

# IDD-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

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*All data presented are opinions and alternative opinions may be printed in later issues. Send feedback and submissions to [jrmullin@verizon.net](mailto:jrmullin@verizon.net)*

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## Editors notes

Well, the new website is up and running. It still needs work and some rewriting but all in all I think it's coming out well. I have asked several groups to review it for its concept rather than content but have had no takers. I wrote this on a new piece of software "Xara web designer MX premium" which came with server access so we have a new server again. This server seems a bit faster and fails less. Thanks to [www.Zymic.com](http://www.Zymic.com) for hosting us until now. It's fairly good as a free server and if you're looking for a hosting site for a web site that isn't too complicated, Zymic will do the job well. I'd be happy to farm out some of the rewrites if you'd like to try some. [Send me a note](#) about what you'd like to tackle and if you want I can send out a file with the original work on it. I'm also working on a cartoon strip which should be ready for the next issue.

With the increasing numbers of non-religious (although still possibly god-believing) people in the country, I was hoping to have a poster at the AAIDD summer conference on living a good life as a non-religious person. Illness interfered with my last minute efforts so this may have to wait until next year. The "nones" as they are called may be as high as 20% of the population.

This issue continues with a review of the Argument for the existence of a god based from design. This is the last of these for a while unless there are specific requests.

We finish up with another reprint from an early (2007) newsletter which is the second 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 beliefs they already hold on humanism. It's a tough situation. It's interesting to reread these articles to see how I would have said things differently or even believe different things now. I probably wouldn't have described Unitarian services as "bland" although we have to agree they are rarely exciting.

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## Humanism for Kids

In the last issue I lamented the lack of websites geared towards kids and early readers about humanism unless they were to attack it. Since then the American Humanist Association has come out with a website, <http://www.KidsWithoutGod.com/>. It's an interesting resource and worth a visit or two. Like Humidd.org this site has sections with different levels for different readers although separates them by age rather than reading ability. Also Google "humanism for kids" and a few more sites will come up although at least one is the copy of another. As I noted in the last issue, searching for good sites leads to religious sites trying to discourage humanism in addition to ones that you are actually looking for. It is important to look over a site before you spend too much time reading it in order to see its orientation. Now we need some good YouTube on the subject .

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### **The Argument for the existence of a god based from design.**

This will be the last of these discussions for a while. They all seem to end up the same way and I'm getting bored, to tell the truth. If someone wants to present an argument for discussion, I will discuss it but other than that, this is it temporarily.

The argument based on design is also called the watchmaker's argument. Basically the argument goes that if you were walking down a beach and came across a watch you would be amazed by its complexity and you would know that it must have been designed and built by something. Similarly if one took a fresh look at the universe and, in particular, humans, you would think that they must also have been designed by something. This argument says that man is too complex to have come into being by accident so a god must have been responsible. My arguments against this are as follows:

1. I think it is extremely relevant that in the example of the watch, which is perhaps more in need of design than humans since it wouldn't work if even one piece was defective, no one suggests a god must have designed it. We know that it was a person that did it. However, a caveman or other primitive might have thought it *was* designed by a god because they didn't know better.[ I realize that there wouldn't be a watch lying around in prehistoric times. Perhaps a better example might be a contemporary tribesman who had no contact with modern civilization seeing an airplane pass over head].
2. There are libraries of evidence for evolution and the expansion of the universe from a small point. There are some things we don't understand about these yet but these are decreasing almost by the day. Eventually we may come to a time when

we seemingly can no longer make more than guesses about what happened in early steps of the process. That, in itself, does not mean that there is not a natural cause of that step. Eventually we may be able to prove it or perhaps be confident that the answer is in one of several possibilities.

3. There are many discussions on how the human body could have been designed better. We have flaws like the lens of our eye that ages and turns cloudy. Some other animals do not have this problem but we do. There are many other examples that are easy to find on the internet. Essentially we are not god-quality work.
4. This argument eventually turns into a “god of the gaps” argument. That argument says that if we don’t understand it, a god must have done it. However over the centuries we have seen our understanding increase by leaps and bounds. The things we can’t explain yet are less and less every year.

Anyway, I’m not convinced by this. Other discussions about this are here:

<http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/theism/design.html> and here:

[http://wiki.ironchariots.org/index.php?title=Argument\\_from\\_design](http://wiki.ironchariots.org/index.php?title=Argument_from_design)

So what do you want to say or teach someone to say in response to this argument? This is another “God of the Gaps” argument. That is, if we can’t explain something then a god must have done it. It might help to argue that science has explained a lot of things that no one could explain even a few years ago and that, as a rule, religion has fought these explanations every step of the way. Evolution is a field where this happens all the time. Creationists say that there are no transitional fossils between known fossil species so one couldn’t evolve into the other. Transitional fossils are fossils that are of a stage in evolution between two established species. For example whales were once land animals and there are numerous fossils showing their evolving into aquatic mammals. When the transitional fossils are found Creationists either say these are freaks of nature and not evidence of a true transitional form or that they need an additional transitional fossil between the two original fossils and the newly discovered one. This is going on right now with an island of smaller prehistoric people that are referred to as “Hobbits” although obviously aren’t the Hobbits of *the Lord of the Rings*. Even though there are numerous complete fossils and all the fossils they have from that age are similar, they are portrayed as immature people or else a few midgets by the Creation believers. The really interesting story behind these people is that they closely resemble an early human species from Africa who were not believed to have traveled from that continent.

Other than pointing out problems with God of the Gap approaches, one could use the “how do we know it was a god that did it?” argument. One could also point out there are museums full of evidence that we evolved gradually. More and more I think that arguments over religious beliefs are not productive so next issue I would like to discuss ways of discussing religious issues with religious people.

***How do you talk to a person with IDD about Humanism in light of their friends' beliefs? (Part two)*** reprinted from V1. n. 4 (Dec. 2007)

In the last newsletter we talked about the nature of belief systems (even humanism) to try to convert others to their system. Generally, one would think a logical argument would serve to end these attempts. In real experiences, this isn't so and this is why there are conversions. The major reasons behind these successes are emotional factors of which two come to mind.

The first of these is probably exemplified in a talk I had with a friend last night. We were at the Holiday party at the Unitarian Church I attend. Don, my friend, originally came from the South and he was talking about how bland Unitarian services seem to him (no argument there!). Sometimes he missed the excitement he remembered at a few Baptist services he attended down there. He remembered singing and everyone happily participating. He didn't miss the Baptist religious teachings but he did miss the emotional experience. So I propose that the *group emotional experience* of a religious service may be a strong emotional factor. It's similar to why people pay big bucks to attend a sports event rather than watching it on the television for free. There's nothing like being caught up in the excitement. Once you've been caught up in the excitement, you want to go back again

and again.

Personally, part of the reason I like Unitarianism is that it is so bland (relatively, I *do* find it intellectually stimulating). I think it's easy to get caught up in a group emotional experience and adopt a silly or dangerous belief. Hitler's rallies in the 1930's and 40's are a very extreme example of this but politicians in general are quite aware that a lively rally will gain them some new supporters. So I tend to avoid these situations when I can. I miss a little fun but I can lead a much more rational life.

The second of these emotional factors is a bit harder to avoid. I could be mean and call it emotional blackmail but it's not as drastic as that. Basically a friend wants to share their religion with you. To say "no" is to reject their friendship and good intentions and, after all, this is an opportunity to do something with a friend. So we say yes once and maybe a second time and so on. Every "yes" makes it harder to say "no" later. The friend thinks he helped you and you are reluctant to tell him/her otherwise. I can remember being encouraged to do that as a child for both religious and non-religious organizations. I'm a lousy salesman so I never succeeded but I

knew of others who had.

At this time, we have talked about the nature of conversion, and in particular, religious conversion. We have also talked about strong emotional factors that influence our ability to be influenced. In our next issue we will talk about how to

address these situations in a very constructive way.

As always, I would like to hear feedback, either good or bad on these issues since I would like this newsletter to be a group effort if at all possible.

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