

New York City Atheists Inc.

Serving the Tri-State area

An affiliate of American Atheists, Atheist Alliance International & Center For Atheism

WEB: NYC-ATHEISTS.ORG COOPER STATION - Box 93, NY, NY 10276-0093

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KENNETH BRONSTEIN

PRESIDENT'S "SERMON"

BE AN ATHEIST ROLE MODEL

It was a guy named Larry, a software engineer from Silicon Valley in California, whose story inspired me to write this piece. Larry, visiting New York City last year, came to one of our NYC Atheists' discussion groups and told us that just about 100 percent of the employees in the small computer company he worked for in Silicon Valley were religious. To the best of his knowledge, he said, he was the only atheist in the entire company.

At first, he said, this made him feel uncomfortable and isolated. But he liked his work, so he decided to deal with the problem in a positive way. "I decided to be on the side of what is moral and ethical in this business and earn the respect of my colleagues," he told us.

Larry did just that, making sure the customers were treated respectfully regardless of race, age or economic status, insisting that defective products be replaced, insisting on complete honesty in product disclosure. He earned the reputation in his firm of being an upright guy, the go-to guy when there was an ethical issue to be resolved. He became more comfortable in his workplace. Comfortable enough, he told us, to gradually reveal to his colleagues and fellow workers that he is a nonbeliever.

Turning Up the Heat Slowly

The operative word here is "gradually." Larry didn't want to culture-shock his workmates. So, first, he came out as simply a non-churchgoer. That was generally deemed acceptable because, let's face it, even many believers do not go to church. Then

Larry let it drop that he was nonreligious. When he felt comfortable that this step had become acceptable to his fellow workers, he segued to intimating that atheism is his philosophy and way of life. Like the frog sitting in a pan of water whose temperature is turned up so imperceptibly that the frog is boiled to death before he realizes it, Larry's colleagues accepted his outlook hardly realizing the apparently increasing magnitude of his nonbelief.

But keep in mind that by the time that happened, Larry's workplace reputation as an upright, moral person of good character had been etched in stone by his actions. He said he is now moving toward hinting to one or two of his colleagues that being an atheist has, in fact, enhanced his moral and ethical outlook and that the part of his character that has enabled him to become respected in the company is largely attributable to his atheism.

"An atheist is good not because someone tells him to be good but because he has thought out the issues and has reached a conclusion about what is the right thing to do," Larry affirmed.

Atheist Ethics Fact-Based

I totally agreed with Larry that afternoon in the discussion group. I do indeed believe that atheists' morality and ethics are more far-reaching and on-target because they are the result of reasoning. Atheists do not need a god or a priest or a minister or a rabbi to tell us what is right or wrong. We have generally analyzed the ethical options in a cerebral way, and have come to our own conclusion about

what is ethical and moral behavior on the basis of what is good for us, for the world and for humanity, not because some guy-in-the-sky tells us what we ought to do.

Larry's story made me think about how important it is for all of us atheists to be role models on the world stage. I feel it is important for each and every atheist to strive for a positive reputation that will elicit respect from friends, family and employers not just for ourselves but for atheism. For atheists to succeed in our objectives of total separation of church and state and the acceptance of atheism as a valued way of life, we must each be a role model of responsible citizenry and ethical behavior.

Learn! Engage! Advocate!

How do we do this? I'll suggest a couple of ways to accomplish this, but the first step is probably the most important: we must all acquire a deep and extensive foundation of knowledge about atheism. This is important, not only for our confidence but also to interface with those who are not atheists. You should learn about Darwin and evolution, the Big Bang theory, indisputable facts such as the age of our universe (13.7 billion years old) and the earth (4.5 billion years) and some basics about the world's major religions.

How do you learn these basics of atheism and how they compare to religious thinking? You read! You read Darwin, Dawkins, Hitchens, Dennett. You go to lectures (NYCA presents at least 24 lectures a year, often featuring top atheist thinkers and writers). If you're a member of NYCA, we email you the weekly FOCUS, which directs you to recently published articles that will keep you on top of fast-breaking atheist issues. With these tools, you can learn to counter the major arguments against atheism with solid facts.

The second step in becoming an atheist role model is to become an active citizen in the community, one who takes on the responsibilities and duties of

citizenship, including advocacy for social justice. Remember, it was Larry's unswerving championing of honesty and fairness in business that ultimately won over his colleagues. Advocacy of ethics and justice in the larger community—among friends, family and social circles—not only upholds our concepts of democracy but it extends the positive side of atheism into the world beyond the workplace.

Need Atheist Office-Holders

We hope that as a community activist, you will champion the people's issues that atheism stands up for and that religion opposes: stem cell research, taxing churches, ending Faith-Based Initiatives, eliminating special rights for religion, fighting for good public schools (only with good public schools can democracy thrive and atheism gain acceptance).

What this is leading up to is, of course that we hope you will ultimately run for office. We need Atheist council members, mayors, governors, congresspersons, senators. With the confidence you've gained from self-education, with the experience you've enjoyed in community activism, with the expertise in defending a position that you've learned from countering religious falsehoods with secular facts, there is no reason why you can't run for any office in the country.

If Sarah Palin Can Do It...

Start with local and state seats—or the school board, as Sarah Palin did. If she, with her misguided fundamentalist outlook, can climb the political ladder to become governor and candidate for U.S. vice president, think of what you, as a well-informed and dedicated atheist, can accomplish. As an atheist office holder, you become a role model not just to your colleagues and acquaintances but to the whole world. So the word is: Learn, Come Out, Step Up, Win Out. We have nothing to lose but our invisibility! □

**ATHEISM IS A CONCLUSION
NOT A BELIEF**

AAI Convention Salutes Comedian Bill Maher

700 Applaud New Atheist Stars in Sunny Burbank



By Jane Everhart

If one of the joys of going to an atheist convention is meeting the new atheist stars—the authors, the movers and shakers, the fledgling leaders and, yes, even the comedians of the atheist movement—then the 2009 Atheist Alliance International (AAI) convention was the place to be on October 1-5 this year.

There were no less than 32 atheist luminaries at the Burbank Airport Marriot in sunny California, ranging from ex-priests to astronomers, from revered atheist frontrunners like authors Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett to interesting young newcomers like Sunsara Taylor and Brian Parra.



Richard Dawkins

But the draw, indeed, the *piece de resistance*, the cherry on top of this convention sundae, was comedian Bill Maher, producer and star of the documentary film *Religulous* (the title is a play on the words “religion” and “ridiculous”), which exposed the flim-flam and irrationality of the world’s religions.

In fact, it was rumored that the convention took place in California (for the second year in a row)—in order to accommodate Mr. Maher, who could not make it to Denver where the AAI 2009 convention had been originally scheduled.

Maher Gets Award

While the acclaimed Mr. Maher is without doubt the funniest and most icon-clashing atheist around, for this writer his appearance was over-hyped and over-anticipated for the amount of time he spent with us, which was a brief appearance on Friday night to accept an award, slated to be from 8:45 to 9:30 p.m.

Actually, the audience first had to endure what seemed like an interminable live broadcast of Maher’s HBO program, *Real Time with Bill Maher*, streamed from Maher’s studio to the conference attendees sitting in the Marriot’s ballroom.



Bill Maher

When that was over, Dawkins (who was a guest on Maher’s show), Maher and their entourage limo’d to the convention banquet hall for the live presentation of the award to Maher. Meanwhile, the audience waiting in the convention ballroom was treated to another comedian called *Mr. Deity* who, good sport though he was, couldn’t quite appease the restless, patiently waiting audience.

Grumblers Cry ‘Unscientific’

There was a bit of grouching among the regulars about the choice of Maher as recipient of the award because the prize is called “The Richard Dawkins Award for outstanding contributions in raising public awareness of the nontheist life stance and advocacy of increased scientific knowledge.” Critics contended that Maher is said to advocate some “unscientific” alternative medicine ideas and eschew some traditional medical views.

But Dawkins, ever the wary gentleman, finessed the controversy by stating that Maher was being given the award because, “behind the wit and humor of the film *Religulous* was a serious message—that religion is not just silly or bizarre, it is dangerous.”

But for this writer, there were a dozen other reasons to be at the Burbank convention. The weather was divine and Burbank Airport Marriot turned out to be more of a

convention center than an airport motel, with plush cushions placed outside to lounge on in the sunny patio between lectures.

True, the convention program booklet was a mess: it didn't list the titles of the lectures nor the rooms they were held in. Since there were three lectures scheduled every hour, attendees had to run from one room to another to decide what topic was being covered by which speaker and where. But no matter. Atheists are nothing if not adaptable. Here are my contenders for most exciting speakers of the AAI convention:

Most Up-and-Coming: Sean Faircloth, a lawyer who served a decade in the Maine state legislature and became the Majority Whip there, is now the new executive director of the Secular Coalition of America. In his dynamic speech he decried the harm that Bush's Faith-Based Initiatives have caused, citing children who have died (two after being left for hours in the overheated closed vans of religious child care centers), noting that these church agencies are not given strict supervision in following proper health and safety rules. "Are children chattel so we can give them to god?" he asked. "Where are the right-to-life people on this issue?" He vowed to fight for the end of government money being given to faith-based charities.



Sean Faircloth

Most Likely To End Up On TV: Richard Dawkins dubbed her "the new, female Carl Sagan." Planetary scientist Carolyn Porco, PhD of the Cassini Imaging Central Laboratory for Operations of NASA, railed against the media, especially TV and the movies, that portray science and scientists as evil and hated. "Scientists are ridiculed and feared because of movies like Frankenstein and The Tales of Grimm," she said. She wants scientists to be portrayed in the movies and TV as, well, ordinary family people and dramatic heroes engaged in the adventure of finding out about nature.

The Next Richard Dawkins: Jerry Coyne, PhD, professor in the department of ecology and evolution at the University of Chicago and author of the book "Why Evolution Is True," pointed out that the U.S. is 33rd out of 34 countries who believe in evolution. Yet, there is so much evidence available now that it is perverse to deny evolution, he noted. Coyne's lucid, accessible explanation of evolution made him a favorite of this writer.

An Oldie But Goodie: Daniel Dennett never disappoints. This venerable professor at Tufts University, author of "Breaking The Spell" and "Darwin's Dangerous Idea," is now into studying--of all things--preachers who are secretly atheists, including former preachers and clergy still practicing but who are closeted nonbelievers. His fascinating talk about these hidden atheists told how preachers are taught to become "spinmeisters" in divinity school, how they learn to fend off criticism and awkward questions about the bible and how they are coached to put a spin on bible statements. A good "spin," Dennett pointed out, "is not a lie, is said with a straight face and is seen as profound—a 'deepity'" A "deepity," he noted, is something that *seems* to be profound but isn't.



Daniel Dennett

Most Uncloseted: His favorite convention speaker, said NYC Atheists' member Dr. Eric Stone of Chappaqua, NY, was Stephen Uhl, PhD, an ex-priest who converted to atheism, became a psychologist and has written a book, "Out of God's Closet." Uhl is now a practicing psychotherapist in the Chicago area and his motto is, "Yes, Virginia, there is Godless Goodness! Lots of it!" "Uhl had everybody spellbound," says Dr. Stone, "by his discussion of what is ethics, what is ethical behavior and how we can tell if we are truly being ethical. To answer this question, he suggested asking ourselves, are my actions harming anyone? Do they harm society?"

Most Persuasive: Sunsara Taylor, a New York-based writer for a newspaper called *Revolution*, who talked about abortion rights for women, intrigued our Dr. Eric Stone. "She said that the moral question of abortion has nothing to do with the baby—or whether or not the fetus is already a child," he reports. "The real moral question of abortion has to do with the freedom of the mother in her own life and with her not being forced to go along with the male-dominated, patriarchal prescription of behavior."

Most Helpful to Local Organizers: Dr. Eric Stone was also impressed with another New York lady (no male chauvinist, he), Kate Lovelady, who has served as a leader in various capacities for the Society for Ethical Culture. She gave invaluable advice from her personal experience on how to organize freethinkers. "She told us, in the John F. Kennedy mode, 'Don't think about what you can get from your new members, think about what your new members can get from you.'"

More Young People, More Profit

In short, the Burbank experience was on the whole a positive one, despite some organizing blips like the botched program-booklet-from-hell. “There were more young people there than I’ve ever seen at a convention before,” said NYC Atheists’ member Elaine Stone of Chappaqua, N.Y.



Stuart Bechman

Stuart Bechman, re-elected president of AAI, says that with 700 attendees, it was the highest AAI convention attendance to date. (However, I find it hard to believe that the 2007 Washington DC convention didn’t exceed that figure.) What’s more, this convention netted \$50,000 profit for AAI.

So What Can Be Improved?

Still, the New York delegates and others had some suggestions for next year’s convention:

1) Don’t spend so much time on budgets and bylaws during interminable board of directors meetings. Budgets and bylaws are not what we are about, says Ken Bronstein, president of NYC Atheists, who waited a whole day to present his substantive ideas to the board and still did not get the opportunity. On his agenda were exciting objectives like taxing churches, stopping Faith-Based Initiatives, an Atheist voting block and Atheist candidates. Surely those items are more important than disputing a \$200 budget item.

2) “More political strategy advice” was called for by Elaine Stone. Affiliates want to know, she says: Where should we spend our energy? How do we marshal our resources? We need to enlist organizing

experts to help us do this.

3) The glamour of the convention needs ratcheting up a notch, this writer feels. We all still remember in 2007, Margaret Downey bouncing out onstage in a sailor suit to the tune of “Anchors Aweigh” to announce next year’s convention on the good ship Queen Mary. A little good-natured theatricality wouldn’t hurt next year.

4) Central to an efficient convention are *details*. We can’t stress that enough. The biographical part of the now-notorious program booklet should have been in alphabetical order. Each speaker’s biography should tell where the speaker is from, his or her title and profession, and the title of their talk. Lack of attention to these details caused distress for many at this convention, particularly reporters, who had to blindly choose which of three simultaneous talks to cover for their publication.



Margaret Downey

5) Where were the accolades for hard workers in the atheist movement? Where are the Oscars of Atheism? To those who think giving out awards is unimportant and “boring,” we say, “Wait until you are given an award. You will be king of the hill for a day.” Volunteer workers—even paid workers—have never protested a public pat on the back. And the operative word here, of course, is “public.” The recipient of the award wants everybody to know how valuable they are. It is a small thing to ask. Do it. ☐

Thanks to Eric and Elaine Stone and Ken Bronstein for their contributions to this article.

**ATHEISM:
A NON-PROPHET ORGANIZATION**

**ATHEISTS ARE NOT JUST NONBELIEVERS,
WE ARE REALISTS**

New Group!

New York City Atheists Launching New Help Group

New York City Atheists Inc. announces a new atheist self-help group, LIVING WITHOUT RELIGION, led by Linda Ford Blaikie, LCSW, a New York City psychotherapist.

The new group will be loosely based on the nationwide series of self-help groups called *Recovering from Religion*, started last spring by Darrel W. Ray, Ed.D of Kansas City and now cropping up in cities all over the U.S.

Dr. Ray recognized that people who are separating from the religion they had been inculcated into as children needed the support of others who were in the same situation or who had already gone through it. Dr. Ray established nationwide support groups for those leaving their religion.

Small Groups

“We meet in small groups of six to 10 people in cities around the U.S., even the world. We follow simple guidelines that ensure meetings and events are productive and provide real support for those who attend. No one has all the answers, but we think there are answers to be found in openly sharing and discussing,” Dr. Ray says.

Psychotherapist Blaikie followed the progress of Dr. Ray’s groups, noted their rapid proliferation and felt that this was a process that could be adapted to New York.

In New York City, however, NYCA’s program planners noted that our community is very different from Kansas City, Cincinnati or Des Moines. Most of our members

have been atheists for a long time; thus, separation from the religious community is not as much an issue as how to deal with an urban world in which atheists are often unrecognized or misunderstood or how to contend with a population and environment where we are a closeted minority often separated from one another by more than six degrees of separation.

No Limit to Issues

“We will tackle problems like how to deal with a religious spouse or parents, or born-again children, how to contend with religious colleagues on the job, or a religious boss, or how to fit in at religious events that you are required to go to, like weddings and funerals,” says Blaikie.

“We’ll consider anything, actually, that troubles our participating members. I can envision us discussing how to find substitutes for the comforts of religion, how we can gain security and confidence without relying on god, how we can face death as atheists who don’t believe in an afterlife, how to become more assertive as atheists. The topics we’ll deal with will depend entirely on what psychological, workplace or family issues our participants bring to us.”

Because a small group seems to work best, the LIVING WITHOUT RELIGION group will accept twelve participants. To apply, please telephone the group’s facilitator, Jane Everhart, at 212-879-2687. Participation is free, but you must be a member of NYCA. Our first meeting will be held November 11 at 7 p.m., at a location disclosed upon acceptance into the group. □

NYC ATHEISTS FORUM

NYC Atheists has established a "forum" section on our website www.nyc-atheists.org

Participate in interesting discussions.

Forum coordinator:

John Wagner (jawagne@med.cornell.edu)

PROUD TO AN ATHEISTS

NYC ATHEISTS TWITTER & FACEBOOK

NYC Atheists has established Twitter and Facebook accounts.

Take a look and enroll.

http://twitter.com/nyc_atheists
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/New-York-City-Atheists/187304681037>

Twitter & Facebook Coordinator:
ALEXANDRA.SIDIROPOULOS@GMAIL.COM

Almost There: Matching Fund Campaign for Bus-Posters!

New York City Atheists announces with pride and gratitude that our donation-matching campaign to raise \$10,000 to extend our atheist bus poster ads into other parts of the New York City, including Queens and the Bronx, is well on its way to success. We have so far collected \$5,000 and reached the halfway mark to matching the anonymous donor's \$10,000 donation.

Let's go all the way and send those Atheist buses rolling through the Boroughs!

As we often say, "You don't have to believe in god to make the world better." But you already knew that. So what can you do? A DONATION IS A GOOD START.

You can contribute via PayPal on our web site, www.nyc-atheists.org. Or you can send your tax-deductible contribution check to: NYC Atheists, P.O. Box 20100, New York, NY, 10021-0061.



The Everhart Family
wishes to thank all those who donated to
The Cancer Society
in memory of April Everhart.
We feel that the best way to memorialize
a loved one is to put our efforts into
saving others from the same
untimely death.

**Jane Everhart
Allen Everhart
Brook Everhart Mark
Dean A. Everhart, M.D.**

NYCA Launches City's First Spanish-Speaking Atheist Meetup



The first-ever Spanish-speaking Atheist meetup group in New York City met on October 27 at the Stone Creek Bar with 13 enthusiastic founders. The group, led by NYCA member Juan Castro, will meet once a month and conduct its meetings entirely in Spanish.

**THE BIBLE HAS LOTS OF
CLERICAL ERRORS**

UPCOMING EVENTS AND MEETINGS

CALL: 212-330-6794 FOR LAST MINUTE CHANGES

NOVEMBER 2009

Nov.	8**	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch / Speaker
Nov.	11 *	Wed.	7:00 PM	NYCA Living Without Religion Group
Nov.	17***	Tue.	7:00 PM	NYCA Meet-Up
Nov.	19****	Thur.	6:30 PM	NYCA Monthly Meeting
Nov.	24*****	Tue.	7:00 PM	NYCA "Spanish Speaking" Meetup

DECEMBER 2009

Dec.	9*	Wed.	7:00 PM	NYCA Living Without Religion Group
Dec.	13**	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch / Speaker
Dec.	15***	Tue.	7:00 PM	NYCA Meet-Up
Dec.	19*****	Sat.	1:00 PM	NYCA Solstice Party
Dec.	29*****	Tue.	7:00 PM	NYCA "Spanish Speaking" Meetup

- * **Location: Call: Jane Everhart – 212-879-2687**
 ** **Press Box Restaurant & Pub – 932 Second Ave. (49/50th St.) – 2nd Floor**
 *** **Stone Creek Bar and Lounge – 140 East 27th St. (3rd/Lex)**
 **** **SLC Conference Center–352 Seventh Ave./16th Floor-(29/30th St.)**
 ***** **TBA**

NYCA CABLE SHOWS

Wednesdays:	5:30 PM	Atheism in History	(Manhattan Cable # 57)
	6:30 PM	This Week in Atheism	(Manhattan Cable # 57)
Thursdays:	7:00 PM	NYC Atheists	(Manhattan Cable # 67)
	7:30 PM	Atheists Book Club	(Manhattan Cable #67)

**NYCA
Cooper Station
P.O. Box 93
NY, NY 10276-0093**

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UPCOMING NOVEMBER EVENTS
CALL: 212-330-6794 FOR LAST MINUTE CHANGES

NOV. 8, 2009 (SUNDAY) 12:00 PM
NYC Atheists Brunch / Speaker

Speaker: J. Anderson Thomson, M.D.



Subject: Psychology of Religion: Why We Believe In god

Dr. Thomson is a psychiatrist in Charlottesville, Virginia. He has a private practice of general psychiatry and forensic psychiatry as well as serving as a staff psychiatrist at the University of Virginia's Institute of Law, Psychiatry and Public Policy and the Counseling and Psychological Services of the University of Virginia Student Health Services.

A dynamic speaker, Dr. Thomson will tell how religion hijacks some of our psychological needs to seduce us into the faith.

Location: Press Box Restaurant & Pub
932 Second Ave. (bet. 49th & 50th Streets)

Cost: Brunch, \$20 (includes selection of Buffet entrees and salad, one soft drink, coffee, tax, tip.)

NOV. 11, 2009 (TUESDAY) 7:00 PM
NYCA Living Without Religion Group

Group Leader: Linda Ford Blaikie, LCSW, a New York psychotherapist

NYC Atheists announces a new atheist self-help group, LIVING WITHOUT RELIGION, that will help participants deal with emotional, religious, family and job problems.

Because a small group seems to work best, the LIVING WITHOUT RELIGION group will accept twelve participants.

Location: Call Jane Everhart, at 212-879-2687

Cost: Participation is free, but you must be a member of NYCA to apply.

NOV. 17, 2009 (WEDNESDAY) 7:00 PM
NYC Atheists Meetup

Group Leaders: Alexandra Sidiropoulos
Michael Dorian



Subject: Alex & Michael will surprise us.

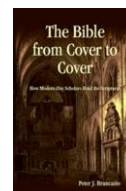
Location: Stone Creek Bar and Lounge
140 East 27th St. (3rd/Lex)

Cost: Free, but participants are expected to purchase a drink or food to compensate Stone Creek for use of their room.

NOV. 19, 2009 (THURSDAY) 6:30 PM
NYCA MONTHLY MEETING

Speaker: Peter Brancazio, PhD.

Subject: Was Jesus Christ Invented By A Committee?



Dr. Peter Brancazio teaches "The Bible from Cover to Cover" at Long Island University where he thoroughly amazes and delights students with his fascinating insights and in-depth knowledge.

Location: SLC Conference Center-352 Seventh Ave./16th Floor-(29/30th St.)

Cost: We ask for a donation of \$5 to help cover the cost of room rental

NOV. 24, 2009 (TUESDAY) 7:00 PM
NYCA "SPANISH SPEAKING" GROUP

Location: TBA

Cost: Free

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RENEW / JOIN NYC ATHEISTS

Through our programs and activities, we have worked to bring awareness of our principles, our vision and, above all, of our existence as atheists. We have done it through our Website, our Meetups, our Cable Shows, our Library and Book Club, our Street Tabling and our Newsletter to enhance our visibility--all of which are funded by your membership.

With the continued growth of our membership, we gather strength in numbers and will more effectively counteract the threat of a looming theocracy.

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NYC ATHEISTS — 2010 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

First Name: _____ Last Name _____

Street Address: _____ Apt No.: _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email: _____@_____ Phone: (____) _____ - _____

NYC Atheists Inc. is a non-profit (501c) non-partisan, educational association with these purposes and goals:

1. To promote the total and absolute separation of church and state
2. To educate and inform the public about Atheism
3. To provide a forum for discussion about Atheism
4. To develop and engage in educational, cultural, charitable and social activities that are beneficial to the members of the NYC Atheists Inc., the Atheist community and the community at large.

YOUR 2010 MEMBERSHIP DUES ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE

Basic __ \$ 25 Friend __ \$ 100 Sustainer __ \$ 250 Patron __ \$ 500 Benefactor __ \$ 1000 Life __ \$ 5000

Signature: _____ Date: _____

CHECK PAYABLE TO: NYC ATHEISTS INC. SEND APPLICATION TO:

**NYC ATHEISTS INC. – MEMBERSHIP
COOPER STATION P.O. Box 93
NY, NY 10276-0093**