

September 2019  
Volume 29  
Number 7

## The Immortality Delusion: Technology Won't Save You! September Public Meeting

Technology will save us all, someday. We'll upload or download ourselves, or whatever they call it then, and abandon these achy, fragile meat suits for a long life of leisure. Or maybe we'll figure out how to preserve these bodies and keep them worth living in. Whichever. Our big breakthrough is just ten years out, maybe twenty. We just have to survive long enough to get there.

Of course, the "big breakthrough" was due ten or twenty years ago, and we're not significantly closer to living forever in any form than we were then. PZ Myers has made a habit of deflating our fantasies about aliens and our simple stories about evolution. Join us September 29 at the Rondo Community Outreach Library as he does the same to our dreams of eternal life.



PZ Myers speaking at Skepticon 7  
Photo by: [Mark Schierbecker](#)

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### Sunday, September 29, 2019

1:00–1:15 p.m.: Social  
1:15–1:45 p.m.: Business Meeting  
1:45–2:00 p.m.: Break  
2:00–3:30 p.m.: Program

4:00 p.m.: Dinner

Rondo Community Library  
461 Dale St N  
St Paul, MN 55104

Ishita Ramen  
712 University Ave W #103  
St Paul, MN 55104



## President's Column Secular Rituals

By *Ben Blanchard*

Greetings fellow MNA-ers  
and assorted other well-wishers.

I recently attended the 11th annual Scepticon convention, the 6th Scepticon I have had the joy of attending. Having attended this Missouri hosted national conference every year since Scepticon 4 (except Scepticon 6, when I was abroad), it has become a highlight of my year. This ritual, almost like a pilgrimage, is a reminder of my past, as well as the history of the modern Atheist/Secularist/Humanist movement. More than that though, it is almost like a family reunion, where I can spend time with loved ones who live across the country, sharing drinks with minor celebrities and new friends, and remembering times and people now past. For me, it is also a driving force to make our community better than it is now, a more accessible, more inclusive, more vibrant community, with a positive attitude in spite of the horrors and disappointments of the mod-

ern world. I suppose when I attended my first Scepticon, as a young pre-med college student who finally found his clan, the world was a more hopeful place, and every year when I return, it is a reminder that we can do wonderful things when we come together.

One of the more powerful talks this year was given by my friend Miri Mogilevsky, titled Secular Ritual Saved My Life, describing her use of secular rituals to cope with her, then her mother's, severe illnesses. Miri not only addressed the science behind using rituals and symbols to better cope with difficult situations, but then went through a framework on how to responsibly build new effective secular rituals. As I was listening to her presentation, I remembered how recently we, as a board, decided to bring more structure and community to our monthly business meetings. For us, this meant asking for life-events that we could celebrate as a community (such as birthdays and anniversaries), as well as directly offering a space for any member to speak to the group at large. But now I wonder what other sorts of secular rituals could help us become more effective as individuals and bond more as a community.

Continued on page 5

## Cryptogram

By *George Francis Kane*

Vpkwmpfdh, mwtm. Wmh wq abh dptnhd

ebfnb dholh abh Qohmnb fm yxpnh wq p dapah

ohxfcfwm.

—Pvsowdh Sfhonh, *Uhlfx'd Ufnafwmpok*



## News and Notes Testing the *Lemon* Test

By *George Francis Kane*

Conservatives had been looking forward to the Supreme Court session that ended in June more hopefully than to any other in memory. Trump's appointment of Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh guaranteed them an ideological majority that would be strongly motivated to overturn decades of progressive decisions that had established legal protections for individual rights. Important to a large segment of Trump's electoral base is gutting the Establishment Clause that secures the separation of church and state.

In the consolidated cases of *The American Legion v. The American Humanist Association* and the *Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission v. American Humanist Association*, religious conservatives believed that they had a vehicle for overturning the *Lemon* test and turning the government into the pliant tool of the politically dominant religion. The conservative bloc on the Court spoke of the need to bring "clarity" to Establishment Clause law.

The bad news is that the finding of the trial court that the Bladensburg Cross in Pennsylvania violates the constitution was overturned. Justice Alito, writing for the majority, concluded:

*Even if the monument's original purpose was infused with religion, the passage of time may obscure that sentiment and the monument may be retained for the sake of its historical significance or its place in a common cultural heritage.... Familiarity itself can become a reason for preservation.... (W)hen time's passage imbues a religiously expressive monument, symbol, or practice with this kind of familiarity and historical significance, removing it may no longer appear neutral, especially to the local community. The passage of time thus gives rise to a strong presumption of constitutionality.*

In other words, a religious monument becomes inoculated by age. We can raise Establishment Clause objections if the government is considering putting up a new religious monument, but once it is up for a few years, it is immune to

any Establishment Clause test.

Alito's reasoning on this point is backward. If the passage of time hides from us the reasons that the monument was put up, we should not be able to draw a presumption that there was no intent to endorse religion. We must instead address the question of whether it has, in fact, promoted religion. "Familiarity" should be no "reason for preservation," as the offense given by the endorsement of religion becomes more acute as the religious composition of the country becomes progressively more non-religious. If removing it seems more hostile toward religion, failure to remove it becomes more hostile to those who do not share the majority's religious beliefs.

Alito writes "Few would say that California is attempting to convey a religious message by retaining the many city names, like Los Angeles and San Diego, given by the original Spanish settlers. But it would be something else entirely if the State undertook to change those names." In fact, some cities do play on their religious history to promote religion, such as police departments displaying historic crosses on badges and on decals on police cars. And was it not naked religious promotion when Minnesota changed the name of its capital from Pig's Eye Landing to Saint Paul?

All that the court was able to agree upon was that religious monuments are OK if they are old. Alito's opinion was joined by Roberts, Thomas, Gorsuch, Kavanaugh, Breyer and Kagan. Only Ginsburg, joined by Sotomayor, dissented. The rest of Alito's opinion, which would have overturned *Lemon*, did not receive majority support, losing Thomas, Gorsuch and Kagan. Thomas wrote an opinion that the 14th Amendment should not have extended the Establishment Clause to the states. Gorsuch wrote that the objectors to the Bladensburg cross should have been denied standing to sue. Kagan wrote a separate concurrence to note that, although "rigid application of the *Lemon* test does not solve every Establishment Clause problem," courts should still focus on the purpose and effect of government action in deciding whether it violates the Constitution.

Like the Bladensburg cross, at least for now, the *Lemon* test still stands.

## Secular Ethics Discussion Group More Smart than Intellectual

By *George Francis Kane*

A monthly discussion group started up in February to examine a branch of philosophy, ethics, from the perspective of atheists. The meetings are announced in the Meetup groups of both Minnesota Atheists and the Humanists MN.

There is minimal “homework” before each meeting, to introduce the essential concepts for the discussion. Typically, this is a short video or two; for August’s discussion it was a couple of articles from Free Inquiry. No one is ever too snowed under by arcane technical jargon to enjoy and participate in the discussions.

The meetings began with a survey of meta-ethics and the types of ethical theories. In March the discussion was of the ethical implications of the atheist conclusion, focusing on the features of theories not available to atheists, such as Divine Command Theory and Natural Law. In April we covered some basic concepts of utilitarianism. In May we experimented with a different format and had a debate between members of the group on the resolution that human exploitation of animals for food and clothing is unethical. In June we returned to utilitarianism and discussed the decision-making process, beginning with Jeremy Bentham’s Felicific Calculus. In July we discussed a very different structure of ethical theory called “Virtue Theory.” In August, we discussed the previously mentioned articles from Free Inquiry proposing a evolutionary psychological foundation for ethics. The September discussion will be led by Nancy Bradshaw on the right to die. To borrow a slogan from the Philosophy Talk radio program, in these discussions we question everything except your intelligence.

Meetings are on the third Thursday of each month, from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. in the party room of the Larpenteur Estates apartment complex in St. Paul. Beverages and snacks are provided.



## Treasury Report May & June 2019

By *Chris Matthews*

### Radio Fund Donations

\$200	George Kane
\$50	Nancy Ruhland
\$30	Steve Petersen
\$25	Jim Barri
\$20	Tim Berry
\$20	Cynthia Flaig
\$144	cash, 5th Sunday fundraiser
<b>\$489</b>	<b>Subtotal</b>

### General/Visibility Fund Donations

\$100	Nancy Hertz
\$100	Mandy & Ross Meisner
\$65	Leonard Sojka
\$50	Edward Lubinski
\$50	Arthur Searcy
\$30	Angela Stehr & Mark Friedl
\$25	David Hahn
\$10	Douglas Earl
\$74	YourCause
\$20	PayPal Giving Fund
\$18	AmazonSmile
<b>\$542</b>	<b>Subtotal</b>

### Building Fund Donations

**\$0 Subtotal**

**\$1,031 Total Donations**

### Expenses

\$1,640	Radio Show
\$950	Donations
\$739	Coffee Mugs
\$506	Newsletter
\$130	Other
<b>\$3,965</b>	<b>Total Expenses</b>

### Current Building Fund

**\$142,033**

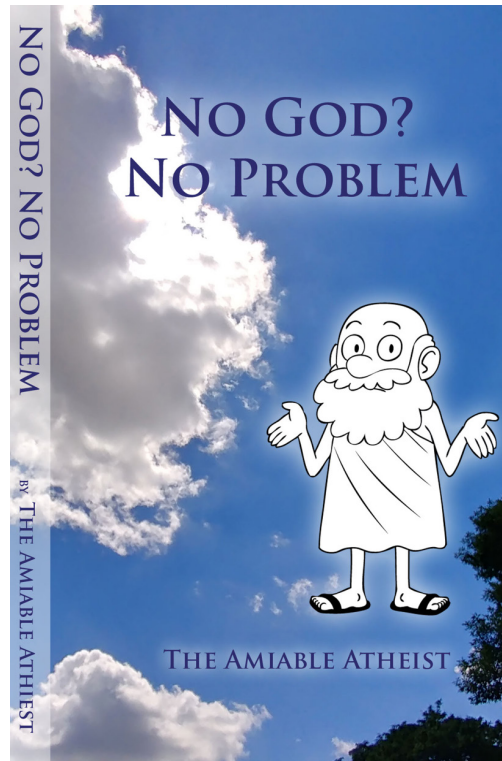
## Book Review: *No God? No Problem*

By George Francis Kane

*No God? No Problem* is a light-hearted new book by “The Amiable Atheist” that is brief but tightly packed with laugh lines. Each chapter can be read in just a few minutes. Some are bullet lists, others are skits. One chapter is a compilation of excerpts from “God’s Advice Column.” This book is not intended to provide arguments that will convert Christians, although the critique of God-believing America is disturbingly honest. Rather, it is just for laughs.

The abundant cartoons by David Camacho are appealingly drawn, and always worth a chuckle. Most of them merely visually present something in the text, but a few add significantly to it. When the text referred to the nude picture of John Lennon and Yoko Ono on the cover of the “Imagine” album, the accompanying

cartoon showed John and Yoko in the Garden of Eden, with an irate God looking down from a cloud asking “How did **those** heathens get in my garden?”



The book would have benefited greatly from a good proof-reading. There were numerous cases of the wrong word, probably the result of an overly aggressive auto-complete program. But one annoying error that recurred throughout was the phrase “If there **was** a God” instead of the subjunctive **were**.

The book is an easy read, which most readers will complete in a single sitting. I recommend instead just reading a chapter at a time, which will only take minutes. The laugh lines are too rapid to appreciate all at once, but a small bite at a time will brighten your day.

There is no reason to even read it cover-to-cover. Simply open it to any random page and enjoy.

*No God? No Problem* was published this year by Breadan Publishing.

### Get Famous (Sort of)

You too can become published by simply submitting something to The Minnesota Atheist newsletter:

- |  |                                      |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| Have a blog?                               | <i>Let us reprint it.</i>            |
| Have an opinion?                           | <i>Let us hear it.</i>               |
| Want to review a movie/TV show/book etc.?  | <i>Give us your take.</i>            |
| Enjoyed a gathering or event?              | <i>Tell us about it.</i>             |
|  | <i>You can also send us a photo.</i> |
| Have a comment about something we printed? | <i>Don't hold back.</i>              |

Just send your input to [editor@mnatheists.org](mailto:editor@mnatheists.org) and we'll do the rest.

### Rituals continued from page 2

If you have thoughts on secular rituals we could do, or other, better ways we could run our meetings, please reach out to me or any member of our board. As always, I want everyone to know that your feedback is essential to making Minnesota Atheists a better organization. If you have any thoughts or suggestions, you can always feel free to send me an email at: [pres@mnatheists.org](mailto:pres@mnatheists.org) or talk with me at an event. I want to know how we can better serve you, and Minnesota Atheists.

# The “Nones” That You Know

Irving Berlin

By *Milo Grika*

Irving Berlin (born Israel Isidore Beilin, May 11, 1888–September 22, 1989) was an American composer and lyricist. He wrote hundreds of songs including “White Christmas” and “God Bless America.”

“All three of us [daughters] would share our father’s agnosticism and sidestep our husbands’ faiths.”

—Mary Ellin Barrett (Berlin’s daughter)

## Cryptogram Answer

Mayonnaise, noun. One of the sauces which serve the French in place of a state religion.

Ambrose Bierce, *Devil’s Dictionary*

## Minnesota Atheists Membership and Donations

### Membership Levels

- One-year student membership \$10
- One-year individual membership \$35
- Three-year individual membership \$90
- One-year household membership \$45
- Three-year household membership \$115
- One-year sustaining membership \$75
- Three-year sustaining membership \$200
- Life membership \$600

### Donation Funds

General Fund \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Building Fund \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Radio Fund \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Donations are tax deductible. Membership fees are deductible for the amount beyond their fair market value.

Student memberships include a subscription to the PDF version of *The Minnesota Atheist* delivered by email. All other memberships include a subscription to the printed version delivered by postal mail. If you would prefer the PDF version delivered by email, please check the box and provide your email address.

Please make checks payable to:

**Minnesota Atheists.**

Students, please enclose a copy of your fee statement or school identification.

Minnesota Atheists  
PO Box 120304  
New Brighton, MN 55112

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Just email newsletter    Email address \_\_\_\_\_  
(Required for student memberships and email subscriptions)

## Upcoming Events

**Atheists Talk Community Brunch** 1st Sunday of every month at 10:30 a.m.,  
Q. Cumbers, 7465 France Ave S, Edina.

**Atheist/Agnostic Alcoholics Anonymous** Every Sunday from 6:00–7:00 p.m. and Wednesday from  
7:00–8:00 p.m.,  
Health Recovery Center building, lower floor, 3249 Hennepin Ave, Minneapolis.  
Based on A.A., minus beliefs in any form of a God.

**Freethought Toastmasters Meeting** 1st and 3rd Monday of every month from 6:30–8:00 p.m.,  
Larpenteur Estates Party Room, 1280 Larpenteur Ave W, St Paul. [freethought.toastmastersclubs.org](http://freethought.toastmastersclubs.org)

**Minnesota Atheists Board Meeting** 1st Wednesday of every month at 6:30 p.m.,  
Amherst H Wilder Foundation, 451 Lexington Pkwy N, St Paul.  
All Minnesota Atheists members are welcome.

**Godless Gamers** Every Thursday at 6:00 p.m.,  
Fantasy Flight Games Center, 1975 County Rd B2, Roseville.

**Freethought Dinner Social** 2nd and 4th Monday of every month from 5:00–7:00 p.m.,  
Davanni's, 8605 Lyndale Ave S, Bloomington.

**Freethinking Females** 2nd Monday of every month at 7:00 p.m.,  
Claddagh Irish Pub, 7890 Main St N, Maple Grove  
And 4th Monday of every month at 7:30 p.m.,  
Sweeney's Saloon, 96 North Dale Street, St. Paul  
**NOTE:** Two different locations.

Shattering the myth that atheist groups are male dominated with a females-only event.

**Volunteer Food Packing** 2nd Thursday of every month at 1:00 p.m.,  
The Food Group, 8501 54th Ave N, New Hope.

**Secular Ethics Discussion Group** 3rd Thursday of every month from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. in the  
party room of the Larpenteur Estates apartment complex in St. Paul.

**Blasphemer's Brunch** 2nd Saturday of every month at 10:30 a.m.,  
Pizza Lucé, 800 W 66th St, Richfield.

**Bowling for Deities** Last Saturday of every month at noon,  
Memory Lanes, 2520 26th Ave S, Minneapolis.

For more events, visit [www.meetup.com/minnesota-atheists](http://www.meetup.com/minnesota-atheists) 

## 8 The Minnesota Atheist

Minnesota Atheists

### Positive Atheism in action since 1991

Minnesota Atheists is dedicated to building a positive atheist community that actively promotes secular values through educational programs, social activities, and participation in public affairs.

#### Minnesota Atheist Board of Directors

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#### Minnesota Atheists Goals

Minnesota Atheists practices positive, inclusive, active, friendly, neighborhood atheism in order to provide a community for atheists, educate the public about atheism, and promote separation of state and church.

#### Minnesota Atheists Media

##### Public Relations Chair

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#### Minnesota Atheists Affiliations

Atheist Alliance of America

Atheist Alliance International

American Atheists

The American Humanist Association

Council for Secular Humanism

The International Humanist and Ethical Union

Secular Coalition for America

#### Minnesota Atheists Membership

Regular members: 183

Life members: 45

Meetup members: 3,045

#### Minnesota Atheists Honorary Members

Hector Avalos, PhD

Dan Barker

Gerald Erickson, PhD

Annie Laurie Gaylor

Dick Hewetson

Robert M. Price, PhD



The Minnesota Atheist — September 2019

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