

∞ The Secular Gazette ∞

Supporting Science, Reason and the Separation of Church and State

Issue #20

September 19, 2011

Some people call atheism a religion – but how can it be one if there is nothing to believe? But non-believers *do* believe – rather – *have confidence* in many things, primarily science and reason – and it's primarily these two things that make the world a better place.

Through the history of mankind we have seen dramatic improvements in the well-being of others through discoveries and empirical thinking in the natural world. In contrast, the supernatural world of faith does nothing to improve the world except through believing a false hope with no-yes-maybe answers and a mythical afterlife existence. Faith is not only unnecessary in this modern world, but hinders the well-being of others through supernatural belief systems and the behavior which stems from these superstitions.

Some might say that we're over those 'dark ages', but I think we might be entering a new 'dark age of politics' where religious freedoms will be decreased by those of the majority, and laws will be changed to reduce individual rights.

Religion is regarded by the common people as true, by the wise as false, and by the rulers as useful. **Seneca the Younger 4 b.c.- 65 a.d.**

Bruce Gleason, Editor

Contents:

[Skeptics Corner](#)

[Sam Harris Speaks](#)

[Science News](#)

[Church & State](#)

[Skeptoid.com](#)

[Born Atheist](#)

[Evo Education](#)

[Backyard Skeptics News and Meetings](#)

[Opinions](#)

[DVDs](#)

[Local and National Groups](#)

Skeptics Corner

Chiropractic is the most significant nonscientific health-care delivery system in the United States. --William T. Jarvis, Ph.D.

....chiropractic today includes more than 60,000 practitioners that represent a wide range of positions, from the traditional subluxation theorists to reformers who are critical of subluxation theory and its related pseudoscientific claims. --Ron Good



Today will be taking a look at Chiropractic medicine. Does it really work? What are the down sides? What evidence is there from the scientific community?

The basic idea of classical chiropractic is that "subluxations" are the cause of most medical problems. According to classical chiropractic, a "subluxation" is a misalignment of the spine that allegedly interferes with nerve signals from the brain. However, there is no scientific evidence for spinal subluxations and none have ever been observed by medical practitioners such as orthopedic surgeons, neurosurgeons, or radiologists. On May 25, 2010, The General Chiropractic Council (GCC), a UK-wide statutory body with regulatory powers, issued the following statement:



The chiropractic vertebral subluxation complex is an historical concept but it remains a theoretical model. It is not supported by any clinical research evidence that would allow claims to be made that it is the cause of disease or health concerns.

Even so, chiropractors still maintain that spinal adjustment is the key to good health.

Chiropractors think that by adjusting the misalignments they can thereby restore the nerve signals and cure health problems. This idea was first propounded in 1895 by D. D. Palmer (1845-1913), a grocer and magnetic healer from Davenport, Iowa. Palmer was a vitalist who considered intelligent energy to be conveying information among various body parts. There is no scientific evidence to support these ideas.



Palmer called this vital energy "innate intelligence" and claimed it was connected to a Universal Intelligence. He even likened himself to Jesus, Mohammed, Joseph Smith, and Mary Baker Eddy (Ernst and Singh 2008).

Palmer claimed that he cured a deaf man, Harvey Lillard, who was a janitor by trade, by manipulating his spine. As Dr. Harriet Hall comments: "This makes no anatomical sense." Palmer also thought he cured a person of heart problems by spinal manipulation. He

Palmer's son Bartlett Joshua (B. J.) Palmer (1882-1961) took over the chiropractic school, and after his father's death expanded the popularity of chiropractic by buying radio and television stations to promote it. His first purchase was in 1922 when he purchased radio station WOC ("Wonders Of Chiropractic") in Davenport. He used the station to market chiropractic, among other things. A second station in Des Moines, WHO ("With Hands Only"), was purchased in 1930. B. J. not only expanded the business by buying media to promote it, in 1924 he introduced a temperature-measuring machine called a neurocalometer as a piece of standard



equipment graduating students would need to detect misalignments in the spine or pinched nerves. He sold the devices for 10 to 20 times the cost of manufacturing them. The price he sold these useless devices for was about the same as the cost of a house in Iowa in the

1920s, yet he sold more than 2,000 of them to graduates of his college and other chiropractors (Ernst and Singh 2008). (For more on the invention of the neurocalometer, see here and scroll down to Dossa Evins.)

Read the rest of this article [HERE](#)

Want to support reason and secular values?

Tired of religious fundamentalist influencing our political system?

Freethought Alliance is a 501C3 organization and will gladly use your donation to promote secular values and the public education of non-belief. Use the DONATION button at freethoughtalliance.org to make your donation of any amount.

The Silent Crowd

Overcoming Your Fear of Public Speaking

It is widely believed that Thomas Jefferson was terrified of public speaking. John Adams once said of him, “During the whole time I sat with him in Congress, I never heard him utter three sentences together.” During his eight years in the White House, Jefferson seems to have limited his speechmaking to two inaugural addresses, which he simply read out loud [“in so low a tone that few heard it.”](#)

I remember how relieved I was to learn this. To know that it was possible to succeed in life while avoiding the podium was very consoling—for about five minutes. The truth is that not even Jefferson could follow in his own footsteps today. It is now inconceivable that a person could become president of the United States through the power of his writing alone. To refuse to speak in public is to refuse a career in politics—and many other careers as well.



In fact, Jefferson would be unlikely to succeed as an author today. It used to be that a person could just write books and, if he were lucky, people would read them. Now he must stand in front of crowds of varying sizes and say that he has written these books—otherwise, no one will know that they exist. Radio and television interviews offer new venues for stage fright: Some shows put one in front of a live audience of a few hundred people and an invisible audience of millions. You cannot appear on *The Daily Show* holding a piece of paper and begin reading your lines like Thomas Jefferson.



Of course, it is possible to just write books and hope for the best, but refusing to speak in public is a good way to ensure that they will not be read. This iron law of marketing might relax somewhat for fiction—but even there, unless you are J.D. Salinger or Thomas Pynchon, remaining invisible is generally a path not to the literary firmament but to oblivion.

Fear of public speaking is also a fertile source of psychological suffering elsewhere in life. I can remember dreading any event where being asked to speak was a possibility. I have to give a toast at your wedding? Wonderful. I can now spend the entire ceremony, and much the preceding week, feeling like a condemned man in view of the scaffold.

Read the rest of this article [HERE](#)

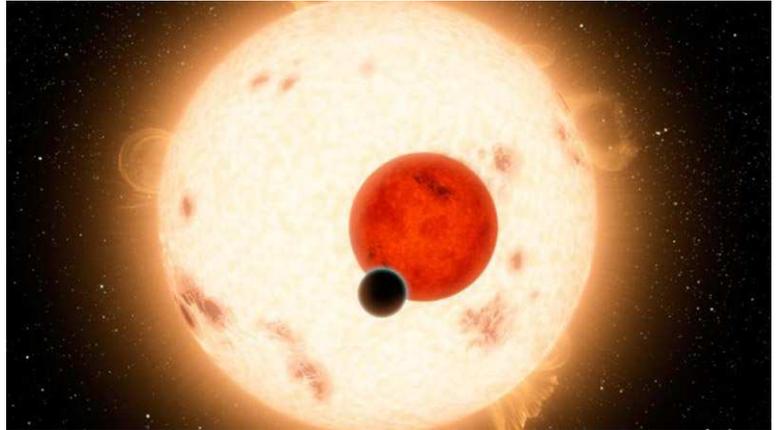


Science News

[NASA Kepler Spacecraft Finds Planet With Two Suns](#)

An uncommon Saturn-mass planet consisting of half rock and half gas that is located some 200 light years away from Earth with two suns has been discovered by Kepler spacecraft.

The rare planet is the first confirmed solar system of its kind. The rare planet orbits two stars, as portrayed in the sci-fi movie "Star Wars" more than 30 years ago. "Star Wars" portrayed the existence of a planet called "Tatooine" which has two sunsets. Now, it has become a reality after 34 years.



"This discovery confirms a new class of planetary systems that could harbor life. Given that most stars in our galaxy are part of a binary system, this means the opportunities for life are much broader than if planets form only around single stars," said Kepler principal investigator William Borucki in a [NASA](#) statement. "I am going to guess there are 2 million more such dual-sun planets," said Laurance Doyle, the lead researcher on the Kepler-16b report.

While the main purpose of the Kepler telescope is to search for Earth-like planets, Doyle took the lead in using the instrument to search for planets orbiting two suns. He said he has been trying to find such a planet for 20 years.

Read the rest of the article [HERE](#)

NASA's 4500 Million Launch Pad for

[NASA Announces Design for New Deep Space Exploration System](#)



NASA is ready to move forward with the development of the Space Launch System -- an advanced heavy-lift launch vehicle that will provide an entirely new national capability for human exploration beyond Earth's orbit. The Space Launch System will give the nation a safe, affordable and sustainable means of reaching beyond our current limits and opening up new discoveries from the unique vantage point of space.

The Space Launch System, or SLS, will be designed to carry the Orion Multi-Purpose Crew Vehicle, as well as important cargo, equipment and science experiments to Earth's orbit and destinations beyond. Additionally, the SLS will serve as a back up for commercial and international partner transportation services to the International Space Station.

Read the rest of this article [HERE](#)

Continents Influenced Ancient Human Migration, Spread of Technology

ScienceDaily (Sep. 19, 2011) —

Researchers at Brown University and Stanford University have pieced together ancient human migration in North and South America. Writing in the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, the authors find that technology spread more slowly in the Americas than in Eurasia. Population groups in the Americas have less frequent exchanges than groups that fanned out over Europe and Asia.

How modern-day humans dispersed on the planet and the pace of civilization-changing technologies that accompanied their migrations are enduring mysteries. Scholars believe ancient peoples on Europe and Asia moved primarily along east-west routes, taking advantage of the relative sameness in climate, allowing technological advances to spread quickly. But what about in North and South America, with its long, north-south orientation and great variability in climate? How did people move and how quickly did societal innovations follow?

Genetic data carries the signature of ancient migrations. Using advanced genetic analysis techniques, evolutionary biologists at Brown University and Stanford University studied nearly 700 locations on human genomes drawn from more than five dozen populations. They say that technology spread more slowly in the Americas than in Eurasia and that the continents' orientation seems to explain the difference. After humans arrived in the Americas 20,000 to 40,000 years ago, genetic data shows, the migrating populations didn't interact as frequently as groups in Eurasia.

"If a lack of gene flow between populations is an indication of little cultural interaction," the authors write in the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, "then a lower latitudinal rate of gene flow suggested for North American populations may partly explain the relatively slower diffusion of crops and technologies through the Americas when compared with the corresponding diffusion in Eurasia."



"Our understanding of the peopling of the Americas will be refined by archaeological data and additional genetic samples," added Sohini Ramachandran, assistant professor of biology in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at Brown and the paper's lead author. "But this is the signature of migration we see from genetic data."

To tease out the migration patterns, Ramachandran and fellow researcher Noah Rosenberg from Stanford gathered genetic markers for 68 indigenous populations from 678 genetic markers in Eurasia and the Americas. The goal was to study the distribution of genetic variation among populations. The similarity or difference in genetic makeup among populations gave the scientists insights about migrations long ago.

To illustrate, when one population breaks off from its parent group, the individuals in the new population take their genomes and any distinct genetic mutations with them. From there, the new population may remain independent of the parent group because of distance or other factors, and over time its genetic makeup diverges from the parent. However, if the new population reunites regularly with its parent population -- known as "back migration" -- the genetic makeup of the two populations remains relatively close.

"When populations do not share migrants with each other very often," Rosenberg explained, "their patterns of genetic variation diverge."

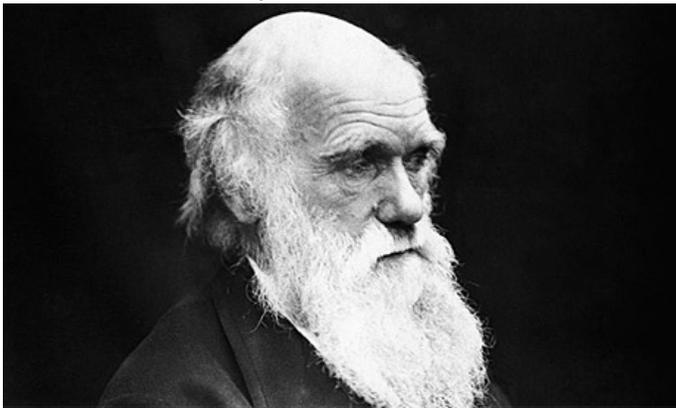
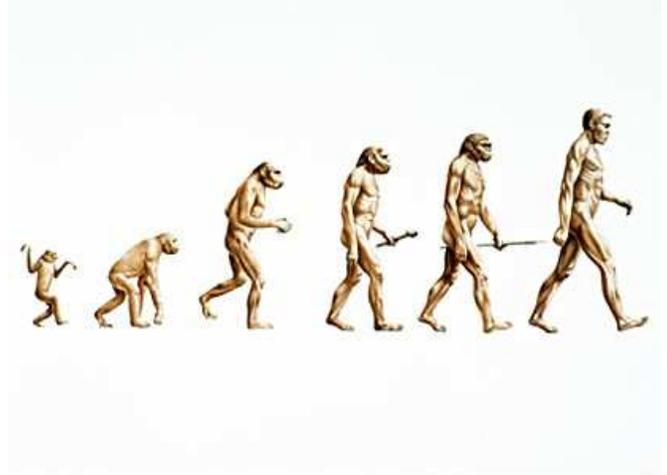
Armed with the genetic background of cultures spanning the Americas and Eurasia, the researchers could test whether the east-west orientation of Eurasia supported a rapid spread of agriculture and other societal innovations, while the dissemination of those advances was slower in the Americas due to the north-south orientation. They found that to be the case: The populations in North and South America are, for the most part, more different from each other than the populations in Eurasia. The reason has to do with the differing climates that migrating peoples in the Americas found when they moved north to south.

Read more [HERE](#)

Evo Education

A NEW FOX NEWS POLL ON EVOLUTION

A recent Fox News poll (September 7, 2011) included a question about evolution and creationism. Respondents were asked, "Which do you think is more likely to actually be the explanation for the origin of human life on Earth: the theory of evolution as outlined by Darwin and other scientists, the



Biblical account of creation as told in the Bible, or are both true?" The theory of evolution was favored by 21% of respondents, the Biblical account of creation was favored by 45%, the combination answer by 27%, and 7% of respondents said that they didn't know.

Evolution was more popular among Democrats than Republicans (28% to 13%), men than women (24% to 19%), college graduates than non-college-graduates (28% to 16%), the affluent than the non-affluent (28% to 15%), and liberals to conservatives (37% to 11%). In results from 1999, the theory of evolution was favored by 15%, the Biblical account of creation by 50%, the combination answer by 26%, and 9% of respondents said that they didn't know. The poll was conducted by telephone among 911 registered voters from August 29 to August 31, 2011; results based on the full sample have a margin of error of +/- 3%.

Looking for a good tax write-off?

Freethought Alliance is a 501C3 organization and will gladly use your donation to promote secular values and the public education of non-belief. Use the DONATION button at freethoughtalliance.org to make your donation of any amount.

Church-State Legal News

Doe v. Government-Sponsored Religion: Why Plaintiffs Sometimes Need To Be Anonymous

(from au.org)

SEPTEMBER 19TH, 2011

BY ROB BOSTON

[AMERICAN CENTER FOR LAW AND JUSTICE \(ACLJ\), RELIGION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES, RELIGIOUS DISPLAYS AND HOLIDAYS](#)

The unpleasant fact is that church-state disputes bring out the worst in some people.

Let's say you lived in Giles County, Va., a rural enclave of about 17,000 people in the southwestern portion of the state. Let's say you were a high school student and you were opposed to the school board's decision to post the Ten Commandments in your school.

Would you be eager to be public about it?

Some people might be willing to stick their necks out and take a public stand. Others might want to remain a little reticent but still look for ways to right this wrong – and they might seek to do so anonymously.

This is not a theoretical situation. Giles County has indeed decided to post the Commandments at Narrows High School. A student who opposes the display [is suing](#), represented in court by the American Civil Liberties Union of Virginia and the Freedom from Religion Foundation.

The student and his or her family also wish to remain anonymous. In a court filing, the student asserts, "I fear that if my involvement were made public, I would experience social ostracism, harassment, or threats from my school peers or community members."

In [a story](#) about this that ran yesterday, the *Roanoke Times* quotes Americans United Executive Director Barry W. Lynn. AU has filed many church-state lawsuits over the years, and we've sometimes represented anonymous plaintiffs. (In court documents, such plaintiffs are usually referred to as "John Doe" or "Jane Doe.")

"It's very ugly out there, and because religion matters so much to people – even when it's government-sponsored religion – people are reluctant to be plaintiffs," Lynn said. "I wouldn't say it's the majority, but there are certainly a growing number of plaintiffs named 'Doe' in these cases."

At AU, we know from experience that plaintiffs in church-state lawsuits can and do experience harassment. When we sued Judge Roy Moore, Alabama's infamous "Ten Commandments judge," the plaintiffs were named. That means people could track them down – and some did.

During the litigation, plaintiff Melinda Maddox, who was newly married, returned from her honeymoon to find that the windows of her house had been [shot out](#).



As I noted in a [February blog post](#) about plaintiffs in church-state cases, it can take real courage to stand up for church-state separation in court. Consider the case of Joann Bell, a mother in Little Axe, Okla., who protested religious activity in her children's public schools in 1981. Her home was burned down by an arsonist.

These days, the web makes it easy to track down virtually anyone with just a few mouse clicks. Sites like Google Maps and Zillow provide photos of most houses. (On Zillow, an aerial photo of my house shows my car in the driveway. One can learn the square-footage of the house, the number of bathrooms, our school district and what we pay in property taxes.)

Francis Manion, an attorney with the American Center for Law and Justice (which is not directly involved in the Giles County case), poses as a defender of open court proceedings.

"The general policy is that lawsuits are supposed to be public, and the public has a right to know who is suing who, and the person being sued has a right to know," Manion said.

Of course, that's easy for Manion to say. He's not the one who might be assaulted in school or suffer from other forms of retaliation. (Manion might want to take a look at some of the reaction the case has already sparked, as noted by the *Times*. Choice comments include: "Keep up the good work, you'll have a special place in Hell" and "Sure sounds to me like non-Christians ought to move out of Giles County before things get ugly over there.")

The unpleasant fact is that cases like this bring out the worst in some people. History, sadly, provides no shortage of individuals who are quick to resort to violence in defense of their faith.

The federal courts have a process that allows plaintiffs to seek anonymity for a reason: to protect themselves. U.S. District Judge Michael Urbanski is currently considering the motion requesting anonymity in Giles County. This should be an easy call. The motion should be granted forthwith.

Emergency Contraception

Charles L. Rulon

Emeritus, Life & Health Sciences

Long Beach City College

Emergency contraception

Q. What is emergency contraception?

A. Since the 1970's, rape victims have often been immediately given several ordinary birth control pills to avoid pregnancy. This worked most of the time and became known as the "morning after pill". Today, there is a specifically formulated "pill", a high dose of a synthetic hormone that can be used by women within 72 hours after unprotected sex to prevent pregnancy (www.GoToPlanB.com). EC is about 75% successful in preventing a pregnancy that would have occurred otherwise.^[1]

EC was finally approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 1999 for women 18 and over with a doctor's prescription. In 2006 it became available without a prescription and in 2009 the age was lowered to 17. Girls under 17 can obtain a prescription.

Q. How does emergency contraception (EC) work?

A. Depending on when they are used during a woman's monthly cycle, EC works by preventing the release of an egg from the ovary, or by blocking sperm from fertilizing the egg, or by inhibiting the implantation of the blastula in the endometrium or inner lining of the uterus. The blastula is a ball of cells smaller than a pin head that will eventually become the embryo.

Q. How safe is EC?

A. The World Health Organization and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration have reviewed the scientific data on EC and found it quite safe. Although regular use is not recommended, there have been no reported deaths or serious complications in over three decades of use. In addition, studies have shown no increased risk of birth defects or other problems with women who accidentally took high dose birth control pills *after* they were already pregnant.

Q. Can EC interrupt an early pregnancy and cause an abortion?

A. No. It takes about five days after fertilization for the developing blastula to reach the uterus and begin to implant in the endometrium. EC is ineffective once the implantation process has begun. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the World Health Organization and the National Institutes of Health all define pregnancy as beginning with the successful implantation of the blastula in the uterus. So even as long as two decades ago, polls revealed that 85% of physi-

cians in the U.S. who opposed abortion did support EC.^[2]

Q. Should EC be available to minors without a prescription?

A. Of course! Because of the short time factor for using EC, because so many teens are into pregnancy denial and careless when they have sex, and because they refuse to discuss their private sex life with their parents, the ready availability of EC becomes critical. Remember, condoms, foam and the sponge are already available to minors without a prescription.^[3]

France made EC available to minors without a prescription years ago. The French Government says it's just being pragmatic. Teens have sex. They make mistakes. Pregnancy shouldn't be one of them. So nurses in public high schools throughout France have been authorized to distribute EC to some 1.7 million French girls by request. Free of charge.

Q. Do we really want to copy the French?

A. In this area, why not? Consider: Every year in the U.S., over three million unintended pregnancies occur. Half are from contraceptive failure and about half of these end in abortions. Furthermore, over one million of these unplanned children are being born to teens at a taxpayer cost of billions of dollars a year. In addition, over two million children in the U.S. are physically abused each year by their mostly young parents. And finally, over 15 million American kids now live in poverty, with hundreds of thousands abandoned to the streets. The emotional, physical, social and financial costs of unwanted pregnancies to all these girls and women, to their kids, to their families, and to society at large are staggering. So of course EC should be widely advertised on TV, covered in all high school sex education classes, available without a prescription in pharmacies, and freely handed out to all girls and women during their routine family planning visits to keep for an emergency!

Q. But if EC becomes too easy to obtain, won't teens use it instead of contraceptives?

A. Some might, but at least they would be using something! Besides, EC can have unpleasant side-effects including nausea, vomiting, headaches and cramping. It's also less effective in preventing pregnancy (75% effective) than are most contraceptives. And, of course, EC provides no protection against AIDS and the other two dozen or so sexually

transmitted diseases. This is the main reason why condom usage is so important with casual sex.

Q. Won't giving teens EC encourage even more sex and more unwanted pregnancies?

A. Numerous studies have already shown that in-depth sex education classes and the easy availability of contraceptives do not result in more sex. But they do result in more responsible contraceptive usage. Also, most contraceptives are not fool-proof. The condom has a 15%/year failure rate with typical use. Even the pill has an 8% failure rate with typical use. Teens are careless and make mistakes. So with EC as a backup, unwanted pregnancies can be greatly reduced.

In most Western European countries, teens are just as sexual as here. But because of widespread availability of sex education, contraception and EC, plus less sexual guilt, the teen pregnancy rate is one-half to one-tenth of ours! Also, the spread of sexually transmitted diseases is viewed as a serious public health problem, not a sign of dirtiness and immorality.

Q. Still, isn't abstinence preferable for teens?

A. Arguably, certainly for young teens. But in the U.S. only 7% of males and 20% of females are currently holding out for their honeymoon. So for those teens who've chosen to be sexual, shouldn't our society do everything possible to avoid unwanted pregnancies?

The importance of EC

Q. Could EC really make that big a difference worldwide?

A. Absolutely! Globally, literally millions of families are devastated year after year as women with small children die from illegal botched abortions, or from pregnancy complications, or suffer chronic debilitating pain from massive infections, perforated uteruses and punctured intestines from botched abortions.

Furthermore, there are now one billion teenagers worldwide who are (or soon will be) having sex. Most lack any sex education, or any access to family planning services. In addition, tens of millions of abandoned children now wander the streets of its major cities and over ten million children continue to die every year from preventable causes.

But with EC the number of unintended pregnancies could potentially be cut in half. In HALF! Thus, the widespread easy availability of EC could constitute one of the most important advances in birth control in the last 30 years. The ability of women to have reproductive control over their own bodies has long been an essential goal in the never-ending battle for global female equality and stronger families, plus reduced poverty and disease.

In addition are sobering environmental realities. Our planet continues to pile up over 75 million additional humans every year, roughly *half of whom were never planned in the first place*. Because of human activity, invaluable forests and topsoil are disappearing at alarming rates. Water tables are seriously dropping in many areas. Deserts and wastelands are rapidly ex-

panding. Species extinction is accelerating. Massive, destabilizing ecological migrations to already overcrowded cities continue to occur and global warming has now become a major concern. If this environmental deterioration is allowed to continue, famines, riots and even social disintegration can't be far behind.

Opposition to EC

Q. Why haven't I heard more about EC?

A. Because of strong religious opposition from fundamentalist Protestants and, in particular, from the Roman Catholic Church.^[4] God has "told" them that once fertilization has occurred, a sacred, precious, innocent, new human life has come into existence, a life to be protected above all else. So "*EC pills are abortifacients that murder innocent pre-born babies!*" reads the anti-abortion literature. Thus, to vigorously oppose EC is to do "God's Will."

Also, anti-abortion activists are claiming that EC encourages promiscuity, which leads to more unwanted pregnancies, which leads to more abortions! These religious beliefs, coupled with patriarchal power motives and moral zealotry have largely fueled the anti-abortion, anti-EC, anti-contraception and anti-sex education efforts in the United States.

As a result, few family doctors until recently have been informing their patients and few health education instructors have been teaching their students about EC. In addition, drug manufacturers were slow to market EC fearing lawsuits, boycotts and major financial backlashes from religiously conservative mutual funds. Also, dozens of states have introduced bills that allow pharmacists to refuse to fill prescriptions for EC.

Q. How about advertising EC on TV?

A. Good luck! Even modern effective contraceptives (representing some of the most important scientific advances in the history of civilization) are still not being widely advertised on American television. In 1986, 50 years after it became legal to advertise contraceptives in the U.S., the first condom commercials appeared on television—but not because we had the highest teen pregnancy rate of all developed nations. Instead, it was a long overdue response to the deadly AIDS epidemic. Yet, even then the uproar, political pressure and threatened boycotts from the Christian Right squashed most ads. Contraceptive education and advertisements, they believed, encourages non-marital sex. Even the mention of responsible contraceptive use in most network programming has been censored for decades.

Q. Wouldn't the Catholic Church be opposed to EC regardless of the abortion issue?

A. Yes, since the Church is already strongly opposed to all forms of "artificial" contraception. Until 2011, the pope was even opposed to condoms for married couples in which one partner was HIV positive. U.S. bishops also have been vocal and consistent opponents of EC (plus opposed to all domestic and international family planning programs). At the United Nations, Vatican officials have aggressively used their

Church's official governmental status (which no other religion has) to block programs and policies that would make contraception and EC more accessible in the poorer parts of the world.

Q. Hasn't there also been a problem with Catholic hospitals in the U.S. when it comes to EC?

A. Absolutely. One in six hospital admittances are to Catholic hospitals. That's 50 million patients a year. About 80% of these hospitals don't offer EC to rape victims brought in. Nor do they refer rape victims to hospitals that do supply EC.^[5] To make matters worse, in recent years an increasing number of non-sectarian hospitals and HMOs have been taken over by Catholic health organizations.

The American public and EC

Q. Do most Americans agree with those opposed to EC?

A. No. Few really consider fertilized eggs and microscopic blastulas to be so valuable or sacred that women should be forced to stay pregnant against their will. Remember, even the majority of anti-abortion physicians in the U.S. support EC. The Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice represents several dozen religious groups in this country. It argues that since major Christian faiths strongly disagree as to God's position on contraception, EC and abortion, this entire issue is not (and never has been) a struggle between the God-fear-

ing and the Godless, as the Christian Right has characterized it.^[6]

Q. Where do Catholics stand on these issues?

A. The majority of American and European Catholics are using modern means of contraception in about the same measure as are Protestant and Jewish couples. And by the late 1980s, Catholic women in the U.S. were actually having abortions at a slightly higher rate than were Protestants.

[1]The Office of Population Research at Princeton University operates the EC Web site. <http://opr.princeton.edu/ec/>.

[2]Trussell, L., Stewart, F., Hatcher, R., 1992, "Emergency contraceptive pills: A simple proposal to reduce unintended pregnancies," *Family Planning Perspectives*. 24: 269-273.

[3]Ellertson, C. et. al., 1998, "Should emergency contraceptive pills be available without prescription?" *Journal of the American Medical Women's Association* 53 (suppl 2) 226-229.

[4]See my article "The Roman Catholic Church & Emergency Contraception" posted on this web site.

[5]For updates see the reproductive health links to the American Civil Liberties Union website: <www.aclu.org>.

[6]See <www.rcrc.org>

Skeptoid.com

By Brian Dunning

Re-printed with permission

All About Fracking

Hydraulic fracturing of natural gas wells incites powerful emotions. How much of the hype is justified?

There are few technologies today quite so popularly disliked today as fracking, short for hydraulic fracturing, the practice of pumping high-pressure water into natural gas reserves deep underground to break up the rock and make the gas easier to mine. Fracking has been harshly criticized all around the world as dangerous, and has even been banned in a number of countries. There are charges that fracking uses toxic chemicals which contaminate ground water supplies; that it causes earthquakes; that it's killing endangered species; that tap water in fracking areas contains so much methane that it can actually burn; and that mysterious illnesses have resulted from the poisonous chemicals it pumps underground. Sound scary? It should. But how much of it is true? Fracking is a perfect place to turn our skeptical eye.

The 2010 movie [Gasland](#) brought these claims (and many others) to the public attention. *Gasland* painted a horrifying and emotionally charged picture of conspiracy, profiteering, environmental ruin, and the reckless wholesale poisoning of people and animals by the drilling companies. The energy industry was quick to respond to the apparent slander, even posting a web page called "[Debunking Gasland](#)" (and [others](#)) that not only denied virtually all of the movie's factual claims, but also was heavy on ad-hominem attacks against its maker, an [activist](#) whom they describe as an avant-garde stage director with no expertise in either geology or drilling. Whom should the average person on the



street believe? Unfortunately, they generally only hear from one of these sources or the other, and rarely or never get the unbiased, science-based facts.

Natural gas is found in the pores of shale or coal, and it escapes through natural fractures. Surface deposits are relatively easy to recover with simple drilling, no fracking required; but for the deepest and richest deposits, those from about 1.5 to 6 km underground, high pressure reduces the number of naturally occurring fractures and the rock's permeability is insufficient to extract much gas. These deep, non-porous formations are where fracking makes sense. Shale beds are often less than a hundred meters thick, so fracking boreholes are usually drilled horizontally to extend through as much of the bed lengthwise as possible, sometimes reaching through as much as a kilometer. The boreholes are sealed with pipe. High pressure water, sometimes as high as 10,000 psi, is then sent down this pipe. This system acts just like a hydraulic ram, where great force can be applied over a large area by introducing high pressure into the ram from a small entry point. This force splits the shale apart, creating numerous small fractures usually about 1mm wide. Then, to prop these fractures open to allow the gas to escape, a "proppant" is added to the water, which is basically sand. Getting this sand into the fractures is the whole point of fracking. Once done, extraction wells going straight down into the shale bed are

Although fracking has been in use since about 1950, it's only been applied in a large scale to natural gas mining since about 2000. About 90% of natural gas mines in the United States access rock that has been fracked. Fracking greatly increases the output of mines, producing domestic energy and profits and all the inflammatory economic and political implications thereof.

[Backyard Skeptics News:](#)

Backyard Skeptics is a grass-roots organization based in Villa Park, CA which sponsors monthly meetings with interesting secular speakers, dinner-and-a-movie nights, science-oriented field trips, outreach programs at the Huntington Beach Pier and atheist advocacy programs. They are the largest atheist group in conservative Orange County. If you are local to southern California are you are welcome to join our meetup group to receive announcements of upcoming events.

<http://www.backyardskeptics.com>



We're now on Facebook – if you're a Facebook fan then join our group by searching for Backyard Skeptics.

NEWS



[9/17/11 Atheist group rips Bible pages in Huntington Beach.](#)

Video [HERE](#).

More [HERE](#) and the same article [HERE](#).

The most comments in the OC Register

and photos [HERE](#). Our purpose for our outreach programs is to let other skeptics and non-believers know there is a group for them in the OC. In addition to this, we wanted to make a point about how immoral several Bible verses are – so we ripped photocopies of the verses in public while mentioning that there are also moral, good stories in the Bible, but are the stories good because they express a humanistic viewpoint, or are they good because the claim to be inspired by God? Youtube video [HERE](#)

[9/16/11 COURT RULES TEACHER MUST REMOVE 'IN GOD WE TRUST' CLASSROOM BANNERS.](#) The God-



focused banners, which the teacher put back up after his previous court victory, were again

ordered to be taken down by the ninth circuit court of appeals.

[9/15/11 AMERICAN ATHEIST LEADER CALLS FOR THE 'ERADICATION' OF 'FUNDAMENTALIST CHRISTIANS](#)

[9/16/11 Religious Right want Homosexuality a Criminal Offence](#)

[9/10/11 OK legislator claims homosexuality is "more dangerous" than terrorist attacks](#)

[9/1/11 Lesbian bishops get Christians killed in Africa Atheists Object to Cross Displayed at World Trade Center](#)

[8/30/11 Pastor Compares Atheists To "Terrorists, Sex Offenders," Suggests National Registry](#)

Older but ironic news [Church altar crushes devout Catholic](#)

[8/30/11 CFI and CSI Petition FDA to Take Action on Homeopathic Drugs](#)

Backyard Skeptics Events

It is free to become a member of Backyard Skeptics but you must join to view our monthly meeting and special event information.

Our Next Monthly Meeting: Thursday September 22, 2011 in Villa Park, CA with the author of The Religion Virus, by Craig A. James. Mr James documents how memes progressed through thousands of years to influence human quest for the supernatural explanations of the unknown.

Sept 29th -We're going to the Segerstrom Theater at the South Coast Performing Arts to see the play "How The World Began" See our meetup site for more info – 6:00pm dinner, 7:45pm play starts

Oct 23 2pm Pasadena Cal Tech Lecture The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined: Lecture in Pasadena with Stephen Pinker. [See meetup.com.backyard-skeptics](#)

October 27, – Free film – "There's No Dinos In Heaven" at Fullerton State campus. See the flyer [HERE](#) (also has a link to the trailer)

April 19th, 2012 – special private viewing at the 60" Mt Wilson Observatory 8pm – 1am.

Other Events

The 2011 AAI U.S. Convention has been scheduled for October 7-9, in Houston, Texas. This event is being held in conjunction with the Texas Freethought Convention as the local host.

Atheists United is organizing a group for the October 16th AIDS walk in West Hollywood. You can register to walk going to <http://www.aidswalk.net/losangeles/>

Sept. 17, 2011 Pier Outreach Program – Atheists Rip Bible Pages

On September 19, 2011, 23 brave skeptics came down to the Huntington Beach pier to make a point. A big point.



Usually, the Backyard Skeptics group doesn't pull these types of shenanigans, but this meetup was different. We planned to do the blasphemous act of tearing pages from the Bible to demonstrate that

certain verses are immoral, and if lived by, would certainly put one in jail very quickly.

Our main purpose of organizing a meetup at the pier is to let others know that there is a community of non-believers in the area where one can share the idea that we can be good without a God. Backyard Skeptics holds monthly meetings near the city of Orange once a month with interesting topics and insightful speakers. We also have placed several secular and somewhat controversial billboards and bus shelter advertisements in this conservative county, albeit not nearly as religious as the Bible belt area, where FFRF proudly displays their billboards.

Huntington Beach is a very nice place to do the outreach program because of the great weather and, I have to admit, scantily clad young people cruising down to get some rays. The Beach Boys were right.

Why the H.B. pier? Because almost every weekend, there are thrones of Christian open-air preachers annoying everyone who passes by with their prothletizing the word of God. Where else better to make a public demonstration? I have to admit I felt a little guilt being a bit louder than we usually are as we



usually stand and wait for other s to approach us, which happens in about 10 seconds of setting up. .

At first we had planned to present our ideas of what we thought of these immoral verses by ourselves, but Greg Crouse, (seen above next to the 'We're not with him' sign) an outspoken member of the Warner Baptist Church in Huntington Beach made it very easy for us as he immediately started in with an aggressive full-voice preaching to our non-believing crowd. (see the video from Evan [HERE](#)) We voiced about 20 immoral verses from the old and new testaments, (see them on our website) then ripped photocopies of them. To my surprise, there were no expected gasps from the crown numbering about 60 or so. I then proceeded to take the Bible and while tearing one random page out, mentioned that most everyone in earshot would agree these verses are immoral. Even this act didn't seem to offend anyone attending. I guess this wasn't as religiously conservative area as I thought! Or more likely, the crowd was shocked that these verses were in their holy book!

My wife was a bit nervous of others that might think this might be too blasphemous and wasn't sure I'd be coming home in one piece!



After the demonstration, I did some interviews with our local OC paper, the Orange County Register. I mentioned that yes – there were some good moral verses

from the Bible, but those verses could be placed in any holy book and they'd still be good. But they are not good because they are supposedly written by God-inspired men. They are good because they are part of humanity. Good for everyone. The Golden Rule is an example.

We continued our outreach program by giving cards to those who were excited to know there was a non-theist organization in their area.

There are three types of people we meet at the pier. 1. Christians who try and change our minds (boy- wouldn't that be a fast-track for them to their mythical heaven!) 2. People who say "Where have you been?" and 3. Those people, usually between 15 and 20, who are not sure what they believe, but they have doubts on believing in religion. These are the people who we gain the most satisfaction talking to. We never say "Atheism is right – Religion is wrong". But we do let them know what and why we don't believe in a sky-daddy, the down side of believing in religious dogma, and then let them decide. This is what differentiates us and the religionists.

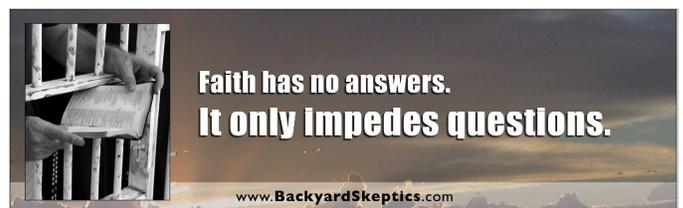
It is very satisfying to be in the public square. Talking to others that seem to agree with our world-view and offering them a place to share without religious dogma makes me feel like I am contributing to a larger movement of secularism, and eventually a better world.

Next month we are placing two billboards in the OC – one with the verbiage "Make This A Better World – Reject All Religious Dogma" with over 30 religious



superstitions under it. The second shows a mad with his hands though prison bars, holding a Bible. It says Faith Answers Nothing – it Only Impedes Questions"

If you're planning or thinking about such an outreach



program in your area, email me and I'll give you some suggestions.

Bruce Gleason

Director, Backyard Skeptics

bruce@backyardskeptics.com

www.meetup.com/backyardskeptics

Born Atheist

A portion of each chapter is included here. See <http://bornatheist.com/index.html> for other chapters

Chapter 15. Women.

A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. The Bible

And say to the believing women that they cast dow their looks and guard their private parts and do not display their ornaments except what appears thereof, and let them wear their head-coverings over their bosoms, and not display their ornaments except to their husbands or their fathers . . . and let them not strike their feet so that what they hide

of their ornaments may be known. The Koran

The role of women in modern society is still evolving. In 1920, the United States amended the Constitution giving women the right to vote. In 1964, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act prohibited employment discrimination on the basis of sex as well as race. In 1965 a Supreme Court decision legalized birth control for married couples in all states and seven years later the right was extended to unmarried couples. In 1972 Congress adopted Title IX which prohibits sex discrimination in education, including athletics, resulting in a surge in women's sports. The first female U.S. Supreme Court Justice was appointed in 1981. Hilary Clinton was a leading presidential candidate in 2008. Although women have not yet achieved full equality, their right to do so is now generally accepted.

Religion, with its scriptures written by men and fixed in time, lags far behind the social changes in the role of women. The most shocking examples of inequality come from Muslim countries. In America's ally, Saudi Arabia, Islam is the official religion and women suffer. Women are effectively treated as minors and need the permission of a male relative to access the limited rights available. Men are allowed to have multiple spouses, women are not. Women are not allowed to drive or vote. Restrictive costumes are required for women who go out in public. Women are limited in their access to public places, their opportunity for education or employment, and their ability to travel. Violence against women and spousal abuse is common.

In other Muslim countries, women are virtual slaves. Burqas are required, education is denied, child marriage accepted, and honor killings conducted. A 2008 movie, *The Stoning of Soraya M.*, shows the horror that some Muslim women face. Based on a true story, it tells of an Iranian woman whose husband wants to marry a 14-year-old and no longer wants to support her. So the husband falsely accuses his wife of adultery and villagers dutifully bury her waist deep in dirt and stone her to death. Her father, husband and two sons participate in the stoning. It is hard to see the religious fundamentalism described in that movie being much more advanced than the Stone Age.

With Stone Age logic, leading Iranian cleric Hojatolislam Kazim Sadeghi recently claimed, "Many women who do not dress modestly lead young men astray, corrupt their chastity, and spread adultery in society, which increases earthquakes." The statement would be laughable if he were not a high-ranking Muslim leader in a 98% Muslim country with more than 67 million inhabitants.

In the brutal world of the primitive past, men succeeded in dominating women through force, but in the modern world of tools, technology and information, women can stand shoulder to shoulder with men. It is crazy to allow a primitive ethic and ancient texts to dictate sex roles in the modern world. Yet religion drags ancient roles and superstitions forward and applies them today.

Look at any photo of the streets in Muslim countries. They are crowded with men, women are absent. One must wonder, where are the women and do they want to be there? The photo is even more troubling when it comes from Iraq or Afghanistan where U.S. tax dollars prop up the government. American taxpayers are paying for regimes that subjugate women. The religiously justified dominance of Muslim men over women troubles most any Western person who observes it, even Western religionists. There is little disagreement among Americans that Muslim women lack equality. However, there is little recognition that the dominant religion in America contains similar ancient myths. The Bible is full of quotes relegating women to second-class status.

Read the rest of this article [HERE](#)

FreethoughtAlliance.org

BackyardSkeptics.com

Both of these sites have one of the largest selections of secular DVDs available anywhere. Most DVDs are only \$10. Make a contribution to your secular organizations by ordering one of our entertaining and educational DVDs

Latest DVD:

[Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion: An Anthropological Survey of the Supernatural World](#)

with Adrian Novotny, Ph.D.

In this presentation, magic, witchcraft, and religion was defined, compared, and contrasted. We surveyed the evolution of human spirituality from its earliest manifestations to the present and beyond. How is it that some form of supernatural beliefs and behaviors constitute a cultural universal, that is, spirituality seems to be a significant component of all human cultures throughout time and space. \$10

[The 2011 Orange County Freethought Alliance Conference 3-DVD set. 13 wonderful speakers. Enlightening, Educational and inspiring. \\$34](#)

[Dr. Richard Carrier: How Christianity Began Is Proof Enough It's Bunk](#)

[San Diego Secular Humanist Conference 2011 - Entertaining speakers, engaging insights and thought-provoking lectures. 2 DVDs \\$45](#)

[Ali Ayaan Hirsi Ali is a spokesperson for human rights and a proponent against female mutilation in Muslim countries. Her riveting personal story is told with the help a local journalist, Jill Stewart. \\$10](#)

[Sean McDowell vs. BYS - Commonalities of Christians and Atheists Sean visits Backyard Skeptics, then Bruce Gleason and Mark Smith visit Sean's church in San Juan Capistrano A 2-DVD set. \\$15](#)

[Sarah Dunn - Atheists in Prison: How the law, culture, psychology shape prison populations \\$10](#)



[Dave Richards - Exploring logical fallacies and how to identify them \\$10](#)

[Eugenie Scott - Creationism, evolution, education, and politics, Taped at Chapman University, Orange CA \\$10](#)

[Orange County 2010 Freethought Alliance Conference 2- DVD set Enjoy 12 full-length seminars and an evening discussion panel for only \\$30](#)

[Does God of the Bible Exist? A 6-Person Panel Debate, December 2009 \\$20](#)

["The God Question" - Debate between Shermer & De'Souza \\$10](#)

[Bruce Gleason - "Why Am I Am Atheist" speech at Calvary Church, Costa Mesa, CA \\$10](#)

[Dan Barker 2 DVD set - Jesus Myth or Fiction? and Why I Became An Atheist \\$20](#)

[Chris Mooney - The War on Science: What Have We Learned? CFI lecture \\$10](#)

[John Shook - The God Theory is Dead CFI lecture \\$10](#)

[Edward Tabash - America at the Crossroads \\$10](#)

[Sean Carroll - The Origin of the Universe and the Arrow of Time CFI lecture \\$10](#)

[Ross Blocher - Swaddling Cloth out of Whole Cloth: Problems with the Nativity Story CFI lecture \\$10](#)

National Secular Links

Here are several secular links to other organizations supporting secularism, science and skepticism around the world:

[Americans United for Church and State Separation, National](#) au.org

[American Humanist Assoc.](#)
americanhumanist.org

[Atheist Alliance International](#) atheistalliance.org

[American Atheists](#) atheists.org/

[Military Assoc. of Atheists and Freethinkers](#)
atheists.org

ACLU.org

BERTRAND RUSSELL SOCIETY

www.users.drew.edu/~jlenz/brs.html

CFI centerforinquiry.net

camp-quest.org

Freedom From Religion Foundation ffrf.org

jennymccarthybodycount.com

Meetup.com (search for humanist, agnostic, atheists or church and state in your area)

National Center for Science Education ncse.com

People for the American Way pfaw.org

Richarddawkinsfoundation.org

James Randi Educational Foundation
randi.org/site

[Southern California Secular Humanist Conference.org](#) (in San Diego)

Whatstheharm.net

Local Southern California groups and links

Ateos Unidos: The group for Spanish speakers!
3rd Saturdays at 11 a.m. at the Center for Inquiry West, 4773 Hollywood Blvd.
Contact Liliana at 323-466-4223.

Americans United Meets the third Sunday of the month at 1:30pm at the [Irvine Ranch Water District](#)
15600 Sand Canyon Ave. Irvine, CA 92618
<http://www.au-oc.org/>

AU General Meeting: 4th Sundays, 11:00 a.m. at Center for Inquiry West,
4773 Hollywood Blvd. Presentation followed by lunch and afternoon activity.
Board meets briefly at 10:30 a.m. for members' concerns. Childcare is available.

<http://atheists.meetup.com/705/>

Adopt-a-Highway: Help us keep our roads clean in the name of atheism!

AU hosts the southbound strip of the Glendale Freeway, Hwy 2, south of the 210.

Keeping the road clean allows us to keep our signage there. Good exercise, and fun company! Two Saturdays a month. Dates vary. Contact Steve 310-670-7131

BackyardSkeptics.com – meets once a month in Villa Park (Orange County) also see meetup.com/backyard-skeptics

Center for Inquiry -Lectures 1st and 3rd Sundays, 11a.m. 4773 Hollywood Blvd., Los Angeles.
Free for members of CFI, \$6 for non-members
<http://centerforinquiry.net/la>

FreethoughtAllaince.org – sponsors debates and events in southern California

Free Thinkers for Liberty.org Freethinkers for Liberty is an organization of humanists and others who reject all superstition, in favor of rationality and critical thinking, who also respect the freedoms our forefathers described in the US Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

Freethinkers Toastmasters: Want to improve your speaking abilities in a fun and supportive group? Join FTTM on 2nd & 4th Saturdays at 2 p.m. at the Center for Inquiry West.
More information: David: 310-479-6318.
<http://www.freethinkersclub.org>

GALAH: Gay and Lesbian Atheists and Humanists- 2nd Sundays, 1 p.m.,
Center for Inquiry West, 4773 Hollywood Blvd.
Contact Ken Wolverton 818-554-9858 or galahla@aol.com

Generation Atheist: A meeting group for atheists in their 20s and 30s, 3rd Sundays, location changes monthly.
<http://atheists.meetup.com/724/Hollywood/East LA: 2nd Tuesdays, 7 p.m. at Atwater Village in Glendale .Contact Steven Gibson 562-900-2834. http://atheists.meetup.com/212/>

Humanist Association of Orange County Meets the third Sunday of the month at 1:30pm at the [Irvine Ranch Water District](#) 15600 Sand Canyon Ave. Irvine, CA 92618
<http://www.meetup.com/OCHumanists>

Humanist Association of Los Angeles: 2nd Sunday,
11:00 a.m.,
Colorado Center Community Room (same as Yahoo
Center),
2500 Broadway, Santa Monica (near corner of 26th
Avenue and Broadway); Contact: Larry Taylor 310-
479-2236,
larry-a-taylor@att.net

Inland Empire: 1st Wednesday, 7 p.m., Riverside
Unitarian Church 3657 Lemon St., Riverside Contact
JanGoings@aol.com
<http://atheists.meetup.com/499/>

Lancaster "Antelope Valley Freethinkers" 4th Thurs.,
7pm, Camille's Garden Cafe, Lancaster
<http://atheists.meetup.com/615/>

Long Beach: 3rd Fridays, 7 p.m., at Hometown Buffet,
290 E. 4th St.
Meal cost is \$16. Contact Rodney 562-437-4370 or
Hank Schultz,
whschultz@mac.com.
<http://atheists.meetup.com/487/>

Orange County Atheists, meets one a month at the
IHOP across from OC Airport
<http://www.ocatheists.com/>

Orange County Atheist United Chapter: 2nd Sundays,
10:30 a.m.,
Tee Room, 3100 Irvine Ave Newport Beach
Contact Norman 310-408-8653 (cell).

San Fernando Valley: 3rd Thursday, 6:30 p.m.,
Kountry Folks Restaurant,
on Sepulveda Blvd. and Chase St.
Contact Henry at 818-988-2806, after 5:00 p.m.
<http://atheists.meetup.com/614/>

Santa Clarita: 2nd Sundays, 11 a.m., at
Greenhouse Café, 26586 Bouquet Cyn. Rd., Santa
Clarita
<http://atheists.meetup.com/670/>

South Bay/Torrance: 3rd Sundays, 7p.m.,
At Marie Callender's, 2979 Artesia Blvd, Redondo
Beach
<http://atheists.meetup.com/729/>

Ventura: 4th Mondays, 7pm,
E.P. Foster Library, 651 E Main Street, Ventura.
Contact Brian Parra for info: 805-794-4714,
venturaatheists@yahoo.com.
<http://atheists.meetup.com/494/>

Ventura "Freethought Parents Network":
Kids playgroup meets every Tuesday at 11am,
Locations subject to change
<http://www.meetup.com/freethoughtparents/>

WestValley : Last Sundays, 2 p.m.,
Daphne's Greek Café, 5780 Canoga Ave. Unit B,
Woodland Hills, CA
<http://secularhumanism.meetup.com/17/>

National Conferences and events:

Texas Freethought Convention, Houston, TX Oct 7-9.
2011