

AAIDD-HUMANIST NEWSLETTER

(formerly Awl Weave Ghat)

The Newsletter of the

American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disorders (AAIDD) Humanist Action Group

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This newsletter expresses the opinion of members of this subgroup and not necessarily of AAIDD

All data presented are opinions and alternative opinions may be printed in later issues. Send feedback and submissions to jrmullin@verizon.net

I will be at the AAIDD Annual Meeting in St. Paul MN this year. I will be hosting a group meeting one morning and also moderating a panel discussion. I was told I could put in a small plug for this group while moderating which I intend to do and hope will be constructive. Things I found out while booking this trip are: 1. The hotel rooms you can book through AAIDD are well-priced and have a view of the Mississippi River. There may be cheaper rooms at nearby hotels if money is an issue; 2. The transit system looks good with a bus (#54) from the airport to a stop two blocks from the hotel. The same bus also goes to the Mall of America on its return trip; 3. Southwest had really good fares, at least from Providence which is where I will be leaving from. Look at their web-only fares. Of course you would want to check all the airlines from where you are traveling. Hope to see you there if you go.

Occasionally I have to remind myself of the goals of this group. It's very easy for a humanist who used to be religious to rant against aspects of organized religion or loud fringe advocates for certain religions. If that's all you see in this newsletter, then please accept my apologies. My hope has always been to be a recourse for people that think that religion is not important to some people with intellectual disabilities, their families and friends.

I read a few fundamentalist Christian websites frequently and in them I can usually see a developing theme which changes from time to time. There's an odd one developing now that says a proof of the existence of a deity is the fact that there is a consistent set of natural laws throughout the universe. This argument assumes that this might not necessarily be the case if the universe formed without intelligent guidance. I propose that it is usually useful to know about these themes before they happen and then be ready to counter them or already have found a solid non-theistic explanation for them. In this case, since the sum total of matter in the universe originated in one small area, it is all the same materials and should be expected to behave in the same manner no matter what part of the cosmos it is in. In fact it is difficult to conceptualize how this consistency wouldn't happen. This is a hard concept for some people to grasp. I may try to give an easier way to explain what happened or a little exercise that might help someone understand a concept better. In this example, it might prove useful to go to different stores and buy similar pieces of fruit, perhaps a golden delicious apple. Then you could show how the apples always taste the same even though they weren't in the same place. You could ask if there was any reason they could think of in which the apples wouldn't be just like the others. Sometimes it is just useful to experience a problem in order to solve it.

Let me know if you think I'm getting carried away at times.

Is it Bullying?

I read a short blog entry¹ on the HuffingtonPost (www.Huffingtonpost.com) that asked if evangelism is bullying². To over-simplify the article, its argument was that a bully might say, "If you don't do what I want you to, I'll beat you up". Is that all that different from someone saying, "If you don't worship my god, you will burn in pain for all eternity"? I suppose one big difference is that the bully might actually beat you up and the other threat might be seen as unlikely to ever really happen. That is the only difference I see, however, as far as wording goes. The evangelist doesn't see that difference between his warning and reality. I would argue therefore that his intent is to bully so I would have no problem teaching a humanist that much evangelism is bullying.

I have a bit less problem looking at another evangelistic statement, though. Suppose they said, "If you worship my god then you will have an eternity of love and happiness"? I can't argue that this is bullying. There are other things about it I don't like. Most of the major theistic religions at this time still believe in the eternity-of-pain-for-non-believers idea even if they don't say it up front. Recalling that Karl Marx said that religion was the opiate of the people (from what I hear) this situation reminds me of drug dealers, especially hard-drug dealers. The first exposure is free and often quite enjoyable but then the relationship stops being fun and games as the user becomes more and more involved with drug use. My point is that the enticement of religion is followed by the threats of eternal pain on those who seek to leave and that this is similar to drug use which starts out fun and ends up very hard to get out of. It's not bullying though.

As always, I would like to hear your opinion on this and how to handle it. I feel confident in thinking and in teaching that the first evangelistic statement is bullying. Everyone seems to get a

¹I tried to find it again to credit the author but I couldn't find it. If anyone knows who wrote it or has better luck finding it than I did, please send me the info and I will correct it as best I can. I tried putting "religious bullying atheists" in the HuffPost search engine which brings up a lot of interesting articles. One that came close to my search was "The Resolution for 'In God We Trust' by Roy Speckhart. This link might still work : http://www.huffingtonpost.com/roy-speckhardt/the-resolution-for-federa_b_840314.html

lot of training on bullies these days and this would be a good discussion point to suggest to someone who had just finished that training.

As for the second evangelistic approach, I would try to get the person with tales of eternal joy to expand more on their religious beliefs. That's when you might learn that their promises are backed up by threats. If you are helping someone who is being approached in this manner you may have to help them get the evangelist to expand on their beliefs. It may be useful to practice getting more information if you can't be there personally. Such a situation where you wouldn't necessarily be there would be if your friend was approached at work. These procedures are always tougher to do than to say. As I've said many times before, individually religious people are almost always wonderful, nice people who mean the best for you and that we have many things in common with them once religion is off the table. Sometimes you just have to work a bit to get past religion in your relationship.



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