

Atheists of Florida

DADE&BROWARD: Third Sunday of each month, 2:00 alternating between Broward County Main Library, 100 S. Andrews Ave. Ft. Lauderdale, or Biscayne Cafeteria, 147 Miracle Mile, Coral Gables. Meeting notifications and activities available in *NEWSNOTES*, a monthly publication mailed to all active Dade&Broward chapter members. FMI: Patrick Bens, 305/940-0442 or 954/929-0441. atheist1@bellsouth.net

PALM BEACH: Meetings are held the third Sunday of each month at 2:30pm. Members notified by postcard. For driving directions or more information, call Charles Schisler 561/627-6340 or 561/624-9359.

Evolution *continued from page 4*

in general, is ending." The Senate vote is also being portrayed as a vindication of the 1999 decision by the Kansas Board of Education to remove evolution from state tests (a vote subsequently overturned when several of the school board members were defeated in the 2000 elections).

Sen. Sam Brownback (R-KS) told the *Washington Times* (6-18-01) that it "cleared the record." In a speech supporting Santorum's amendment, he argued: "The great and bold statement that the Kansas School Board made was simply that we observe micro-evolution and therefore it is scientific fact; and that it is impossible to observe macro-evolution, it is scientific assumption....[Santorum] clarifies the opinion of the Senate that the debate of scientific fact versus scientific assumption is an important debate to embrace."

A Broader Offensive

Evolution also came up as an issue in the House education bill, H.R.1. As

CHAPTER EVENTS

TAMPA BAY: Last Saturday of each month through August, Noon - 1:30, Clearwater East Public Library, 2251 Drew Street, Meeting Room A. Beginning September, First Wednesday of each month, Pinellas Park Library, 7 - 9 pm. Third Wednesday of each month, 7 - 8:30 pm, Platt Library, 3910 S. Manhattan Ave., Tampa, Community Room. Dinner at 5:30 preceding Wednesday meeting at Piccadilly Restaurant on Dale Mabry just north of Henderson, front room. FMI: Ed Golly, 813/839-7567, AthAFLE@aol.com.

ORLANDO: Meetings scheduled for the first Sunday of each month at the Orange County Public Library, 101 East Central Blvd, 3rd Floor, Downtown Orlando, 1:00pm. FMI: Nan Owens (813) 662-6612. nanowens@ix.netcom.com.

passed by the House Education and the Workforce Committee, H.R.1 included a provision mandating that students be tested on science in addition to the reading and math testing provisions called for in the original bill—a presidential priority. Scientific societies pushed for the testing provision lest science lose attention as resources are concentrated on tested subjects.

The Next Step

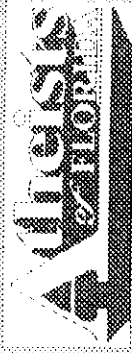
A House-Senate conference committee must work out differences in the two bills—both bodies must vote on an identical measure before it goes to the president for his signature, which is expected. Conferees have yet to be named but will surely include senior members of the Senate HELP Committee and the House Education and the Workforce Committee.

Given the clear public rejection of the 1999 Kansas school board's action, it does not seem likely that the majority of the senators who voted for the amendment share Brownback's opinion of its implications or agree with the Discovery Institute that their purpose was to "change the face of the debate over the theories of evolution and intelligent design in America." Indeed, faced with such rhetoric, they might just decide that Santorum presented his "innocuous" amendment to them as something other than the anti-evolution stalking horse that it truly is.

Notice to Miami Book Fair and Cirkus McGerkus comps...

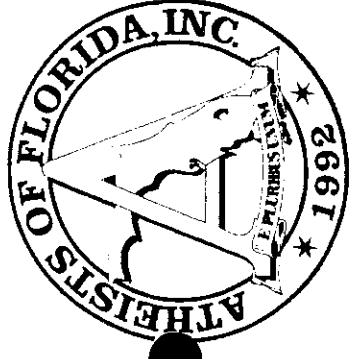
We have been sending you complimentary newsletters since these events. Please join this month or we must regrettably drop you from our mailing list. (see page 7)

8 July 2001



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May, 2001

Atheists of Florida

Dedicated to the absolute separation of State and church
Sponsor of the MARK TWAIN SCHOLARSHIP FUND, Incorporated
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www.atheistalliance.org/florida

Camp Quest and Book Fairs

LIKE ANY 12-YEAR-OLD, Anna DuBose of New Jersey dreams of going away to summer camp.

But finances make that impossible for her mother, Lori, a single working parent and member of a local Free Inquiry chapter. She can only afford to send her daughter to an in-town summer day camp.

Now the Atheists of Florida have a chance to make Anna's dream come true.

We're looking for donations to pay the \$495 tuition for a week-long stay at Camp Quest in Lebanon, Ohio. Lori DuBose has found transportation to the camp for Anna, but can't handle the tuition on her own.

A of F chairman Ed Golly, a four-year counselor volunteer at Camp Quest, can vouch for Anna's excitement over the camp. He first met Anna as an 8-year-old, on her first and only stay at the camp, which has an Olympic-sized swimming pool, nature trails, rock climbing, horseback riding, crafts, archery, lectures and plane rides for the newcomers.

Here's our opportunity to have a positive influence on a youngster's life. Camp Quest, incidentally, is the only summer camp sponsored by a Humanist organization in the country. It purposely promotes critical thinking, and has no religious influences.

Golly plans to return as a counselor again this year. Each year, he takes about half the campers for a flight in his Cessna. For most, it is their first flight in a general-aviation airplane.

Other events

We're rapidly approaching the time of year where we take our wares outdoors and meet the public.

The last Saturday of October brings Circus McGurkis in south St. Pete. We circle the wagons with our friends from the ACLU, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, and the Humanists. It's a great opportunity to meet other freethinkers and let them know that real, live atheists really exist.

The following month we always spend three days at the Miami Book Fair International. On Friday, hundreds of school kids pass our stand. This year we expect to be ready for them with our new "Bill of Rights" book covers. These covers have the ten amendments on the front along with some nice quotes from the founding fathers. On the back, we also display the Ten

FAREWELL

—Words by James A. Young
I will cling to your memory,
though death drive a wedge
between us.

This parting has severed the
joy from my song.

Look, the birds are still flying,
the morn sun brightly shining,
a new day is dawning and life
presses on.

I will never forget,
the joys that you brought me,
those faces, bright smiles,
kind words.

You will always be dear,
never forgotten.

I'll love you forever.
Jacques Musy,
farewell.

Commandments of the Christian superstition along with the biblically referenced remarkable citations of punishment for failure to obey the edicts. Dade/Broward chapter director Patrick Bens does a magnificent job preparing the stand with our books, bumper stickers, pens, pamphlets and other goodies for sale or give-away.

We are also hoping to be accepted for participation in the *St. Petersburg Times* Book Festival on the St. Pete campus of USF. It would be our first year of participation in that event.

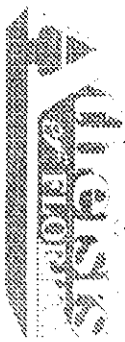
All these events cost money. Our table at the Book Fair costs \$400 and the books we display for sale need to be purchased wholesale.

Although we rarely ask our membership for financial assistance beyond their membership dues, we can always use extra help for these very worthwhile projects. If you can help, please send your check to Atheists of Florida/P.O. Box 130753 / Tampa, FL 33629. We'll list the names of all who assist us in a future newsletter.

We would like to include an envelope in the newsletter for your convenience, but we send a lot of newsletters to other atheist groups and the media. Since bulk mail requires that all pieces be identical, we'd be sending a lot of envelopes needlessly. Thanks for any help you can give.

Dade&Broward members—
beginning next issue,
NEWSNOTES will become a supplement inside this newsletter

Puritanism. The haunting fear that someone somewhere may be happy.



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- Limited Income (over 65) 10.00 Yr
- Newsletter (over 65) 10.00 Yr

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February 12, 1809 is the birth date of Charles Darwin. He changed scientific thought forever. First with his evidence on evolution and then with his ability to write so that everyone could understand his scientific books.

The Origin of Species was not the first book on evolution. The idea goes back to antiquity, and among nineteenth-century

THE SOLUTION IS EVOLUTION

No. 10—Charles Darwin

—Jim Strayer



authors the evolutionary notions of Lamarck and others had been widely discussed since the early 1800's. What Darwin actually accomplished for

evolution was to make it more than just a speculation. He was the first to discover the compelling evidence for evolution, and to show how evolutionary thinking could be used as the basis for scientific investigation. He also provided a plausible cause, or mechanism, for evolution. This was his principle of "natural selection," which he explained by analogy with selective breeding in agriculture. The breeder selects the kind of animal or plant he wants from a varying group of organisms (artificial selection); subsequent generations become more and more like the kind he chooses. Darwin proposed that something very much like that occurs in nature, and therefore called it "natural selection."

Darwin did his work 135 years ago. It should be apparent, even to the most uninformed, that advances have been made in the evidence that supports evolution. Darwin did not have the benefit of computers, ultra-sound, the electron microscope, radioactive dating, X-ray, plate tectonics, DNA sequencing, or any other scientific advancement of the last hundred years.

Pasteur, Einstein, Newton, and Darwin, like all scientists, made mistakes. These mistakes were and are being investigated and corrected by other scientists. That is what science is, the use of evidence to support or change a theory. There has been no theory advanced to explain the diversity of life and the physical changes in the universe other than evolution.

The scientific instruments that are used in the study of medicine, immunology, and other health-related fields are the same instruments that are used to study evolu-

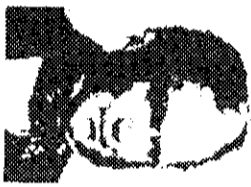
tion. The instruments that are used to search for natural resources, develop agriculture, advance animal husbandry, investigate crimes, and examine the environment are the same instruments that are used to study evolution.

Most scientists believe that Darwin's greatest contribution to our world was the theory of natural selection. As a result of this theory, scientists were able to leave the proximate explanations that they had been dealing with for so long and enter the realm of answering why certain phenomena occur. In other words, they had a testable method of proving where certain traits appeared and why they were successful.

Prior to 1959 (when the *Origin of Species* became a topic of conversation), scientists were forced to answer questions with the same sorts of explanations Creationists still use today (Intelligent Design, Abrupt Appearance, or Created by God).

With the natural selection theory, they were finally able to show a route by which certain phenomena were reached and others rejected. Suddenly, reasons for why many things occur became understandable.

Natural selection gave us a method of understanding why *all* biological phenomena arise.



The Darwin revolution grew steadily for the first 100 years and resulted in a theory that was more scientifically explanatory, predictive, socially significant, philosophically important, and practically applicable than any previous model had been in the history of science. And yet, with all of these changes, the real work for Darwin's theory was yet to come.

The study of genetics, the discovery of DNA, advances in biochemistry, and amazing technical advancements such as the computer have all added strength to the theory. So much so, that it is considered by most scientists to be a law.

Modern scientists (William Hamilton of Oxford, Richard Dawkins of Oxford, Stephen J. Gould of Harvard, and others) began using a gene-focused and kin-selected variant of natural selection that Darwin could never have dreamed about. Darwin's ideas were sharpened to such an extent that there are few phenomena that they do not seem to readily explain.

It is the application of "survival of the fittest" to genes rather than individuals which gives natural selection the scientific authority it truly needs.

Charles Darwin died at the age of seventy-three and the world has not been the same since.

Clueless creationists

May 28, 2001
Letters to the Editor
Lexington Herald-Leader
Lexington, KY 40508
Dear Editor,
The May 25 letters advocating creationism demonstrate profound misunderstandings of

LETTERS



If creationists are interested in science, perhaps they could learn what evolution is and the evidence for it

science. Several letters obscure what evolution is and what is understood by the term "theory." One letter accuses scientists of being blind and stubborn for not seeing the "obvious reality" of his version of creationism. As usual stale anti-evolution claims are made without positive evidence presented for creationism. One letter includes the remarkable claim: "In the fossil record, there are fossils of just about every creature or plant that ever lived on Earth." No paleontologist would agree with such a ludicrous statement. Likewise, the writer claims there are no transitional fossils. Transitional fossils are well-known in many lineages and are spectacularly established in: horses, elephants, camels, whales, humans, and many other groups.

Most college-level paleontology textbooks document these and reference the original scientific literature. One writer lists scientists of the past that supported creationism. Of those listed, none achieved notoriety after 1900; in fact several lived in the 1600's. Lord Kelvin, the physicist, was not a creationist. This inaccuracy has been pointed out before, in this forum, after another creationist made the same blunder. If creationists are interested in science, perhaps they could learn what evolution is and the evidence for it from scientists instead of aping fundamentalist pamphlets. They could take classes at local colleges or universities in relevant subjects such as biology or geology or read books by scientists. Even if they don't accept that evolution happened, at least they would learn what it is they don't believe. Instead, people with little or no knowledge of science repeat the same discredited arguments. Sincerely,

—Daniel J. Phelps
President, Kentucky Paleontological Society

Science is atheistic

Published in the St. Pete Times June 3rd.
Re: New form of creationism shouldn't be in school curriculum, by Robyn Blummer, May 20 and letters in response, May 27.

First, for a change I'll disagree with Robyn Blummer. Science is an atheistic philosophy. Atheism is, in its essence, a refusal to accept the faith component of an idea. Religion, which nearly always includes an element of faith, is therefore not scientific by nature, where atheism is. Show me the evidence, I'll accept it—but don't misunderstand what constitutes evidence, a common error of believers.

Second, evolution is not now nor has it ever been "in trouble" as a scientific concept. That's impossible, as any concept of science is always open to being revised or discarded if adequate evidence to the contrary is found. There is no, none, zero, not a shred of real evidence supporting Intelligent Design. It's merely wishful thinking and skewed interpretation by believers.

Finally, let's imagine there is a "designer" up there somewhere. I'd hardly consider it intelligent, given the flaws of nature: fleas, mosquitoes, Jesse Helms, oh, the list goes on for pages!

—Brent Yaciv
Wesley Chapel

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If you are receiving newsletters because you signed up at the Miami Book Fair International or Circus McGurkis, it's time to join A of F or we must drop your name from our mailing list. It's easy. Just cut this part of the page, which includes your mailing label on the other side and send it to the address below.

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LAST SUMMER, proponents of intelligent design creationism held a Capitol Hill briefing to educate congressional members and staff on the failures of Darwinism and their alternative proposals. They also lectured their audience on the moral decay that the teaching of Darwinism had wrought on society. A panel discussion was moderated by David DeWolf, a law professor at

Evolution assaulted by feds — David Applegate

Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington and author of a legal brief on how to get intelligent design into public

school curriculum.

Like most of the other speakers at the briefing, DeWolf is a senior fellow at the Seattle-based Discovery Institute's misnamed Center for the Renewal of Science and Culture, a conservative think tank dedicated to promulgating intelligent design as an alternative theory to evolution. Up until that briefing took place, the political debate over the teaching of evolution in public schools had taken place at the state and local level, but the briefing appeared to be a disturbing expansion of anti-evolution efforts into the federal legislature. That appearance is now reality with DeWolf and briefing speaker Phillip Johnson, a law professor at the University of California at Berkeley and CRSC senior fellow, taking center stage.

K-12 Education Bill Used as Vehicle

Education was a campaign priority for Dubya, and the first bills produced this year in both the House and Senate — R.J. and S.1, respectively — are comprehensive overhauls of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which covers most federal aid programs for states and local school districts. S.1, entitled the Better Education for Students and Teachers Act, was passed by the Health, Education, Labor & Pensions (HELP) Committee in March, having been introduced by the committee's then-chairman Jim Jeffords (now I-VT). The full Senate took it up in May with hundreds of amendments being

Santorum (R-PA) rose to speak on his amendment #799, which he handed in the previous evening. It is a non-binding "Sense of the Senate" resolution, a common tactic used to put the Senate on record about a given subject without worrying about statutory implications. According to Santorum, his amendment dealt "with the subject of intellectual freedom with respect to the teaching of science in the classroom, in primary and secondary education. It is a sense of the Senate that does not try to dictate curriculum to anybody; quite the contrary," it says there should be freedom to discuss and air good scientific debate within the classroom. In fact, students will do better and will learn more if there is this intellectual freedom to discuss." He then stated that the amendment was "simply two sentences — frankly, two rather innocuous sentences." The amendment reads: "It is the sense of the Senate that — "(1) good science education should prepare students to distinguish the data or testable theories of science from philosophical or religious claims that are made in the name of science; and "(2) where biological evolution is taught, the curriculum should help students to understand why this subject generates so much continuing controversy, and should prepare the students to be informed participants in public discussions regarding the subject."

Santorum then went on to read a passage lauding the benefits of "a more open discussion of biological origins in the science classroom." Although most amendments, especially non-binding ones, are simply added by unanimous consent or withdrawn without a vote, Santorum called for a roll call vote to put the Senate on record. Kennedy, the floor manager, then expressed his support for the amendment, but nobody speaking against it. The amendment passed by a 91-8 vote. All Democrats voted for it (except Sen. Chris Dodd, D-CT, who was absent). The eight Republicans who voted against the amendment were opposed on the grounds that it was an unnecessary federal intrusion in a state and local matter.

Whether or not one views the specific language of the amendment as innocuous or objectionable, this vote has become a public relations bonanza for the intelligent design creationists. The Discovery Institute issued a press release stating: "Undoubtedly this will change the face of the debate over the theories of evolution and intelligent design in America. From now on the evidence will be free to speak for itself. It also seems that the Darwinian monopoly on public science education, and perhaps on the biological sciences/see **EVOLUTION**, back page)

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Atheist Alliance Inc.

A Break with the Past
A Harbinger of the Future

- The first democratic national atheist organization.
- The first to have completely autonomous member societies.
- The first to be run entirely by its member societies (now 22, with one in India)

- The first whose goal is to help build strong, democratic, independent atheist organizations in every state.
- The first whose principal interest is coalition building within the community of reason.

AAI requires no dues
Members contribute through free-will donations, volunteered services and mutual assistance.

NATIONAL PROJECT
• Secular Nation quarterly magazine (\$20/year)

- Annual Easter weekend conventions (Year 2000, Sacramento, CA)
- Nationwide public access distribution of atheist TV programs
- Web site: www.AtheistAlliance.org
- CART Projects (Contribution to Advance Rational Thinking)

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mac@anth.org
www.AtheistAlliance.org

IN JUNE THE ATHEIST ALLIANCE INTERNATIONAL (AAI) board of directors voted to donate \$2,500 to Atheist Centre in Vijayawada, India. This donation is to help support an expansion of their criminal reform project.

BACKGROUND FOR READERS not acquainted with the Atheist Centre:

The Atheist Centre, one of the original members of the Alliance, is unique among our member associations. Whereas many atheist groups engage in community service projects and activities in their local communities, none do so to the level or in the challenging conditions of this particular member

Atheist Alliance Report Atheist Alliance Grants Funds to Atheist-Directed Project —Marie Elena Castle

society. Within its region, the Atheist Centre makes available social services quite varied in nature. (Some of its activities are akin to those that a Catholic Social Services or Jewish Family Services here might provide under contract with the government.)

ENGAGING IN A criminal reform project in India is not the same as in the United States. When India was under British control, they actually established criminals as a caste and confined them to certain areas.

The caste system is India's primary hindrance to progress. It does no good to promote atheism per se in India because the culture is totally immersed in Hinduism, which is totally immersed in belief in reincarnation and the caste system. To undermine religion in India, it is essential to undermine the caste system.

The Atheist Centre's many projects focus on that in a number of ways. For example, the SAMSKAR criminal reform project to which AAI is contributing includes intermingling as a means of reforming criminals who are actually designated as a caste (meaning that's how you are born, must live, and die). This involves having members of different castes eat together — taboo in India. To the extent that you remove the taboo you weaken the hold of the caste system and therefore the hold of Hinduism, and therefore you advance secular thinking and the idea that one's destiny is one's control and being a criminal is not foreordained.

India is a large, diverse, ununited country, so any project will not have a major impact that is immediate and widespread. At anyone can do a chip away at problems. As someone said, those who wait until they can do a whole lot of good all at one time never do any good at all. In India, the options are to do what little one can or do nothing.

We hear about the wonderful works of Mother Teresa in India. The Atheist Centre does much more good many times over in many ways for many more people. But we don't have the propaganda machine of the Catholic Church working for us.

On the matter of cost. The SAMSKAR criminal reform project is projected to cost \$25,000. That may not sound like much in terms of the project's scope, but the dollar is valued above the rupee many, many times over, so \$25,000 goes much, much farther in India than it would here.

Two members of the AAI board, Marie Castle and Barb Stocker, have visited the Atheist Centre and have seen what they have there and how much they do. It is very impressive, especially in comparison with the rest of the culture. We have every reason to be proud that Atheist Centre is a charter member of AAI.