

IDD-HUMANIST NEWSLETTER

The Newsletter of the

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

September 2012 , v6 issue 3

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

Editors notes

There's some interesting news coming up about the web site. It had bothered me that I advertise the site as useful to people with IDD and their families. However most of it is written at a high school level or higher. To help with this problem I am revising the web site so that it is possible to find the same information at a detailed and a simple version and go between them as desired. What is here now will be the detailed version. The simple version will be friendlier, have shorter sentences, a little more color, and feedback for the mouse user. This will be a new area for me and perhaps most of us. I could use suggestions and comment on the revised site when I publish it.

One interesting thing that I've noticed while looking for material to link to the new part of the site is that there is very little on the internet about humanists that is appropriate for my needs. The comics, like the late George Carlin, are funny and insightful but much too profane. Sites that try to explain humanism in simple language, even sites for kids, are hard to find if there are any which is interesting since the religious folks have tons of sites and YouTube material geared toward children or those looking for a simple explanation of a religious point.

This issue continues with a review of the transcendental argument for the existence of a god. It's an involved argument and, as I mention in the review, quite popular with a nephew of mine.

We finish up with another reprint from an early (2007) newsletter which is the first part of a two part article on addressing the conflicted messages a person with IDD may get. These messages would be on religious views from friends or relatives in conflict with the message they already hold on humanism. It's a tough situation. One thing that changed since writing it is that I try to avoid talking about Answers in Genesis because I worry about the emotional health of the founder and don't think he reliably presents common fundamental religious viewpoints..

One correction from the last issue. I wrote about fears of people getting the disease from the vaccine it is meant to prevent.. According to an article in a recent issue of *Scientific American*, the oral form of polio vaccine can give a few people of one of the three forms of polio in it. It is actually giving more people the disease than catch it from nature. Both of these are very low numbers. However using it is the best way of eliminating that disease without using the much more expensive and harder to distribute injected vaccine. This is a rare event and I don't think this is what vaccine deniers in the third world are talking about. I mention it because technically I made an error.

Proofs of the existence of a God -the Transcendental Argument

We are continuing in our series on reviews of arguments for the existence of deity and how to respond to them This one is very intense to the people that believe it. Essentially it says that without a god to create logic, knowledge, and the laws of physics, there would not be consistency through the universe and there would be chaos instead. Logic creates morality so all morality is based on the existence of a deity. This is very hard to understand and argue for or against although people like a nephew of mine who believe in it, think it's great. There's a multi-page outline of the argument at <http://carm.org/transcendental-argument>. It is hard to read but you can still pick out logical problems. As always, I want to point out that showing that this proof is inadequate doesn't disprove the existence of a deity but rather only that this argument is not good enough to prove there is one.

It's hard for me to imagine why there wouldn't be consistent physical laws throughout the universe with or without a god. If one were to imagine an experiment to test this, the transcendental argument would be difficult to prove, perhaps impossible. I have to wonder if it were true if it would not be possible to create gaps in space, even small, in which consistency was not apparent. However this is speculation as is the statement that there would not be consistency. When you get down to it, this whole argument is speculation since it is based on initial hypotheses we can't prove or disprove. As in many arguments, for god or otherwise, we run into an impasse if we can't test the hypothesis. The Wikipedia sees it as a very weak argument, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transcendental_argument_for_the_existence_of_God They base their objections on primarily philosophic analysis.

As far as we know, it's all the same types of matter and the same forms of energy all through the universe. It's sensible to expect the matter to all behave the in same ways and react to the forces that touch it in similarly. If matter and energy are constant, there

should be laws of physics. If there are laws of physics, there should be mathematics. If there is mathematics, there is logic. If there is logic there is a good basis for morality. As we have discussed at least once in earlier newsletter, morality can't be exact but only approximate. Even exceptions to general rules are a product of logic.(remember the famous example of the violation of the prohibition of killing in which a large number of people are saved if you let one person die) so logic can only be a basis of morality..

I sometimes think this is an "emperor isn't wearing any clothes" argument. I think we all remember the fairy tale in which a vain emperor is convinced he is wearing clothes that everyone but a fool can see. He is afraid to say that he doesn't see his clothes for fear of appearing a fool. At the end, he appears before his subjects thinking he must be wearing nice clothes but is really naked. The subjects don't say anything for fear of appearing to be fools. A child finally says, "Look, the emperor isn't wearing any clothes" and everyone realizes the child is right and then realizes who the fools are. To me this argument is so complicated and "cosmic" that people that don't understand it think it must be right and agree with it so that they don't look stupid. In reality it has no substance.

So what can you or a loved one with IDD do if confronted with this argument? I went through the whole line of logic about innate consistency in the universe, laws of physics, mathematics, and logic with my nephew. We only reached an impasse. Although I felt I won, he probably didn't feel that way. The best I can suggest is to take the hard line from the start. Say, "That just isn't so, it doesn't take a god for there to be order in the universe". If they insist on continuing say, "Prove it, show me a place with no god and let's see what it looks like". We should be willing to say, "That doesn't make sense" and to keep saying it whenever the argument doesn't make sense. That's my opinion on this matter, what do you think? Send me your ideas and I will publish them whether you agree with me or not and will withhold your identity if you'd like. Send it to

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How do you talk to a person with IDD about Humanism in light of their friends' beliefs? (Part one) reprinted from V1. n. 3 (Sept. 2007)

In the last issue I suggested that we have a topic for subsequent issues. For this issue I suggested that we discuss how to

react when someone with IDD has been approached by someone else who says that they should believe in God or a

specific religion. This discussion assumes we think they should maintain humanist beliefs. It also assumes that we are important to this person and they are important to us. In preparing for this essay I found that this is a huge topic, larger than one newsletter should contain, so it will continue it over several issues.

If you do an internet search on this issue you find out one thing quickly: no one likes it when other religions try to convert their members. Nevertheless many religions feel that it is appropriate for them to do it to others. In fact some see it as their mission. Mormon men, for example, generally spend 2 years each in missionary work and we are all familiar with Jehovah's Witnesses knocking at our door on the weekend. These two are perhaps classic examples of religions that approach others to join them and there are many others. Additionally there appears to be an equal number of religious individuals who feel, on a personal level, that they should do the same thing. Generally Humanists don't actively attempt to convert people to their views. Even in Humanism, thought, there are movements like the New Atheism that are vocal enough about their beliefs that it is obvious that conversion is a large part of the intent behind their message.

In any effort of this type, there are two major elements. The first is the logical component and the second is the emotional component. One would think that the logical component would be all that one needs to hear to make up one's mind. After all, if a religious or non-religious belief system doesn't make sense, then why should anyone believe

in it? Shouldn't there be just one logical belief system and a large number of illogical systems? A review of the educational materials of most religions suggests otherwise. It seems all belief systems assume that they follow from the rules of logic. Some of them, like the Catholic Church make little *logical corrections* along the way. By logical corrections, I mean ways of explaining events which totally bypass logic. In the Catholic Church example, three groups of events referred to as *Mysteries* are ways of just taking illogical events out of the realm of discussion. The remaining areas for discussion vaguely fit into a logical framework.

Other belief systems totally pervert logic. *Answers in Genesis* (AIG) (<http://www.answersingenesis.org>) is a young earth creationist organization that I feel is an example of a group that totally perverts logic in their arguments. I feel they call the scientific method "circular logic" and then freely use circular logic in their arguments. I believe that they find extreme fringe science, like the unlikely belief that the speed of light has changed over time or that the rate of continental drift was much faster in the past. They then use these "discoveries" to discount established scientific beliefs and "prove" their belief that the earth is only 6000 years old. They appear to honestly believe what they write and that it is based on solid logic. I mention them as an example of a group that, although there is nothing in the traditional scientific world that supports them, believes that they make perfect sense. After visiting their website, I usually visit the National Center for Science Education website

(<http://www.natcenscienced.org>) to cure my headache and find more rational explanations of what AIG preaches.

People with IDD often have a weak sense of logic or at least one that is limited in the complexity of arguments that they can process. This is also found in the typical intelligence crowd but

more so in the population with IDD. If someone can't exclude a solicitation based on logic, they are more susceptible to emotional appeals. In the next part of this essay we will discuss emotional appeals in relation to belief conversion for people with IDD.

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