

NOSHA NEWS

Newsletter of the New Orleans Secular Humanist Association Winter 2008

**New Orleans Secular
Humanist Association**
520 St. Louis St., Apt. 3
New Orleans, LA 70130
(a 501c3 corporation)
<http://nosha.secularhumanism.net>

DIRECTORS / OFFICERS

Harry Greenberger, President
David Schultz, Vice President
& Website Maintenance
Connie Gordon, Treasurer
& Newsletter Editor
Charlotte Klasson, Secretary
Patrick Lestrade, AAI Rep.
Timothy Ruppert
Douglas Hinton
Gina Cedotal
Langston Goldfinch
Barbara Forrest
J. Michael Malec
Denis Dwyer
Will Hunn

NATIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Council for Secular Humanism
American Humanist Association
Atheist Alliance International
American Atheists, Inc.

MEETINGS

3rd Saturday of month, 2:00 pm
New Orleans Public Library
219 Loyola Avenue

N.O. COX CABLE TV
CH 76 "Humanist Perspective"
Sat. midnight; Sun. noon
CH 78 "Atheist Viewpoint"
Tues. 10:30 am; 10:30 pm

THE RIGHT TO DECIDE FOR OURSELVES WHEN TO DIE: THE PURPOSE OF THE FINAL EXIT NETWORK

Some long-time members of NOSHA may recall that several years ago our community hosted a visit by Faye Girsh who was then the president of the Hemlock Society. Not only did she address NOSHA, but she also spoke to groups at both Tulane and LSU Medical Schools. Her message was predominantly that many mentally competent individuals in the United States are suffering needlessly from debilitating and/or painful illnesses. Their families and loved ones suffer, too, and it was the Hemlock Society's goal to alleviate that suffering. They would do that not by assisting with suicide, but by giving counseling and support and guidance to self-deliverance from their agony.

There are other organizations in the United States whose goal is the same, but they, along with factions of the Hemlock Society have developed political agendas and are trying to change the laws, as the state of Oregon, has allowing for some types of assisted suicides. The Hemlock Society itself has reorganized and the new organization, which leaves the legislating to others, is called the Final Exit Network.

For NOSHA's February meeting, the President of the Final Exit Network, Ted Goodwin, drove over from Florida to pay us a visit. Several of us lunched with Ted



before the regular monthly meeting and found him to be a charming, warm and caring, and knowledgeable individual. He explained to us that one of the reasons for the reorganization away from those seeking legislation was that such change will not come soon enough to alleviate the pain and suffering of many individuals who need help now. Those suffering from cancers, ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease), Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, and many others need help now.

From the Final Exit website the organization's goals are listed as: to serve people who are suffering intolerably from an incurable condition which has become more than they can bear; to foster research to find new peaceful and reliable ways to self-deliver; to promote the use of advance directives; and to advocate for individuals when their advance directives are not being honored.

In Ted's remarks at the NOSHA meeting he went into much detail on and stressed the importance of advance directives which include living wills, durable power of attorney, and DNRs (Do Not Resuscitate orders). He also stressed how important it is to discuss early on, even before one becomes ill, with family and friends what one's desires are in this regard. These are not the kinds of choices that should be "sprung" upon those who care for you.

It is also essential that everyone involved understand that Final Exit never breaks the law. They never provide one with the means for taking their own life, but rather with the knowledge of how and even with counseling about when.

We really appreciate Ted's visit with us and learning more about Final Exit Network. If you want more information or to contribute to or volunteer your time and assistance, go to www.finalexitnetwork.org or phone 1-800-524-EXIT (3948).

**EUTHANASIA: TOWARDS
A HUMANIST PERSPECTIVE**

(In the same vein as Ted Goodwin’s visit from the Final Exit Network, we wanted to share this article by Ana Lita, Ph.D., director of the IHEU-Appignani Center for Bioethics, an affiliate of the International Humanist and Ethical Union, which appeared in the Humanist Network News, the free e-zine of the Institute for Humanist Studies, Feb. 6, 2008.)

The term euthanasia comes from the Greek word “good” or “merciful” death; euthanasia is now commonly understood as helping to end the life of persons suffering from incurable illnesses paralleled by unmanageable pain and debilitating complications.

Generally, people discuss “active” euthanasia, in which death is brought about by direct intervention, and “passive” euthanasia, which involves the removal of life-prolonging/sustaining technologies.

Individual humanist groups are ultimately concerned not with disputing the right to voluntary euthanasia, but to shaping a debate which considers legal, public, and policy-related measures aiming at compassionately supporting those faced with the decision whether or not to end their lives.

Active euthanasia involves both “voluntary” euthanasia, in which a patient requests a lethal dose from a physician and then self-administers, and “physician-assisted suicide,” (PAS), in which the doctor, at the request of the patient, administers a lethal injection.

Bioethicist Peter Singer, in his *Practical Ethics*, also describes ‘involuntary euthanasia,’ which does not involve the consent of an otherwise competent patient. Singer also explores ‘non-voluntary euthanasia’ at length, which involves the ‘merciful’ killing of those unable to speak for themselves, such as severely disabled infants or those who have never had or have lost the ability to comprehend their circumstances, but who have never before expressed a desire for circumstantial euthanasia.

Though for Singer, ‘non-voluntary euthanasia’ might represent a “justifiable ending of a human life,” the IHEU-Appignani Center for Bioethics does not endorse this view, but, rather, is concerned with the requests for a humane end to life made willingly by adult individuals capable of this decision.

The intent of the Center is to consider, and when appropriate, respond to the moral and ethical arguments surrounding euthanasia and to foster progressive responses from civil, religious, and political stakeholders.

The “right-to-die movement,” as discussed by Derek Humphry & Mary Clement in *Freedom to Die*, is rooted in ideas of classical Greece and gained momentum from the rights-based culture of the sixties.

It has since become a more prominent movement due to an expansion of life-prolonging technologies that alter the dying process. Many people living with AIDS choose to seek an intentional end to their lives and often find compassion and support from others within AIDS-affected communities. For many opposed to euthanasia, including many religious believers, conservatives, and physicians, euthanasia violates the most widely quoted tenet of the Hippocratic Oath: “Do no harm.”

As a secular humanist organization, the IHEU-Appignani Center for Bioethics focuses on the concept that life is to be

valued and that humans are to determine how best to enhance the quality of their lives. From a humanist perspective, technology should further this enhancement and prolong our lives insofar as we continue to feel that our lives have value and worth according to our individual standards.

A potentially misleading argument against euthanasia is comparison to Nazi-sponsored euthanasia programs. This comparison attempts to equate the terminally ill who have advocated for voluntary euthanasia with the victims of a xenophobic initiative bent on selective race extinction. A more compelling worry is that euthanasia would lead to physicians pressuring patients to end their lives.

While the fear surrounding euthanasia is as human as the desire for it, these fears and ensuring dehumanizing criticisms reveal themselves as lacking in both compassion and rationality when they render the very people faced with incredibly difficult decisions about life and death peripheral to ethical dialogue.

Unlike the abortion debate, which questions the morality of one human being choosing to deny the life of a *potential* person, voluntary euthanasia simply entitles one human being to exercise ultimate dominion over her or his person.

Support for euthanasia neither undermines the profundity of such a decision, nor implies a disregard for the feelings of those who would likely be incredibly pained over the loss of one they love. It merely attempts to uphold one’s human rights during a time so personal, that no one can really understand or speculate on until she or he finds her/himself in the same position.

* * * * *

MEMBERS’ PUBLISHED LETTERS

The following letter, written by **Harry Greenberger**, appeared in *The Humanist* magazine, January-February 2008 edition:

I was dismayed to read in “The Issue at Hand” (November/December 2007) from the editor of the *Humanist*, that “the claim that all humanists are atheists is debatable,” while the definition of humanism on inside the front cover reads, in part: “Free of theism and other supernatural beliefs, humanism thus derives the goals of life from human need and interest rather than from the theological.” You write that you “simply don’t think about God,” but that doesn’t exclude you from the definition of humanism which frees us from such mysticism.

To which the Editor responded:

You raise a subtle difference in two definitions of atheism and a flaw in the logic regarding my own view. Dictionaries show that, etymologically, the prefix “a” means “not, without, lacking” and theism is “belief in the existence of a god or gods.” As someone who doesn’t “think about” a god or gods, I am indeed “without” and therefore would fall into the category of being a-theistic. However, words aren’t defined by etymology but by usage, and thus atheism means “the doctrine or belief that there is no God,” “denial of God,” and the like. My intention was to say there are humanists who don’t avow disbelief in a god but, as the definition in the magazine states, are altogether free of the question.

* * * * *

THE WONDER OF SCIENCE

Ann Druyan

(The following is excerpted from an article entitled “Ann Druyan Talks About Science, Religion, Wonder, Awe . . . and Carl Sagan” which appeared in Skeptical Inquirer, November/December 2003.)

I’ve been thinking about the distorted view of science that prevails in our culture. I’ve been wondering about this because our civilization is completely dependent on Science and high technology, yet most of us are alienated from science. We are estranged from its methods, its values, and its language. Who is the scientist in our culture? He is Dr. Faustus, Dr. Frankenstein, Dr. Strangelove. He’s the maker of the Faustian bargain that is bound to end badly. Where does that come from? We’ve had a long period of unprecedented success in scientific discovery. We can do things that even our recent ancestors would consider magic, and yet our self-esteem as a species seems low. We hate and fear science. We fear science and we fear the scientist. A common theme of popular movies is some crazed scientist somewhere setting about ruining what is most precious to all of us.

I think the roots of this antagonism to science run very deep. They’re ancient. We see them in Genesis, this first story, this founding myth of ours, in which the first humans are doomed and cursed eternally for asking a question, for partaking of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge.

It’s puzzling that Eden is synonymous with paradise when, if you think about it at all, it’s more like a maximum-security prison with twenty-four hour surveillance. It’s a horrible place. Adam and Eve have no childhood. They awaken full-grown. What is a human being without a childhood? Our long childhood is a critical feature of our species. It differentiates us, to a degree, from most other species. We take a longer time to mature. We depend upon these formative years and the social fabric to learn many of the things we need to know.

So here are Adam and Eve, who have awakened full grown, without the tenderness and memory of childhood. They have no mother, nor did they ever have one. The idea of a mammal without a mother is, by definition, tragic. It’s the deepest kind of wound for our species; antithetical to our flourishing, to who we are.

Their father is a terrifying, disembodied voice who is furious with them from the moment they first awaken. He doesn’t say, “Welcome to the planet Earth, my beautiful children! Welcome to this paradise. Billions of years of evolution have shaped you to be happier here than anywhere else in the vast universe. This is your paradise.” No, instead God places Adam and Eve in a place where there can be no love; only fear, and fear-based behavior, obedience. God threatens to kill Adam and Eve if they disobey his wishes. God tells them that the worst crime, a capital offense, is to ask a question, to partake of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. What kind of father is this! As Diderot observed, the God of Genesis “loved his apples more than he did his children.”

This imperative not to be curious is probably the most self-hating aspect of all, because what is our selective advantage as a species? We’re not the fastest. We’re not the strongest. We’re not the biggest. However, we do have one selective advantage that has enabled us to survive and prosper and endure: A fairly

large brain relative to our body size. This has made it possible for us to ask questions and to recognize patterns. And slowly over the generations we’ve turned this aptitude into an ability to reconstruct our distant past, to question the very origins of the universe and life itself. It’s our only advantage, and yet this is the one thing that God does not want us to have: consciousness, self-awareness.

Perhaps Genesis should be read as an ironic story. Here’s a god who does not give us the knowledge of good and evil. He knows we don’t know right from wrong. Yet he tells us not to do something anyway. How can someone who doesn’t know right from wrong be expected to do the right thing? By disobeying god, we escape from this totalitarian prison where you cannot ask any questions, where you must never question authority. We become our human selves.

Our nation was founded on a heroic act of disobedience to a king who was presumed to rule by divine right. We created social and legal mechanisms to institutionalize the questioning of authority and the participation of every person in the decision-making process. It’s the most original thing about us, our greatest contribution to global civilization. Today, our not-exactly-elected officials try to make it seem as if questioning this ancient story is wrong... That the teaching of our evolving understanding of nature, which is a product of what we have been able to discover over generations, is somehow un-American or disrespectful of strongly held beliefs. As if we should not teach our children what we’ve learned about our origins, but rather we should continue to teach them this story which demonizes the best qualities of our founding fathers.

This makes no sense and it leads me to a question: Why do we separate the scientific, which is just a way of searching for truth, from what we hold sacred, which are those truths that inspire love and awe? Science is nothing more than a never-ending search for truth. What could be more profoundly sacred than that? I’m sure most of what we all hold dearest and cherish most, believing at this very moment, will be revealed at some future time to be merely a product of our age and our history and our understanding of reality. So here’s this process, this way, this mechanism for finding bits of reality. No single bit is sacred. But the search is.

And so we pursue knowledge by using the scientific method to constantly ferret out all the mistakes that human beings chronically make, all of the lies we tell ourselves to combat our fears, all the lies we tell each other. Here’s science, just working like a tireless machine. It’s a phenomenally successful one, but its work will never be finished.

* * * * *

“A tyrant must put on the appearance of uncommon devotion to religion. Subjects are less apprehensive of illegal treatment from a ruler whom they consider God-fearing and pious. On the other hand, they do less easily move against him, wrongly believing that he has the Gods on his side.”

--Aristotle, Greek philosopher (384-322 BCE)

“But I owe that I cannot see...evidence of design and beneficence on all sides of us. There seems to me too much misery in the world. I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created that a cat should play with mice.”

--Charles Darwin, British naturalist (1809-1882)

“I have never seen the slightest scientific proof of the religious theories of heaven and hell, of future life for individuals, or of a personal God.”

--Thomas Edison, American Inventor (1847-1941)

DARWIN DAY 2008

On February 23, 2008, the University of New Orleans hosted the 9th annual celebration of the birthday of naturalist Charles Darwin in our community, a celebration initiated in 2000 hosted by NOSHA and Tulane University. In 2001 and 2002, the commemoration moved to the UNO campus in partnership with NOSHA, and in 2003 the lakefront campus made the celebration their own. NOSHA continues to be grateful to UNO and particularly to recently retired Dean of Graduate Studies, Robert Cashner for taking the reins and making this an annual event. Only in February 2006, immediately following Hurricane Katrina, was UNO unable to put together the event. That year, NOSHA hosted a smaller celebration with two of our own members making presentations, Dr. Stephen Darwin of Tulane University and Dr. Barbara Forrest of Southeast Louisiana University in Hammond.

In the previous eight years, New Orleans Darwin Day has seen lectures from local and regional university professors from Nicholls State, LSU, Southeastern and Tulane representing disciplines as wide-ranging as biology, philosophy, mathematics, and English. There have also been several national headliners including Dr. Massimo Pigliucci (then of the University of Tennessee at Knoxville), Dr. Michael Ruse of Florida State University, Dr. Tim Berra of Ohio State University, and last year Dr. Daniel Dennett (*Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*) from Tufts University. This year's Darwin Day was once again special and headlined by a nationally known figure.

The day opened with a talk by this year's event organizer, Dr. Mark Phillips of UNO's Department of Philosophy. His talk was entitled "A Kinder More Radical Darwinism." His talk was a call for scientists to be less confrontational with proponents of creationism so that more common ground might be reached. The second speaker was our own Dr. Barbara Forrest who gave a spirited update on the continuing effort of intelligent design advocates to undermine the teaching of good science in America's public schools, even since the Dover (Pennsylvania) trial in 2005 in which the courts found that teaching creationism is the same as teaching religion. Her own book (co-authored with Paul R. Gross) is *Creationism's Trojan Horse: The Wedge of Intelligent Design*.

After a lunch break, the headliner for this year's Darwin Day was introduced. He is Dr. Michael Shermer who writes regular column in *Scientific American* and is the editor of *Skeptical Magazine*. Among his more recent books are *Why Darwin Matters? The Case Against Intelligent Design* and *Why People Believe Weird Things*. Following the topic of his book, he spoke to a large audience about "Why Darwin Matters." He summarized his own personal history from an evangelical upbringing to facing his own doubts early in his college years. After he went to graduate school and learned about evolution, his change of views was solidified. His doctorate is in History of Science, and he has made it his life's work, to be a skeptic, a "debunker" as he called himself.

If you missed Darwin Day 2008 and would like to know more about the intelligent design movement, you can find out more at www.creationismstrojanhorse.com. To learn more about Michael Shermer, his website is www.michaelshermer.com. If you want to know more about

past Darwin Days in New Orleans, summaries are available in past NOSHA newsletters (usually in the winter editions) on the NOSHA website at <http://NOSHA.SecularHumanism.net>.



Michael Shermer (above) addresses Darwin Day 2008 at the University of New Orleans, February 23, 2008.

A SCIENTIFIC CREATION STORY

(Following the theme of Darwin Day 2008, we would like to share with you an article by **Michael Shermer** which was first published in Darwin: A Norton Critical Edition, 2001. NY: W.W. Norton:625-626. It was adapted here from Michael Shermer's website.)

To the Citizens of Kansas (along with those from Ohio, Georgia, Michigan, and a dozen other states contemplating the teaching of "intelligent Design" creationism as a "balance" to the theory of evolution in public school science classes), I present you with a small literary sampling of how the opening chapters of Genesis will have to be revised to accommodate modern scientific theories and data. I call it Genesis Revisited.

In the beginning – specifically on October 23, 4004 BC, at noon – out of quantum foam fluctuation God created the Big Bang. The bang was followed by cosmological inflation. God saw that the Big Bang was very big, too big for creatures that could worship him, so He created the earth. And darkness was upon the face of the deep, so He commanded hydrogen atoms (which He created out of Quarks and other subatomic goodies) to fuse and become helium atoms and in the process release energy in the form of light. And the light maker he called the sun, and the process He called fusion. And He saw the light was good because now He could see what he was doing. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

And God said, Let there be lots of fusion light makers in the sky. Some of these fusion makers appear to be more than 4,004 light years from Earth. In fact, some of the fusion makers He grouped into collections He called galaxies, and these appeared to be millions and even billions of light years from Earth, so He created "tired light" – light that slows down through space – so that the 4004 BC creation myth might be preserved. And created He many wondrous splendors, including Red Giants, White Dwarfs, Quasars, Pulsars, Nova

and Supernova, Worm Holes, and even Black Holes out of which nothing can escape. But since God cannot be constrained by nothing (can God make a planet so big that he could not lift it?), He created Hawking radiation through which information can escape from Black Holes. This made God even more tired than tired light, and the evening and the morning were the second day.

And God said, Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together unto one place, and let the continents drift apart by plate tectonics. He decreed sea floor spreading would create zones of emergence, and He caused subduction zones to build mountains and cause earthquakes. In weak points in the crust God created volcanic islands, where the next day He would place organisms that were similar to but different from their relatives on the continents, so that still later created creatures called humans would mistake them for evolved descendants. And in the land God placed fossil fuels, natural gas, and other natural resources for humans to exploit, but not until after Day Six. And the evening and the morning were the third day.

And God saw that the land was lonely, so He created animals bearing their own kind, declaring Thou shalt not evolve into new species, and thy equilibrium shall not be punctuated. And God placed into the land's strata, fossils that appeared older than 4004 BC. And the sequence resembled descent with modification. And the evening and morning were the fourth day.

And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creatures that hath life, the fishes. And God created great whales whose skeletal structure and physiology were homologous with the land mammals He would create later that day. Since this caused confusion in the valley of the shadow of doubt God brought forth abundantly all creatures, great and small, declaring that microevolution was permitted, but not macroevolution. And God said, "Natura non facit saltum" – Nature shall not make leaps. And the evening and morning were the fifth day.

And God created the pongidids and hominids with 98 percent genetic similarity, naming two of them Adam and Eve, who were anatomically fully modern humans. In the book in which God explained how He did all this, in chapter one He said he created Adam and Eve together out of the dust at the same time, but in chapter two He said He created Adam first, then later created Eve out of one of Adam's ribs. This caused further confusion in the valley of the shadow of doubt, so God created Bible scholars and theologians to argue the point.

And in the ground placed He in abundance teeth, jaws, skulls, and pelvises of transitional fossils from pre-Adamite creatures. One he chose as his special creation He named Lucy. And God realized this was confusing, so he created paleoanthropologists to sort it out. And just as He was finishing up the loose ends of the creation God realized that Adam's immediate descendants who lived as farmers and herders would not understand inflationary cosmology, global general relativity, quantum mechanics, astrophysics, biochemistry, paleontology, population genetics, and evolutionary theory, so He created creation myths. But there were so many creation stories throughout the land that God realized this too was confusing, so He created anthropologists, folklorists, and mythologists to settle the issue.

By now the valley of the shadow of doubt was overrun with skepticism, so God became angry, so angry that God lost His temper and cursed the first humans, telling them to go forth and multiply (but not in those words). They took God literally and 6,000 years later there are six billion humans. And the evening and morning were the sixth day.

By now God was tired, so God said, "Thank me it's Friday," and He made the weekend. It was a good idea.

* * * * *

"I cannot imagine a God who rewards and punishes the objects of his creation, whose purposes are modeled after our own—a God, in short, who is but a reflection of human frailty."

-- Albert Einstein

"Although atheism might have been logically tenable before Darwin, Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist."

-- Richard Dawkins

"For me, it is far better to grasp the Universe as it really is than to persist in delusion, however satisfying and reassuring."

-- Carl Sagan

* * * * *

WINTER SOLSTICE CELEBRATION

The scheduled speaker and topic for the December 15, 2007 NOSHA meeting, jibed nicely with the celebration of the winter solstice. Humanists have no regularly scheduled holidays to observe (for obvious reasons), so many of us have chosen to recognize naturally-occurring phenomena, i.e. the summer and winter solstices.

Patrick Lestrade, (pictured below) a professor of physics and astronomy, was our speaker for the December meeting, addressing "Gamma-ray Bursts and Oddities from Space."



Following Patrick's talk, a committee of NOSHA members entertained with song and games appropriate to the solstice. They also provided delicious refreshments.

NOSHA thanks Serena Bodellini, Ida Stone and Betty Alessandra for organizing the party and providing refreshments, and a special thanks to Gina Cedotal for yet another one of her delicious cakes, beautifully decorated to commemorate the winter solstice.

NEW BOARD MEMBERS 2008

At the last NOSHA meeting of 2007, two new board members were elected to replace two who have relocated away from the New Orleans area. The two new members are **Will Hunn** and **Patrick Lestrade**. We are happy to have the two of you aboard.

Will has been a member of NOSHA since its inception, having attended the first organizational meeting in 1999. Before that meeting, he and another member of Community Unitarian Church led a discussion group that they called “the freethought forum” which met before Sunday morning services.

He said that in the early ‘70s he happened across a copy of *The Humanist* magazine and immediately subscribed. He is also a charter subscriber to *Free Inquiry*, and avidly reads the works of such freethinkers as Robert Ingersoll, Bertrand Russell, and H. L. Mencken. Will took early retirement after 34 years in the full engineering section at Avondale Shipyards several years ago, so has much free time for reading.

Patrick is a newer NOSHA member, and while he splits his time between Starkville, Mississippi and New Orleans, has been an active participant since his first visit. He is a New Orleans native and comes back for every holiday and university break. A professor of physics and astronomy at Mississippi State University, he is one of at least a dozen university faculty among NOSHA’s members.

Following the December 15 meeting, the board members present held a brief meeting to elect officers for the new year. All officers agreed to remain and were re-elected by acclamation. They are Harry Greenberger, President; Dave Schultz, Vice President; Connie Gordon, Treasurer, and Charlotte Klasson, Secretary. Connie Gordon also remains as editor of this newsletter, and Will Hunn agreed to coordinate refreshments for regular NOSHA meetings. The new liaison to AAI is Patrick Lestrade. The full cohort of NOSHA board members may be found on this newsletter’s front page.

* * * * *

THANKS FOR YOUR SUPPORT

At the end of January, NOSHA president Harry Greenberger sent out a reminder about 2008 membership dues. He stressed the importance of an official membership roster rather than just being on an organization’s mailing list. About 35 of you answered the call, several bringing in new members under the 2 for 1 offer. This brings our total dues-paying membership to well over 100 with an additional 100 or more on the mailing list.

Some of you were very generous adding a few extra dollars to your \$15.00 membership fee, and we appreciate it. What is really gratifying, though, is the number of people who have moved away from the New Orleans area who remain not only on our mailing list, but maintain their dues-paying memberships. Some of you left the area well before Katrina and are still supportive of NOSHA even while supporting local secular organizations in your areas. We are very grateful.

* * * * *

WAS DARWIN A RACIST?

*(Recently NOSHA member and evolutionary biologist **Dave Schultz** was called by a newspaper in Kentucky to get his take on whether or not he thought Charles Darwin was a racist. The question arose after Ken Ham, founder of Kentucky’s new Creation Museum co-authored a book in which he accuses the father of evolutionary theory with being a racist. The article entitled “Creation Museum founder’s book calls evolution theory racist,” appeared in a Kentucky newspaper in February and was picked up by the Baton Rouge Advocate on March 1.)*

LOUISVILLE, Ky – The founder of a popular Kentucky Christian museum that rejects evolution says in a new book that Darwin’s theory fuels racism and genocide.

Ken Ham, who opened the Creation Museum last year, and co-author Charles Ware, president of Crossroads Bible College in Indianapolis, have written “Darwin’s Plantation: Evolution’s Racist Roots,” arguing that the theory inspired the Nazi belief in racial superiority and the murderous policies of Soviet dictator Josef Stalin.

“What Darwinian evolution did I would say is provide what people thought was scientific justification for separation of races,” Ham said in an interview.

Ham is not the first to try to tie Darwin with racism. The charge has been made for years.

It came up last month in arguments over science curriculum at a South Carolina state school board meeting. In 2001, Louisiana’s state legislature considered a bill that said Darwin supported racist ideologies.

David L. Schultz, associate professor of biology at Nicholls State University in Louisiana, said Darwin was egalitarian and had a history of speaking out against slavery.

“Darwin was not a racist,” he said.

Ham runs the Christian group Answers in Genesis and has already made an impact with his \$27 million high-tech museum in Petersburg, south of Cincinnati.

The complex has attracted more than 300,000 visitors with exhibits that treat the Bible’s creation story as natural history and contend that evolution theory is wrong because it contradicts the Old Testament. The Creation Museum asserts that the earth is just a few thousand years old, dinosaurs coexisted with man and Adam and Eve were the first humans.

In the new book, Ham says that Darwin’s theory that natural selection caused gradual biological changes over time, puts some races “higher on the evolutionary scale” and others “closer to the apes.”

“Although racism did not begin with Darwinism, Darwin did more than any person to popularize it,” Ham writes.

Ham further contends that the theory fanned the flames of “ethnic superiority.”

“Stalin, Hitler and Mao were responsible for the deaths of tens of millions – and it can be shown they did this because of the influence of Darwinian naturalism...,” Ham writes.

Eugenie Scott, executive director of the National Center for Science Education, a California group that defends teaching evolution in public schools, said Hitler rarely mentioned evolution.

“Darwinian evolution is based on natural selection, which means that any population can adapt to its environment,” Scott

said. “The ironic thing for the creationists is that Hitler grounded Aryan superiority as a God-given quality.”

Ham said he came to the topic because he was upset by the unfair treatment of aboriginal tribes in his native Australia and the racism he saw in the United States when he arrived here in the 1970s. He said he experienced a backlash from some church groups after he wrote an article critical of biblical-based arguments against interracial marriage, which made him even more determined to tackle the issue.

“I got more what I would call hate mail from people, supposedly Christians in the church, than for any other article I’ve ever written,” Ham said. “So to me I just had a real burden that I wanted to educate the church on the matter.”

But Schultz called the argument “a ploy to get evolution out of the curriculum.”

“Of course everybody’s against teaching children racism, so if you call it racist, you can have it removed,” said Schultz. He testified before a Louisiana legislative panel that took up the bill that would have tied evolution with racism. The measure was eventually stripped of any reference to Darwin.

Ham said Answers in Genesis does not advocate teaching creationism in public schools.

In South Carolina, that state’s board of education approved a biology textbook that references evolution. One board member had argued that the scientific theory was used by Nazi Germany as an excuse to kill millions of people.

NOSHA MEETING DATES

- March 15 – Jim Dugan, Tulane University
“A Visit to the Creation Museum: Or Where Did That Idea of the Young Earth Come From Anyway?”
- April 19 – Walter Block, Loyola University
“Libertarianism, Objectivism, Atheism and Religion”
- May 17 – To be announced
- June 21 – Summer Solstice Celebration
- July 19 – To be announced

The New Orleans Secular Humanist Association (NOSHA) was formed to provide an opportunity for like-minded people to meet and exchange ideas and to promote awareness of secular humanist viewpoints in the community. We are committed to the application of reason and science to the understanding of the universe and to the solving of human problems. We reject efforts to explain the world in supernatural terms and to look outside nature for salvation. We strive to make the public aware of the importance of the separation of church and state, to oppose the teaching of creationism and other religious doctrines in the public schools, and to provide a voice of reason when superstition is presented in the media. We believe in enjoying life here and now, and in cultivating moral excellence. We believe in the fullest realization of the best and noblest we are capable of as human beings.

To become a friend of THE NEW ORLEANS SECULAR HUMANIST ASSOCIATION, complete, clip, and mail in the following form:

Check one: New Member Renewing Member Mailing list only Newsletter by mail

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone and/or e-mail: _____

2008 Annual dues are \$15.00. Make checks payable to "NOSHA" and mail to Connie Gordon, 2509 Giuffrias Ave., Apt. 603, Metairie, LA 70001.

NOTE: For those of you who receive the newsletter by standard mail, the year for which you have last paid membership dues is reflected in the upper right corner of the mailing label.

**NOSHA
520 St. Louis St., Apt. 3
New Orleans, LA 70130**