



Volume Nine Number 6 - July 2007

Meeting at Westside Unitarian Universalist Building 901 Page Ave Ft Worth 7 PM, 2nd Wednesday of each month - July gathering is on the 11th. Many of us dine at Luby's Cafeteria at 5:30 prior to the meeting (8th Ave South of Elizabeth Blvd) Join us if you'd like!

Last month's picnic was a resounding success!

The Fort Worth Humanists hosted a picnic at Trinity Park on the second Sunday of June. Invitees were members of the DFW Atheists, the University of Texas Freethinkers, and of course, our own members and friends.

As you might expect, those in attendance enjoyed meeting other people with like minded interests. The event was so successful that we are making plans to hold a picnic on a more frequent basis. It has even been suggested by many that we make this a quarterly activity.

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The American Humanists Association has awarded our chapter a grant of \$1,000 to be used as seed money to establish an outreach program benefiting those suffering from the consequences of drug and/or alcohol abuse. The program will be administered by our own licensed therapist, Dr. Russell Elleven, who will counsel those who choose not to seek the guidance of a "higher being," but will not exclude those who do.

Our speaker for the June meeting, Jack Z. Smith, columnist and member of the editorial board of the Star-Telegram, discussed "what the population increase will do for the North Texas region". One of the largest crowds ever to attend one of our sessions asked insightful questions on this, and other topics about which Mr. Smith is knowledgeable. Thanks Jack, for a very enjoyable and enlightening evening.

July's meeting will feature a discussion of what Humanism means to our younger members and how they decided it was something they could embrace and to which they could contribute. Jill Jung, Eric Stevens, Michael Little and Josh Donnoe will present the program.

Treasurer's Report

Beginning Balance	\$ 845.10
Collected Dues	246.00
Total Credits	1,091.10
Debits	
Honorarium: J Tant	25.00
Office Supplies	8.06
Printing Expense	14.40
Total Debits	47.46

Net Balance	
Dated June 13, 2007	\$1,043.64
Attested: Dolores Ruhs 6/13/07	

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The \$1,000 check issued by the American Humanist Association is not included because it is not in our general fund, but has been earmarked for SMART (Self Management and Recovery Training) - the program to assist drug and alcohol dependent people).

See: <http://www.smartrecovery.org/>



Yabba-dabba science

From the LA Times May 24, 2007 Opinion Page

Note to would-be Creation Museum visitors: the Earth is round.

THE CREATION MUSEUM, a \$27-million tourist attraction promoting earth science theories that were popular when Columbus set sail, opens near Cincinnati on Memorial Day. So before the first visitor risks succumbing to the museum's animatronic balderdash — dinosaurs and humans actually coexisted! the Grand Canyon was carved by the great flood described in Genesis! — we'd like to clear up a few things: "The Flintstones" is a cartoon, not a documentary. Fred and Wilma? Those woolly mammoth vacuum cleaners? All make-believe.

Science is under assault, and that calls for bold truths. Here's another: The Earth is round.

The museum, a 60,000-square-foot menace to 21st century scientific advancement, is the handiwork of Answers in Genesis, a leader in the "young Earth" movement. Young Earthers believe the world is about 6,000 years old, as opposed to the 4.5 billion years estimated by the world's credible scientific community. This would be risible if anti-evolution forces were confined to a lunatic fringe, but they are not. Witness the recent revelation that three of the Republican candidates for president do not believe in evolution. Three men seeking to lead the last superpower on Earth reject the scientific consensus on cosmology, thermonuclear dynamics, geology and biology, believing instead that Bamm-Bamm and Dino played together.

Religion and science can coexist. That the Earth is billions of years old is a fact. How the universe came into being and whether it operates by design are matters of faith. The problem is that people who deny science in one realm are unlikely to embrace it in another. Those who cannot accept that climate change may have caused the extinction of dinosaurs 65 million years ago probably don't put much stock in the fact that today it poses grave peril to the Earth as we know it.

Last year, the White House attempted to muzzle NASA's top climatologist after he called for urgent action on global warming, and a presidential appointee in the agency's press office chastised a contractor for mentioning the Big Bang without including the word "theory." The press liaison reportedly wrote in an e-mail: "This is more than a science issue, it is a religious issue. And I would hate to think that young people would only be getting one-half of this debate from NASA."

With the opening of the Creation Museum, young people will be getting another side of the story. Too bad it starts with "Yabba-dabba-doo!"

For more cut and paste: <http://citybeat.com/gyrobase/Content?oid=oid%3A139674>

What's wrong with the word atheist?

I have spoken with many non-believers in North Texas and have heard some express concern with the terms atheist, freethinker, non-theist, agnostic, skeptic, pagan, deist, non religious, and even humanist.

After diligent research I have discovered a word that seems, to me at least, to encompass what we conceive to be rational, without explaining what we do not.

In the early seventeenth century, Ben Jonson (1572-1637) coined the word nullifidian which Webster's Dictionary defines thusly, n. nul li fid ian a person who has no faith or religion. A straightforward word explaining a simple concept.

Webster's defines atheist as a person who denies or disbelieves the existence of a supreme being or beings. So I defer to Mr. Jonson, who wrote:

'Twas only fear first in the world made gods.'

As a point of interest: The antonym of nullifidian is solidifidian n. A belief that faith alone brings salvation.

Many of you have seen this cartoon - it appeared in a recent issue of the Star-Telegram - but I thought those who haven't, would enjoy it!



"The founders of our nation were nearly all Infidels, and that of the presidents who had thus far been elected [Washington; Adams; Jefferson; Madison; Monroe; Adams; Jackson] not a one had professed a belief in Christianity...."Among all our presidents from Washington downward, not one was a professor of religion, at least not of more than Unitarianism."

The Reverend Doctor Bird Wilson, an Episcopal minister in Albany, New York, in a sermon preached in October, 1831, first sentence quoted in John E Remsburg, "Six Historic Americans," second sentence quoted in Paul F Boller, *George Washington & Religion*, pp. 14-15

Washington revealed almost nothing to indicate his spiritual frame of mind, hardly a mark of a devout Christian. In his thousands of letters, the name of Jesus Christ never appears. He rarely spoke about his religion, but his Freemasonry experience points to a belief in deism. Washington's initiation occurred at the Fredericksburg Lodge on 4 November 1752, later becoming a Master mason in 1799, and remained a freemason until he died.

After Washington's death, Dr. Abercrombie, a friend of his, replied to a Dr. Wilson, who had interrogated him about Washington's religion replied, "Sir, Washington was a Deist."

"...Of all the nonsense and delusion which had ever passed through the mind of man, none had ever been more extravagant than the notions of absolutions, indelible characters, uninterrupted successions, and the rest of those fantastical ideas derived from the canon law; which has thrown a glare of mystery, sanctity, reverence, and right reverend eminence and holiness around the idea of a priest such that no mortal could deserve."...John Adams

"I have recently been examining all the known superstitions of the world, and do not find in our superstition, Christianity, one redeeming feature. They are all alike founded upon fables and myths."...Thomas Jefferson

"The purpose of the separation of Church and State is to keep forever from these shores, the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries."...James Madison

"It will not do to investigate the subject of religion too closely, as it is apt to lead to infidelity."...Abraham Lincoln.

What do you think the men who appear on our paper currency would say about their portraits appearing on one side and the words "In God We Trust" on the other?

And-Er-Rahman III (891-961) The greatest of the Moslem Arab Caliphs, who raised Spain from a state of profound demoralization to one of unprecedented prosperity, culture and brilliance while Christian Europe lay in the darkest phase of the Dark Age. It was from the splendor of his empire that civilization was rekindled in France, then in Europe generally. See S.P. Scott's *Moorish Empire in Europe* (3 vols. 1904) Scott piously deplores his "infidelity" and sensuality and then describes his magnificent work in lyrical language. Stanley Lane Poole (*The Moors in Spain*, 1897) also says that he created a civilization "such as the wildest imagination can hardly conjure up." He defied the Koran all his life and was clearly an atheist.

His fifty year reign saw the equal treatment of Jews, Moslems and Christians, ushering in a period of enlightenment that rivaled that of Constantinople. If only we in the Twenty-first century can learn from the Tenth.

The U.S. Constitution clearly states the following:

Article VI. Clause 3

"... but no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States."

And:

Amendment I

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;"

Since each state must accept the U.S. Constitution in it's entirety before entering the Union, what were the legislators of the following states thinking? Pandering to their constituents, I suspect.

Arkansas State Constitution, Article 19 Section 1 ("Miscellaneous Provisions") No person who denies the being of a God shall hold any office in the civil departments of this State, nor be competent to testify as a witness in any court.

North Carolina's State Constitution, Article 6 Section 8 "Disqualifications of office. The following persons shall be disqualified for office: First, any person who shall deny the being of Almighty God."

Pennsylvania's State Constitution, Article 1 Section 4 reads:"No person who acknowledges the being of a God and a future state of rewards and punishments shall, on account of his religious sentiments, be disqualified to hold any office or place of trust or profit under this Commonwealth."

Parliamentary Assembly Assemblée parlementaire



1. The Assembly asserts the standard setting role of the Council of Europe and is aware of its own responsibility in reassessing the basis on which our societies are to be built. It recognises science as part of this basis.

2. The advance of scientific knowledge through the process of rational enquiry is thousands of years old. Ancient civilisations around the World made valuable contributions. Modern science started in Europe with the scientific revolution of the 15th and 16th centuries. This was followed by the Age of Enlightenment in the 18th and has continued to the present. New theories were seldom easily accepted by the establishment, as was the case for instance with Lamarck and Darwin's work on evolution in the 19th century.

3. However, in recent years we have witnessed attempts to reconcile the biblical account of creation with modern science and outlaw the theory of evolution. "Creationists" pretend that "intelligent design" by a supreme entity is the scientific explanation for the universe.

4. Such an approach has no credibility among the scientific community but has succeeded in raising doubts in less informed minds, including persons with high political responsibilities, mainly in the USA but also in Europe. Some schools are now forced to teach creationism. The middle path of providing equal time for both merely offers a middle way between truth and falsehood.

5. Support for the scientific theory of evolution is almost universal among those with religious beliefs in Europe and nothing in this motion is intended as disrespect for any religion.

6. However, the Assembly is concerned at the possible negative consequences of the promotion of creationism through education and recommends that the Committee of Ministers assess the situation in the Council of Europe member countries and propose adequate counter-measures.

*Signed*¹:

McINTOSH, Andrew, United Kingdom, SOC

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BARGETZE, Rony, Liechtenstein, EPP/CD

CILEVIČS, Boriss, Latvia, SOC

de MELO, Maria Manuela, Portugal, SOC

de PUIG, Lluís Maria, Spain, SOC

DEVÍNSKY, Ferdinand, Slovakia, EPP/CD

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LEGENDRE, Jacques, France, EPP/CD

MacSHANE, Denis, United Kingdom, SOC

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TXUEKA, Iñaki, Spain, ALDE

WESTERLUND PANKE, Majléne, Sweden, SOC

WODARG, Wolfgang, Germany, SOC

Continued from the previous page:

Texas' State Constitution, Article 1 Section 4

"No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office, or public trust, in this State; nor shall any one be excluded from holding office on account of his religious sentiments, provided he acknowledge the existence of a Supreme Being."

Maryland, South Carolina, and Tennessee have similar provisions in their constitutions.

by **Bob Riggins**

I have compiled a list of "[Things Creationists Hate](#)" which might also be of interest.

Human Embryos

...especially very small ones, actually have tails and gill slits. So do all mammal, bird, reptile, amphibian, and fish embryos. One would almost think they are related somehow. Thank goodness for modern Creation Science, which has taught us how to ignore, deny, or find some rationalization (anything at all will do) to explain away this and all other evidence of evolution. (Yes, Ernst Haeckel fudged his diagrams of embryos to emphasize the similarities among the youngest ones. But he didn't make up the tails and gill slits. They're there. Look closely at some of your favorite fetus photos. Quit writing me about this until you've done your homework.)

Unusual Babies

...with such birth anomalies as being born with a tail, or covered with fur. Tails (abnormally extended coccyges) are more common than most people realize, since they are, of course, surgically removed immediately, and often the child himself is never told. For furry people, refer to the famous Mexican family, several of whom are circus performers.

These would, of course, be some of the "throwbacks" which creationists assert must, of course, occur if evolution is real. But since evolution is, of course, not true, the good creationist, upon being presented the very evidence he demanded, will, of course, not be fazed in the slightest. Of course.

A small footnote: back in the good old days, when everyone was a literal-creationist, and religion was science (known as the Dark Ages, with good cause), such babies were identified as the spawn of Satan, and killed instantly, along with their mothers, who were, naturally, witches.

Their Own Coccyges

...when examined closely via X-rays or a prepared skeleton, look disturbingly like the vestigial remnants of tails . They certainly serve no purpose nowadays (or very little--the few muscular attachments they still have could easily be re-engineered onto a less vulnerable structure), and if you've ever broken

you've probably wondered why we were Created with such a useless source of potential agony. (Besides, coccyx sounds downright obscene.)

Their Appendixes

Same problem as the coccyx , only it's even more likely to cause the average creationist great discomfort, and occasionally death. The scientifically literate, when cursed with appendicitis, might bewail the incomplete evolution that has left him with a useless and sometimes dangerous abdominal organ. Perhaps the creationist praises his Creator for blessing him with a "cross to bear." (Part of the Improving the Gene Pool Project: If you're a young-Earth creationist, the next time you have an attack of acute appendicitis, or better yet a ruptured appendix, rush with it to the nearest Peter Popoff Healing Crusade. Stay away from those modern "doctors," who actually think we're mammals ! And for those folks who have heard that the appendix may serve some role in endocrine or immune functions, in the words of Carl Drews, "Something that explodes and kills people is definitely a mixed blessing, even if it does help somewhat with immune functions." Folks whose "god-given" appendixes have been removed don't seem to suffer from their absence, and I've never met one who wished he had it back.)

The Cause of Cancer

And who wouldn't hate that? But I don't mean the carcinogens that set it off, like tobacco tars, asbestos, or solar ultraviolet; I mean the root cause that makes it possible for things like those to start cancers growing. And that cause turns out to be evolution in action! A cancer starts when a carcinogen, or sometimes just a random accident, causes a mutation in a gene of one cell. That mutation "switches on" genes that are normally "off," and makes the cell start reproducing wildly, as though it were an embryonic cell, and not a dedicated part of an adult body. A mutation is one unit of evolution. In this case it is harmful, but the ability to mutate is so valuable to DNA--it lets it adapt to new conditions--that that mutability cannot be given up, even if it sometimes produces fatal cancer. It is perhaps significant (it makes evolutionary sense) that cancers in people are very rare until after their peak reproductive years.

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"I do think it would help if we had a public voice attacking the excesses of religion equivalent to the great 19th-century atheist Robert Ingersoll (who was once the Republican vice presidential candidate; try to think of a prominent atheist politician today)."

- Molly Ivins

The Hair on the Backs of Their Necks

...which stands up at the very thought that their children might actually be exposed to an evil-lutionist at school. When they stop to think why the hair on the backs of their necks should stand up, at that or any terrifying situation, the only explanation that makes sense is that it's a vestigial reaction inherited from our mammal ancestors. Other mammals' hair rises in response to "hair-raising experiences" as a defense. It's a warning sign of aggression, and may make the animal look bigger and fiercer. We've apparently given up that signal, maybe in favor of words or other body language. About the only trace left is that creepy feeling about nape of the neck and scalp, which is almost impossible for others to see.

(suggested by Ron Tolle)

Goosebumps

(the bumps, not the books [although many creationists hate those "occult" books, too]) Goosebumps were obviously "created" to erect and "fluff up" the hair or fur on a hairy or furry mammal ancestor, thereby improving its insulation value against the cold. Since most of us nowadays have so little body hair as to render it useless for insulation purposes, goosebumps are another vestigial reaction whose tool (fur) is no longer with us.

A creationary epiphany! : since God wouldn't create a useless bodily function, goosebumps were originally useful! Adam and Eve had FUR! (For folks who have stockpiled food and weaponry in anticipation of the Coming Race War, an epiphany is a sudden realization of a great truth.)

Wisdom Teeth

Steven Gay reminds us that wisdom teeth are a bit of a problem for modern humans--and any parts of our bodies that serve no purpose, are in the way, or are just more trouble than they're worth are a bit of a problem for creationists to rationalize. Why would a Master Creator give us more teeth than will fit in our jaws? I don't think I know anybody who has had all four third molars grow into place with the others and serve as useful chewing teeth. In some people they never erupt.

My top two grew out, but having no bottom ones to work against, they were useless for chewing. A great many people simply have to have them removed or suffer severe dental problems--because modern jaws are just too small to accommodate third molars.

Wisdom teeth make sense as evolutionary leftovers (probably in the process of evolving away entirely). What sense can creationists make of them (especially if one lives to the biblically promised threescore and ten)? (Thanks to the folks who have written to me to tell me that they have all four functional third molars. All have noted that they and their dentists recognize that they are rare exceptions.)

The Last Little Piggy

...the one who went, "Wee, wee, wee!" all the way home. (For those with deprived childhoods, I'm talking about little toes.) They're one more body part that is in the way, all too easily injured, and, when you stop to think about it, useless. We don't use them in walking. In parts of the world where people go barefoot most of the time, little toes missing through accident or disease are quite common, and don't hinder the person's mobility at all. Think we need them for balance or something? Our cloven-hoofed fellow mammals get by with two toes on the ground. Horses manage to be mighty fast with just one! Predatory mammals generally put four down. Do we need the extra because we're bipedal? Ostriches are on their feet all day, and can outrun anybody you know--how many toes do they use? Think about it: other primates have prehensile toes. Kids notice right away that monkeys really have four hands. A fifth digit is pretty useful if you're scrambling through branches (and secondarily manipulating objects). Our little fingers are truly useful and probably in no danger of disappearing. But we quit climbing in trees with our rear "hands" and they became feet--which explains why they have useless fifth digits. And while we're at it...

Doggie Toes

What is that thing hanging off the back of your dog's lower leg? It's his "dewclaw," and it's entirely useless. On some dogs it's so much in the way that it's surgically removed. It's not a result of selective breeding, either. Cats have 'em, wolves have 'em, tigers have 'em. What would it possibly be except a now-useless fifth toe, in the process of disappearing through evolution?

Blind Cave Fish

...and other cave critters that still have vestigial but absolutely useless eyes. Evolution can be that sloppy, but can a perfect Creator?

-Donald Wilson

For more Things Creationists Hate, go to: <http://www.skepticreport.com/creationism/vestigial.htm>

Breaking the Spell By Daniel Dennett - Reviewed
by Troy Jollimore of the San Francisco Chronicle

The most baffling thing about religion, surely, is how few people seem to find it baffling at all. From the inside -- the perspective of the practicing believer -- the religious life may seem the most natural thing in the world. But that each religion has its bizarre features is an all-too-obvious fact to those who stand outside it. What matters more, though, is that religion itself is a rather bizarre phenomenon -- a fact that is less commonly observed than it might be, not only because few of us approach religion entirely "from the outside," but also because most religions have built-in mechanisms to discourage objective evaluation, investigation and criticism.

Daniel Dennett's "Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon" asks us to imagine ourselves outside, to try to occupy the perspective of the objective observer, and to ask such fundamental questions about religion as: Why does it exist at all? Is it good for us?

In light of the resistance many people feel, and most religions encourage, to taking an objective scientific approach to this sacrosanct subject, the book is bound to raise some eyebrows. And despite his occasional avowals to the contrary, it is fairly clear that Dennett intends a certain amount of eyebrow raising. If not, he would have chosen a different title. ("Breaking the Spell" seems to suggest some sort of mesmeric trance from which we must be freed.) And he would surely have chosen not to label himself and his fellow atheists, agnostics and other naturalists as "Brights" -- a term that, as he himself admits, may be taken to suggest that the religious are "dim or stupid." (He disavows this implication, of course, writing that religious people "might like to choose a name for themselves. Since, unlike us Brights, they believe in the supernatural, perhaps they would like to call themselves supers.")

At the same time, Dennett does not conceal his desire to write a book that will appeal to a broad spectrum of readers: the super as well as the bright. The main business of the book is to give a scientific account of how religion might have evolved among creatures such as us, in the absence of supernatural forces. But before plunging into this endeavor, Dennett spends three chapters attempting to convince his more skeptical readers that such a project is worth undertaking. It's hard to know just what to think about these first hundred pages. Dennett's defense of the free and open scientific investigation of religion is eminently sensible, and he is careful to give a fair hearing to both sides. But it is composed mostly of familiar points and is therefore rather unlikely to convince anyone who hasn't already been convinced.

As for those who have already been convinced (the majority of the book's readers, presumably), they don't need to hear the arguments and might indeed be a bit bored by this part of the book.

Such readers would be well advised to skip ahead to Part 2, "The Evolution of Religion." These five chapters usefully summarize much of the current scientific work on the nature and origin of religion. A good deal of the discussion here relates to the possibility that a "symbiont" theory of religion might provide a better explanation than a so-called sweet-tooth theory. Briefly (and over-simplistically), this is the idea that rather than asking how did it promote human survival to develop a taste for religion, it might be more useful to think of religion as a type of mental parasite that is itself capable of, and subject to, evolution.

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