Tim Berra of UCLA, "The greatest weakness of creationist arguments is the competitive nature of science. Any researcher that proves the assertions of creationists will be a wealthy man."

The creationists again did not make their case. This was a pep rally for the faithful. Amen. 

*~David M. Bagley PDCB, NDDAA
Poor Damn Cuntry Boy, No Damn Degree At All*

And The Survey Says:

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

A. I think school in general should be taught from a foundation of atheism, so that religion is viewed as a distinct choice, not as the default position. Kids should be taught the history of religion, comparative religion, and the consequences that religious belief will have for their own intellectual integrity. It's useful to examine religion in the context of cultural evolution.

From the Editor



John Koonz, Editor

When you are done reading your copy of *The Atheist*, consider leaving it someplace where it can be found and read. If you know of any graduating high school seniors, encourage them to enter the FFRF essay contest. We need to get behind this extraordinary effort to promote positive atheism.

I included the quote from Jeff Dee because it is important that atheists know what to say when confronted with the issue of morality. I am in e-mail contact with a number of young atheists around the country. A number of them have started Freethought, Humanism and Atheist clubs at their schools. Some of them are now being accused of being somehow responsible for the violence in our public schools. *Homo sapiens* are social primates. Kids need to learn how to behave. When they figure out that the gods are make believe, they still need to know that certain behaviors are unacceptable in civilized societies. If you are interested in starting, or helping with, some kind of atheist Sunday school for our kids, please bring it to the attention of the ACA board. ~~ACA~~

~John Koonz, Editor jknz@hotmail.

Your ACA board of directors:

Co-chairs:

Susan Brown
John Koonz

Treasurer:

Earle Beach

Secretary:

Don Rhoades

Board members:

Keith Berka
Sue Osborne
Michelle Gadush
Jim Hallamek
Ken Miller
Arval Bohn
Ray Blevins
Vic Farrow
Jeff Dee

Cartoon

Paul Koonz © 1999

Announcements

- **ACA Board meetings** are on the second Sunday of the month at 12:00. Board meetings are open to all members.
- Our **Lecture Series** will continue with Howard Thompson on June 6, and Paul Wilson on July 4. Lectures are held at Furr's Cafeteria in Northcross Mall, 11:00 am. Susan Brown is in charge of scheduling our lectures
- **Products** There are still 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 jeezuss. See Don Rhodes for more information. Godless dollars are available now for \$1.50. See Michelle Gadush for more information on these and other exciting atheist products.
- Vic Farrow takes care of our **ACA library**. If you have a book you would like to donate, we would be happy to take it. **Social Events** are coordinated by Mary Sue Osborne. Regular get togethers are being planned.
- **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.
- The Atheist is printed on somewhat recycled paper! All photos are by Rodney Florence, unless otherwise stated. For more information about any of these coming events, call (512) 371-2911 or e-mail kellenvh@earthlink.net

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 u n t i l 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

Austin, TX 78764

P.O. Box 3798

