

THE ATHEIST VOICE

BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE METROPLEX ATHEISTS
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EDUCATION

Science museum sees the light, but leaves unanswered questions

William McEwen
METROPLEX ATHEISTS

Officials at the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History found themselves in the middle of controversy when The New York Times reported that a museum staff member rejected showing an IMAX film, fearing its mention of evolution might offend Christians.

The March 19 New York Times story, also published in the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, featured an interview with Carol Murray, marketing director of the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History. Murray said a test audience of 137 people viewed *Volcanoes of the Deep Sea* at the museum. She said some thought it was well done, and some thought it was "blasphemous." One called the film "anti-creationist propaganda."

(This reporter's request for a breakdown of the actual number of people who were offended was denied by Bill Lawrence of the museum, who cited confidentiality of marketing data.)

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Ron Steinke

Metroplex Atheists members gather outside the museum after viewing *Volcanoes of the Deep Sea*. Behind them is a sculpture of an Acrocanthosaurus, the dinosaur that once thrived in Texas.

SOCAS

DOE is sued over federal funding of Alaska bible college

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

The national Freedom From Religion Foundation, a freethought association working to keep church and state separate, filed a federal lawsuit on April 21 against the Department of Education's massive federal funding of Alaska Christian College in Soldotna, Alaska.

The 3-year-old unaccredited "college" is affiliated with the Evangelical Covenant Church of Alaska. It offers no academic

classes, such as math or English, or degrees. It enrolls only 37 students who wish to "brush up on their Biblical knowledge," go into the ministry, or "learn what it means to become a fully committed follower of Jesus Christ."

The lawsuit is challenging the most recent allotment of federal dollars to the school, \$435,000 allocated in the 2005 omnibus funding bill passed in late November, at the request of Alaska's only House member, Rep. Don Young. Half of

the bible school's funding to date has been public, with the school receiving more than \$1 million in aid, amounting to an unprecedented \$20,000 per student.

Its website identifies the school as "a Bible centered college," where students "study and apply God's Word" and "serve Christ." In website advice to students about supplies to bring, "Bible" is at the top of the list.

Continued on page 2

SOCAS

Idaho Atheists win big against NDOP discrimination

AMERICAN ATHEIST

A U.S. District Court Judge ruled earlier today that the State of Idaho could not deny a permit to Atheists wishing to hold a "Day of Equality" rally on the steps of the state capitol building, and instead allow a National Day of Prayer event to take place even though the Atheists reserved the space first.

Supported by American Atheists, the Idaho Atheists and AA State Director Susan Harrington sued Governor Dirk Kempthorne and state facilities manager Tom Mason arguing that the state had violated the constitution when it cancelled the IA reservation for tomorrow's event.

It all started when Harrington noticed that the scheduling calendar for May 5 - the National Day of Prayer, which has included a religious rally on the capitol steps -- was blank. She promptly scheduled the Idaho Day of Equality for the venue. Mr. Mason, however, later realized that

while his office "routinely" scheduled the NDOP for that time, the Atheists were there first. He then cancelled the Idaho Atheists reservation.

Backed by American Atheists, Harrington and the Idaho Atheists went into federal court, arguing that they were victims of state-sponsored religious discrimination.

"Government state facilities officials have intervened and stated that it was their mistake and that our Atheist group must give up our spot we legally obtained in order to give preference to a religious group,"

Harrington said in a statement to reporters. "Even though the National Day of Prayer event wasn't scheduled when we made our reservations, even though we had been assured that we were following the guidelines, and even though the National Day of Prayer people were going to move their event inside, the state is saying that we Atheists cannot hold our event on the front steps and that we have to move to the

side steps."

Harrington added that Governor Kempthorne "must set a standard of inclusiveness and neutrality with respect to religious opinion or practice. Religious opinion is a person matter, and the government has no business implying that Atheists are second-class citizens because they don't believe in gods."

According to news reports, though, Kempthorne -- who issued an official proclamation in support of the National Day of Prayer event - is "disappointed" in the judge's decision which upheld fairness and the separation of church and state. He grumbled to reporters, "I will take part in the National Day of Prayer event, no matter where it is held, because of my own belief in the importance of prayer -- not to make a political statement."

He also said that "attempts to accommodate the Idaho Atheists, by offering them a very similar venue on the same day and at the same time, were rejected."

Funding – From page 1

Alaska Christian College is the only unaccredited, nondegree school in the nation that got money in 2004 from the federal Fund for the Improvement of Post-secondary Education.

The Juneau Empire editorialized (Dec. 28, 2004) against the "astonishing amount of public money [lavished] on a tiny, brand-new religious school."

"Alaska's congressional delegation might just as well have put a \$1 million check in the church collection plate," the newspaper editorialized.

First-year students who complete the program receive a "Certificate of Biblical

Studies." Returning students "partnering with the neighboring community school" can receive a "Certificate of Biblical and General Studies." The school has only applied for accreditation with a biblical association, for which it would not be eligible before 2007.

In previous federal funding, \$200,000 received with the help of Alaska U.S. Sens. Ted Stevens and Lisa Murkowski in 2004 paid for the New Hope Counseling Center.

Rep. Young has gotten the school a previous \$400, 000 in tax funds, of which \$250,000 went to fund salaries for the five faculty members, \$75,000 was used for scholarships, and the rest

went for student recruitment and other activities.

The additional funding last November drew criticism from Citizens Against Government Waste, a Washington, DC, watchdog group.

In a notice last July when the college sought "a new full-time director of admissions," Alaska Christian College president said: "The job has two main responsibilities. Recruit 30 students each year and love them when they arrive."

The school appears to be missionarizing Native Alaskans. Ninety percent of its student population is Native.

Both Sens. Murkowski and Stevens have paid personal visits to the bible college.

Do you know of any Church/State separation violations?

Some things to look for are the posting of the ten commandment in public (government) buildings including public school buildings, city parks, municipal buildings, and libraries.

To voice your concerns, please email the Metroplex Atheist Director:
director@metroplexatheists.org

METROPLEX ATHEISTS

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SOCAS

Day of Prayer held on private property

METROPLEX ATHEISTS

Officials with Metroplex Atheists, an advocacy group for state-church separation and atheists' rights in the Dallas/Fort Worth area, commend the National Day of Prayer's Dallas chapter for their decision to hold their 2005 event on the privately-owned Thanksgiving Square Center rather than the front of the Dallas City Hall or “Old Red” Courthouse where the group has been holding its events for years.

“This is heartening” said John Hattan, Metroplex Atheists secretary. “For years, the Dallas NDOP committee has worked to blur the lines of state-church separation by giving the impression of city endorsement of Evangelical Protestantism over other religions. They have always held the event on city property and had local lawmakers endorse the event. While I'd like to see Christians follow their own holy book's mandate in Matthew 6:5-6, the move to private land and lack of lawmakers on the docket at least renders the event as more religious than political, and that's a step in the right direction”.

Ever since former Minnesota governor Jesse Ventura received bad press from Gary Bauer's Family Research Council

in 1999 for refusing to endorse the overtly sectarian religious event, lawmakers have been careful to respond positively to requests for endorsement. While the “National Day Of Prayer Task Force” insists that their event is not about politics, many NDOP events take place on government owned land. Also, NDOP organizers have often requested that government officials from the federal level down to the local level improperly use their offices as a way of giving the appearance of government endorsement of Christianity.

About the move, Metroplex Atheists activism coordinator Vincent Lundgren commented “It's not a total victory, as the city-funded Dallas Police Color Guard will still be in attendance, but I'm hopeful that the local NDOP coordinator will continue to work towards ‘de-politicizing’ this event. Given that the Thanksgiving Square Center is designed to be an open forum for all religions, I'd like to see them eventually allow invocations from non-Christian religions or even atheists, but you have to take things one step at a time.”

Thanksgiving Square is funded and managed by the Thanks-giving Square Foundation, a Texas nonprofit organization. www.thanksgiving.org

CHUCKY D IS HERE!

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www.metroplexatheists.org/shop/index.htm

RATIONALLY SPEAKING

Habemus Papa!

Or, rather, they (the roughly one billion Catholics of this planet) now have a new Pope, former German cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now known as Benedict XVI. As a former Catholic (sort of) and an Italian who grew up not far from the Vatican,

I followed the American media frenzy over the death of John Paul II with much interest, although the whole coverage by CNN and company struck me as rather odd. It is true that Catholics still make up a large fraction of Americans (and they vote based on some - but apparently not others - of their beliefs, as John Kerry discovered when it turned out that abortion is a moral issue, but war somehow isn't).

Still, only 20% of American Catholics actually claim to closely follow the dictates of any Pope, and the US media usually pays little or no attention to what the self-described infallible sage from Rome says or does. No, the media frenzy was really just another example of celebrity worship, no different from the coverage of Michael Jackson's trial or the ever-fascinating saga of who Brad Pitt really goes to bed with.

That said, what ought we to think about the just departed Pope, Carol Wojtyla? As a scientist, I can't really complain that much about him. He managed to officially pardon Galileo (almost four centuries later, but hey!), though he refused to apologize for burning Giordano Bruno at the stakes. John Paul II also wrote a letter to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in 1997 advising Vatican scientists (and Catholics at large) that the Church doesn't have a problem with the scientific theory of evolution (that didn't help me much when I was living in Tennessee, since most of the local creationists would simply retort that the Pope was wrong and sure to go to Hell, which I'm confident would have come as shocking

news to the man from Poland!).

On the other hand, Wojtyla was certainly a very conservative Pope, even by the standards of the Catholic Church as they had evolved since the Second Vatican Council. John Paul II refused to consider a larger role of women in the Church, actively campaigned against the use of contraceptives worldwide (Church officials on the ground in Africa have been accused of lying about the effectiveness of condoms to prevent AIDS, just to promote their senseless "abstinence only" policy), not to mention of course his opposition to gay rights and abortion.



Dr. Massimo
Pigliucci
ATHEIST ALLIANCE

While one can surely expect the 2000-year old institution based in Rome to fighting a rear-guard war against human progress, it seems to me that a man indirectly responsible for the death and suffering of millions around the globe should hardly be considered for a fast-track to sainthood! Indeed, there have been many dissenting Catholic voices, even within the Roman Curia, against the strictness of Wojtyla's views.

Which brings us to Benedict XVI. Although Ratzinger chose his name with the intent of being conciliatory (Benedict the XV inherited a highly divided Church at the beginning of the 20th century, with progressives once again pitted against conservatives, and did his best to bring about a reconciliation), he isn't exactly known as a moderate within the Vatican.

On the contrary, Ratzinger served under John Paul II as head of the "Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith," a position that allowed him to punish a score of "liberals" within the Church. According to the New York Times, one of Ratzinger's com-

ments on his role as defender of Catholic orthodoxy was that "The Pope told me that it is my biggest religious obligation not to have my opinions." How sad. And yet, how remarkably apt to capture not just Ratzinger's position, but the whole idea of the Catholic Church: not only there is one invariable truth, but nobody else can access it other than the highest ranks of the Church itself. It is precisely this sort of attitude, of course, that started the Protestant Reform and brought about a major schism among Christians, a schism that Benedict XVI is highly unlikely to help heal.

There are good reasons to think that Ratzinger has been chosen to succeed John Paul II because the august cardinals debating inside the Sistine Chapel had no idea of where the Church should go, and just wanted to buy some time (they are supposed to be inspired directly by God, but it seems that even the Almighty needed five rounds of voting to make up His mind).

On the one hand, North Americans, and especially Europeans, have been abandoning the Church precisely on the ground of the kind of strict orthodoxy enforced by John Paul II and, likely, by Benedict XVI. Most Catholics in Western countries seem to feel an increasing cognitive dissonance between the realities of a complex multicultural society and a set of teachings that has hardened over two millennia.

Then again, the Church has been growing especially in South America and Africa, where evangelical Christians and ultra-orthodox Catholics have been making the fastest gains in terms of converts. Thorned between choosing a liberal Pope to recoup some of the losses in Europe and the US, and an even more conservative one to help the expansion in the new territories, the college of cardinals went for the safest choice: an old Pope (Ratzinger is 78), who will maintain the same course established by John Paul II for a few more years.

After that, God will provide. Or will She?

Are you searching for Atheists on the internet?

Join in the discussions at the DFW Atheist Talk group.
groups.yahoo.com/group/DFWatheistTalk/

BOOK REVIEW

The Ayn Rand Cult

John Hattan

METROPLEX ATHEISTS

First off, I must apologize. I had announced and planned to do a review of the new atheist "superhero" comic, *The Atheist* this month. And I had fully planned to do so. I made sure to put the comic in a place where I wouldn't lose it. Then I lost it.

So instead I'll be reviewing an interesting book that I just finished, *The Ayn Rand Cult* by Jeff Walker (Open Court Publishing, 1999). The Ayn Rand/Objectivism phenomenon was something that I'd always found interesting. Cults, by and large, are religious entities. From the Scientologists to the Baghwan-followers in Oregon to the Jim Jones folks who offed themselves in Guyana, cults and religions have always gone hand in hand. In fact, even defining the difference between a cult and a religion is a tricky thing. The best definition I've found for a cult is from the Watchman Fellowship, which is an Arlington-based Christian anti-cult group. You can read their list here.

www.watchman.org/cults/cult.htm

Unfortunately, they really have to tiptoe around their terminology and couch their terms with things like "destructive cult" and "cultic" because every one of their attributes of a cult could be applied to mainstream Christian denominations!

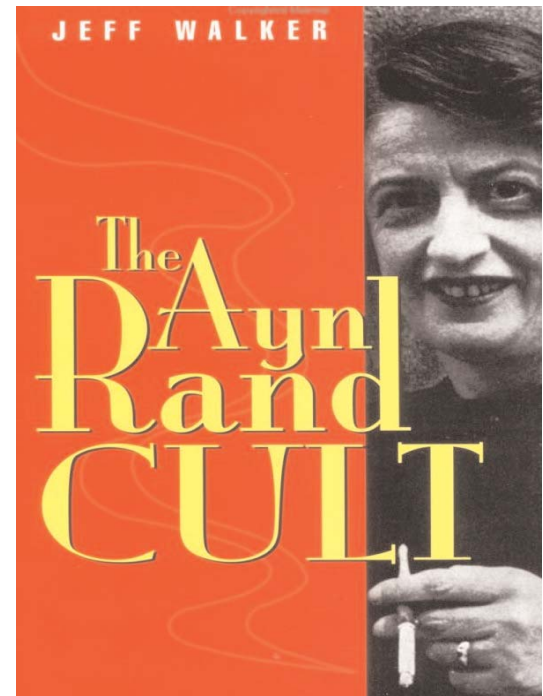
And this is why I find the Ayn Rand folks interesting. While the group has certainly gone through changes and upheavals over the past fifty years, it's got all of the earmarks of a cult despite the fact that they're the most anti-religious folks you'll find. And *The Ayn Rand Cult* documents much of the cultic behavior of the group. As you can imagine, most of the book centers on Ayn Rand herself, her personality, and the people with whom she surrounded herself. While economic mover-n-shaker Alan Greenspan was certainly the biggest success of Rand's personal inner-circle, he was at best a peripheral character in the drama. The book spends most of its time on Rand's vaunted-then-excommunicated "golden boy", Nathaniel Branden, followed by Branden's second-rate replacement, Leonard Peikoff.

Despite Branden's unintentionally showing

the irrationality of the self-proclaimed "most rational personal in existence" with the exposure of their extramarital affair and his later expulsion from the group, *The Ayn Rand Cult* doesn't give him much of a break. From his PhD (which is apparently only slightly more accredited than the \$20 doctorate I have from the Universal Life Church) to his embrace of suspicious psychological techniques like subliminal tapes and hypnotic regression, Branden comes off as a narcissist who's still looking for the outlet for his narcissism. The Ayn Rand Cult seems more entertained than sympathetic regarding the early efforts he made in transforming objectivism from a philosophy espoused in a couple of schmaltzy novels into an independent organization, only to later be declared anathema (and even later a non-human) by that same movement because of the bruised ego of the founder. The book opens with Rand's infamous final words to Branden, "If you have an ounce of morality left in you, an ounce of psychological health, you'll be impotent for the next twenty years! And if you achieve any potency, you'll know it's a sign of still worse moral degradation!" describing Rand's words as placing "a curse on his penis".

While I don't think anyone (including the author) would think that Rand or Branden believed in curses, opening the book with this quote showed a repeating theme that applied to Rand's followers, that of moral degradation. While Rand herself would never tolerate the thought that her personal morals were anything other than the pinnacle of reason, everyone in her vicinity had to walk on eggshells and avoid expressing any opinions about anything, from politics to music, lest their preferences be carefully analyzed and shown to be clear signs of moral failures. Even something as personal as liking the music of Beethoven or the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey* was a sign of a deviant mind.

Branden's 1968 expulsion (and subsequent removal from all Rand works, extending as far as dubbing over Branden's voice during a taped Q&A session with Rand) was undoubtedly the turning point in the objectivist movement. Leonard Peikoff, Branden's



replacement as Rand's "intellectual heir", comes off as a pale replacement, clearly having neither Branden's charisma nor ambition. If not for the royalties from Rand's books and the constant influx of new members from the "for more information" cards in Rand's books, it's doubtful that Peikoff would even have the obscurity that he currently enjoys. It took him fourteen years to complete his sole original work, *The Ominous Parallels*, under the tutelage of Rand herself, and has apparently done little since Rand's death except to declare *Atlas Shrugged* inerrant and high-profile objectivists to be anathema, like former associate David Kelley and current Federal Reserve chair Alan Greenspan. Like Rand's break with Branden, Peikoff has required that all associates similarly break all ties (personal and professional) with members that he has declared "disgraced".

And that, my friends, is what in my opinion separates an organization from a cult. When founding members suddenly become "The White Pig" (to use *Animal Farm* vernacular) and are declared to not only be no longer part of the organization but evil agents of *The Other Side* that were infiltrating the organization's ranks, your organization is suffering from the paranoia of the senior members. And, unfortunately, Rand and Peikoff shared a paranoia that will keep the Objectivist movement from gaining any serious ground.

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Museum – From page 2

Murray also told the Times, "If it's not going to draw a crowd, and it is going to create controversy, from a marketing standpoint, I cannot make a recommendation [to show it]."

On March 23, the Fort Worth Star-Telegram ran nearly a full page of letters from readers. Nineteen readers assailed Murray's decision, many saying they would never again visit the museum. Only one reader was sympathetic: Rick Townsend of Colleyville chided the newspaper for not quoting "creationist" scientists in the article.

The museum was also inundated with letters and telephone calls from angry residents, including many members of Metroplex Atheists. The museum reacted quickly, granting interviews to the press, responding to the public via e-mail and snail mail, and even writing an op-ed piece for the Fort Worth Star-Telegram.

The e-mail, snail mail, and op-ed piece all included this message from Van Romans, president of the museum: "Readers of the articles understandably gained the impression that the museum lacks the willingness to present scientific viewpoints in an uncensored environment, which is incorrect. The results of the survey taken after pre-screening *Volcanoes of the Deep Sea* revealed that several individuals were concerned about its references to evolution. The museum would like to set the record straight: Those

concerns were not the determining factors as to why we did not show the film."

The museum quickly scheduled *Volcanoes* for a month-long engagement, and a longer run in the summer.

On May 1, 20 members of Metroplex Atheists saw the film at the museum. *Volcanoes of the Deep Sea* follows the interests of a German geologist, whose is fascinated by rocky land forms along the coast of Spain. He and other researchers board the high-tech sub *Alvin* for a voyage to the bottom of the sea. There they find similar land forms, as well as previously unknown creatures that thrive in the most inhospitable place on Earth.

So why were the religionists distressed? This reporter heard only one possible upsetting reference. Narrator Ed Harris, referring to the bottom of the ocean, said, "It is possible that five billion years ago, life began here."

After viewing the film, Metroplex Atheist members chatted outside the museum. All were surprised that religionists had been disturbed. "We might be witnessing a great PR scheme on the part of the museum," John Hattan said.

An interesting possibility, though unlikely.

The museum's quick response to the *Volcanoes* controversy is an excellent study of well-managed damage control. Yet there are unanswered questions, and this reporter's repeated requests to Ms. Murray

for an interview were ignored. These are the key questions:

1. Ms. Murray, you said evolution played a role in the decision not to show the film. Mr. Romans said it did not. Which one of you is telling the truth?
2. Is this the first time fear of offending religionists played a role in a decision about whether the museum would feature a movie or an exhibit?
3. Does the museum really have a pro-evolution position? Or is there a new policy of "don't mention placating religionists" to the press?

The museum's spin implies Ms. Murray mislead *The New York Times*. Then why is she still working there? I've never been one to embrace conspiracy theories, and I'm not suggesting that one is happening here, but it does appear possible that Ms. Murray is being made a scapegoat. Marketing directors do not work in a vacuum.

The Metroplex Atheists applaud the museum for responding quickly, speaking to the media, and reversing the original decision not to run *Volcanoes of the Deep Sea*.

But we call on our members to keep watch to make sure the museum stays true to its mission as an institution to present and promote science. As Albert Einstein said, "One thing I have learned in a long life: that all our science, measured against reality, is primitive and childlike – and yet it is the most precious thing we have."



TEMPTED?
www.metroplexatheists.org

Book – From page 5

Barbara Branden and David Kelley come off as the innocent victims in *The Ayn Rand Cult*. Both were sincere followers of a noble ideal, and both faced the wrath of megalomaniac leaders (Rand and Peikoff, respectively) for non-offenses (being married to Nathaniel Branden and speaking to an "evil" Libertarian group, respectively). And both appear to have cast bad feelings aside in the interest of moving on. David Kelley founded The Objectivist Center, a Peikoff-free alternative to the Ayn Rand Institute. Barbara Branden wrote a tell-all book (later a movie) detailing her adventures with Rand, but was even then unable to say much negative about Rand, describing her then-husband's affair with Rand as a side effect of a great passion and "sense of life".

Reading *The Ayn Rand Cult* put to rest a lot of questions I'd had about Rand and her doings. For example, I'd always wondered why the project to make an *Atlas Shrugged* movie and/or miniseries had been an endless cycle of false starts and non starts, passing through the hands of at least a dozen talented producers and screenwriters and not shooting a single frame in over 30 years of attempts. Also, I wondered why Rand deified engineers and scientists in her books but surrounded herself with actors and navel-gazing philosopher-wannabes. Finally, I wondered why Rand spoke so longingly about men who "moved the world" but married a wimp whose greatest ambition was to be a C-grade movie extra.

The answer, not surprisingly, to all three questions was "Rand's idealized world and

the real world weren't always in accord". The same Hollywood that started her career was suddenly full of evildoers who wanted to change her inerrant work. The real life "world movers" weren't all that interested in hearing diatribes about "second handers" while having smoke blown in their faces by an abrasive chain-smoking philosopher. And sometimes sullen alcoholic gardeners really are sullen alcoholic gardeners and aren't secretly ambitious world-movers who are waiting for their moment to bloom.

The Ayn Rand Cult is far from a robust and lasting warning about the "cult of reason". Much of it reads as a gossipy "tell all" account of odd happenings in Rand's collective. Some parts of the book seem to heap scorn on people without a point. For example, the book spends four pages on Branden's suspicious PhD, trying to figure out if the California Graduate Institute qualifies as an authentic diploma-mill or is just a mediocre school. The facts the author does bring up (Branden presenting his lecture-tapes as a PhD thesis and refusing to license himself as a psychologist) do the job in bringing his vaunted credentials into question, so spending pages on his school just seems gratuitous.

Furthermore, many characters in the drama only exist as quote-mines without backgrounds. One frequently quoted objectivist is George Smith, presumably the same George Smith who wrote *Atheism: The Case Against God*. His background or relationship with Rand is never made clear. In fact, if I hadn't already read his comments about objectivism in "the purple book", I likely wouldn't have

caught on that it was the same person. Many of these transient characters are simply referred to as "objectivist <name>" or "neo-objectivist <name>" without ever making clear who the person is or even what "neo-objectivist" is.

The book also ends poorly, bringing up several earlier books that may have heavily influenced *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*. While it's interesting to see the books' influences, showing that ideas in the books aren't original won't impress anyone other than hardcore "randroids" who think that Rand's books are the alpha and omega of modern literature. Finding a book that's not influenced by earlier works is a virtually impossible task, as people who write are also people who read. Rand was apparently not much of a reader, but she was certainly influenced by other works.

The book finishes with a completely unnecessary chapter outlining an alternate future in which Rand has a child, quits smoking, and softens her stance that she is the walking embodiment of pure reason.

The book's certainly not perfect, but I do commend the author for an even-handed account of Rand's quirky cult. The author's biases for or against objectivism or liberal/conservative/libertarian politics never worked into the narrative. The book never once degenerated into "I'm against conservative politics, therefore objectivism is wrong" or anything like that. If the author ever had a beef with objectivism's philosophical claims, those claims were made via quotes from current and former objectivists.

Next issue, I promise to review the comic book.



Attention DFW area Atheists and Agnostics!

The Humanist Church
of North Texas HAS MOVED
Scheduled services are now held every third
Saturday at 11:30 a.m. within the
Religious Education Building
of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Oak Cliff
3839 W Kiest Blvd
Dallas, TX 75233
www.humanistchurch.org/



A message from the Outgoing and Incoming Chair of Metroplex Atheist

Howdy folks, it's your now-former chairman here. It's been a terrific ride for me during the five or so years that I've chaired Metroplex Atheists. I'm not going spend a dozen pages enumerating specific events, but suffice it to say that we've upset enough school officials, been flipped the bird by enough churchgoing grandmothers, and exchanged enough liquor-filled chocolates to last most of a lifetime.

I know you haven't agreed with me on everything, and that's fine. I'd much prefer that we leave the head-nodding half-asleep agreement to the parishioners. Given the choice between herding sheep and herding cats, I'll take the cats. Herding sheep is easier, but if you herd cats, you'll end up going in unplanned directions. And I prefer things that way.

As you probably understand, I'm not leaving my post for any kind of personal reason. I just wanted to give the club a chance for some "new blood". While I'm proud of what Metroplex Atheists is now compared to our old meetings in the musty offices of Prime Construction, I'd like to see us go even further.

And, as you noticed, I was in a bit of a rut. We'd all grown happy with meetings and parties and the occasional protest, but I wanted to see a bit more, and I didn't want to see us squander potential opportunities because of inertia on my part. Metroplex Atheists is a democratic club, and part of what makes it a democracy is that leadership changes over time. A club with unchanging leadership is doomed to wallow in inertia until it's irrelevant, and I didn't want that to be us.

I'll be continuing on as secretary and webmaster for the club, so I won't be any less involved than before. I'm just handing over the reins to new folks to see what'll happen under their watch. David and Vince are both very capable folks who've shown that they can improve Metroplex Atheists without killing off our existing momentum.

Oh, and don't worry about new layers of bureaucracy and formality slowing things down. During the last meeting I took a covert vote among a quorum of members, and I've already amended the bylaws to include the club-secretary's option to Krazy-Glue together any pages of Robert's Rules of Order that he finds personally offensive.

See you at the next meeting!

*JOHN HATTAN
OUTGOING CHAIR
SECRETARY, METROPLEX ATHEISTS*

Thank you for electing me to the position of Chair for 2005. I am honored.

My wife Shannon participates in the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). Like the Metroplex Atheists (MA), the PTA is also a democratic all-volunteer non-profit organization. I was impressed to learn that the Carrollton Early Childhood P.T.A. (CECPTA) was founded in 1958. Each year for almost five decades within this local organization, candidates have been nominated, elections held, and procedure books updated and passed on to successors.

I certainly hope that the history of the MA continues for at least fifty years. Within the Metroplex Atheists Reading Group (MARG), we recently discussed the book "Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism" by Susan Jacoby. One of the themes of the book is that, unlike the supernaturalists, atheists have failed to create institutions to propagate their message to subsequent generations. Consequently, we must continuously struggle to rediscover ourselves instead of building on previous efforts.

I have a number of theories about why some volunteer organizations persist while others fade away. One of those theories is that some groups become too dependent upon one or more key individuals. When those individuals leave, a leadership crisis might occur which places the survival of the organizations at risk. To ensure continuity, I advocate rotating members through the various officer positions from year to year. This distributes organizational knowledge and prevents stagnation.

While I might serve in another office, I pledge that I will not continue as the Chair of the MA in 2006. If you have never before served as an officer of the MA, I encourage you to consider nominating yourself at the close of 2005. At our next monthly meeting, look around the room and consider the size of the pool of regular attendees from which we can draw our candidates. You might conclude that 2006 is the year you accept the honor of serving as Chair.

*DAVID WALLACE CROFT
CHAIR, METROPLEX ATHEISTS*

Are you searching for Atheists in the metroplex?

Join in the discussions at the DFW Atheist Talk group.
groups.yahoo.com/group/DFWatheistTalk/

Letters to the Editor

Moore's Rock

As a patriotic citizen of the United States of America I am very grateful that Judge Roy Moore's Ten Commandment Monument has been moved to private church property.

Moving ten commandment monuments from public property to private property is an important step in protecting one of the most cherished freedoms granted us by the Constitution of the United States of America - the freedom to follow any religion we choose or to follow no religion at all.

When a religious monument is on any government property, it presents the government as establishing that religion as the state religion. For example, the first com-

mandment of the ten commandments, when taken in context, tells us that we should have no other gods before the god, Yahweh, of the Old Testament, so with the erection of the ten commandments monument, the government commands the worship of Yahweh.

Where does this command to worship Yahweh leave good U. S. citizens who are Buddhists or Hindus or Wiccans or Deists or followers of any of the many other religions in the U. S.? Where does this command leave me, a god free atheist?

As a patriotic United States citizen, I thank you for this step to preserve our constitutional democracy.

CAROLYN S. HOLLAND

Semiliterate Theist Troll

Hello people I gotta let you guys know that in the beginning God crated every thing on the earth. And I tell you this **THERE WILL BE NO ATHEIST IN HELL.** Why because you will know the truth then. I pray for the unbeliever to become a believer.

I YOUR RIGHT than PROVE ME WRONG BY YOUR FACTS.

BILLY WEBB

Editors note: This was the spawn of a lengthy chat between him and John Hattan. His response and remainder of the conversation is posted at the DFW Atheist Talk website:

groups.yahoo.com/group/DFWatheistTalk/

WWII & Korea:

James Hardwick (Ret), Navy

Korea:

Chris Gregory, Air Force

Iraq:

Brian McIntosh (Ret), USMC

Shawn Ruzek, USMC

To the "Atheists in foxholes"
proudly serving the United States:

Thank you for your unselfish
sacrifice so that we may
all live in a safer world.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Business Meeting

REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING:

What: Meeting to decide general business of the group and to discuss current events

Date: Third Sunday of the month

Time: 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM

Place: Heritage Park
217 Main St. at Second St.,
Irving, TX

400 E. Abram Street
Arlington, TX

HUMANIST CHURCH OF N. TX:

What: All the things you want in a church, without the gods

Date: Third Saturday of the month

Time: 11:30 a.m.

Place: Unitarian Universalist Church of Oak Cliff
3839 W. Kiest Blvd,
Dallas, TX

Date: June (TBA)

Time: TBA

Place: TBA

DALLAS BRIGHTS:

What: For those with a naturalistic world view

Date: Fourth Monday of the month

Time: 6:00 p.m.

Place: TBA, for location visit:
DallasBrights.org

Social Meetings

DALLAS / PLANO ATHEIST MEETUP DAY:

What: Meet with other local Atheists to talk about your beliefs

Date: Every Tuesday

Time: 7:00 PM

Place: TBA; For locations near you visit: *atheists.meetup.com*

J. GILLIGAN'S:

What: "My dinner with Atheists," social time with a bunch of heathens

Date: Every Wednesday

Time: 6:30 PM – 9:00 PM

Place: J. Gilligan's Bar & Grill (Meet on the grill side)

MA READING GROUP:

What: The Metroplex Atheists Reading Group discusses selected books. Come join in, even if you didn't read the selection. For the latest book, visit:

www.metroplexatheists.org/read/

Date: Third Sunday of the month

Time: After the regular meeting

Place: Heritage Park
217 Main St. at Second
Irving, TX

INFIDELS BASH:

What: Celebration of the Summer Solstice with a sacrilegious slant

Media

ATHEIST NETWORK:

What: Atheist internet radio. To listen visit: *www.atheistnetwork.com*

Date: TBA

Time: TBA

Place: Wherever you have access to broadband internet

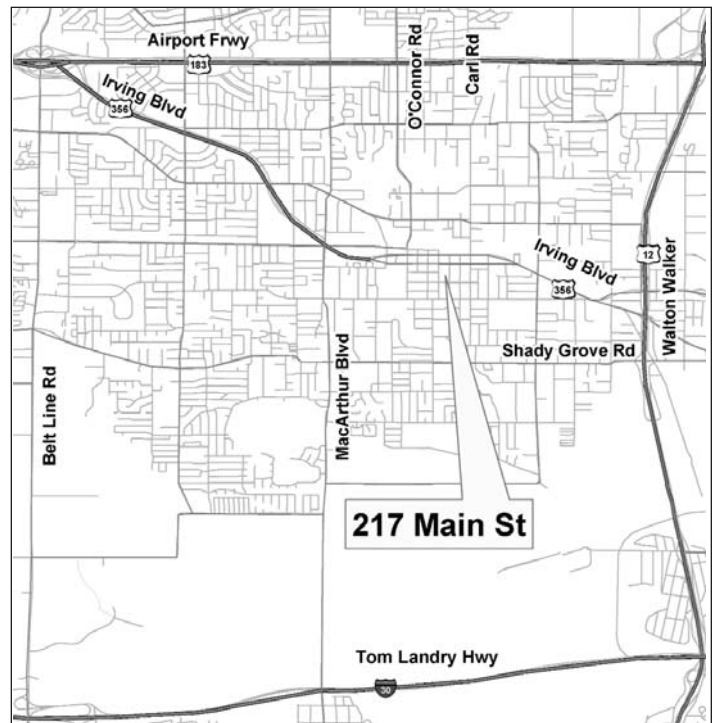
To have your events listed email:

The Atheist Voice Editor at
editor@metroplexatheists.org

METROPLEX ATHEISTS

COME
JOIN
US

EVERY THIRD SUNDAY
1:00 PM – 3:00 PM



May 2005

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3 D/P Meetup	4 J. Gilligan's	5	6	7
8 <i>Mother's Day</i>	9	10 D/P Meetup	11 J. Gilligan's	12	13	14
15 Reg. Meeting & MARG	16	17 Atheist Meetup	18 J. Gilligan's	19	20	21 Humanist
22	23	24 D/P Meetup	25 J. Gilligan's	26	27	28
29	30 <i>Memorial Day</i>	31 D/P Meetup				

June 2005

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 J. Gilligan's	2	3	4
5	6	7 D/P Meetup	8 J. Gilligan's	9	10	11
12	13	14 D/P Meetup	15 J. Gilligan's	16	17	18 Humanist
19 <i>Father's Day</i>	20	21 Atheist Meetup	22 J. Gilligan's	23	24	25
26	27	28 D/P Meetup	29 J. Gilligan's	30		

July 2005

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3
4	5	6 D/P Meetup	7 J. Gilligan's	8	9	10
11	12	13 D/P Meetup	14 J. Gilligan's	15	16	17 Humanist
18 Reg. Meeting & MARG	19	20 Meetup <i>Solstice</i>	21 J. Gilligan's	22	23	24
25	26	27 D/P Meetup	28 J. Gilligan's	29	30	31

***THE ATHEIST VOICE* is a bi-monthly publication of Metroplex Atheists.**

For more information, please visit our website: www.metroplexatheists.org

To submit an article or letter to the editor, please email us.

The Atheist Voice Editor: editor@metroplexatheists.org

THE ATHEIST VOICE
c/o Metroplex Atheists
3333 Southlake Park Rd.
Southlake, TX 76092

Deliver to:

“Because we must. Because we have the call. Because it is nobler to fight for rationality without winning than to give up in the face of continued defeats. Because whatever true progress humanity makes is through the rationality of the occasional individual and because any one individual we may win for the cause may do more for humanity than a hundred thousand who hug superstition to their breasts.”
— Isaac Asimov, when asked why he fights religion with no hope for victory

WHY DO WE FIGHT?