



## **Evolution for Dummies a talk by Howard Elgison**

4:00PM March 20, 2005  
Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street, Charleston

In their attacks on evolution, Creationists rely heavily on the lack of knowledge of their audiences. Most people do not have the scientific backgrounds to understand how egregiously Creationists misrepresent both the facts and the theory of evolution. In addition, they do not understand how weak and unscientific both “Creation Science,” and its recent incarnation, “Intelligent Design” really are. Howard Elgison has devised some entertaining ways of demonstrating the basic tenets of evolution (and the way science, in general, works) as well as some relatively easy ways of discrediting creationism. In his talk, he will explain:

- The basic tenets of evolution as both fact and theory
- The difference between evolution and abiogenesis
- How Creationists misrepresent the ideas of evolution and abiogenesis
- How the Creationists’ main objection to evolution, namely that the cellular structures of living organisms are far too complex to have come about by natural means, can easily be shown to be false
- How there is no single coherent Creationist hypothesis
- How the various Creationist hypotheses, which say nothing more than “God did it,” do not stand up to scientific scrutiny nor do they advance human knowledge

*Howard Elgison began life as a small Jewish child, and, after a lifetime of unrepentant heresy, has achieved the status of Heathen, First Class. Although formally educated as an engineer, complete with personality removal, he has managed to learn enough about evolutionary biology to be on the short list of candidates for the anti-Christ. While awaiting the Rapture, an event which he is greatly anticipating, he spends most of his free time looking for his car keys. In real life, Howard has dabbled in the field of electrical engineering while authoring a book (*The Unholy City*), a couple of plays (*Frankly Charleston*, *TV Dinner Theater*), and magazine publishing (*The Eclectic Eel*).*

## Second Round of Get-Acquainted Dinners to Be Held Sam Moskow

The first set of Get-Acquainted Dinners concluded in January and participants agreed that they were a success. The purpose of the dinners is to bring together new and potential members with current members to share three meals over a period of two to three months. There are no formal programs; the discussion is free-flowing and wide-ranging. Current members act as the hosts for the first meal. After that, it is up to the group to decide when and where to meet. The first group met at members homes, but the venue could be a restaurant, or now that spring is close, a picnic at a park or the beach would be a possibility.

Anyone interested in participating can contact Sam Moskow at [smoskow@knology.net](mailto:smoskow@knology.net) or 556-4490.

## A God-fearing pastor's wife from Michigan swaps places with the godless wife of an Atheist in Georgia

Surely you all remember Reginald Finley, who hosts a show on his Website under the name "The Infidel Guy"! As it turns out, it is his wife, Amber Finley, who was selected by ABC-TV to "swap families" with the wife of a Christian minister. The show will air at 10PM on March 16th. We leave

it up to you to decide for yourself whether this is good TV. However, one thing is certain, this show will be a topic of conversation among those who want to rid society of unfair prejudices against atheists, as well as among those who would prefer to rid society of atheists instead.

## Editorial Response Herb Silverman

In the February issue of the Separationist, the editors offer their support for the right of a Georgia school district to mandate stickers on science texts that say: "This textbook contains material on evolution. Evolution is a theory, not a fact, regarding the origin of living things. This material should be approached with an open mind, studied carefully and critically considered."

The rationale of the editors is twofold: (1) The statement is true. Evolution is a theory and we should approach all questions about how we know things with an open mind and a critical approach. (2) Religious parents who don't get their sticker may pull children out of the public school "melting pot" and either home school them or send them to private religious schools where they will likely become religious fundamentalists.

I would certainly like to see all material approached with an open mind, studied carefully and critically considered. However, for the state

to single out evolution alone gives credibility to the "just a theory" crowd and further discredits the public perception of the validity of evolution. Though I agree that we would be better served with fewer students in private religious schools, I worry that the teaching of evolution is already so watered down that many public school students are not learning much more about it than students in religious schools.

Finally, the editors point out that the SHL principles encourage negotiation and compromise to resolve differences. So here is my compromise. Put the stickers on science texts as long as churches agree to put the following sticker on their holy texts: "This book, written in a pre-scientific era, contains material about supernatural beings whose existence is unproved and controversial. This material should be approached with an open mind, studied carefully and critically considered."

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## Editorial Response

Scott Barton

In your recent February "Opinion" in the Separationist, you explored the controversy over the evolution stickers in Georgia High Schools. After a brief review of the problem, you recommended we not make such a big deal out of the stickers. After all, they clearly noted that "evolution is a theory, not a fact" and that it should "be studied carefully and critically considered." On the surface, both statements seem reasonable. However, I believe the proponents of these stickers have a nefarious intent that went unexplored in your article.

First, it's clear that the intention of the sticker was to cast the term "theory" in terms of its more colloquial meaning, such as in, "Well, that's your theory!". But biologists don't use the word in that sense at all. Rather, they are referring to the very best theory about the origins of life given mountains of evidence provided by thousands of investigators for hundreds of years! Allowing the religious right to define what biologists mean by "theory" is a slippery slope indeed.

In a similar vein, to say that "Evolution is a theory, not a fact" is literally true. But it creates a false dichotomy between the two in the minds of impressionable children. It only gives the surface appearance of being unbiased. There is no mention that "the facts" overwhelmingly support evolution over all other theories of how living organisms came to be. In areas heavily dominated by the religious right, high school teachers often avoid teaching evolution partially or entirely in order to avoid the wrath of fundamentalist parents, thus effectively bypassing the pious recommendation that evolution be "studied carefully and critically considered". The purpose of such stickers is to advance a theological idea. We must look beyond the literal denotation to the connotation that underlies it. Such statements do not belong in our science textbooks.

One could actually argue that there is a moral imperative to teach the theory of evolution. In one small area, the study of evolution and the practical application of the information learned has saved millions of lives. The emergence of drug resistant microorganisms in hospitals and in countries all over the world, (such as methicillin resistant staph

aureus, drug resistant tuberculosis, drug resistant malaria, etc.) is due to natural selection, driven by human decisions. These organisms threaten the lives of thousands of people each day. The suffering of the victims is real, and tragic. There is good evidence that when physicians are educated about how the process of evolution works, and they make the appropriate choice of antibiotics, that fewer people get sick with difficult or impossible to treat conditions and more lives are saved.

Of course, speaking of something as obvious as antibiotic resistance is not evidence for the origin of species in general, but even this well accepted idea frightens ideologues on the religious right. Google "evolution and antibiotic resistance" to get a sampling of how they distort the facts to "prove" that antibiotic resistance doesn't mean evolution really happens.

The flip side is that ignoring, downplaying, or casting doubt on the fact that our actions as human beings have an evolutionary impact that rebounds upon us is foolish, misguided, and ultimately immoral. The first thing we have to know is that evolution happens! The second is that our actions can cause organisms to evolve. The third is that we must take personal responsibility for those actions. A physician giving an antibiotic, a farmer using pesticides, a patient demanding antibiotics, a legislator passing an agriculture bill - all need to understand the potential evolutionary consequences of their actions in order to make moral decisions about how to proceed. When we teach our children about evolution, we are giving them one of the essential tools needed to make such decisions.



## SHL Discussion Forum Nick Wright

Did you know that there is an easy way to communicate with your fellow SHL members and keep up with relevant news and current events at the same time? Just go to the SHL website at [lowcountry.humanists.net](http://lowcountry.humanists.net) and click on "Discussion." There you will find the SHL Discussion Forum, a convenient and easy to use message board system. You don't even need to register to post messages!

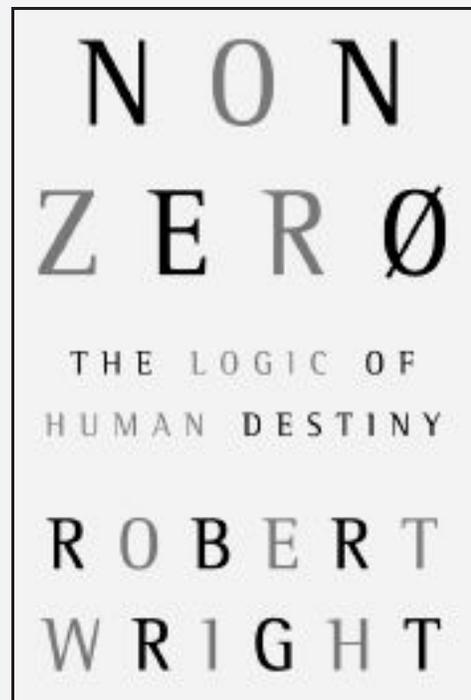
Click on "Open Discussion," to enter the gen-

eral chat area, or catch up on recent happenings in "News and Current Events," where recent topics have included the fight over displaying the Ten Commandments going to the US Supreme Court, Evangelicals gathering to iron out their plan for America, and even a story about how some Christians fear a new school lunch system is a sign of the End Times.

Come join in on the discussion!

## Humanist Book Discussion Group Loretta Haskell

The Humanist Book Club will meet on Sunday, March 27 from 3:00 – 5:00 at the West Ashley *Barnes and Noble* on Sam Rittenberg Blvd. to discuss Robert Wright's book, *Nonzero*. Wright's premise of the book is that as our world grows and evolves it is possible for us to find ways in which we can all win. Bill Clinton commented on the book at the Mayflower Hotel in September of 2000 and stated "...the argument of the book is that, notwithstanding all the terrible things that happened in the 20th century – the abuses of science by the Nazis, the abuses of organization by the communists, all the things that continue to be done in the name of religious or political purity – essentially, as societies grow more and more connected, and we become more interdependent, one with the other, we are forced to find more and more non-zero-sum solutions. That is, ways in which we can all win." Everyone is welcome to attend the discussion regardless of having read the book. Howard Elgison will facilitate.



*Inspiration need not be used only in a religious context. The source of my inspiration at the February SHL adopt-a-highway program was Kathryn Prevost. At 80 years old, she resumed her regular trash pickup two months after breaking her hip. Were my theology different, I might call it a miracle. But it is Kathryn, not a deity, who deserves all the credit. None of us can possibly understand what she went through as a Holocaust Concentration Camp survivor. Kathryn continues to be a sweet and active humanist and an inspiration for all of us.*  
- Herb Silverman

## Licensing Reason by Bill Davis

*[This article reproduced with permission of the Charleston City Paper. It was originally published in the 16 Feb 2005 issue of that paper.]*

Back in January [the Charleston City Paper] reported that fewer than 50 South Carolinians had opted to pay \$34 for an "In Reason We Trust" specialty state license plate for their cars. Ironically, the story has enjoyed a small afterlife of its own in cyberspace, getting reprinted in a number of atheist/secular humanist online newsletters and blogs. One man who ran across the story, Damon Kempfski of Conway, recently went into a DMV office to buy the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry-sponsored plate for his SUV. But when he got to the counter, he says, the clerk not only refused to give him a godless plate, saying they were out and he would have to go through Columbia to get one, but began to proselytize to him about his need for a faith in the almighty. Sensing the clerk was truly concerned about his

eternal soul, Kempfski wasn't too insulted, even though as a former paratrooper, he feels like he's fought for the right to put whatever message he wants on his license plate. The clerk could not be reached for comment. DMV spokesperson Beth Parks confirmed last week that on the day Kempfski went in for his plate, there were actually two in that office, and that it is inappropriate for clerks to share their faith with a customer or try and convert them. She said there is at least one "Reasonable" plate available in every DMV office in the state. Thank God.



### It's That Time Again...

It's time again for you to send in your membership fees for 2005. Your dues support the mission of the SHL by helping us to print and distribute this newsletter, provide refreshments at our regular meetings, present our guest speakers with honoraria, and consider further ways to get the secular humanist message out into the community! Please complete and return the following form with your check:

#### Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry MEMBERSHIP FORM

Status:     Renewal                       New Member

Level:       Individual (\$24)     Family (\$36)  
                  Benefactor (\$50)

Your Name: .....

Your Address: .....  
.....

E-mail Address: .....

Please send a check payable to the "Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry" to  
**Doris Hoten / SHL Treasurer / 113 Lancer Drive / Summerville, SC 29485**

**THE SEPARATIONIST**  
Newsletter of the  
Secular Humanists  
of the Lowcountry

Editors:  
Alex and Laura Kasman

**SHL Calendar**

**March 16, 2005:** *Atheist featured on Wife-Swap Show* – Amber Finley, co-host of the Infidel Guy Show, will be featured as an atheist who switches places with a minister's wife in the television show airing 10:00pm ET on ABC.

**March 20, 2005:** *SHL Meeting* – Our guest speaker will be SHL's own Howard Elgison. Join us at 4:00PM at Gage Hall on Archdale Street.

**March 27, 2005:** *Book Discussion Group* – Discussing the book *Non-Zero: The Logic of Human Destiny* by Robert Wright. The club will meet at the West Ashley Barnes & Noble from 3:00 - 5:00 and Howard Elgison will facilitate.

**March 25 - 27, 2005 :** *31st National Convention of American Atheists* – To be held in Philadelphia, PA. For more information <http://www.atheists.org/convention/>

**March 25-27, 2005:** *National Convention of Atheist Alliance International* – To be held in Los Angeles, CA. Speakers include Penn and Teller, Richard Dawkins, and Julia Sweeney. For more information <http://atheistalliance.org/convention2005.html>

**JOIN THE SHL**

The Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry (SHL) is a group of freethinkers who believe in the humanist philosophy. Members come primarily from the Charleston, SC area. The SHL is affiliated with American Atheists, American Humanist Association, Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, Atheist Alliance, Council for Secular Humanism, and the SC Progressive Network.

Annual tax-exempt membership fees are \$24 (individual) or \$36 (couple or family); additional donations are always welcome. Members receive this newsletter and can participate in activities planned for the Lowcountry. For more information consult our Webpage at:

[lowcountry.humanists.net](http://lowcountry.humanists.net)

**CONTRIBUTE...**

Please contact the editors with any questions or comments about this publication. Contributions of short articles, news items, letters-to-the-editor or other information of interest to SHL members are always appreciated. Write to us at [newsletter@lowcountry.humanists.net](mailto:newsletter@lowcountry.humanists.net) or use the contact information at the bottom of page 2.

On the Web at [HTTP://LOWCOUNTRY.HUMANISTS.NET](http://LOWCOUNTRY.HUMANISTS.NET)

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