

The Secular Gazette

Supporting Science, Reason and the Separation of Church and State

Issue #40 April 13, 2013

From the Editor



Coming out does more than you think...

After witnessing Dave Silverman's lecture at the February Backyard Skeptics meeting, (see next page for a free viewing) I decided to do a test at his suggestion. I have a T-shirt with the word "Atheist" in large letters with the caption "Come out – Reality is fine". The 'test' was to wear this at a very popular travel show convention at the Los Angeles Convention Center several weeks ago.

Dave mentioned in his lecture that a shirt similar to mine, worn by him 20 years ago, brought a plethora of negative comments when worn in public (Dave did a lot of flying and wore the shirt in airports all over the country). Now, all the comments are positive, showing anecdotal evidence about how perception of the non-believer has changed in just two decades.

So how did people react in a very populated and public setting such as a travel show? As soon as the first person said "I like your shirt", my wife said "start counting!" So I did. Comment after comment was positive. Not one negative comment, although I did get a negative head shake by one travel company employee there which I counted as a negative 'hit' in my informal count.

Five positive comments were heard in total, some from the vendors at the show (I wonder what their bosses would think if they overheard the complement - would they be punished for a positive comment against the superior's religious views?). One loud comment was from the Starbucks employee, which had some heads turning from the people in line. I had a Mocha without whip cream.

The next test was in the airport going to Chicago for work at a swing dance convention. (I'm in the video business and record these convention over a three-day period). No comments at LAX, but in Chicago coming back, one traveler, a professional trombone player, said 'nice shirt'. We struck up a pleasant conversation that passed the time as we waited for our delayed flight to leave. And while boarding in the jetway, a suited man turned around and said "nice shirt – you must get a lot of flak for that!" I responded that just the opposite happens, that I receive nearly all positive comments. (I find the looks of passengers most interesting while walking down the aisle during flight)

When I first became an advocate of atheism 7 years ago, I was worried of what people would think of such a bold statement of 'non-faith' Now I know that the result of wearing such an outted symbol not only lets others know that is OK to sport such a shirt (no stab wounds yet) but that atheism is becoming more accepted in our culture, and that discussion and discourse is more open than even on the subject.

Try it yourself. Start with an 'A' pin from the Richard Dawkins foundation, move up to a shirt with a axiom or quote, then graduate to a bright shirt with an obvious "I am a proud atheist".

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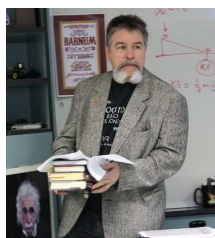
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Bruce Gleason, editor

Freethought Alliance

Orange County, CA Conference

Three weeks to go! Reserve your seat! May 4, 2012



PZ Myers - biological evolutionist and a defender of non-belief

Dr Myers is a public critic of intelligent design (ID) and of the creationist movement in general and is an activist in the American creation–evolution controversy.

Greta Cristina - atheist blogger and activist

Greta Christina is the regular atheist correspondent for AlterNet, and has been writing about atheism in her own “Greta Christina’s blog” since 2005. Her blog is now part of <http://freethoughtblogs.com/>. In 2009, Hemant Mehta at the “Friendly Atheist” ranked Christina’s blog in the Top Ten most popular atheist blogs.



Margaret Downey – freethought advocate

is an atheist activist who is the former President of Atheist Alliance International and founder and president of the Freethought Society (formerly Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia).[1][2] She also founded the Anti-Discrimination Support Network, which reports and helps deal with discrimination against atheists.

Darrel Wayne Ray is a writer and speaker on leadership and organizational development and author of two books on the topic. He is the author of the book *The God Virus: How Religion Affects Our Lives and Culture*. Ray is founder of the organization “Recovering Religionists”, a national self-help group for those leaving their religious indoctrination. In May 2011, he published the survey *Sex and Secularism: What Happens When You Leave Religion?*



Matt Dillahunty is a public speaker, internet personality and the president of the Atheist Community of Austin. He hosts the live internet radio show “Non-Prophets Radio” and of the Austin-based public-access television show *The Atheist Experience*. [2] He is also the founder and contributor of the counter-apologetics encyclopedia *Iron Chariots* and its subsidiary

Jessica Ahlquist Ahlquist v. Cranston was a case where the United States District Court for the District of Rhode Island ruled that a “School Prayer” banner posted in Cranston High School West was a violation of the Establishment Clause of the United States Constitution and ordered its removal. The suit was brought by Jessica Ahlquist, a student at the school, with the assistance of the American Civil Liberties Union.



Reserve your seat here: <http://freethoughtalliance.org/fta/annual-conference/admission/>
Lunch and dinner are included

Sam Harris

[The Riddle of the Gun](#)

(printed with permission)

Fantasists and zealots can be found on both sides of the debate over guns in America. On the one hand, many gun-rights advocates reject even the most sensible restrictions on the sale of weapons to the public. On the other, proponents of stricter gun laws often seem unable to understand why a good person would ever want ready access to a loaded firearm. Between these two extremes we must find grounds for a rational discussion about the problem of gun violence.

Unlike most Americans, I stand on both sides of this debate. I understand the apprehension that many people feel toward “gun culture,” and I share their outrage over the political influence of the National Rifle Association. How is it that we live in a society in which one of the most compelling interests is gun ownership? Where is the science lobby? The safe food lobby? Where is the get-the-Chinese-lead-paint-out-of-our-kids'-toys lobby? When viewed from any other civilized society on earth, the primacy of guns in American life seems to be a symptom of collective psychosis.

Most of my friends do not own guns and never will. When asked to consider the possibility of keeping firearms for protection, they worry that the mere presence of them in their homes would put themselves and their families in danger. Can't a gun go off by accident? Wouldn't it be more likely to be used against them in an altercation with a criminal? I am surrounded by otherwise intelligent people who imagine that the ability to dial 911 is all the protection against violence a sane person ever needs.

But, unlike my friends, I own several guns and train with them regularly. Every month or two, I spend a full day shooting with a highly qualified instructor. This is an expensive and time-consuming habit, but I view it as part of my responsibility as a gun owner. It is true that my work as a writer has added to my security concerns somewhat, but my involvement with guns goes back decades. I have always wanted to be able to protect myself and my family,

[Read more here...](#)

<http://www.samharris.org/blog/item/the-riddle-of-the-gun>

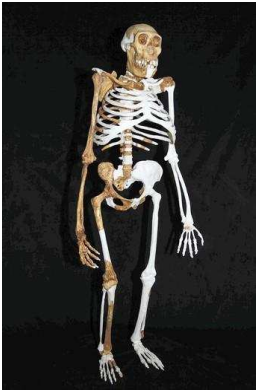


and I have never had any illusions about how quickly the police can respond when called. I have expressed [my views on self-defense](#) elsewhere. Suffice it to say, if a person enters your home for the purpose of harming you, you cannot reasonably expect the police to arrive in time to stop him. This is not the fault of the police—it is a problem of physics.

Like most gun owners, I understand the ethical importance of guns and cannot honestly wish for a world without them. I suspect that sentiment will shock many readers. Wouldn't any decent person wish for a world without guns? In my view, only someone who doesn't understand violence could wish for such a world. A world without guns is one in which the most aggressive men can do more or less anything they want. It is a world in which a man with a knife can rape and murder a woman in the presence of a dozen witnesses, and none will find the courage to intervene. There have been cases of prison guards (who generally do not carry guns) helplessly standing by as one of their own was stabbed to death by a lone prisoner armed with an improvised blade. The hesitation of bystanders in these situations makes perfect sense—and “diffusion of responsibility” has little to do with it. The fantasies of many martial artists aside, to go unarmed against a person with a knife is to put oneself in [very real peril](#), regardless of one's training. The same can be said of attacks involving multiple assailants. A world without guns is a world in which no man, not even a member of Seal Team Six, can reasonably expect to prevail over more than one determined attacker at a time. A world without guns, therefore, is one in which the advantages of youth, size, strength, aggression, and sheer numbers are almost always decisive. Who could be nostalgic for such a world?

Science News

Evidence points toward solving evolutionary 'missing link'



April 11, 2013|By Monte Morin, Los Angeles Times

With long arms, high shoulder blades and powerful fingers, the ancient creatures were built for climbing trees. But they also had long lower limbs, flat feet and a flexible lumbar spine that gave them a distinct evolutionary edge: They could cover long distances by walking upright on two legs.

After four years of intense analysis, a team of paleoanthropologists is making its most detailed case yet that a pair of ancient skeletons discovered in a grassy South African valley could represent the direct evolutionary link between modern humans and the family of human ancestors that includes the Australopithecus known as Lucy.

In a series of six papers published in Friday's edition of the journal *Science*, the researchers argue that the "mosaic nature" of the Australopithecus sediba specimens makes them a strong candidate to be the "missing link" — the branch of Australopithecus that ultimately gave rise to the

genus *Homo*, which includes *Homo sapiens*. More: <http://articles.latimes.com/2013/apr/11/science/la-sci-australopithecus-20130412>

The Next Generation Science Standards



There is no doubt that science—and, therefore, science education—is central to the lives of all Americans. Never before has our world been so complex and science knowledge so critical to making sense of it all. When comprehending current events, choosing and using technology, or making informed decisions about one's healthcare, science understanding is key. Science is also at the heart of the United

States' ability to continue to innovate, lead, and create the jobs of the future. All students—whether they become technicians in a hospital, workers in a high tech manufacturing facility, or Ph.D. researchers—must have a solid K–12 science education. Through a collaborative, state-led process, new K–12 science standards have been developed that are rich in content and practice and arranged in a coherent manner across disciplines and grades to provide all students an internationally benchmarked science education. The Next Generation Science Standards are based on the Framework for K–12 Science Education developed by the National Research Council.

More: <http://www.nextgenscience.org/next-generation-science-standards>

Dose of Reality

There are two vaccines that guard against human papillomavirus, and they are in rare company among medical inventions — the vaccines prevent cancer. Only the hepatitis B vaccine can make the same claim. Cancer-causing HPV can trigger abnormal cell growth on the cervix, and cervical cancer still kills up to 4,000

U.S. women each year. The virus is also implicated in cancers occurring in the anus and the throat. All told, according to a 2011 study, 29 percent of sexually active U.S. girls and women carry a potentially cancer-causing HPV infection.

Back in 2006 and 2009, when the HPV vaccines Gardasil and Cervarix came onto the market, health officials dreamed of halting the spread of HPV, which is sexually transmitted, in a single generation. Scientists call

such blanket coverage herd immunity — in which a pathogen gets vaccinated into oblivion, becoming so rare that even unvaccinated people are protected.

More: http://www.sciencenews.org/view/feature/id/349370/description/Dose_of_Reality





Tennessee bill allows Christian counselors to reject suicidal LGBT students



The Tennessee state Senate on Monday considered a bill that would allow counselors to discriminate against LGBT students, sexually-active students or anyone else based on religious objections.

Republican state Sen. Joey Hensley encouraged fellow senators to pass SB 514 to “prevent an institution of high education from discriminating against a student in the counseling, social worker, psychology programs because of their religious beliefs.” According to *The Tennessean*, the bill was inspired by Julea Ward, a Christian student who was expelled from Eastern Michigan after she refused to “engage in gay-affirming counseling” by helping an LGBT student who wanted to be treated for depression in 2009. Arizona has already passed a

law based on the case. Similar bills have also been proposed by lawmakers in Michigan and Georgia.

Hensley’s bill would protect any student who “refuses to counsel or serve a client as to goals, outcomes, or behaviors that conflict with a sincerely held religious belief.” <http://www.rawstory.com/rs/2013/03/12/tennessee-bill-allows-christian-counselors-to-reject-suicidal-lgbt-students/>

Poll Shows Many Americans Ill-Informed on Church-State Separation

A [new poll from YouGov](http://big.assets.huffingtonpost.com/toplines_churchstate_0403042013.pdf) http://big.assets.huffingtonpost.com/toplines_churchstate_0403042013.pdf (pdf) asks Americans their views on church-state separation. A disappointing 32% would favor a constitutional amendment naming Christianity the official religion of the United States. A whopping 42% think either that states are allowed by the Constitution to establish official state religions or aren't sure whether they are. Only 58% know correctly that they are not allowed.

What else could the freedom of religion stand for, if not the freedom from having an official state, or national religion imposed? Could it be that many Americans think it's merely a ceremonial designation, like the official state bird, or flower?

Read the [poll questions and answers here](http://big.assets.huffingtonpost.com/toplines_churchstate_0403042013.pdf). http://big.assets.huffingtonpost.com/toplines_churchstate_0403042013.pdf



Future of Mt. Soledad cross could hinge on meetings between lawyers

SAN DIEGO – 10News has learned there may soon be an end to the long-fought battle over the Mount Soledad cross. The cross is a symbol unto itself. It is also a war memorial and this weekend above all others, many people think about it. "I served in the U.S. Air Force," said Joe Bissell, who lives nearby. "My father fought in World War II in the U.S.

Navy, so it has a special meaning in my heart. I really hope people will keep fighting to keep it here for that reason." His wife Tracey added, "We have appreciation for it for both reasons. We have people who served in our families... also, of course, because of the religious and spiritual meaning of the cross." There have been legal battles over the constitutionality of the memorial for decades. "The government has to stay out of the business of religion," said Jim McElroy, who has been the lead attorney in the effort to move the cross off public property. McElroy is expecting a meeting with government lawyers soon to discuss a compromise. The U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the case last summer, leaving the appellate court decision intact: that it is unconstitutional as it stands now on federal land. "I think the option that makes more sense, constitutionally, is to move it, keep it intact, move it close by and everybody can continue to enjoy it," said McElroy. "The War Memorial will be what it should be: a memorial for all veterans." He expects negotiations to last several months, although he knows they could all go back to court again. "I'm sure we'll have productive discussions," said McElroy. This Easter, the cross remains atop Mount Soledad.

[Climate Change News](#)

(see more at the [Backyardskeptics.com](http://backyardskeptics.com) Climate Change News site)



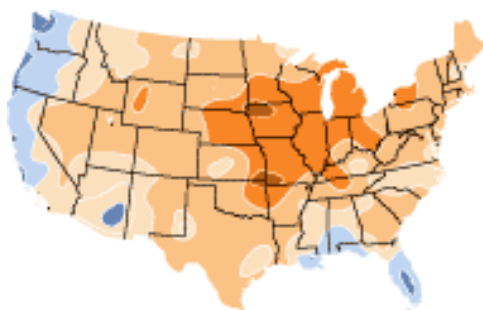
[Sea ice max continues downward trend](#)

In September 2012, the ice cap over the Arctic Ocean shrank to its lowest extent on record, about half the size of the average summertime extent from 1979 to 2000. That sea ice minimum continued a long-term trend of diminishing ice cover over the past few decades.

During the darkness and bitter cold of Arctic winter, new sea ice forms and older ice re-freezes and grows. This growth typically reaches its maximum extent in late February or early March.

According to a NASA analysis, this year's annual maximum extent was the fifth lowest in the past 35 years. The yearly maximum—15.09 million square kilometers (5.82 million square miles)—was reached on February 28, 2013, according to scientists at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center. The 2013 winter extent is 374,000 square kilometers (144,402 square miles) below the average maximum extent for the past three decades.

<http://climate.nasa.gov/news/896>



[Not Even Close: 2012 Was Hottest Ever in U.S.](#)

The numbers are in: 2012, the year of a surreal March heat wave, a severe drought in the Corn Belt and a huge storm that caused broad devastation in the Middle Atlantic States, turns out to have been the hottest year ever recorded in the contiguous United States.

How hot was it? The temperature differences between years are usually measured in fractions of a degree, but last year's 55.3 degree average demolished the previous record, set in 1998, by a full degree Fahrenheit.

¶ If that does not sound sufficiently impressive, consider that 34,008 daily high records were set at weather stations across the country, compared with only 6,664 record lows, according to a count maintained by the Weather Channel meteorologist Guy Walton, using federal temperature records.

¶ That ratio, which was roughly in balance as recently as the 1970s, has been out of whack for decades as the country has warmed, but never by as much as it was last year.

¶ "The heat was remarkable," said Jake Crouch, a scientist with the National Climatic Data Center in Asheville, N.C., which released the official climate compilation on Tuesday. "It was prolonged. That we beat the record by one degree is quite a big deal."

¶ Scientists said that natural variability almost certainly played a role in last year's extreme heat and drought. But many of them expressed doubt that such a striking new record would have been set without the backdrop of global warming caused by the human release of greenhouse gases. And they warned that 2012 was probably a foretaste of things to come, as continuing warming makes heat extremes more likely.

¶ Even so, the last year's record for the United States is not expected to translate into a global temperature record when figures are released in the coming weeks. The year featured a La Niña weather pattern, which tends to cool the global climate over all, and scientists expect it to be the world's eighth- or ninth-warmest year on record.

More: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/09/science/earth/2012-was-hottest-year-ever-in-us.html?_r=0#h

Interested in donating to the secular community each month?
Freethought Alliance/ Backyard Skeptics has \$4/month,
\$20/month and \$40/month contribution levels. All your
donations are tax-deductible and will help Orange County's
community of non-theists and church-state supporters grow.

[Contribute HERE](http://backyardskeptics.com/wordpress/contribute/) <http://backyardskeptics.com/wordpress/contribute/>

Ban Oral And Anal Sex! Says Virginia's Attorney General



Last month three judges on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 4th Circuit deemed a Virginia anti-sodomy law unconstitutional.

Now Ken Cuccinelli, Virginia's Republican Attorney General and the party's candidate for governor in November, has filed a petition asking the entire Court to revisit its decision to overturn this state law prohibiting sodomy.

But wait! Didn't the Supreme Court in the famous Lawrence v. Texas case in 2003 hold that sodomy laws violate a person's right to privacy?

In fact, the court's action did not actually take the laws off the books, but rather renders them unconstitutional to be enforced. Few states have repealed the laws since then, which is why Virginia still has that prohibition on its books.

That's how Cuccinelli is able to ask the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals to agree with

him and uphold the constitutionality of Virginia's sodomy law, which makes anal and oral sex between people of any sex a crime. (The question remains as to why Virginia's Attorney General wants to involve himself so thoroughly in what people do in the privacy of their bedrooms.)

More details on the case involved from rawstory:

The Washington Blade reported on Wednesday that Cuccinelli's petition, filed on March 26 calls for an en banc hearing involving all 15 judges on the court to reconsider the March 12 ruling by a three-judge panel declaring the "Crimes Against Nature" law unconstitutional.

The law, which prohibited oral and anal sex, was deemed unconstitutional in a 2005 case involving a 47-year-old defendant, William Scott MacDonald, accused of asking a 17-year-old girl to perform oral sex on him. According to BuzzFeed, despite the girl rebuffing his advances, MacDonald told authorities she did so "against his will." MacDonald was eventually convicted of soliciting a minor in an attempt to break the sodomy law.

Republicans Side With Iran And North Korea, Oppose UN Treaty To Keep Weapons From Terrorists

By [Stephen D. Foster Jr.](#)

Senate Republicans and the National Rifle Association are preparing to side with the likes of Iran and North Korea in opposition to a U.N. Arms Trade Treaty that would help prevent weapons from falling into the hands of terrorists and human rights violators.

The United Nations General Assembly passed the international treaty by a vote of 154-3 with 23 nations abstaining from voting. The Tuesday vote marked the first time the U.N. has attempted to regulate the global arms trade in an effort to keep weapons of war from those who would commit

acts of terror and human rights violations. The only three countries to oppose the treaty were Iran, North Korea, and Syria. According to Reuters:

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon welcomed the vote, saying the treaty "will make it more difficult for deadly weapons to be diverted into the illicit market and ... will help to keep warlords, pirates, terrorists, criminals and their like from acquiring deadly arms."

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry issued a statement praising the treaty:

"A strong, effective and implementable Arms Trade Treaty that can strengthen global security while protecting the sovereign right of states to conduct legitimate arms trade."

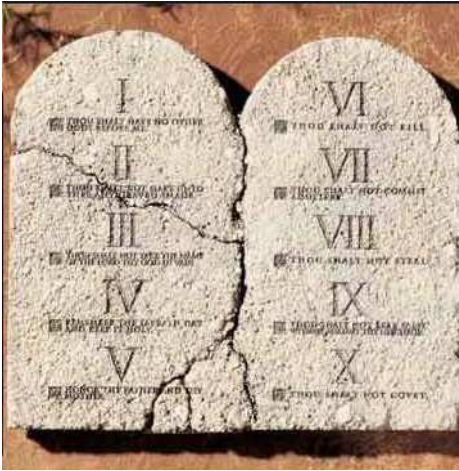
Kerry also reassured Americans that ratifying it would not affect domestic gun ownership protected by the Second Amendment of the Constitution.

"Nothing in this treaty could ever infringe on the rights of American citizens under our domestic law or the Constitution, including the Second Amendment," Kerry said.

<http://www.addictinginfo.org/2013/04/05/republicans-side-with-iran-and-north-korea-oppose-un-treaty-to-keep-weapons-from-terrorists/>

FFRF.org News

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is the largest group of agnostics and atheists on the world. They contribute to the separation of church and state by bringing lawsuits to those who cross the line (or wall)



[Commandments out in Kentucky school district](#)

At the urging of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, numerous framed postings of the Ten Commandments have come down in Breathitt County Schools in Kentucky.

FFRF contacted the manager for the school system, Larry Hammond, on April 5 about the postings. FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott wrote that the display of the Ten Commandments throughout the schools was a flagrant violation of the Establishment Clause.

FFRF requested that all principals be directed to remove the Ten Commandments, noting that FFRF considers such egregious violations of conscience in public schools as requiring a speedy resolution.

"The Supreme Court ruled on this very issue over 30 years ago. It is unacceptable that a public school system would willfully violate the Constitution in this manner in 2013," said Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president. The Supreme Court ruled in *Stone v. Graham* in 1980 that posting the Ten Commandments in Kentucky

schools was motivated by a religious purpose and is unconstitutional.

A Breathitt student informed FFRF on April 11 that many of the displays had been removed. Hammond, the manager of Breathitt County Schools, was appointed by the Kentucky Department of Education to oversee the troubled school system. It was reported that the Department of Education issued a statement agreeing that the displays violated the Constitution. <http://ffrf.org/news/news-releases/item/17569-commandments-out-in-kentucky-school-district>



[FFRF contests mayoral prayer breakfast](#)

April 10, 2013

The city of Hattiesburg, Miss., shouldn't be using city resources and public tax dollars to promote a May 2 religious observance, FFRF Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell told Mayor Johnny L. DuPree in an April 9 letter of complaint.

The event being publicized as the "Mayor's Annual Prayer Breakfast" is being held at the city-owned Lake Terrace Convention Center and features renowned gospel singer Andraé Crouch, who is also a Church of God in Christ pastor.

According to information on the city's website, tickets (\$40 or \$320 for a table) can only be purchased by sending payment to the city. The registration form asks for checks made payable to "Mayor's Community Activity Fund."

A city press release directs those interested in learning more about the religious event to Kathleen Hartfield, a city administrative assistant whose city phone number is included.

The city's promotional materials include a quote from Mark 9:29, "And he said to them, This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer." The breakfast coincides with the evangelical National Day of Prayer. "Given the high degree of city involvement and entanglement in the event, this conduct is government espousal of religion," Cavell noted. "The city must refrain from expending any further taxpayer dollars, using publicly funded employees and drawing on any other publicly funded resources to promote the religious prayer breakfast."

She added that it's not uncommon for ministerial associations or private groups to host a prayer breakfast and invite public officials, who attend as individuals, which is the case at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington. "But it is absolutely unlawful, inappropriate and unseemly under the First Amendment for a mayor's office itself to host such an event or work in tandem with event organizers to put on the breakfast." <http://ffrf.org/news/news-releases/item/17533-ffrf-contests-mayoral-prayer-breakfast>



Backyard Skeptic's free on-demand lectures are starting to populate the playlist on our streaming server [HERE](#).

<http://backyardskeptics.com/wordpress/new-streaming-video/>

Watch American Atheist **Dave Silverman** in action with his latest lecture "Ready – Aim – Firebrand Atheism". Dave talked about how the timing of strongly-worded atheistic billboards correlates with the search for 'atheism' on the web. This is by far the best evidence that firebrand atheism, as Dave practices, promotes the acceptance of this minority within American culture. His speech inspired me to wear an prominent atheist T-shirt in public to promote a better way of believing – or 'non-believing' if you will. Go to our streaming site above to see Dave's speech for free. Make a donation if you enjoy his lecture.



Our latest addition on our [streaming server](#) service was November's Backyard Skeptics meeting with **Russel Orrell**, an ex-Scientologist with a Leven 6/Class 8 rating. He took part in 'terrorizing' those who left the religion. (Scientology has a bad habit of losing over 80% of their flock each year) He explored the tenants of the 'religion' and brought two e-meters for the attendees to try out. Please contribute a minimum of \$1 or more if you enjoy this or any free lecture on our new [streaming](#)

[service](#).

On October 24, 2012, the Backyard Skeptics monthly meeting was proud to have **Brian Dunning** talk about locally grown produce. Brian is the founder of the Skeptoid podcast of which an episode is included in every Secular Gazette. Visit his site at Skeptoid.com. Please contribute a minimum of \$1 or more if you enjoy this or any free lecture on our new [streaming service](#).



Watch this Backyard Skeptics lecture from May 2012 [HERE](#)

James S. Bullock, professor of astronomy and astrophysics at UC Irvine, was captivated by astronomy at age 8 by Carl Sagan's TV series Cosmos. Today he explores such fundamental questions of cosmology as: Why there is so much invisible dark matter compared to the amount of ordinary matter in galaxies? What is this "missing mass"? Director of the multicampus UC Southern California Center for Galaxy Evolution, he

represents the UC Irvine on the UC-HiPACC council. Please donate at the donate button at backyardskeptics.com

God is Imaginary

Imagine heaven

If you talk to a Christian about heaven, you can clearly understand that the notion of heaven and everlasting life is imaginary. Each conversation will be different, but a typical conversation might go something like this:

Chris: Jesus transcends death and promises eternal life to all who believe in him! Lift up your heart to the Lord Jesus Christ and he will give you eternal life!

Norm: How will he do that?

Chris: Have you ever read the book called "Left Behind?"

Norm: No

Chris: You should! They have sold over 20 million copies of the book, because it is the truth! It describes exactly what will happen. One day the Lord Jesus calls his children home, and they are carried straight to heaven! Airplanes crash because their pilots have vanished. Cars run into phone poles. This is exactly what is described in the Bible.

Norm: The people completely vanish?

Chris: Yes. All that is left behind is their clothes, their jewelry and their hearing aids! The believers are transported directly to heaven!

Norm: Their naked bodies are transported to heaven?

Chris: Yes!

Norm: There are six billion people on the planet. They each weigh about 150 pounds or so. Are you telling me that God lifts a trillion pounds of human flesh off the planet in an instant?

Chris: Absolutely not! Only the believers are transported!

Norm: OK, half a trillion pounds?

Chris: Yes!

Norm: And where does this half a trillion pounds of flesh go?

Chris: To heaven!

Norm: To heaven... where is that?

Chris: It is in another dimension, of course! God lives in heaven!

Norm: How do all the bodies get to this "other dimension" called "heaven"? Do they float up into the sky and then travel through the vacuum of space?

Chris: No, silly! They are dematerialized and then rematerialize in heaven!

Norm: So you are saying that half a trillion pounds of naked human flesh are somehow "dematerialized" out of our universe, and then they "rematerialize" in "another dimension" called "heaven?" And the "dematerializing" process somehow distinguishes between natural human flesh and unnatural things like clothing and hearing aids?

Chris: Yes!

Norm: So... what if the person has artificial heart valves, a couple of stents and two titanium hip joints? Are those ripped out of his body and left behind with his jewelry?

Chris: Yes!

Norm: And what happens to that poor person, whose heart collapses and whose legs are now flopping around detached from his pelvis?

Chris: The book doesn't really talk about that... I imagine God would fix them up!

Norm: And what about all the people whose bodies are wracked with cancer and AIDS and emphysema?

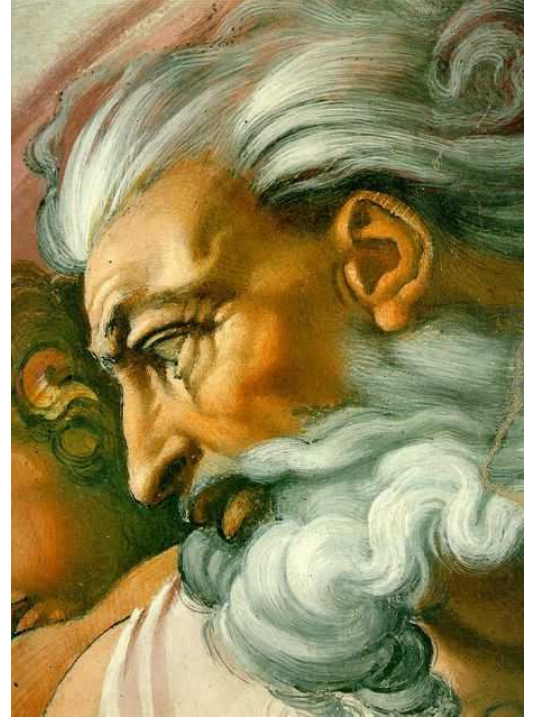
Chris: God fixes them all up too!

Norm: And what about all the decrepit 80-year-old bodies?

Chris: God gives them new, young, beautiful bodies!

Norm: And what about all the people whose bodies have died and decomposed?

Chris: God gives them young, new, beautiful bodies too!



Continued at <http://godisimaginary.com/i18.htm>

By Brian Dunning (reprinted with permission)

Pope Joan

Was a Middle Ages pope actually a woman in disguise?



Has the greatest coverup of all time been successfully accomplished? That's the question we're going to try and answer today. If true, the Roman Catholic Church had a female pope, sometime around the year 1100, give or take a century or two. No women appear in the list of historical popes, so is it possible that the Church could have doctored all the many historical records? That seems to be an impossible task, given the number of historians worldwide and the number of manuscripts written. So let's take a look at these manuscripts and see if Pope Joan was real.

The earliest known reference to Pope Joan comes from a Middle Ages document, the best-known publication of which was made in Germany in 1874. It was the *Archiv der Gesellschaft für altere deutsche Geschichte*, the *Archives of the Society for Old German History*. It records a portion of the chronicle of the Diocese of Metz, the *Chronica universalis Mettensis*, written in the early 1200s by the Dominican historian Jean de Mailly. He did not give many details, but he wrote the following (my own rough translation of the original Latin is given):

A popess was not included in the catalog of Roman pontiffs, who was a woman pretending to be a man. She was sufficiently talented that she became a notary of the court, then a cardinal, and then pope. One day she was climbing onto her horse when she gave birth to a child. Immediately, her feet were bound to the tail of the horse, and she was dragged and stoned by the people. She was buried on that spot.

There do not seem to be any known writings that mention the "popess" during the ensuing century or more, which is odd. But, very soon after de Mailly's account, the story was repeated by the Dominican Etienne de Bourbon, whose specialty was as an historian of heresies – for which Pope Joan would certainly qualify. Bourbon gave the year of the event as 1099.

Shortly thereafter, the lady pope appeared in print again, this time in a list of Roman popes and emperors. It was published right around 1300, some 20 years after the death of its author, who was yet another Dominican chronicler, Martin von Troppau, known as Martinus Polonus. The work, *Chronicon pontificum et imperatorum* (*Chronicle of Popes and Emperors*) corroborates de Mailly's account. Martin fleshed out the story a bit, but from where he could have gotten his additional details is not known. A frequently published translation says:

John Anglicus, born at Mainz, was pope for two years, seven months and four days, and died in Rome, after which there was a vacancy in the papacy of one month. It is claimed that this John was a woman, who as a girl had been led to Athens dressed in the clothes of a man by a certain lover of hers. There she became proficient in a diversity of branches of knowledge, until she had no equal, and afterwards in Rome, she taught the liberal arts and had great masters among her students and audience. A high opinion of her life and learning arose in the city, and she was chosen for pope. While pope, however, she became pregnant by her companion. Through ignorance of the exact time when the birth was expected, she was delivered of a child while in procession from St Peter's to the Lateran, in a lane once named Via Sacra (the sacred way) but now known as the "shunned street" between the Coliseum and St Clement's church. After her death, it is said she was buried in that same place. The Lord Pope always turns aside from the street and it is believed by many that this is done because of abhorrence of the event.

More: <http://skeptoid.com/episodes/4353>

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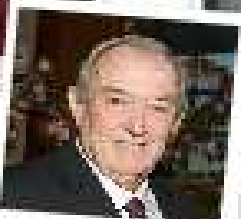
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Special Guest*



*Richard Dawkins,
Special Guest*



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Figure 1 A view of the Video Player from our streaming service

Skepchick Brian Dunning from the Skeptoid Podcast, Eugenie Scott from NCSE, Sadie Crabtree from JREF, physicist Vic Stenger, writer Tim Callahan, science educator James Corbett, Sean Faircloth from Secular Coalition and Jim Underdown from Center for Inquiry. Go here to see the lectures: <http://link.clickstreamtv.net/pbzjrnx>

All of the speakers from the 2012 [Orange County Freethought Conference](#) are also on our new streaming server. Cost is only \$10 for all 18 lectures – about \$.60 each! Especially educational and entertaining is Michael Shermer’s lecture entitled “The Moral Arc of Science”. The lecture includes over 100 graphs about how the world is indeed getting better, from increased longevity and fewer wars, to better medicine and more democratic states.

Also available are lectures from our other great secular speakers: Mr Deity, Rebecca Watson from Skepchick, Brian Dunning from the Skeptoid Podcast, Eugenie Scott from NCSE, Sadie Crabtree from JREF, physicist Vic Stenger, writer Tim Callahan, science educator James Corbett, Sean Faircloth from Secular Coalition and Jim Underdown from Center for Inquiry. Go here to see the lectures: <http://link.clickstreamtv.net/pbzjrnx>



[Skeptic Society new streaming lectures](#)

Michael Shermer’s non-profit Skeptic Society from Cal Tech, Pasadena has live-streamed three lectures so far, two of which are on line for only \$2 each.



Speaker: Dr. Benjamin K. Bergen. He draws together research in psychology, linguistics, and neuroscience to offer a new theory of how our minds make meaning.



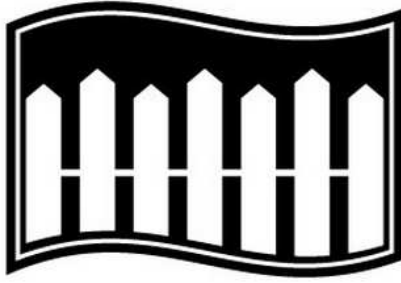
Near-Earth Objects was presented by the JPL scientist, Dr. Yeomans and explored how we track these objects and what we can do about those which might hit the earth.



Patrick McCray - The Visioneers: How a Group of Elite Scientists Pursued Space Colonies, Nanotechnologies, and a Limitless Future.

See the lectures at this link: <http://link.clickstreamtv.net/rqm8v6f>

Go to Shermer’s Skeptic.com site to see all the lectures LIVE one a month. Next on is April 28th.



Backyard Skeptics

BYS is part of the Freethought Alliance, a 501C3 grass-roots organization based in Villa Park, CA which sponsors monthly meetings with interesting secular speakers, dinner-and-movie nights, science-oriented field trips, outreach programs for letting others know about our secular community and atheist advocacy programs. We have five local chapters with over 1000 members. If you are local to Orange County/Los Angeles you are welcome to join our meetup group to receive announcements of upcoming events.

<http://www.backyardskeptics.com>



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[Backyard Skeptics Events](#)

<http://backyardskeptics.com/wordpress/events2/>

BYS has many fun and education and entertaining events such as field trips and lectures, movie & dinner nights and psychic parties. Join us!

Past events:

Overnight camping trips

Wine and Dine parties

Mt Wilson Telescope viewing

Protest at San Diego's Creation Museum

Dinner and movie night

Lectures at the Long Beach Aquarium

Skeptics Society Pasadena lectures.

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Secular DVDs from 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

[The 2012 Orange County Freethought Alliance Conference 3-DVD set. 18 wonderful speakers. Enlightening, Educational and inspiring. \\$45](#)

Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion: An Anthropological Survey of the Supernatural World with Adrian Novotny, Ph.D. \$10 special
Thomas Quinn - "God Needs Therapy" (a comedy) \$12

[Dr. Richard Carrier: How Christianity Began Is Proof Enough It's Bunk \\$12](#)

[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

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

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>

San Diego Coalition of Reason

FreethoughtAlliance.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

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

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).

Atheists United 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/>

[San Diego New Atheists and Agnostics
http://www.meetup.com/atheists-518/](http://www.meetup.com/atheists-518/)

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

[Atheists United South Bay/Torrance: 3rd Sundays,
7p.m., At Marie Callender's, 2979 Artesia Blvd,
Redondo Beach http://atheists.meetup.com/729/](http://atheists.meetup.com/729/)

[Atheists United 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/](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/](http://www.meetup.com/freethoughtparents/)

[WestValley Secular Humanists: Last Sundays, 2 p.m.,
Daphne's Greek Café, 5780 Canoga Ave. Unit B,
Woodland Hills
http://secularhumanism.meetup.com/17/](http://secularhumanism.meetup.com/17/)

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