

"...we are in no way
a Christian nation."
President George Washington

Critical Thinker

The Bimonthly Newsletter of United States Atheists | May / June 2003

An Evening At A Christian College

by Kendall Auel Member & Co-host of "Bunk Busters"

It isn't often that atheists get much respect from Christians, and it is even more unusual for an atheist to be invited to speak to a group of Christian college students. One might expect some kind of ambush tactics if such an invitation were given. So on March 17th I went to see just what would happen when Jim Archer, our new USA president, spoke to a group of college students at Cascade College in southeast Portland. The title of his talk was "An Atheist's World View: 15 Principles."

Cascade College is a small Christian college affiliated with the Churches of Christ. The Churches of Christ rose from the Restoration Movement, an effort in America to eliminate the hierarchical structures of the traditional churches. There is no formal organizational structure in the Churches of Christ, and they suppos-

edly have no accepted doctrine. They are, however, *Bible* fundamentalists and tend to be *Bible* literalists.

Jim had been asked by Ron Clark, an instructor at Cascade College, to speak to his "Historical Jesus" class. It's not clear what the connection to atheism was, but I think it was something like this: you can use logic and reason to believe in Christ because there is historical evidence for his life. Never mind that there is more evidence for the life of Tom Sawyer. But I digress.

The setting for Jim's talk was casual, with Jim seated in a comfortable chair and the audience in a semi-circle in front of him. There were perhaps six to eight atheists that had come to sit-in and give moral support. I estimate that there were 15 to 20 college students and a couple of teachers in attendance as well.

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Kiwanis Club Talk

by James E. Archer President, United States Atheists

On April 4th, I attended the monthly meeting of the Kiwanis Club at the Radisson hotel. The meeting opened with a prayer. As I always do during a prayer, I looked around to see who was not praying. The results were not encouraging: no one.

I opened my talk with a reading from the *Bible*: Psalm #1 which concludes with the words: "but the way of the ungodly shall perish." I suggested to the group that they ignore the psalmist and take "the council of the ungodly."

I then launched into my talk: "An Atheist's World View: 10 Principles." With a few exceptions, the response of the audience was rather cold. At the end, only two questions were asked and the meeting was abruptly ended. I expected anger and criticism and got only silence. I don't think this group was ready to deal with the issues I raised. So what else is new?

Nonetheless, two members of the group made a point of telling me they were not religious ("agnostics") and I went away with a really "cool" pen light. Atheism marches on! ■

Upcoming Events

Adopt-A-Highway Cleanup

Saturday, June 14, 9:30am Meet at the Atheist Community Center, 6415 SE Foster Rd. Join us for about two hours of cleaning-up the stretch of highway "adopted" by USA. Dress for the weather, wear comfortable shoes and bring a pair of gloves. There's no telling what you'll find by the side of the freeway.

Weekly Meetings

Every Tuesday, 7:30pm Join us at the Atheist Community Center, 6514 SE Foster Rd., Portland. Guests and the public are always welcome.

May 06	Speaker
May 13	Social/discussion
May 20	Work/discussion
May 27	Open forum
June 03	Speaker
June 10	Social/discussion
June 17	Work/discussion
June 24	Open forum

Bunk Busters

"Bunk Busters" is the TV show produced by USA and cablecast through Portland Cable Access. Join co-hosts Jerry Billings and welcome new co-host Kendall Auel.

Schedule (on Comcast Cable):

Tuesdays	7:30pm	Ch. 22
Saturdays	1:30pm	Ch. 23
Sundays	2:30pm	Ch. 11

Web Site

Be sure to check our ever-improving Web site for the latest information.
www.unitedstatesatheists.com

Dial-An-Atheist

For a weekly message of common sense, dial 503-ATHEIST (284-3478).

Critical Thinker

For complete submission guidelines, go to www.unitedstatesatheists.com/criticalthinker/. Deadline for next issue: June 15, 2003. Send to criticalthinker@unitedstatesatheists.com.

Two Arguments Against God

by **James E. Archer** *President, United States Atheists*

Recently I have received several e-mails from Theists who asked me to give the reasons why I don't believe in God. There are two approaches that one can take to this question and I would like to discuss them both.

The first, and by far the most difficult approach, is to actually take on the challenge of giving reasons. This is a difficult but not impossible task. The main reason it is difficult is the highly abstract and obscure nature of the god-concept. But let's give it a try anyway; first some background.

How does one go about demonstrating that something exists? You must define what the entity is, including any properties that are claimed for the entity. Let's try this out for the god-concept.

God is the spiritual entity whose properties include:

- Being all-powerful
- Being all-good

I think most Theists would agree that god must have these two properties.

Does such an entity exist? Let's observe first that "evil" exists in the world; that bad things happen to good people. Few would question this. Now a good God would stop bad things from happening. To stand by idle while injustice is everywhere is not ethically defensible behavior. If God is all-powerful then he clearly has the ability to stop injustice. But he does not do so. Therefore either god cannot stop it and is therefore not all-powerful, or chooses not to stop it and is therefore not all-good. It follows then that an all-powerful, all-good god does not exist.

Note that it is often asserted that you cannot prove a negative and that therefore Atheism cannot have a sound logical foundation. This claim is entire-

ly false. In mathematics, the most logically rigorous of all human endeavors, the method of proof by contradiction is used to prove some of the most important mathematical results that are currently known. A simple example of this is the proof that there is no largest prime number. The method employed is simple. One assumes there is a largest prime and then proceeds to construct a larger one, contradicting the initial assumption. This is the proof of a negative: that one cannot find a largest prime. To summarize: you prove a negative by assuming the positive and showing it leads to a contradiction. This is exactly the argument about god used above.

But there's a problem here. The problem is that Atheists are not obligated to provide Theists with any arguments that god does not exist.

Imagine I claimed that on the dark side of the moon live creatures that are 70 ft. tall, have three eyes and seven legs. And I was to ask the question, what makes you believe such creatures do not exist? I think most people would be amazed at the question. The relevant question is why would anyone believe it?

God is a far more unlikely being than the creature mentioned above. I don't believe in god because I have no reason to believe. It's that simple. I don't need reason to not believe. I need reasons to believe. And I find none.

Philosophically speaking, those who claim that something exists have the burden of demonstrating it. As noted above, they must demonstrate it exists and then show it has the properties claimed. This requirement isn't even remotely met by Theists.

My personal preference is for the second argument. Atheists don't owe

Theists an explanation for why God doesn't exist. But engaging Theists in such arguments can be fun and intellectually challenging. Either way the Atheist position remains logically sound and factually based. We have nothing to apologize for. ■

Christian College

...continued from front cover

The pleasant surprise was that the audience was polite, respectful, and attentive. Jim gave his presentation and then opened up the floor for questions and discussion. By the questions they asked, it was apparent that they had paid attention and given some thought to Jim's description of the atheist world view.

As should be expected, the students were very firm in their Christian beliefs. For example, they took the Genesis account at face value in spite of the enormous scientific evidence which contradicts the literalist belief. That is a surprisingly common view, even among college-educated Christians.

One young man expressed his belief that the most fundamental particle in nature is the sound wave. Thus, the *Bible* is correct that everything sprang from God's spoken word. That bizarre notion didn't get much support even amongst the Christians. Another student related the story of a severely injured person who was apparently saved by prayer. They seemed to recognize that divine intervention was not the only explanation, but chose to believe it was the best explanation.

The question and answer period was lively and provocative, and I sensed a real desire for these young students

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What Would Jerry Do?

by Jerry Billings Treasurer & Co-host of "Bunk Busters," United States Atheists

"Intelligent Design?"

Any time that there is a supposition or a hypothesis, there are two kinds of evidence to consider — let's call them Positive and Negative. The creationist position is that there is Positive evidence and the case is proved. And there lies the defect in the approach. It is non-scientific to search only for Positive evidence. It is the duty of the one claiming a position to search for Negative evidence, because no matter how much Positive evidence there may be, the very existence of just some Negative evidence will destroy the affirmative position.

Earth must have been designed by a wise, omnipotent, loving being because just look at the many blessings we enjoy. But what about plagues, droughts, disease, parasites, earthquakes, volcanos, yes, & even Satan. Could a person visit a children's ward in any hospital and conclude that there was an intelligent designer at work somewhere along the line? Can a xian logically defend the reputation of the designer by blaming Satan for the evils that exist when it was the designer who put Satan in charge? Does the design of Hell fit into the loving intelligent design in any way?

Given that there is substantial Negative evidence, the claim that there was an intelligent designer cannot be justified. On the contrary, it is fully established as disproved.

*Jerry Billings, Atheist
(by the way, I own a watch)*

The Prayer of Allegiance

When the McCarthy era politicians changed the wording of the Pledge to make it a Prayer, the effect was far more wide-ranging than one might think. As originally written it was a pledge only to, "My Flag." It was hoped that people of all nations could accept the Pledge. There was nothing nationalistic in it.

The first change was to make it a pledge to, "(T)he flag of the United States of America." No longer was it international, but still okay. Then in 1954, the wording was changed to make it no longer a pledge to our country, but a pledge to God who apparently keeps a close eye on the good old USA.

Think about it for a minute. We are now pledging allegiance to, "One nation, under God;" no longer to the nation but to the supernatural. It is no wonder that the radical religious right is outraged. Another little trick of theirs has been exposed. There is no limit to the deviousness of the RRR running all the way from "Intelligent Design" to "The Prayer of Allegiance."

One thing that the RRR cannot stand, though, is a bright light. If we keep on exposing the trickery of the Born Agains, sooner or later, everyone will know them for what they are.

*Jerry Billings
500,000 candlepower Atheist*

USA Volunteer Opportunities:

- **Someone to manage the USA Web catalog page and process orders**
- **Someone to present some item of humor at our weekly meetings**
Contact James Archer at a meeting or president@unitedstatesatheists.com.
- **Proofreader for the *Critical Thinker*.** Done via e-mail, takes about an hour every two months. Contact James Smith at criticalthinker@unitedstatesatheists.com.

Christian College

to understand why atheists think the way we do. Jim provided an excellent role model. He was calm, rational, and respectable. Whatever strange preconceptions might have been in their minds — of atheists as extremists or degenerates — they left with a much better image, of a deep thinker with coherent ideas. And I left with the impression that some Christians just might be willing to respect the legitimacy of the atheist position.

I want to thank Jim for being willing to enter a potentially hostile environment and make his case. It is one step on the path to eliminate discrimination against atheists and to reduce the bias against atheism as a valid philosophical stance. ■

*Join us every Tuesday night,
7:30pm at 6514 SE Foster Rd.*

Third USA Highway Cleanup A Success

by Nan Steinebach Member, USA

As part of our service to the community, USA has accepted responsibility for picking-up litter along I-205 between Columbia Boulevard and Airport Way, through the Adopt-A-Highway program. On March 15, we did our third cleanup. Four members did a "bang up" job of cleaning one section of highway and, I might add, in record time. As usual, Fred managed to find small goodies. Participants have made gathering for lunch an after-cleanup ritual, and we have a good time discussing anything and everything.

If you are interested in joining us for the next cleanup on June 14 (see details on the cover), please send an e-mail to Nan at contacts@unitedstatesatheists.com. ■

Join United States Atheists!

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I am an Atheist and would like to join United States Atheists.

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If you provide your e-mail address we will add you to our e-mail list to keep you updated on USA news and events. If you do **not** wish to be added to the list, please check this box:
Your personal information will be used only for United States Atheists purposes, and will not be sold or shared with other organizations.

I would like to help out financially. Enclosed is a charitable donation:

Student or Low Income (\$15) Basic (\$40) Couple (\$60)

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Please make check or money order payable to United States Atheists and mail to:

United States Atheists
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You may also join at any of our regular meetings held every Tuesday evening at 7:30 at the above address. Contributions are also gratefully accepted at our meetings.

United States Atheists is a 501(c)(3) educational charity run by volunteers. Donations are tax-deductible. Consult a licensed tax expert for details on how it would apply in your tax situation.

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Welcome to the **new** *Critical Thinker!*
See inside for Atheist news & views

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STAMP

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