

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion ..."
The first words of the Bill of Rights of the United States Constitution

San Francisco Atheists

March 2010 Newsletter

March meeting program

Historic Meeting (David Millett)

Evolutionary Theory Today: What We Know And Controversies

Briefing with White House Officials

Evolutionary biologist Dave Seaborg will discuss what science knows about evolutionary biology today, and the scientific controversies being debated in the field. It will include the evolution of sex, sociobiology, what attracts people and animals to the opposite sex and how that is adaptive, punctuated equilibrium, mass extinctions, how new species are formed, evolution of altruistic behavior, evolution of homo-

sexuality, the importance of neutral genes and random factors in evolution vs. natural selection, defense against predation, and where evolution is likely to go in the future. The talk will include a Power Point presentation. Fossils and animals will be shown to illustrate the ideas presented. People will be given the opportunity to handle these. And of course there will be a discussion.



Atheist Group Heralds 'First Time in History' Policy Briefing with White House Officials. The Secular Coalition of America calls this meeting "the first time in history a presidential administration has met for a policy briefing with the American non-theist community." [Source](#)

"It is one thing for Administration to meet with groups of varying viewpoints, but it is quite another for a senior official to sit down with activists representing some of the most hate-filled, anti-religious groups in the nation," says In God We Trust's Chairman Bishop Council Nedd. [Source](#)

Council Nedd II is an American political, religious and cultural commentator who serves as the Bishop of the Chesapeake and the Northeast in the Episcopal Missionary Church, a Continuing Anglican church. [Source](#)

Meeting at Schroeder's Restaurant Saturday March 27 at 6:00pm

Schroeder's Restaurant, rear dining room,
240 Front St San Francisco, CA 94111
Schroeder's Restaurant is two blocks north of Market Street, between California and Sacramento Streets. Use California Street cable car, or BART/MUNI Embarcadero stop. Parking on street or at nearby Embarcadero garage.

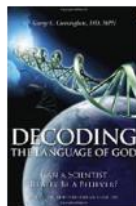
February meeting

Decoding the Language of God

Dr. George Cunningham, author of: "[Decoding the Language of God](#)" engaged our members with his debunking of Francis Collins' book: "The Language of God - A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief".

the talk. We encourage you to buy Dr. Cunningham's book to learn more about how a man of science will throughout the scientific method to be able to incorporate the nonsense of religious mythologies into his life.

Dr. Cunningham used powerful logical arguments and historical facts to point out Collins' flawed thinking, inconsistent arguments, and disregard for the facts. Our members asked many interesting questions following



My question to the Chairman of the "In God We Trust" organization is: How does he justify an unconstitutional concept such as having the term "In God We Trust" forced into our public arena. Is he so misinformed in the United States constitution that he is unaware of how illegal this phrase is? Or is he just pushing his delusional religion into government to further his desire to spread this unsubstantiated mystical non-sense?

Notice too how he joins two separate concepts in his comment above: "hate-filled and anti-religious". When have hate-filled and anti-religious become synonymous? I would remind the Bishop of the deplorable and shameful history of his club and organization:

1. Islam: Second Sudanese Civil War
2. Hinduism: Indian Rebellion of 1857
3. Taoism/Daoism: Yellow Scarves Rebellion, Five Pecks of Rice Rebellion
4. Buddhism: White Lotus Rebellion, Sri Lankan Civil War
5. Judaism: Jewish-Roman Wars
6. Sikhism: Sikh uprising (1982-91)

I for one would argue that it is the Bishop's club that has a track record of being hate-filled.

So my final question to him is: Why do you, Bishop Council Nedd, associate yourself (and continue to push on others) the philosophies, ideals, and principals of such a hate-filled thing as organized religion? I say you are hate-filled, not atheists.

1. Christianity: Crusades, French Wars of Religion, Thirty Years War, Taip-

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The Spirituality of Avatar (Larry Hickok)

A paradigm of self deprecation

Being a tad bit slow, I finally saw Avatar, the epic movie so many are talking about. I was aware of the criticism in the Atheist community of the director, James Cameron, himself a supposed Atheist. Now I understand why.



Briefly, the movie posits a future world in which a humanoid species inhabits an Earth-like moon called Pandora. Humans, living in a society very much resembling the worst stereotypes of the Neo-Con movement, covet the planet for its most valuable mineral, called unobtainium. (The metaphors are not terribly subtle in this movie.) The humanoids, known as the Navi, live in complete harmony with nature, and worship a goddess known as Eywa. In fact this harmony is often symbiotic, as the Navi can interface with other creatures via a natural data link at the end of their tails. The Navi fly on the backs of giant birds, and ride horse-like creatures employing this process. They also communicate with their ancestors and much of the planet via a neural network centered in Hometree, a living tree that provides the featured clan's home. Again this data link takes place naturally via tendrils at the end of the Navi's tails interfacing with the tree.

By far the largest deposit of unobtainium is directly under Hometree, and the shallow humans intend to mine these riches by destroying this vital tree. There is not the slightest hint of a moral problem with this; these people see everything, including each other, as just another object to use.

After a battle in which the natives of all types sustain heavy casualties, the Navi win. This is presented as a victory for spirituality, albeit with a semi-material basis. This brings to mind the Star Wars spirituality, known as the Force, which has its basis in the "midichlorians" found in all living things. Both scenarios portray spirituality with a physical basis, while making it clear that they are still seeing the

universe in Dualist terms, the spirit and physical world. The later is base; the former the essence of goodness. The Navi are good because they connect with a living, objectively existing Truth that culminates in the goddess Eywa.

I have argued many times against Atheists speaking of spirituality. (For example, see my presentation on this subject at the East Bay Atheists site.) This movie brings up a another related question: Why do people have such a need to think that noble concepts, such as living in harmony with each other and with the planet and its inhabitants, must have an objective existence based outside our consciousness? Why must we succumb to the authority of the spirit world in order to feel connection in our lives? Why must we lose ourselves in a symbiotic relationship with nature, like the Navi do when they interface?

I think two primary themes underlie such concepts. One is of course the classic Dualist contention that people are bad, and we can only rise above our base material existence by discovering a Higher Consciousness that exists outside ourselves in a Spirit world. The other theme is related, but different: It is the core problem of existential angst. If meaning in our lives is purely subjective, then how can we be sure that it is real? If we are not somehow part of an external Higher Consciousness, then aren't our noble feelings just genetically determined by chemical reactions?

Consider, for a moment, the joy and pleasure of eating. Few people think of this as something beyond themselves; yet they very much enjoy it — sometimes too much. Sex likewise is usually accepted as a product of evolution, and still enjoyed. However when we contemplate concepts like love and altruism, our minds look for a Higher Consciousness that embodies these ideals. Part of this is certainly a function of the ideals themselves, as they are very much focused on others. They also bring a deep sense of inner peace and happiness, and that, combined with the other focus, causes them to feel as though they are a function of a profound entity that exists outside of us.

The alternative to this that these deep-seated ideals are as much a part of our evolution as the enjoyment of food and sex, leaves many feeling that they are an illusion. But the real illusion is that these ideals have an existence outside of our consciousness. Why can't we relish the higher pleasures of truly loving and being altruistic just as we relish other pleasures? The folly of guilt based altruism and loving is central to this issue. Are we altruistic because we are told we should be? And if that is not enough incentive, consider Hell. Or are we altruistic because we have evolved such that we find true altruism and love profoundly pleasurable?

I think Cameron is stuck in a paradigm that threatens to destroy our species, a paradigm of self deprecation that results in us likewise not embracing the world around us. When we learn to embrace and nurture who we are, focusing on those aspects of our consciousness that give us the most profound sense of well being, then we can embrace the outside world with the insight and caring that evolution has given us.

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Atheist News

With blatant disregard for the first amendment

If you're part of secular America – that is, if you're an atheist, an agnostic, a religious liberal or even a mainstream believer who thinks religion should be kept out of politics and vice-versa – then you should be very afraid of what the Republican party has in store for you in 2012.

[Read the full story](#)

Briefing with White House Officials (continued)

"[SCA Spokesperson] Paul Fidalgo... said he couldn't offer any details about what Obama aides said in the meeting because of an agreement that their discussion be kept private.

President Obama — as expected — did not make an appearance.

Fidalgo said the meeting went “very, very well” from the coalition’s perspective, that members were “encouraged by the reception we got today” and that they hope to be invited back for follow-up discussions.”

[Read the full story](#)

Only in Texas

In the small Texas town of Mt. Vernon , Drummond's Bar began construction on a new building to increase their business. The local Baptist church started a campaign to block the bar from opening with petitions and prayers. Work progressed right up till the week before opening when lightning struck the bar and it burned to the ground.

[Read the full story](#)

D.C.'s Catholic Charities Dumps Family Insurance

So They Don't Have To Cover Same-Sex Partners!

I didn't think I could have any less respect for the institutional Catholic church, but they keep setting new lows. This is simply appalling.

[Read the full story](#)

SkeptiCal Conference 2010

It is my honor to announce the first SkeptiCal Conference, a science and skepticism conference in Northern California. The event will be held on Saturday, April 24th at the Brower Center in Berkeley, California. The conference is sponsored by both the Bay Area Skeptics and the Sacramento Area Skeptics. Speakers will include Eugenie Scott (Director of NCSE), David Morrison (NASA Senior Scientist), Karen Stollznow (SkepChick, MonsterTalk Podcast, Point of Inquiry), Wally Sampson (Editor of the Scientific Review of Alternative Medicine), and many more. Registration will begin soon, check the website for the most up to date information:

<http://www.skepticalcon.org/>

Symphony of Science

This is a brilliant web site with super emotional videos. We recommend it to you.

<http://www.symphonyofscience.com/index.html>

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East Bay Atheists

Meeting program

Francis Collins, Director of the National Institute of Health, mapper of the human genome, internationally distinguished scientist, is WRONG! That's the contention of our speaker, Dr. George Cunningham at our March meeting where he will discuss his book: Decoding the Language of God - Can a Scientist Really Be a Believer?

The 269 page book is a point by point refutation of the "evidence" and arguments in Collins bestselling book, The Language of God - A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief, which claims to reconcile the scientific worldview with faith that Jesus was the resurrected son of God. The book is a readable summary of the philosophical and scientific support of Atheism. The bulk of the book is an analysis of the unreliability of the Bible as proof of Jesus' divinity.

It answers the question 'Are scientists believers?' by looking at the data. It proposes a naturalistic evolutionary explanation for what Collins describes as the moral law divinely instilled in all humans. Cunningham argues that a creator God is a logical contradiction, and critiques the 'What came before the Big Bang?' and Anthropic principles argument for God.

Cunningham retired after 40 years from the California Department of Health Services, where he played a major role in developing maternal and child health programs, including the largest prenatal and newborn screening program for genetic disorders in the world. He has published more than 150 scientific articles.

If you would like purchase a signed copy he will accept cash or checks only. (Discount price \$15)

Sunday, March 21, 1:30 - 3:30 PM
Berkeley Main Library, 3rd Floor Meeting Room 2090 Kittredge St., 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.

Larry Hicok, Coordinator: 510-222-7580
Ski Grabowski, Treasurer: 510-652-8350
info@eastbayatheists.org

Quote of the month

Isaac Asimov

"I am an atheist, out and out. It took me a long time to say it. I've been an atheist for years and years, but somehow I felt it was intellectually unrespectable to say that one is an atheist, because it assumed knowledge that one didn't have. Somehow it was better to say one was a humanist or agnostic. I don't have the evidence to prove that God doesn't exist, but I so strongly suspect that he doesn't that I don't want to waste my time."

What's on

Calendar of events

Click on an icon below to see what's on:



Joke of the month

