



THE MINNESOTA ATHEIST

Sunday, November 15, 2015 Monthly Public Meeting

“Atheists in America” with Professor Penny Edgell

You have probably heard that atheists are the most distrusted group in America. This observation was detailed in a 2006 article published in the American Sociological Review, titled, “Atheists as ‘Other’.” The lead author of that paper was Professor Penny Edgell of the Department of Sociology at the University of Minnesota.

They found that Americans were more likely to vote for a person who was a woman, black, Jewish, or gay for president than an atheist. Also, “Americans name atheists as those least likely to share their vision of American society. They are also more likely to disapprove of their children marrying atheists.”

The paper included data from the American Mosaic Project, which “studies what brings Americans together, what divides us, and the implications of our diversity for our political and civic life.”

Prof. Edgell also taught a class about atheists at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis campus, this past spring, titled, “Topics in Sociology: Atheists and Others in the US.”

The American Mosaic Project has recently conducted a second survey. So, have things gotten better for atheists in the last ten years? Come hear our speaker to find out!



Penny Edgell

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Sunday, Nov. 15, 2:00 pm

Ridgedale Library

12601 Ridgedale Dr.

Minnetonka, MN 55305

(On the south side of Ridgedale Dr, across the street from the Ridgedale Mall)

1:30pm Doors open

2:00pm Featured Speaker

4:00pm Post-meeting dinner at:

Chipotle Mexican Grill

12509 Wayzata Blvd, Minnetonka

(south side of Ridgedale Mall by

JCPenney)

President's Column

By Eric Jayne



The holiday season will soon be upon us and we've been told that it's the most wonderful time of the year. I personally prefer summer and find the warm weather to be the most wonderful time of the year, but I do enjoy the holiday season. I like the extra family time, decorating the Christmas tree, gifts, lights, sledding in the snow, egg nog, and I even enjoy the holiday music. Another one of my favorite parts of the holiday season is practicing positive atheism with my godless friends in the community. In addition to our monthly community volunteer events at the Food Group food bank in New Hope (every second Thursday of the month) and at the Family Place shelter in St. Paul (every third Saturday of the month), we are holding one additional event in November and one in December.

On **Thanksgiving morning** (November 26) Minnesota Atheists will be participating in the annual *Walk to End Hunger* at the Mall of America. It's a family-friendly 5K fun walk that will raise money for hunger relief organizations in the metro area. The event kickoff is at 7:30am and ends whenever you want to leave (up to 10am) so you will have plenty of time to enjoy the rest of your Thanksgiving plans. The Minnesota Atheists walking team will be raising money for Keystone Community Services which is a 501 (c)(3) secular nonprofit agency that serves the East Metro with three different food shelf locations.

Registration is \$25, which goes directly toward our team's fundraising goal for Keystone. If you would like to register for the event but can't pay the \$25 registration fee, you can register under the "Hunger Fighter Jr" registration. No registration fee will be charged if you register as a "Hunger Fighter Jr," but you will still be able to raise money as a team walker. If you can't attend the walk but would like to support the Minnesota Atheists in this hunger relief effort you can make a financial donation to an individual team walker or to the

entire team. Your donation will go directly to the Keystone food shelves. Visit the Minnesota Atheists meetup page or WalktoEndHunger.org for more information.

On **December 12** we are asking our members and supporters to consider donating a new toy, book, puzzle, game, or other appropriate item for children and joining us in the large banquet room at the Green Mill restaurant in St. Paul on Saturday, at 12pm to feast and wrap your gift along with several other donated gifts. For a list of suggested donated gifts please visit childrensmn.org/giving/giving-toys-and-gifts/wish-list or you can also view the list on the Minnesota Atheists Meetup event page.

Our turnout in years past have been impressive with last year's donations totaling three carloads of gifts. The gifts will be tagged with a greeting card that says *Happy Holidays from Minnesota Atheists* and then they are distributed by the staff of Children's Hospital to children who are patients and to members of their families so that they can have a better opportunity to play and have fun while in the hospital.

Last year we received a thank you letter from Children's Hospital that read: *Please accept our heartfelt appreciation for your generous gift given in memory of not believing in Jesus to Children's Hospitals and Clinics of Minnesota.* If you like to celebrate the secular, fun, and charitable parts of the holiday season without Jesus or any other god-belief, consider joining our gift donation feast in December and our hunger-fighting team of walkers at the Mall of America Thanksgiving morning.

Happy Holidays!

News and Notes

By George Francis Kane

The Freedom from Religion Foundation convention was held in Madison Wisconsin over October 9 & 10. The turnout from Minnesota was notable. Nancy Ruhland organized a party for Minnesotans that was hosted by Dick Seegers, that had at least 30 attendees. Many of them were atheists whom I met years before, but whose names have become hard to pull from the caverns of my memory. I began each conversation by glancing at the name tag in the lanyard each conference attendee wore. Most of the time this worked quite well to rekindle a rapport with an old friend, but I confess that sometimes I still could not make the connection. One imposing figure was identified by his name badge as Cranberry Chicken. A lovely lady at the party was Champagne Tilapia. (I presume that she was a stripper.) Another was Vegetable Strudel. Wow, did her parents ever have a problem with girls' names!

The headliners of the conference, Taslima Nasrin and Ron Reagan, both spoke on Friday night. Their presentations were strong and valuable. Nasrin spoke about the horrors of life of women under Islam, while Reagan spoke of the many problems in America that arise because of the intrusion of Christianity into government. Both speakers, however, presented material that was familiar to most of the audience. I felt that I learned more from two presentations by the FfRF's senior staff of attorneys on the cases they have worked during the last year. I felt that these presentations, however, needed more tangible conclusions. For example, during one question and answer period, I observed that there seemed to be a recurring pattern of government agencies refusing to address Establishment Clause violations, forcing the FfRF to sue them. Then, when they realized that courtroom defeat was inevitable, they would change policy to comply with the FfRF's original request. This action would make the suit moot, leading to the dismissal of the case. I asked if this tactic was intended to avoid paying opposing lawyers' fees. The first answer was that the point of the suits was not to make money. (But is it not better that the donors to the FfRF do not solely carry that burden?) A following answer was that there were some cases in which the government changed policy, but the FfRF was still awarded legal

costs. I would have appreciated an explanation of the conditions under which legal fees attach and when they do not.

To my mind, the most enlightening presentation of the weekend was by Kevin M. Kruse, titled "One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America." This is also the title of his just-published book. The thesis of the presentation was that the myth of "Christian America" was the product not of the Cold War, but of domestic politics of the 1930s and 1940s. The leading capital interests of the 1950s regarded the greatest threat to their domination of the economy to be not the foreign enemy, but the "creeping Socialism" of the New Deal. They heavily funded ideological campaigns by such organizations as the American Liberty League and the National Association of Manufacturers, but found that they could not tip the scales of national opinion against popular New Deal programs. They recognized that they had to outsource the job of selling capitalism to ministers, who would argue that capitalism is the product of the spiritual content that underlies the "American way of life." The "Iron Curtain" nations were ideologically useful to show that abandoning capitalism results in the loss of individual freedom. Today we often think of economic conservatives and evangelical Christians as conflicting factions in the Republican Party. When, for example, state legislators have tried to enact religious exemption from laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, major corporations threatened reprisals. Kruse shows, however, that the political strength of religious conservatism was originally built by the efforts of capitalists to keep government out of the affairs of business

Cryptogram By George Francis Kane

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October Meeting Review

The Ethics of New Testament Ethics by Hector Avalos

By Joe Smith

Hector Avalos is a professor of Religious Studies at Iowa State University and has a Doctor of Philosophy in Hebrew Bible and Near Eastern Studies from Harvard University, a Master of Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School, and a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology from the University of Arizona in 1982, and is a long time friend of Minnesota Atheists.

Is the Jesus identified in the Christian New Testament ethical? This is one of the questions that Dr. Hector Avalos tries to answer in his book: *The Bad Jesus: The Ethics of New Testament Ethics*.

The common understanding of Jesus, says Dr. Avalos, is limited by authors who are apologetic, biased and antithetical. The divinity of Jesus often overshadows any biographical work on Jesus as a man. In his book *The Bad Jesus*, Dr. Avalos takes Christology down the path of ethical examination by citing biblical verses and evaluating the behavior of Jesus as a man against today's societal norms.

One example discussed by Dr. Avalos is the question of the "Love thy enemy..." ideal that Jesus is credited with originating. Dr. Avalos proves convincingly that the "Love thy enemy..." concept was in

existence at least 1,000 years prior to the time of Jesus, and was known in other cultures. Additionally Dr. Avalos identifies the biblical scriptures that contradict the "Love thy enemy..." claim as Jesus wants his enemies to burn for eternity in fire.

In *The Bad Jesus*, Dr. Avalos discusses other contradictions in Christology including: was Jesus anti-imperialist, misogynistic, or anti-Semitic, and did Jesus even know his own bible? The demand for Dr. Avalos's book was high, and no copies were available by the time I arrived on Sunday. I think I will request that my local library order a copy.

Other books by Hector Avalos include: *The End of Biblical Studies*, *Fighting Words: The Origins of Religious Violence* and *Se puede saber si Dios existe? [Can One Know if God Exists?]*



Hector Avalos

Out of the Closet



My favorite quote by John Kennedy is:

I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute.

**Steve Petersen
Out of the Closet Atheist**

Cable Report

By Steve Petersen



John Wreisner and George Kane

In October George Kane interviewed John Wreisner about The Satanic Temple and its tactics in the struggle for separation of state and church. The interview covered the founding humanist principles of the Satanic Temple as well as national and local issues that the Satanic Temple has tackled.

Cable Crew: George Kane, Brett Stembridge, Shirley Moll, Steve Petersen, Les Stordalen, Grant Hermanson and Art Anderson.

Podcasts: Programs are available on the MinnesotaAtheists.org website. Access via iTunes and YouTube has been made possible by Grant Hermanson. To date, our channel has had over 134,000 downloads.

Have a program idea? Would like to be an interviewer or interviewee? Would like to get some experience of being on the crew behind the scenes? We have opportunities for you! Also, if you would like to see Atheists Talk on your local station, we can work to make that happen. Please contact Steve Petersen at address@mnatheists.org.

Cable Schedule

Bloomington: Ch. 16. Sunday 11:00 p.m. Sponsors: David and Joanne Beardsley.

Minneapolis: Ch. 75. Monday 7:00 p.m. Sponsor: Steve Petersen.

Northwest Community Television (NWCT) Brooklyn Center, Brooklyn Park, Crystal, Golden Valley, Maple Grove, New Hope, Osseo, Plymouth and Robbinsdale, Ch. 20 check web page for date and times: <http://nwct.org/programming.aspx>
Sponsor: Grant Hermanson

Rochester: Ch. 10. Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday 7:30 p.m. Sponsor: Jim Salutz.

Roseville, Shoreview, Arden Hills, North Oaks, Little Canada, Falcon Heights, Lauderdale, Moundsview/New Brighton: Ch. 14. Wednesday 10:30 p.m. Sponsor: Shirley Moll.

St. Cloud: Ch. 12 Thursday 8:30 to 9:00 p.m. Sponsor: Tom Stavros.

St. Paul: Ch. 15 Wednesdays 5:00 p.m. Sponsor: Jim Wright.

Stillwater: Ch., 16. Tuesday 7:00 p.m.; Wednesday 9:00 a.m. Sponsor: Lee Salisbury.

White Bear Lake, Hugo, Lake Elmo, Mahtomedi, Maplewood, North St. Paul, Oakdale, Vadnais Heights: Ch. 15. Saturday 8:00 p.m. Sponsor: Michael Seliga.

Minnesota Atheists Recognizes Mike Haubrich



Minnesota Atheists presented Mike Haubrich, pictured here with August Berkshire, with a Certificate of Appreciation for serving 7 years of his time for the Atheist Talk radio program.



I am an out atheist so doubters know that non-belief is an option.

**Mike Haubrich
Out of the Closet Atheist**

Cryptogram Answer

The claim that the United States was founded and then flourished as a Christian nation turns out to be an all-American fraud, disseminated in the 1950s and after by an odd combination of reactionary businessmen, well-meaning political leaders, cranks, cynics, and dupes.

-Sean Wilentz

Treasury Report By Chris Matthews

Radio Fund

Cynthia Flaig	\$25
Mark Paquette	\$15
Total Radio Fund	\$40

General/Visibility Fund

Stephanie Arbesfeld	\$25
Art Kallenbach	\$20
Meetup individuals	\$67
Total General/Visibility Fund	\$112

Total Income: \$152

Current Building Fund Total \$134,358

Top Expenses

Conference	\$4,308
Radio Show	\$820



Call for January Articles

We welcome contributions from all readers of The Minnesota Atheist. While we cannot guarantee that your submission will be accepted for publication, we will carefully consider anything that is related to atheism. We would especially like to receive contributions which provide profiles of individual atheists and which report atheist-related events in the wider community.

Because we are a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization, we cannot print articles that support or oppose a specific candidate, but we can print articles that support or oppose specific causes. Article length should ideally be 500-1000 words and no more than 2000 words.

Please send submissions to the editor, Jenny Nolan at edito@mnatheists.org by 11:59pm on October 22. All submissions may be edited for style and length.

We look forward to receiving your submissions. Without readers like you The Minnesota Atheist would be needlessly constrained in its breadth and depth.

**Let us know
how atheism
fits into your life .**

**We want to hear from
you in 2016!**

Happy New Year!

Secretary Report By Heather Hegi

October

- Reported on Secular Family Night, this event was a success.
- Speaker ideas for the early months of 2016 were discussed.
- Reported on the Meetup Organizers Meeting.
- Discussed committees, committee needs, and how to direct volunteers.
- Discussed scheduling a quarterly business meeting to cover the 4th quarter.

Complete meeting minutes are available to dues-paying members by contacting Heather at sec@mnatheists.org

Quarterly Business Meeting: November 30th

By Jill Carlson

Hello! Minnesota Atheists had a tremendously successful first quarterly Business Meeting in September. At least 35 people were in attendance and much was accomplished and many committees presented updates. I personally want to thank all attendees and those who helped plan the first Quarterly Business Meeting. Please mark your calendars for the 4th quarter meeting on Monday, November 30th at 6:30 p.m. for another night of great Pizza Luce food and fun conversation. The party room at the Pizza Luce-Richfield has been reserved and the agenda for the meeting is being prepared. Minnesota Atheists is exploring this venue as a permanent location for our future meetings.

This gathering will be a prime opportunity for people who identify as MN Atheist newbies, lurkers, visitors, members, lifers and leaders to talk about the direction of our organization and set goals. Are you involved in a project at Minnesota Atheists and you need some volunteer help to make your activity richer and more vibrant? This meeting would be a great place to build coalitions, to network and to learn about new initiatives. Board elections are coming up and great new organizational projects are being developed. Your ideas are valuable. The Minnesota Atheists board of directors graciously invites you on November 30th at Pizza Luce located at 800 W 66th St., Richfield, Minnesota at 6:30 p.m. There is no cost to

attend, but having some food would be great way to support our free meeting space. The Minnesota Atheists board estimates costs to participate in the pizza bar to be \$10 a person.

If you have any questions, topics or comments about this evening please direct those thoughts to me at chair@mnatheists.org.

Best Regards,
Jill Carlson, Chairperson Minnesota Atheists

November 30, 2015

**Pizza Luce
800 W 66th St.
Richfield, MN**

6:30 p.m.

Featured Blogpost

The Status Quo is Reality All Else is Ideology

By M. A. Melby

The reason I thought to write about this type of argument was an on-point tweet about Gamergate by Tauriq Moosa.

"A bullet cannot think, so stop forcing your agenda," he said, getting his white male character to fire a gun at an "African zombie." See, by proclaiming their politics are "neutral" they can liken it to "science" - & science facts are true regardless of opinion.

It goes something like this:

What I'm accustomed to is natural and is therefore good or neutral.

You want to change that.

You are an ideologue and I am not.

This is a bit like An Appeal to Nature. However, it can be described best as being unaware of base assumptions as Dan Olson explains in his impressive analysis of Gamergate.

In anti-vaxx arguments, this manifests as *"When I was a kid, we had chicken pox and measles and we liked it!!"* arguments. There is a fear-of-change element to this mode of thinking as well. Anything besides what someone is accustomed to is painted as dangerous and unnecessary even if the evidence points to a profound benefit.

This way of thinking fuels arguments against trans teenagers being provided medical transition. The *"do nothing"* option is pushed as a NEUTRAL option, even though it is far from it. The framing of the conversation is not: Which option is going to result in this young person being healthiest and happiest? Instead, the conversation is framed as: How is changing "nature" dangerous and risky? The dangers and risks of allowing the "natural" puberty to continue is simply not considered, even if those dangers and risks are real and demonstrable.

Among anti-feminists, this tendency to prefer the way things are may include good old fashioned distress of the privileged. However, the current situation may also be literally presented as nature itself! To stand against the current normal can then be painted as anti-nature, anti-science, and pure ideology!

An example of this approach is a common repackaged religious argument. Politicians can't (technically) use religious arguments to enact law. So, they need to repackage GOD as NATURE. When Allen Quist, a Minnesota political candidate, discussed "the natural order of the husband being the head of the wife" he also stated that he believed there was a "genetic predisposition".



Of course, he made that up.

What he really meant was: I am comfortable with men being the heads of households, it seems natural to me, and I don't want it to change. By using pseudoscience to back up his sexist demands on women and families, he protects his ideological argument in a facade of rationality.

So, what to do? How do you counter this?

Find out what the person believes is the natural order or part of the status quo.

Repeat back what they say as a description of the current situation.

Ask if they believe that's how it should be or needs to be.

If they say that it is unavoidable, ask for evidence of their claim.

For example,

I realize that currently men are often considered the heads of households and afforded final authority in decision making. Do you think that if a woman marries a man that she should be expected to perform that role as prescribed to her? Should she be inclined to accept the decisions that her husband makes on her behalf even if she believes those decisions are wrong or not in her best interest?...Yes, I realize that in many cultures women are expected to be subordinate to men. Is there a reason you believe such an oppressive system is inevitable?

Essentially, keep mentioning what the current situation is and that it is not, indeed, neutral. Promote introspection by making reality more visible. Explain what the current situation actually is, how it operates, and what the risks are of allowing it to continue without challenge.

The problem is that they are wearing the present like a well-worn shoe. They need it to be described to them in order for them to even notice it. They will not recognize that their defense of "normal" is an inherently ideological stance if they remain unaware of the unspoken assumptions it is built on.



Winter Solstice Celebration: A Festivus for the Rest of Us

Friday, December 18th @ 6pm
Minnesota Humanities Center
987 Ivy Ave E, St. Paul

Registration Deadline – December 8th
\$35 for Dinner & Entertainment
(\$30 with Member Discount*)
\$10 for Entertainment Only

Join us for a fun secular celebration of the season! Freethinkers are remaking the holidays based on the true reason for the season—the winter solstice—to create a festi-
vus for the rest of us like in the good old days! There'll be a festi-
vus pole where we will collect gifts for Bridge for Youth and festi-
vus activities, such as the airing of political grievances, and secular caroling. And, a mummers play—featuring none other than Galileo—with appearances from Buzz Light Year, Yoda and Spock. Don't miss it!

**Member discounts are for dues-paying members of either
Humanists of Minnesota or Minnesota Atheists.*

Upcoming Events

- Walk to End Hunger with Minnesota Atheists** Thursday, November 26th at 7:30 a.m., Mall of America, 8100 24th Ave S, Bloomington. Join us on Thanksgiving morning to help build awareness and raise money for hunger relief programs.
 - Quarterly Business Meeting** Monday, November 30th at 6:30 p.m., Pizza Luce, 800 W 66th St, Richfield
 - Winter Solstice Celebration** Friday, December 18th, Humanities Center, 987 Ivy Ave E, St Paul
 - Godless Gamers** Every Sunday at 2:00 p.m. and Thursday at 6:00 p.m., Fantasy Flight Games Center, 1975 County Rd B2, Roseville
 - Atheist/Agnostic Alcoholics Anonymous** Every Sunday from 6:00-7:00 p.m. and Wednesday from 7:00-8:00 p.m., Health Recovery Center building, lower floor, 3249 Hennepin Ave, Minneapolis. Based on A.A. minus beliefs in any form of a God.
 - Atheists Talk Community Brunch** 1st Sunday of every month at 10:00 a.m., Q. Cumbers, 7465 France Ave S, Edina
 - Freethought Toastmasters Meeting** 1st and 3rd Monday of every month at 6:30pm, Larpenteur Estates Party Room, 1280 Larpenteur Ave W, St Paul. freethought.toastmastersclubs.org
 - Freethinking Females** 2nd Wednesday of every month at 7:00 p.m., Claddagh Irish Pub, 7890 Main St N, Maple Grove, and 4th Monday of every month at 7:30 p.m., Chatterbox Pub, 800 Cleveland Ave S, St. Paul (note two different locations). Shattering the myth that Atheist groups are male dominated with a female's only event.
 - Volunteer Food Packing** 2nd Thursday of every month at 1:00 p.m., The Food Group, 8501 54th Ave N, New Hope
 - Blasphemer's Brunch** 2nd Saturday of every month at 10:30 a.m., Pizza Lucé, 800 W 66th St, Richfield
 - Minnesota Atheists Board Meeting** 3rd Wednesday of every month at 6:30 p.m., Amherst H Wilder Foundation, 451 Lexington Pkwy N, St Paul. All Minnesota Atheists members are welcome.
 - Bowling for Deities** Last Saturday of every month at noon, Memory Lanes, 2520 26th Ave South, Minneapolis
- For more events, visit www.meetup.com/minnesota-atheists



Minnesota Atheists Membership and Donations

- One-year student membership \$10
- One-year individual membership \$35
- Three-year individual membership \$90
- One-year household membership \$45
- Three-year household membership \$115
- One-year sustaining membership \$75
- Three-year sustaining membership \$200
- Life membership \$600

Donations are tax deductible. Membership fees are deductible for the amount beyond their fair market value.

Student memberships include a subscription to the PDF version of *The Minnesota Atheist* delivered by email. All other memberships include a subscription to the printed version delivered by postal mail. If you would prefer the PDF version delivered by email, please check the box and provide your email address.

Minnesota Atheists
PO Box 120304
New Brighton, MN 55112

Please make checks payable to Minnesota Atheists.
Students, please enclose a copy of your fee statement or school identification.

General Fund \$ _____
 Building Fund \$ _____
 Radio Fund \$ _____

Name: _____
 Street Address: _____
 City, State, Zip: _____
 Phone: _____
 Email (required for student memberships and email subscriptions): _____

Minnesota Atheists

Positive Atheism in action since 1991

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.

Minnesota Atheist Board of Directors

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Minnesota Atheists Goals
Minnesota Atheists practices positive, inclusive, active, friendly, neighborhood atheism in order to provide a community for atheists, educated the public about atheism, and promote separation of state and church.

Minnesota Atheists Affiliates

Minnesota Atheists is affiliated with the Atheist Alliance of America, Atheist Alliance International, American Atheists, The American Humanist Association, the Council for Secular Humanism, The International Humanist and Ethical Union, and the Secular Coalition for America.

Minnesota Atheists Membership

Regular members: 206
Life members: 42
Meetup members: 2017

Minnesota Atheists Honorary Members

Hector Avalos, PhD
Dan Barker
Gerald Erickson, PhD
Annie Laurie Gaylor
Dick Hewetson
Robert M. Price, PhD



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