



San Francisco Atheists | April 2009 Newsletter

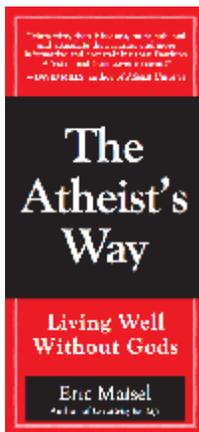
April Program Meeting: Dr. Eric Maisel



This month, **Dr. Eric Maisel** will speak on his new book, *The Atheist's Way*.

The Atheist's Way answers the question, "How can a person make meaning in a universe that cares nothing about meaning?" It is at once an atheist lifestyle guide and a handbook on the practice of making and maintaining personal meaning.

In it, we hear from former believers who have made the journey from belief to atheism, survey thousands of years of atheist traditions, reestablish the primary role of personal responsibility in the realms of ethics and meaning, examine the rewards and challenges of atheism, and discover what is required of each of us if we are to live well without gods.



Dr. Eric Maisel is the author of more than thirty books on a variety of subjects, among them atheism, creativity, depression, anxiety, and addiction.

Dr. Maisel founded the field of creativity coaching and is widely regarded as America's foremost creativity coach. He trains creativity coaches, provides core trainings for the Creativity Coaching

Association, and coaches creative and performing artists by telephone, by email and in workshop settings.

Dr. Maisel holds degrees in philosophy (B.S.), psychology (B.A.), creative writing (M.A.), counseling (M.S.), and counseling psychology (PhD). He is a California licensed marriage and family therapist, hosts two shows on the Personal Life Media Network, and writes a monthly “Coaching the Artist Within” column for Art Calendar Magazine.

Dr. Maisel’s recent writings on the paradigm shift from seeking meaning to making meaning, on the existential roots of depression, anxiety, and addiction, and on the next steps in atheist living have gained him a wide audience. He invites you to join him in these investigations by participating in The Atheist’s Way virtual book review tour, by listening to his shows on the Personal Life Media network, by visiting his creativity and atheism blogs, by discussing The Atheist’s Way, by training with him as a meaning coach and by inviting him to speak. .

6:00 pm Saturday, April 25, 2009

[Schroeder’s Restaurant](#), rear dining room, 240 Front Street. SF Financial District, 2 blocks north of Market, between California and Sacramento Streets. Use California Street cable car, or BART/MUNI Embarcadero stop. Parking on street or at nearby garage. Restaurant and bar remain open after meeting.

San Francisco Atheists is an affiliate of American Atheists. You can help American Atheists fight for your rights by joining for \$35 per year. As a subscriber of this newsletter, you can also request a free 6 month trial membership. Join at www.atheists.org or call 908-276-7300.

Camp Quest Is Seeking Counselors



Camp Quest West is an overnight camp located in the Sierra foothills of California for children ages 8 to 17. Camp runs from Sunday, July 12, 2009, through Saturday, July 18. There will be a staff party the night of July 18, so plan to stay on until July 19.

Camp Quest West’s goals are 1) to promote a sense of belonging in the freethought community, 2) to encourage critical thinking, 3) to promote respect for others with differing viewpoints, and 4) to provide a safe and fun environment for personal development.

Camp Quest West is seeking applicants to become counselors. Although there is no pay, you will have the opportunity to work with and learn from other freethinkers, to have a unique camping experience in one of the most beautiful areas of the country, and to help develop critical thinking in young people, all while having fun.

California law requires that we have an RN or LVN on site, so we are especially seeking a nurse. Although we can't pay a salary, in addition to all the wonderful opportunities this camp offers volunteers, the nurse's child can attend camp for free. Now there's an offer you can't refuse.

If you are interested in becoming a counselor or camp nurse for Camp Quest West, go to www.campquestwest.org.

You can learn more about your duties by emailing west@camp-quest.org or by downloading the application. Positions will be filled by qualified people according to when the application is received, so we urge you to apply as soon as possible.

East Bay Atheists Meeting



This month [East Bay Atheists](#) hosts **Dr. Richard Carrier** who will speak on *Not the Impossible Faith: Why Christianity Didn't Need a Miracle to Succeed*.

Richard describes his talk as “an amusing tour of [his] latest book, which exposes the lousy scholarship and probable dishonesty of the infamous online Christian apologist J.P. Holding. In the process, you'll learn all kinds of useful and interesting things about the ancient world and the earliest Christians, and why their religion was a natural success — all contradicting Holding's book, *The Impossible Faith*, which argued Christianity was so badly conceived it could never have succeeded unless it had irrefutable proof that Jesus had risen from the dead. Poppycock!”

Richard Carrier is widely known for his scholarship on Christianity and the societies that spawned it. We are certain you will enjoy this talk. And Richard's new book, on which the talk is based, will be on sale after the discussion.

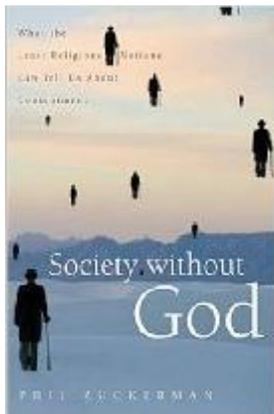
Meeting is **Sunday, April 19**, 1:30 - 3:30 PM in the Berkeley Main Library, 3rd Floor Meeting Room. 2090 Kittredge Street, One Block From Downtown Berkeley BART.

BART Access: From the downtown Berkeley BART Station, walk 1.5 blocks south on Shattuck Avenue, then turn right on Kittredge. The library is a half block down the street on the left.

Parking: The city parking lot at Allston & Harold Way, a short block from the library, is \$5 for the entire day on Sunday. If you don't mind walking, take University to MLK, turn right and then instead of proceeding left on Allston to the parking lot, turn right. In several blocks you will see parking on the side streets.

Information: Larry Hicok, Coordinator: 510-222-7580 Ski Grabowski, Treasurer: 510-652-8350

Society Without God: Book Review



Society Without God

Book Review by Don Havis

When I was first informed about the book, *Society Without God*, I was told that it was a book about the two least religious countries in the world, Denmark and Sweden, and how they were doing just fine, thank you, without much religion. My reaction was that, well, I already knew that, so why should I read a book that tried to convince me of that proposition? Then I read the book out of some curiosity about the details, and was delighted that I did. The book answers so many more questions and is about much more than I was at first lead to believe.

The author, Phil Zuckerman, is a social scientists and a professor of Sociology, specializing in the sociology of religion, at Pitzer College. Mr. Zuckerman lived in Scandinavia for fourteen months and interviewed nearly 150 Danes and Swedes. As a very thorough-going sociologist and researcher, he was careful to seek out people who represented all levels of society. He also sought out those who claimed to be religious as well as those who claimed to be entirely secular, or had no particular interest in religion. What he found was unusual and even unexpected. In a nutshell, the vast majority of those interviewed simply didn't give the subject of religion much thought at all. Those very few who actually claimed to be "fundamentalists" were found to be a "miniscule minority." (p.7.)

Some of the highlights of the book include the examination of the two classic reasons for the prevalence of religion in most societies, with helpful short excerpts from his interviews, in Chapter 3 entitled, "Fear of Death and the Meaning of Life." The reader gets some surprising

insights from the interviewees as to why these questions seem to absorb so much less of the Scandinavian's concern or time. Mr. Zuckerman's well-informed speculations as to why there was such a remarkable lack of true-believers in Scandinavia provides the reader with some very astute observations in chapter 6, entitled simply, "Why?" The question of "Cultural Religion" and its nature is examined in chapter 8.

The whole question of just how society works in a relatively religion-free society (very well, as you might suspect) is examined, and compared with other parts of Europe and especially with the United States, throughout the book. Many other Sociological studies are cited copiously; but this is done quite unobtrusively with simply a reference number referring to the extensive fifteen-page "Notes" and the ten pages of "Bibliography" at the end of the book. For those who might like to examine further evidence of Zuckerman's claims or support for his carefully labeled speculations, his book offers a veritable treasure trove of valuable references. This feature has the double-advantage of not burdening the reader with extraneous material as well as making the book a fairly short, entertaining read of only 183 pages.

The basic message of the book could not have been summarized better than it was by one of the book-jacket cover reviewers, author Arlene Stein, who said that *Society Without God*, "Puts to rest the belief that you need God in order to be a moral person, that irreligious societies are wracked by social problems, and that godless people are unhappy and unmoored." Highly recommended by this reviewer.

Study Links Religion & Aggressive End of Life Care



On March 18th, the New York Times carried a story that is profoundly revealing, but has not received the attention in the secular community that it deserves. I quote:

Terminally ill cancer patients who drew comfort from religion were far more likely to seek aggressive, life-prolonging care in the week before they died than were less religious patients, and far more likely to want doctors to do everything possible to keep them alive, a study has found.

The patients who were devout were three times more likely than less religious ones to be put on a mechanical ventilator to maintain breathing during the last week of life, and they were less likely [to] do any advance care planning, like signing a do-not-resuscitate order, preparing a living will or appointing a health care proxy, the analysis found...

“People think that spiritual patients are more likely to say their lives are in God’s hands - ‘Let what happens happen’ - but in fact we know they want more aggressive care,” said Holly Prigerson, the study’s senior author and director of the Center for Psycho-oncology and Palliative Care Research at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston.

“To religious people, life is sacred and sanctified,” Prigerson said, “and there’s a sense they feel it’s their duty and obligation to stay alive as long as possible.”

Aggressive life-prolonging care comes at a cost, however, both in terms of dollars and human suffering. Medicare, the government’s health plan for the elderly, spends about one-third of its budget on people who are in the last year of life, and much of that on patients at the very end of life.

Aggressive end-of-life care can lead to a more painful process of dying, researchers have found, and greater shock and grief for the family members left behind.

Prigerson’s rationalizations for the theists’ desperate attempt to put off death as long as possible is nothing short of jaw-dropping sophistry, at least to this observer. Life is sacred, and so we must use every means known to science to prolong it when nature — or rather, God — “decides” it is time for us to die. Frankly this makes less sense than the Trinity! I find myself torn between whom to pity most, the frightened theists or their apologist.

The article makes it clear that these futile measures to prolong life not only increase the pain of dying for the patient, but also for their families. Additionally society pays heavily for this fear-driven expense in the form of hefty Medicare bills. But no, this is not an ultimate act of panicked short-sighted narcissism. It is not an obvious example of a primal and childlike overwhelming fear of death, a fear that cares nothing about the cost to society and family of one’s actions, not to mention the increase in one’s pain in the dying process. Of course not! This is a religious decision, and therefore needs to be held in the highest respect.

All of us are aware that the denial and fear of death drives much religious belief. Likewise the actions of desperate theists to prolong life, no matter how miserable and how costly, for as long as possible, is a transparent example of the root cause for their sentiments.

I, for one, was not surprised by this survey, and I was not surprised by the sophistry of the interpretation of the survey. That, after all, is what religion is all about. — *Larry Hicok*

Mark Your Calendar!

How Weird Street Faire - Sunday, May 10, 2009

Summer Solstice Picnic - June 27, 2009

Details forthcoming!

San Francisco Atheists now on Facebook

A screenshot of the Facebook page for the San Francisco Atheists group. The page header shows the Facebook logo and navigation links. The group name "San Francisco Atheists" is prominently displayed. Below the name, there is a "Basic Info" section with details about the group's type and description. A "Contact Info" section provides an email address and website. A "Members" section shows a grid of member profile pictures. On the right side, there are sections for "View Discussion Board", "Group Type", "Admins", and "Events".

If you are one of the 175 million and growing members of social networking website **Facebook**, join our new "Group" on the site. [Click here to see the San Francisco Atheists Facebook group](#) and show your support by joining the group!

[American Atheists also has a Facebook Group page.](#)

Our new site is growing and it's a handy place to join a discussion, post items and comments, see upcoming events, and to network with other Bay Area Atheists.

Facebook is free, but you do need to become a Facebook member before joining a Facebook Group. Signing up is quick and easy.

Joke Of The Month



"At least with math and physics
you sometimes find the answer."

Quote Of The Month



"What religion a man shall have is a historical accident, quite as much as what language he shall speak."

-- George Santayana, philosopher (1863-1952)

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