

AAIDD-HUMANIST NEWSLETTER

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

Is it Science or is it technology?

There's a cartoon by Dan Lietha you can access through the [answersingenesis.org](http://www.answersingenesis.org) site at <http://www.answersingenesis.org/media/image/cartoons/after-eden/science-is-great> In case it is no longer accessible at that address, let me summarize the cartoon. In it there is an adult sitting at a computer listening to an on-line speaker. The speaker says that creationists don't believe in science and that's the problem with them. The amazed adult thinks of his computer, air conditioner, internet connection, LED lighting and other modern conveniences. The implication is that the adult is a young-earth creationist and that he uses science all the time and the evidence is all around him so how can someone make that accusation?

Why am I bringing this up? I am because saying you have the support of science is a big deal. Humanists do it all the time. Lately some religions, usually if not always the extreme ones, are trying to say science backs their view. As an example, Creationism tries to call itself "Creation Science". There are seemingly thousands of "scientific explanations" of biblical events like what the star that leads the wise men to Bethlehem was or how Moses managed to cross the Red Sea. It is easy for someone to be taken in by these claims which, of course, is why they were made. After all, you can't argue with Science can you? So what can you do if you are being "seduced" by science or have a loved one who is being "blinded" by science and are very close to accepting a view that you do not think is otherwise rational?

It is important to realize the difference between science and technology. Science is a method of finding information through observation and experimentation. It also includes the information that has been determined through observation and experimentation. Technology is the practical application of science. As an example, it is science to find that the rapid explosive combustion of a fuel in a container with a nozzle will propel the container rapidly. It is technology to use that combustion to propel a missile. You don't necessarily need to know why a rocket works in order to use one to go into space.

As I have said in most of these discussions, it is better to have addressed them before the problem arises. Still, this is a difficult pair of concepts to try and explain especially when others are so firm in their belief of what they mistakenly think science and technology

are. You can try to do experiments in your kitchen along with your friends or loved ones as a way of teaching science. The internet is full of simple experiments which lead to a conclusion. It may be useful to teach a mantra, “Science needs experiments” and a question to ask, “What experiment did you use to find this out?”

For technology a trip to Best Buy ® or another electronics store might be useful. If any place uses familiar technology, it’s these big box electronic stores. The mantra there would be, “ Does this do an experiment?” with the answer always, “No”.

These are difficult concepts that many people get through college without fully understanding. I would be happy to print any ideas anyone has on how to address this issue and teach the difference.

I Am No Longer Going To Use *Answers In Genesis* And, In Particular, Ken Ham’s Opinions As A Typical Religious Viewpoint

It’s been fascinating to watch and sad too. More and more Ken’s writings talk of persecution and evil atheists, in so many words. This is from a recent (12/14/11) blog entry by Ken on his website (www.answersingenesis.com) in which he discusses an article written about him and creationism by an academic who criticizes him:

“This is a country where it is almost impossible to even mention the word “creation” in the science classes of public schools and where mostly evolution is taught as fact to the majority of public school students. Then because of me—beware of the consequences—the following is what is really going happen: “School systems will be treated to full frontal assaults for teaching the scientific theories that scientists find most enlightening. The result will be a culture war of massive proportions that will convince most teachers simply to ignore meaningful science lessons entirely.

Oh, and then there is the incredible misinformation about what happened when I was not allowed to speak at a homeschool (sic) convention. . . ”

I don’t believe that I have taken this quote out of context but if it is still available, it is at <http://blogs.answersingenesis.org/blogs/ken-ham/2011/12/14/academic-vp-and-provost-of-college-stoops-to-new-low-in-personal-attack/> and you can make your own decision. More and more Ken appears to be seeing himself as a victim of a vast atheist conspiracy

that is supported by, of all people, other significant religious people like the home school convention organizers.

I read his book, *Already Gone*, in which he shows statistics that only about 20% of what I would consider hardcore religious teenagers stay with their church once they go to college. This is not, as I would suspect, because they realized that history and scientific observations show more probable alternative causes to events that they previously, without question, ascribed to a supernatural origin. To Ken it is because they are not indoctrinated strongly enough so that they would have answers to any attempt to sway their reason with facts. These answers aren't nearly as good as one would think based on other articles on his website telling students how to keep their beliefs in spite of their education. My concern, however is that this is an example of Ken withdrawing more and more from rational discourse into a world where he is one of the few holders of the truth and everyone else seems out to get him.

I hope I am wrong with this belief about this man. He is very sincere in what he does and hopes his work will benefit humankind. He pays himself a very low salary for a hard-working man who spends so much time on the road, manages a museum, and is seen as an expert in his field. Still, I have to worry that he has become too extreme and defensive in his views and does not represent a typical level of religiosity. To argue against his views is really a cheap shot, that is, he is so extreme that he is easy to argue against. However the typical religious person is not as easy to argue against. Because of this I am no longer looking at him as someone who represents beliefs to critique. I will still enter into discussions about him if someone else initiates them but that is all. Do you have any opinions on this matter?

For an interesting discussion on what *not* to say to religious friends, see <http://thehumanist.org/january-february-2012/seven-things-to-avoid-when-talking-to-strangers-about-humanism/> I may discuss this in the next issue.

Darwin Day is February 12th. This is a Humanist holiday, for the most part, and your loved one or friend with IDD may need a reminder that most people don't celebrate it just because you do and that's okay. For a little more information on Darwin Day, go to: <http://darwinday.org/>

Remember in reading this newsletter, all links are meant to work if you click on them. In the rare case where I get it wrong when composing, paste the address into your browser

If you look up old issues of this newsletter, you may notice that the title on all of them has changed to *IDD-Humanist Newsletter*. The content is the same and a subtitle references the former name

Did you see our friends at the AAIDD Religion and Spirituality Division printed our contribution in their last newsletter? I am waiting for them to send one to me and I will return the favor. I didn't get any feedback about the essay directly and I don't know if the R&S Division got any. The article is at <http://www.aaiddreigion.org/news/guest-post-humanist-action-group> and you may want to read the rest of the newsletter too.

I've started announcing the release of these newsletters in the AAIDD online newsletters. After the last announcement the website got 15 hits. This is much higher than usual. I don't track the hits on the newsletters so I don't know if anyone went right to the newsletter and doesn't show up in the stats.

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www.AAIDD-Humanists.org or www.Humidd.org