

# The Minnesota Atheist

Minnesota Atheists

Established 1991

Positive Atheism in Action <sup>SM</sup>

Volume 20 Number 4

April Meeting

April 2010

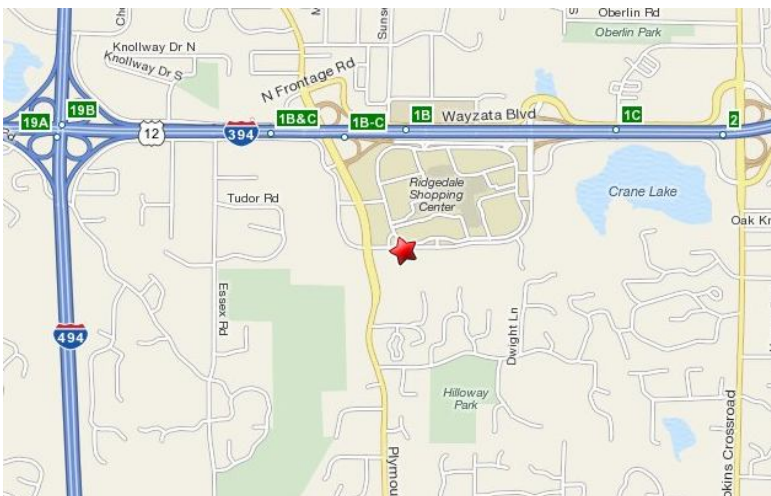
## Existentialism

**E**xistentialism, as defined and described by Jean-Paul Sartre, is a lucid, compelling account of what it means to live a meaningful life in a world devoid of ultimate meaning. His famous dictum “existence preceded essence” says it all: by accepting the fact of our existence and by acting appropriately on it, one can fashion an identity far truer than the one imposed by religion, the state, or other presumptive authorities. Sartre begins by tracking the three emotional stages experienced by a person when awakened to the absence of a god: “anguish, abandonment, and despair.” In despair—an end point, according to religionists—he sees a new beginning, in which the individual takes complete control of his or her life. He describes how, simply by making conscious, mindful choices, we begin to live “authentically” and to forgo the acts of “bad faith” that

rob us of our legitimate selves. The end point of this process—actually the process itself—is a re-integration of our personal, moral, and social beings, based on a principle shared by every human society: the Golden Rule.

Our April meeting will feature Nick Pease, adjunct professor at the University of Minnesota and founder and CEO of Pease Prose Services. Pease will talk on the topic of existentialism, especially as it relates to a freethinking, atheistic worldview. Pease will argue that existentialism is “applied atheism,” and has been presenting it as such for decades as part of his humanities courses. Additionally, Pease will consider Sartre’s ideas and their relevance to our daily lives.

Please join us!



### When?

Sunday, April 18, 2009

1:00-1:15 p.m. - Social Time

1:15-1:45 p.m. - Business Meeting,

1:45-2:00 p.m. - Social Time

2:00-3:30 p.m. - Speaker’s presentation  
and Q&A

4:00 p.m. - Dinner at Wanderer’s Garden  
Chinese Buffet Restaurant

### Where?

Ridgedale Public Library

12601 Ridgedale Drive

Minnetonka, 55305

### Inside

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- ⇒ The Texas State Board of Education v. American History...see page 7
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**MNA Meetup members: 661**  
**Life memberships: 31**

**Honorary Members**  
**Dan Barker**  
**Gerald Erickson, PhD**  
**Annie Laurie Gaylor**  
**Dick Hewetson**  
**Robert M. Price, PhD**

### Minnesota Atheists Mission Statement

Minnesota Atheists is dedicated to building a positive atheist community that actively promotes secular values through educational programs, social activities and participation in public affairs.

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**Minnesota Atheists practices positive, inclusive, active, friendly neighborhood atheism in order to:**

- Provide a community for atheists;
- Educate the public about atheism; and
- Promote separation of state and church.

## President's Column: Ambassadors of Atheism

by August Berkshire



**Building Fund:  
\$123,156.01**

While I am not in favor of atheist evangelists who, as atheist comedienne Paula Poundstone joked, would go door-to-door with a book full of blank pages, I am in favor of us doing more to meet the second goal of our organization: Educating the public about atheism.

Since 1989, when we were the Twin Cities Chapter of American Atheists, we have produced a public access cable TV program called *Atheists Talk*. Since then, our Cable TV Committee has created and broadcast at least 200 shows.

This project was begun by **Art Anderson**, who continues to help with the cameras. **Steve Petersen**, **Grant Hermanson**, **George Kane**, and **Brett Stenbridge** help in the control booth. Frequent interviewers include **Grant Steves**, **James Zimmerman**, and **George Kane**. Others helping on cameras include **Shirley Moll**, **Wendy Steinberg**, **Karen Burke**, **Mike Haubrich**, and **Brian Knoblock**. Distribution is handled by **Steve Petersen**.

We thank the many guests who have appeared on our program. We also thank our members who sponsor it on their local cable TV stations (see the Cable TV Report on page 13). The program is also turned into a podcast by **Grant Hermanson**, which people can download from our website and iTunes. (Grant also converts tapings of speakers at our monthly meetings into podcasts as well.)

Do you have a cable program you would like to do – perhaps a book you'd like to discuss? Would you like to help as part of the crew? (Operating a camera is really easy.) Can you help with technical aspects of production

and distribution? We'd love to have you join us!

As far as personal appearances go, up until now we have mostly relied on the media, community groups, and schools contacting us. It's time we became more proactive about reaching out to society to let everyone know we're here and what we stand for. This increased outreach will primarily be achieved through three committees:

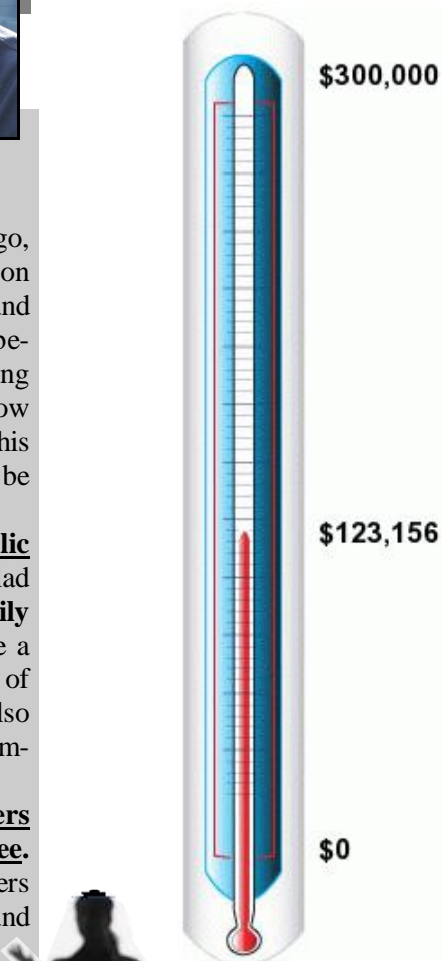
**George Kane** chairs our Public Relations Committee and we are glad to have professional help from **Emily Matejcek**. We are looking to create a press kit and to increase the number of press releases that we do. We will also be contacting schools and other community organizations.

**Laura Hutt** chairs our Speakers Bureau and Education Committee. At this point our main public speakers are **George Kane**, **Grant Steves**, and **me**, but we would like to enlist others to speak on behalf of Minnesota Atheists and atheism.

Shy about public speaking or need to hone your skills? Join **Free-thought Toastmasters** and receive speaking tips and friendly encouragement! (See page 15 for more information.)

We will also be creating pamphlets that you can use to explain atheism to friends, family, and acquaintances. This will complement the excellent yellow tri-fold pamphlet created by **Jack Caravela** detailing the many things Minnesota Atheists does.

I chair the Program Committee, which includes outreach efforts such as participating in marches and festivals and sponsoring our Day of Rea-

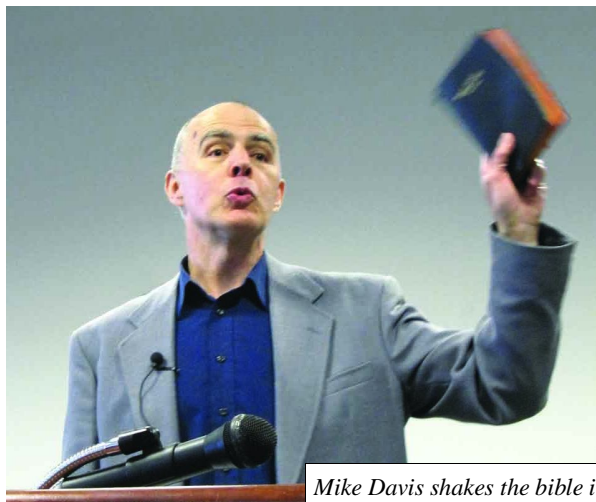


son at the Minnesota State Capitol. These events are great opportunities for our members to mingle with the general public for one-on-one discussions.

We all become ambassadors of atheism whenever people get to know us and our worldview.

# March Meeting Review

by George Kane



Mike Davis shakes the bible in an attempt to get some sense out of it. Photo credit: Richard Trombley.

The March public meeting featured local author Mike Davis speaking about how to use the Bible in discussions with Christian believers. Davis noted that most atheists steer wide of the Bible in such discussions, because they feel that they do not know it very well. Davis claimed that very few Christians have ever read the Bible critically, so pointing out contradictions can be an effective approach to undermine the Bible's credibility.

Davis pointed out that there are numerous contradictions between the Gospel accounts of Jesus' resurrection, even though it is the core belief of the Christian faith. For example, the Synoptic Gospels say that Simon of Cyrene carried Jesus' cross, while John, who by tradition was present, claims that Jesus alone carried it. And who were the first to come to Jesus' tomb on Sunday? According to Mark, it was Jesus' mother Mary, Mary Magdalene, and Salome; according to Matthew, it was the two Marys only. According to Luke, it was the two Marys, Joanna, "and the other women;" according to John, it was Mary Magdalene alone.

After the meeting, Davis signed copies of his

books *The Atheist's Bible Companion to the New Testament: A Comprehensive Guide to Christian Bible Contradictions* and *The Atheist's Introduction to the New Testament: How the Bible Undermines the Basic Teachings of Christianity*. Davis also offered free wallet cards featuring a



Mike Davis gently describes one of the Gospels' scarier stories. Photo credit: Richard Trombley.

variety of quotes demonstrating biblical contradictions to use "in emergency situations."

It was the first meeting since the election of the new board of directors, so George Kane presided. The business meeting featured a call for volunteers for committees. Andy Flamm distributed a list of the committees and their chairs (see page 5). Richard Trombley was presented with an award (see below).

Jesus said: "Whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father in heaven." (Matthew 10:33)  
 BU F: Peter denied Jesus 3 times. (Mark 14:72)  
 SO: Will Peter be denied entrance to heaven?  
 Did Jesus come to judge the world?  
 YES: Jesus "is to judge the living and the dead" (2 Timothy 4:1)  
 NO: Jesus said: "I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world." (John 12:47)

Find Christian Bible contradictions at:  
[Bibleblunders.com](http://Bibleblunders.com)

"He who is the...  
 More Christian...  
 Bibleblunders.com



Minnesota Atheists chair George Kane (left) presents Richard Trombley with an award for several years of excellent photography for the MNA newsletter and website. Photo credit: August Berkshire.

# Minnesota Atheists Committees

by Andy Flamm

It's Springtime, and that means we have a new Board of Directors, along with a renewed energy focused on taking the great organization we have and making it even better.

To that end, the Board has updated the list of standing committees which exist to plan and carry out the various Minnesota Atheists activities. Here is a quick rundown of the list, including the mission of each committee and the current Chair (some groups have not met since the new Board was elected; an Acting Chair is listed).

## Atheist Community

### **Membership Committee**

Works to maintain current membership, solicit new members, welcome new members, and foster a positive atheist community. Secondary role is to solicit donations. Chair: Andy Flamm, andrew.flamm@gmail.com

### **Program Committee**

Plans and executes activities for members (most of which are also open to the general public), such as monthly meetings, Meetups, social hours, picnics, 5th Sunday dinners, Day of Reason, booths and marches at festivals, Winter Solstice party, regional conferences, and debates. (Acting) Chair: August Berkshire, augustberkshire@gmail.com

### **Building Committee**

Researches possible buildings to buy, plans for the successful transition to ownership and supervises use of the building once obtained. (Acting) Chair: August Berkshire, augustberkshire@gmail.com

### **Bylaws Committee**

Makes grammar and spelling corrections to the bylaws and recommends changes for MNA members to vote on. (Acting) Chair: August Berkshire, augustberkshire@gmail.com

### **Chapter Exploratory Committee**

Helps establish the guidelines for other freethought groups in Minnesota to become legal chapters of Minnesota Atheists. Chair: August Berkshire, augustberkshire@gmail.com

## Outreach

### **Public Policy Committee**

Clarifies our political position on issues that pertain to separation of state and church, including vouchers, stem

cell research, gay rights, sex education, contraception, abortion, and voluntary euthanasia. Chair: George Kane, nup@minn.net

### **Speakers Bureau & Education Committee**

Provides free MNA speakers for the media, schools, and events hosted by other groups. Develops a curriculum and trains speakers. Creates handouts. Chair: Laura Hutt, lhutt@comcast.net

### **Public Relations Committee**

Creates press releases, opinion pieces, and letters to the editor that it sends to the media. Chair: George Kane, nup@minn.net

### **Charitable Works Committee**

Plans activities that allow atheists to do good works and improve our image. Chair: Jack Caravela, jackc@usfamily.net

## Media

### **Web/Technology Committee**

Designs and manages website. Manages mailing list, Mail Chimp, and Atheists Weekly E-mail (AWE). Chair: Cody Peterson, cody.c.peterson@gmail.com

### **Podcast Committee**

Creates and broadcasts podcasts. (Acting) Chair: Mike Haubrich, tuibguy@gmail.com

### **Cable TV Committee (& Crew)**

Produces and distributes cable programs. Chair: Steve Petersen, spetersen175@gmail.com

### **Editorial Board & Newsletter Committee**

Produces newsletter. Chair: James Zimmerman (editor), zgoatee@gmail.com

Please consider volunteering to serve on one or more committee. The time commitment does not have to be huge, but we need as many members as possible to help us in our important work. Plus, many volunteers find that working with other members is their favorite part of belonging to Minnesota Atheists.

To volunteer, just contact the appropriate committee chair(s) or a member of the Board. Your ideas and efforts will be great appreciated by our community.

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# *I Don't Believe in Theists*

In an interview during the Vancouver Olympics on February 24th, bobsledder Lyndon Rush took advantage of his position as an Olympic athlete to tell the world that he doesn't believe atheists exist. He went on record stating that there are no atheists at the top of bobsled runs, arguing: "Maybe they're not in a period of their life where they believe in God, I guess. I don't know. I don't really believe in atheists."

Out of all the ignorant and offensive things that theists say, I'm not sure there is one that bothers me more than this, the flat out denial that I exist. "Oh sure," says the Christian, "Ryan thinks he's an atheist, but it's all a cover for living his sinful, immoral life. He's not really an atheist because nobody can really be an atheist because there is a scripture that says that all humans actually believe in God on some level."

If I am understanding the logic properly, the theist is saying:

1. I (the theist) believe in God AND
2. I believe that God writes literature AND
3. I believe that one particular book was written by Him AND
4. There is something in that book that I think says that atheists don't really exist. THEREFORE
5. Atheists don't actually exist.

Wow. No arguing with that chain of, er... reason. I mean, why actually talk to one of your fellow humans about their beliefs and accept that those beliefs are held with the same conviction your own are

when you can just use your closed little world of circular logic to deny the very existence of alternate beliefs?

There is little that is more disrespectful of a person than to tell them that they don't believe what they say they believe. It says, "your whole life is a lie." It nearly always implies that the non-believer is secretly some sort of pervert or immoral person because that's the only logical rationale available for why somebody would choose to make their entire life a lie.

I can sit around and get all righteously indignant over this kind of lunacy all day, but it's so silly it's hardly worth the effort. Instead, I'm going to take the approach of arguing their point in reverse: I argue that theists don't really exist.

To begin with, the default state of all babies when born is to not believe in anything in particular (except eating and pooping). They don't look at a pretty flower and think "God made that," they simply see a pretty flower. If their parents tell them "God made that", they will believe that. If the parents say, "Allah made that," they will believe that. Basically, the child's brain get wired in response to what they are taught and every theist in the world is also an atheist when you change the subject to a God they were not indoctrinated into believing in. Try convincing an adult to believe in Odin when they grew up believing in Jehovah. Ain't gonna happen.



**by Ryan Sutter**

Theism is a system of belief grafted onto an initially atheistic person.

But doesn't that mean theists still exist? Following Rush's anti-atheist logic, I'm going to argue no. Here's why: Sure, there are people who claim to be theists. Perhaps those people even think they really do believe in God, but when it comes right down to it, they don't and they secretly know it. The evidence lies in the fact that theists have to spend massive amounts of time and energy reassuring themselves that God exists by reading devotional books, telling everybody just how much they believe, praying, and committing many other such acts of self-selling. The entire life of religion is based around trying to keep devotees believing; keep them from doubting. This is the only sphere of life in which people have to work to convince themselves of things they supposedly believe. You don't go around obsessing over the fact that you need oxygen to survive, writing hymns about it, saying prayers about it, swallowing doubts about it, cultivating faith about it. You simply breathe. Theists don't build up their faith that their car, or their house, or their dog exists, but somewhere in the innate, pattern-matching, problem-solving, *sapient* brain is something that says, "oh sure, mom and dad said God exists, so He certainly must exist, but He's, well, invisible, and um, I can't, you know, actually demonstrate this to myself without trying really hard, and, um..."

This is like nothing else in the world. Faith is only required because in our natural state we know that things that exist only inside our heads, that can't be touched, tasted,

*(Continued on page 12)*

# News and Notes

**O**n March 11, **Michael Newdow** suffered two setbacks in the type of church/state separation cases that have made him famous. A three-judge panel of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled 3-0 in the first suit that the words “In God We Trust” are constitutionally permissible on coins and currency, and later ruled 2-1 against him in his second suit against the pledge of allegiance in public schools.

In a 2002 case, the Ninth Circuit Court ruled in Newdow’s favor on the pledge of allegiance, but he lost at the Supreme Court not on the merits of his case, but on standing, as he was not his daughter’s custodial parent. So Newdow found new plaintiffs, but this time the panel decided that “one nation, under God” is a patriotic statement, not a religious one.

In the majority opinion, Judge Carlos Bea wrote that “Congress’ ostensible and predominant purpose was to inspire patriotism. The phrase ‘one nation under God’ does not turn this patriotic exercise into a religious activity.” Bea was joined in the majority by Judge Dorothy Nelson.

Judge Stephen Reinhardt wrote in dissent that the 1954 law adding “under God” to the pledge was “designed to promote religion and to indoctrinate schoolchildren with a religious belief. The teaching of religious views is the function of the family and the church, not the state and the public school system.”

Reinhardt reluctantly joined the majority in the national motto case, as the US Supreme Court in 1989 cited “In God We Trust” as a mere “reference to our religious heritage.”

To an atheist, both decisions are patently absurd. I cannot imagine that this court’s rulings could have been made by anyone but a Christian fulfilling a personal desire for government to endorse his god beliefs. I would love to see one honest judge recuse himself from an Establishment Clause case because he is an observant Christian. And why are Christians not denouncing these decisions for denying that god has religious significance?

**Cartoon Intifada redux.** Lars Vilks, a Swedish cartoonist, received anonymous death threats from Somalia after a newspaper published one of his panels that depicted the

head of the prophet Mohammed on the body of a dog. Commendably, several Swedish newspapers reprinted the cartoon to demonstrate solidarity with the cartoonist’s right to free expression. In shameful contrast, no major American newspaper or magazine published the Danish cartoons of Mohammed that ignited widespread violence a few years ago, for fear of offending Muslim sensitivities.

Irish police broke the assassination plot and arrested four men and three women, from Morocco and Yemen. They planned to kill Vilks to collect a \$100,000 reward, with an additional \$50,000 bonus to slit his throat. The group that offered the rewards also offered \$50,000 to kill the editor of the paper that published Vilks’ drawing. In January, Danish police shot and killed an assassin who had tried to kill Kurt Westergaard, who had pictured Mohammed wearing a bomb as a turban.

In the U.S., police arrested Colleen LaRose, a Pennsylvania woman who posted online as “JihadJane,” who may be part of the conspiracy. Her computer contained an email from someone in

South Asia who instructed her to kill an unnamed person in Sweden. “I will make this my goal till I achieve it or die trying,” La Rose reportedly replied.

**Conservatives on the Texas State Board of Education** defeated a proposal that would have added a requirement to the history standards to require students to examine the reasons for the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. The proposal was defeated on strictly partisan grounds, with all five Democrats voting in favor and all seven Republicans voting against.

The Establishment Clause, which states that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion,” is the foundation of court decisions that have defined our version of the separation of church and state.



Social conservatives often argue that this principle has no legal basis, since “separation of church and state” is not mentioned in the constitution. Perhaps they will require that future textbooks have the Establishment Clause blacked out. Earlier they removed Thomas Jefferson from a list of Enlightenment thinkers who inspired political change, because he supported separation.



by George Kane

## Minnesota Atheists at the Movies: *Shutter Island*

by Jack Caravela

For our March 7th Reel and Meal, fifteen intrepid atheists journeyed to the Rose- dale 14 Theatre in Rose- ville, Minnesota to see Martin Scorsese's recently released film *Shutter Island*. This homage to film noirs of old seemed a natural choice for us, promising both suspense and fine performances by a number of distinguished actors, including Ben Kingsley and Max von Sydow. Later, over pizza and hoagies at a nearby Davanni's, the consensus was that while none of us were disap- pointed on either count, the film was not quite what we expected.

This review is not purposefully cryptic, but it is impossible to provide an accurate summary of *Shutter Island* without giving away plot twists and surprises. Please indulge me before reading the next para-

graph by keeping in mind that this is a film in which nothing can be as- sumed to be as it seems.

As the story opens, two U.S. Marshals (played by Leonardo Di- Caprio and Mark Ruffalo) are travel- ing to a remote island off the coast of Massachusetts to investigate the disappearance of a patient at a hospi- tal for the criminally insane, a mur- deress who is under the delusion that she is living at home with her family

and that all the attendants are servants. The Marshals are met with many of the

familiar obstacles in movies of this genre: a secretive and suspicious staff (headed by Kingsley and von Sydow), forbidding terrain, and the fierce winds and rain of an ap- proaching storm. In DiCaprio's char- acter we also have the well-worn ar- chetype of a detective struggling

with his own painful past. If these elements lead you to believe that Scorsese has made an old-fashioned whodunnit, you are hereby advised to suspend your judgment until the end of the film (and I do mean the very end; the twists are not complete until the very last line of dialogue).

In the first part of our informal post-viewing discussion we went over the details of *Shutter Island* to compare our understandings of what

**Shutter Island, directed by Martin Scorsese, released Feb- ruary 19, 2010. 138 minutes.**

"really" hap- pened. Once we cleared up the minor plot points, the conversation

delved into such weighty topics as the imperfection of memory and the power of delusions. A film that had been advertised as an-old fashioned suspense melodrama had provoked a rich and lively conversation and this may have been *Shutter Island's* most satisfying surprise.

## Highway Clean-up

The highway clean-ups for Rice, MN and Lakeville, MN are set. The Rice clean-up will be on Sunday, April 25th. We will start the clean up at 1:00 pm. Some will gather at noon for brunch at the Old Creamery Café in Rice, at 405 Main Street, just west of the stoplight on Highway 10. Contact Deb at 320-253-5422, or Steve Petersen

at 651-484-9277. Steve can also be reached via email at [achair@mnatheists.org](mailto:achair@mnatheists.org).

Dress for outside weather conditions with sturdy shoes and work gloves. The latest in high- way vests will be supplied. If there is rain we will still meet and discuss and plan the next date. Additional details appear on the Minnesota Atheists Meetup site.

The Lakeville clean up is set for Sunday, May 23rd. Details will be in the next newsletter and on the Minnesota Atheists Meetup site.

## March Treasurer's Report

by Brian Knoblock

### \* General Fund \*

Shirley Moll	\$100.00
Paul Schenck	\$50.00
February Meeting	\$18.20

* Building	Fund *
Vernon Young	\$100.00
Daniel Norte	\$ 35.72
James Whitney	\$ 50.00

**Total Income            \$353.92**





## All Taxpayers are Created Equal

by **Herb Silverman**

*Q: If a church or other religious organization receives government funding, should it follow all government rules, including those against discrimination based on sexual orientation? Or should government exempt such organizations from requirements that violate particular religious beliefs?*

If you get a federal grant, you can't use that grant money to discriminate on the basis of your religion. These are not my words, but the words of a well-known former Constitutional Law professor from the University of Chicago. Presidential candidate Barack Obama delivered them in a speech about faith-based initiatives in Zanesville, Ohio, on July 1, 2008.

Despite his own admirable words, President Obama still lets stand this Bush-era violation of separation of church and state. Rather than simply prohibiting faith-based discrimination completely, the administration says discrimination will be decided on a case-by-case basis. I oppose the use of any taxpayer money going to religious institutions, but especially money that condones discrimination. Religious freedom allows religions to discriminate, but not on the taxpayer's dime.

The Obama administration did the right thing in the case of Catholic Charities by not exempting them from the laws of the land. And Catholic Charities certainly has the right to formulate discriminatory policies consistent with its religious principles, but not while taking taxpayer money.

By the government not providing such religious exemptions, I'm hoping some religions will modify their discriminatory policies. This happened gradually with a religion, which some call an academic institution, in my home state of South Carolina. Fundamentalist Christian Bob Jones University, in danger of losing its tax-exempt status, changed in steps from not admitting blacks, to admitting married blacks (1971), to admitting unmarried blacks (1975), and finally (gasp) to ending its ban on interracial dating (2000).

If religious freedom means anything, it means that government can't favor one religion over another, or religion in general over non-religion. We must not promote an Orwellian society where all people are equal under the law, but some people are more equal than others.

*(Article originally appeared in the March 9, 2010 edition of the Washington Post. Used with permission. —ed.)*

## Freethought Cryptogram

by **George Kane**

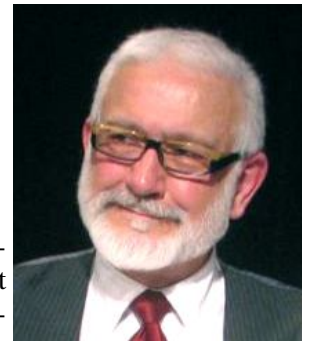
L Fphlc Hwtldh eber qleck ew br phcphc cr wlqhcw.

Ec ew brckebf ihww ckwb wjpphbxhp.

-Xlb Zlpshp, "Irwebf Qleck eb Qleck"

**(Solution on page 13.)**

## Book Review: *Encountering Naturalism*



by Grant Steves

Fundamental in my search for answers has been to turn to science and philosophy. Science provides the evidence, and philosophy provides the reasoning strands that bring the evidence together for answers. In Thomas W. Clark's book, *Encountering Naturalism*, you will find one rational answer through the philosophical school of naturalism. Clark's presentation is a simple introduction to naturalism. For a more challenging approach, I would recommend Richard Carrier's book, *Sense and Goodness Without God* (2005) and the website: [www.centerfornaturalism.org](http://www.centerfornaturalism.org).

Science may establish that empathy is the basis for ethics, but it does not develop the ethical system of application. Science does not tell us if the consequentialist appears right or if the deontologist is. In Clark's short book we are introduced to naturalism as it responds to "the big questions of human nature, human purposes and how we might best flourish here on Earth, naturalism is worth exploring." Clark argues that naturalism, "takes science, and more broadly a rational, evidence-based empiricism, as the most reliable means for discovering what exists."

Historically, naturalism can be found in ancient Greece and among the Buddhist of India. It

*Encountering Naturalism*, by Thomas W. Clark. ©2007, 104 pages.

is one of the older philosophical groups. For Clark, it has evolved into one that advocates connection, compassion, and control. Just as Socrates wanted people to know themselves, so does naturalism. In Clark's chapter "Who Are We?" he develops the idea that all is physical and nothing supernatural. We have to question the character of freewill and determine its limitations.

Most atheists will have little disagreement with facts stated within his book. The conflict may arise when he proposes how naturalism supports Progressive Policies. He makes a strong argument based on determinism that holds a person responsible for himself or herself. It would mean we have no ultimate freewill and must respond to the idea of failure based upon cause and effect and not some supernatural craps game. "We can't take credit for what's ultimately a matter of lucky genes and lucky social status at birth." This is not a philosophy based on divine selection or intervention. The supernatural has no evidence to support its belief system. We accept that, causality will help shift the justification for having a reasonable standard of living from getting what

you deserve, on the basis of self-caused merit, to getting what you need to live a fulfilled, satisfying life."

Social policy seen through the philosophical lens of naturalism requires us

to address issues with compassion and understanding for the circumstances that resulted in behavior that is anti-social. There is a genetic cause for depression and perhaps for some criminal behavior. How does society determine punishment, when the crime was committed under the influence of a genetic flaw?

In a controversial chapter, Clark discusses "Naturalizing Spirituality." He defines spirituality as "appreciating that our complete inclusion in the natural world can generate feelings of connection and significance equal to those offered by traditional religions." For him it is our "deep sense of connection, of an expanded self derived from contemplating our origins in the cosmos, is a defining characteristic of spirituality."

And it is aesthetics of nature that also "play an important role in generating the spiritual response." Clark's redefinition of spirituality extracts religion and attempts to define it as an effect derived from one's experiences with the natural environment. "From a naturalistic perspective there cannot be any ultimate purpose to existence... this can have a profound and positive psychological impact." That is the spiritual dimension without religion. It is the "empirical truth generated by science that works quite wonderfully to ground and inspire our approach to ultimate concerns." Clark does not find a term to substitute for spiritual, but he does seem to see value in the effects we experience and are described as spiritual.

Clark then turns to the culture wars of our society and the role naturalism plays in this conflict. Some of these socially progressive ideas may conflict with some readers' social views. For example, a naturalist accepts the findings of science that there is a genetic component to homosexuality.

The conflict in abortion is over the soul and personhood. Naturalism rejects a supernatural concept of soul, but it does argue a secular view of personhood. This ap-

(Continued on page 12)

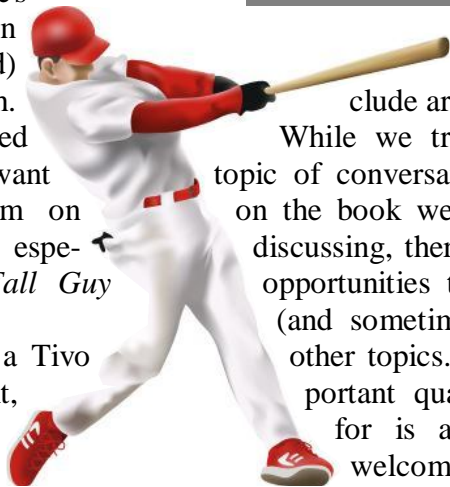
## Minnesota Atheists Meetup Events in the South Suburbs (and Target Field)

The public elementary school I attended had a no homework policy on Wednesdays. This policy was implemented to assure schoolwork didn't interfere with church activities which were commonly held on Wednesday evenings. I was one of the many children who experienced the weekly indoctrinating, mind conditioning, brain washing AWANA classes (Approved Workmen Are Not Ashamed) held at a church. Back then I believed in God but I didn't want to learn about Him on Wednesday nights, especially when *The Fall Guy* was on TV!

Now that I'm a Tivo owning godless adult, I reserve the first Wednesday evening of every month (except July) to exercise my freethinking skills at the Minnesota Atheists Book Club event in Burnsville. We meet in the party room at Davanni's restaurant at County Road 11 and Country Road 42 (less than 15 minutes from the Mall of America). Food purchase is not required but you might find their pizza and hoagies to be too irresistible to pass up. We start filing in around 6:30 p.m. and begin the discussion at 7:00 p.m. After the discussion winds down we consider other books for future meet-



by Eric Jayne



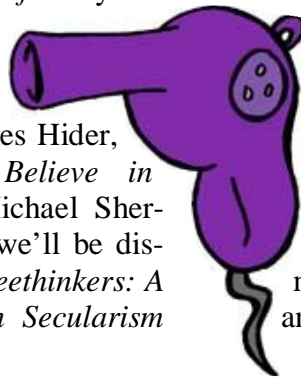
ings and conclude around 9:00 p.m. While we try to keep the topic of conversation somewhat on the book we happen to be discussing, there are plenty of opportunities to veer a little (and sometimes a lot) into other topics. The most important quality we strive for is a friendly and welcoming environment that fosters an enjoyable conversation. This approach has created a therapeutic outlet where local atheists freely interact with other local atheists.

Some books we have discussed include *Quiverfull* by Kathryn Joyce, *Misquoting Jesus* by Bart Ehrman, *Spirits of Allah* by James Hider, and *Why People Believe in Weird Things* by Michael Shermer. On May fifth, we'll be discussing *American Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism*

by Susan Jacoby. If you're interested in coming to one of our friendly Burnsville book discussions I encourage you to visit the Minnesota Atheists Meetup site for more information.

In addition to the monthly Burnsville book club meetings I'm organizing two other upcoming events: a Minnesota Twins outing and a *de-baptism* ceremony. For the Minnesota Twins event, I have reserved 25 discounted tickets for Sunday, May ninth (Mother's Day). The tickets are \$11.50 each and they're available to the first 25 who RSVP on the Meetup site.

The de-baptism event will be Sunday afternoon, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, at Al Baker's Restaurant in Eagan. It will be a tongue-in-cheek ceremony where those who were baptized (or not) will have an opportunity to rescind their baptism under the christening power of the *Hair Dryer of Reason*, which will posthumously dry your baptismal water away. Each person who gets de-baptized will receive a certificate that recognizes their disassociation with God. We'll enjoy cocktails, appetizers and dinner during and after the impious ceremony. Keep checking the Minnesota Atheists Meetup website ([meetup.com/minnesota-atheists](http://meetup.com/minnesota-atheists)) for more information about these events and more!



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(The badge shown above is just a sample; yours needn't say "George Francis Kane" unless you specifically request that it does. —ed.)

## I Don't Believe in Theists (continued)

(Continued from page 6)

seen, heard, or smelled are in all likelihood not there. We know we can imagine anything but only experience through our senses. Part of us knows this and throws up a little internal voice that says, "Sure, I think I feel God, but how do I know that's not just an emotion? A neurochemical? No, no, no, don't doubt, doubt is bad, go look for some external proof, or better yet just stop thinking like this and pray more, or preach, or read about how other people really believe and emulate them." Religious belief is a non-stop exercise in self-selling and stopping

your brain from reaching a conclusion consistent with all of its non-God experience. Gods are an exception to all other rules we've ever encountered and it's only through careful indoctrination on the part of parents and diligent effort on the part of self that this exception to the rule can be maintained. And the exception cannot generally be maintained for other gods. "My god is undeniably obvious, but yours is so obviously ridiculous that I feel sorry for you," is a common theistic attitude.

So, there are no theists. There are only people who really, *really* want to be theists, people who sincerely want God to be there and have dedi-

cated their lives to denying the voice in their head that tells them it's

all nonsense. They're all secretly atheists because they were born as atheists, they are atheists about other Gods, and they require proof for everything else.

Call us atheists wrong, call us late for dinner, just don't tell us that we secretly believe your story. It's crazy, it's disrespectful, and it's highly offensive. And, if theists find my argument that they don't exist is offensive, or disrespectful, my point is well made.

(Three days after his interview, Rush and his team competed in the four-man bobsleigh finals. With Jesus' help, they came in third. —ed.)

## Encountering Naturalism (continued)

(Continued from page 10)

plies to end of life decision as well. Do we make decisions based on science or a supernatural conception of life's beginning and end?

The fourth conflict addresses the culture war issues of teaching evolution in the public schools. Science supports evolution but does not promote naturalism. Naturalism supports science and religion's separation from

government.

In conclusion, "the significance of naturalism lies in its profound redefinition of who we are and the consequences of that redefinition for ourselves and society." Naturalism provides the worldview that science cannot. Because of naturalism, we have a possible worldview that models "empathy, compassion and acceptance that flow from understanding our caused, interdependent nature."

"Naturalism is a reality-based, humanistic and effective philosophy of life that can see us safely through the 21st century, and into the world to come."

# March Cable Report

by Steve Petersen

**F**or our March episodes George Kane interviewed August Berkshire for two programs titled "State/Church Laws."

This was a detailed program that covered Supreme Court decisions and both the Minnesota and US Constitutions. I would like to thank both August for his research and Grant Hermanson for his graphics upload on this program as he was able put court decisions on screen as they were discussed on the program.

We hope to be back on in the St. Cloud area soon, thanks to member Jack Richter.

**Cable Crew:** George Kane, Brett Stenbridge, Shirley Moll, Steve Petersen, Wendy Steinberg, Grant Hermanson, Mike Haubrich, and Karen Burke.

**Podcasts:** MinnesotaAtheists.org. Made possible by Grant Hermanson.

**Cable Schedule:**  
**Burnsville / Eagan Commu-**

**nity Television:** Channel 14. Check their web site [www.bect.tv](http://www.bect.tv) for day and times. Sponsor: Kevin Hardisty.

**Bloomington:** Channel 16. Monday 9:30 p.m. Tuesday 5:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. Sponsors: David and Joanne Beardsley.

**Minneapolis:** Channel 17. Saturday 8:30 p.m. Sponsor: Steve Petersen.

**Rochester:** Channel 10. Tuesday, Wednesday and

Thursday 7:30 p.m. Sponsor: Jim Salutz.

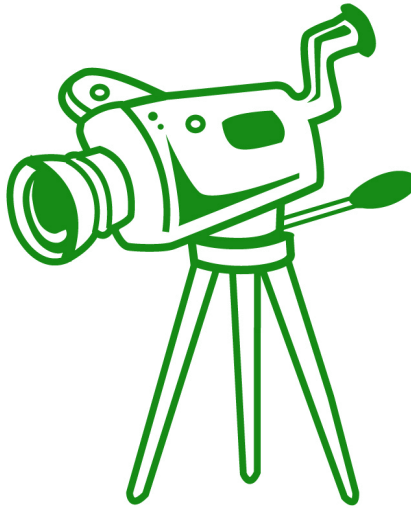
**Roseville, Shoreview, Arden Hills, North Oaks, Little Canada, Falcon Heights, Lauderdale, Mounds View, New Brighton:** Channel 14.

Wednesday 10:30 p.m. Sponsor: Steve Petersen.

**Stillwater:** Channel 16. Tuesday 7:00 p.m. and Wednesday 9:00 a.m. Sponsor: Lee Salisbury.

**South Washington County:** Channel 14. Tuesday 7:00 p.m. Sponsor: Jim Bodsberg.

**White Bear Lake, Hugo, Lake Elmo, Mahtomedi, Maplewood, North St. Paul, Oakdale, Vadnais Heights:** Channel 15. Saturday 7:30 p.m. Sponsor: Michael Seliga.



*Host George Kane, right, interviews August Berkshire on separation of state and church..*

## Cryptogram Answer

A Great Escape into faith is no retreat to safety. It is nothing less than surrender.

-Dan Barker, "Losing Faith in Faith"

# The End



by James Zimmerman

**M**ark your calendars: the end of the world is coming. No, not the literal demise of the planet, but the end of civilization as we've come to know it. To be precise, the end is coming on April 23<sup>rd</sup> of this year. That's actually the latest possible date; it could come even sooner.

Of course, this isn't the first time Jehovah's Witnesses have predicted the end. Both at the level of official doctrine and on a personal front, Witnesses can't seem to wrap their mind around the idea that the world might – just might – last for more than another few years.

First, they thought the End would be here in 1914:

"The 'Time of the End,' a period of one hundred and fifteen (115) years, from A.D. 1799 to A.D. 1914, is particularly marked in the Scriptures. — *Studies in the Scriptures, Series 3: Thy Kingdom Come*, ©1891, p.23.

Then they changed it to 1918:

"The end of the harvest is due in the spring of 1918." — *The Watch Tower*, May 1, 1918, p.132.

When the 1920s arrived with no sign of Armageddon's occurrence, they anticipated:

"[T]he great jubilee cycle is due to begin in 1925. At that time the earthly phase of the kingdom shall be recognized." — *Millions Now Living Will Never Die*, ©1920, p.89.

Then, with a note of caution, they next suggested 1975:

"Does it mean that Armageddon is going to be finished, with Satan bound, by 1975? It could! It could!" — *The Watchtower*, October 15, 1966, p.629.

As Carl Sagan once said: "It is astonishing in the face of such transparent evasions that this religion has any adherents at all." (*Broca's Brain*, p. 333)

I was born into that religion after all these prophecies had come and gone with no fulfillment. Still, the Witnesses maintained an excited expectation that the End was near. "It's right around the corner," some would say. Others, feeling that hyperbole wasn't forceful enough, claimed: "It's not around the corner anymore, we've turned the corner and we're headed right towards it."

It probably goes without saying, but such a worldview colors every aspect of one's life. There was no need to plan for retirement as was no chance of growing old. There was no need to plan for college – because spending

time and money in such a pursuit was the pinnacle of waste when Armageddon was looming. Many Witnesses indefinitely postponed reproducing, believing it would be better to wait for god's paradise than to raise children in this wicked world. My family members offered platitudes such as: "God will bring an end to this terrible world before you even have to go to school." And later: "You're fortunate, the Paradise will be here before you have to get a job."

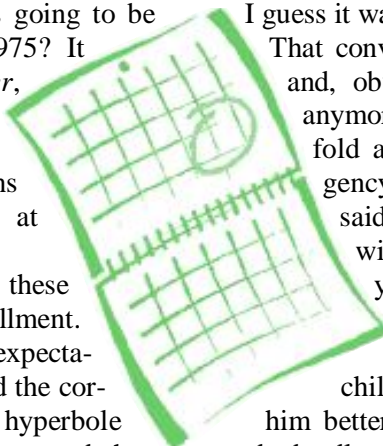
One morning, after I had completed high school and had been working at a job for several years, I was in a car with a group of other Witnesses as we drove around the neighborhood proselytizing. One woman in the car asked: "How much longer do you think this world we last before God brings the End?" This was an odd question to pose, because the only safe answer was: "Soon, very soon," and to guess and exact time would be to put oneself in the position of a prophet.

Nevertheless, the others in the car did give answers. The woman sitting next to me said: "Oh, I suppose it could go on for another six months or so." Another dared to suggest we might still be living in this hedonistic, immoral world long enough to have to switch out the calendars. When it came my turn to answer, I said: "I don't know. Maybe five years." This immediately met with stunned looks, an audible gasp, and the one other man in the car saying: "Oh, James, that's not good thinking," indicating that my lack of hypervigilance might be a cause for concern.

I guess it was.

That conversation took place over ten years ago and, obviously, I'm not a Jehovah's Witness anymore. In an effort to spur me back into the fold and into the mindset of apocalyptic urgency, one of my uncles emailed me and said, in part, "I can't believe that this system will go on for more than two to three years."

As a life-long Witness (and one of those who has denied his desire to have children in the sincere belief this will keep him better prepared for Armageddon), my uncle undoubtedly wouldn't say anything contrary to the Watchtower Society's current doctrine. So I think we have it on reliable authority. He sent me the aforementioned email on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007. Therefore, as a service to the public, I am making known this astonishing fact: Armageddon is coming this month. April 23<sup>rd</sup> at the latest. At 11:27 in the morning, if that helps.



# Minnesota Atheists

www.mnatheists.org  
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## Things to do, places to go: A Calendar for Atheists

Sundays, 6:00-7:00 p.m. **Atheist/Agnostic Alcoholics Anonymous**, 3249 Hennepin Avenue south, #55 (Men's Center, in the basement) Minneapolis. Open to men and women. FFI: tcAgnostic@gmail.com.

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday, 1-3:30 p.m., **Minnesota Atheists Monthly Meeting**. (No meeting in July or August.) See MNAtheists.org for details.

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday, **Fundraiser Dinner for Building Fund**. Price: \$7.00 (May, August, and November 2010).

1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday, 6 p.m., **Freethought Toastmasters Club**. Larpenteur Estates apartment complex, 1280 Larpenteur Ave. W., St. Paul. (Park directly in back and follow sidewalk to Party Room.) Roger Belfay, (651) 222-2782 or George Kane, nup@Minn.net.

2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Monday, 5-7 p.m., **Dinner Social**. Davanni's Restaurant, 2312 W.

66<sup>th</sup> Street (corner of Penn Ave. and 66<sup>th</sup> St.), Richfield, Bob/Marilyn Nienkerk, (612) 866-6200.

1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday, 11:30 a.m., **Lunch Social**. Old Country Buffet, Co. Road B2 between Snelling and Fairview, Roseville. Bob/Marilyn Nienkerk, (612) 866-6200.

3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday, 11:30 a.m., **Lunch Social**. Dragon House Restaurant, 3970 Central Ave., Columbia Heights. Bill Volna, (612) 781-1420.

4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday, **Meal and a Reel**, Uptown, Minneapolis (Hennepin Ave. and Lake St.) 6 p.m. meal, 7 p.m. movie. George Kane, nup@Minn.net. Details in Atheists Weekly E-mail.

Thursdays, 7 p.m., **Campus Atheists, Skeptics and Humanists (CASH)** See cashumn.org for program and location.

1<sup>st</sup> Thursday, 6-9 p.m., **Atheists Talk television show taping**. MTN, Studio A,

125 SE Main St., Minneapolis. Steve Petersen, (651) 484-9277.

2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday, evening. **Rochester Area Freethinkers** monthly get-together. Bill Kass, hawthorn64@hotmail.com or (507) 259-4237.

3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday, 6:30 p.m., **Minnesota Atheists board meeting**. Location varies. Contact George Kane, nup@Minn.net.

**To sign up for Atheists Weekly E-mail (AWE), send a request to awe@mnatheists.org.**

**To sign up for Minnesota Atheists Meetups, go to <http://atheists.meetup.com/493>.**

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Aren't you all looking forward to spring,  
when all the plants strive to inseminate  
your nose?

-PZ Myers, February 9, 2010 (on his blog Pharyngula)

**“Check out our website at  
mnatheist.org.”**