

## Meetings

### Roundtable

Nov. 4, 2007  
Pellissippi State  
Goins Admin Bldg.  
10:30 AM

Presenter:  
Vera Maya

Topic: US & Cuba Relations:  
A History

A brief historical overview of U.S. and Cuba relations:  
- Batista and pre-Castro Cuba  
- Implications of Castro's revolution and its impact on the Cuban population  
- Post-Castro American policy towards Cuba and evaluation of the policy and  
- Post-Castro future of Cuba

### No Book Club Presentation Instead

Nov. 11, 2007  
Pellissippi State  
Goins Admin Bldg.  
10:30 AM

Speaker: Joe Barnhart,  
University of North Texas (retired)

Topic:  
Beliefs as a Psychological  
Phenomenon

If we can admit it is possible for us to be rational even when some of our beliefs are false, then perhaps we can pass judgment on some of our neighbors' claims and beliefs without impugning their native intelligence or even their wisdom in general.

### Philosophy

Nov. 18, 2007  
Pellissippi State  
10:30 AM

Presenter: Dr. Ralph Isler  
Oakridge National Laboratory

Topic:  
The Greatest Story Ever Told - The Origin and Evolution of the Universe

### Key Points From God the Failed Hypothesis

Victor Stenger in his book, God, the Failed Hypothesis, makes a very important point. He begins by quoting the United States National Academy of Sciences.

“Science is a way of knowing about the natural world through natural causes. It is limited to explaining the natural world through natural causes. Science can say nothing about the supernatural. Whether God exists or not is a question about which science is neutral.”

This type of statement leaves science open to claims of dogmatism. It states that science will not consider the possibility of or much less examine all aspects of the universe. In addition, it is not a correct statement. Scientists have and continue to scientifically explore supernatural claims and hypothesis.

There has been much scientific testing of paranormal claims. (Some not to well done.) There is also current research on the power of prayer. Some of these studies have actually been done well and with good controls. (The results, when done well, have been unresponsive of the supernatural claims and hypotheses. The important aspect in regards to science is that even when these experiments were done by religious scientists, those who remained true to good science have accepted the negative results of the experiments. (They haven't necessarily rejected their faith though.)

The difference between being dogmatic and scientific is that (as Stenger states it) “When scientists express their objections to claims such as evidence for intelligent design in the universe, they are not being dogmatic. They are simply applying the same standard they would for any other extraordinary claim.”

His point is that methodological naturalism can be applied without “dogmatic attachment to metaphysical naturalism.”

I might also add that this statement about science being only about the natural world slips right down the slimy slope of non-overlapping magisteria. Science does have much to say about ethics, feelings and beliefs as well as creationism and psychic claims. As Stenger points out, such statements are not just wrong, they are also a trap that leaves the scientific community in an unresolvable position.

Stenger demonstrates in the book how science can show that any claims about God or gods interacting with reality are “testable, verifiable, and falsifiable by the established methods of science.” He also shows how all such claims of the major religions are so improbable as to be essentially impossible.

“...if the Biblical record can be proven fallible in areas of fact that can be verified, then it is hardly to be trusted in areas where it cannot be tested.”

Archer L. Gleason (from God the Failed Hypothesis)

### **Book Club Schedule**

December: God is Not Great by Hitchens.

January: Stumbling on Happiness  
by Daniel Gilbert

February: Economics as Religion  
by Robert H. Nelson

March: Atheist Universe: The Thinking Person's Answer to Christian Fundamentalism by David Mills with a forward by Dorion Sagan

## **Bible and Heaven? Or Hard-core Iron Age materialism?**

“From the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for even in any thing that is done under the sun.”

Ecclesiastes 9: 5-6 King James Version

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## **An interesting Christian activity in Tennessee**

This is from News of the Weird in Funny Times.

“The periodic Christian Nudist Convocation took place in July”... in Tennessee. One attendee “compared his work to missionary work: ‘Some people get sent to Africa, some people get sent to South America, and the Lord was like, ‘I want you to go to nudist resorts’ and I’m like “Wow, what an assignment.””

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## **Billy Graham Strikes (out) Again**

In a recent column the letter was from a student who wants to do medical research. He said that a famous scientist recently stated that he was glad his family didn’t raise him to be religious because it would have gotten in the way of being a true scientist. This worried the writer.

Graham’s response was, of course, that the scientist was wrong. He states that real question is whether science and religion are in conflict. He says they aren’t and the reason: “All truth is God’s truth.”

Wow, talk about a monopoly! A preemptive strike on ideas and knowledge. A copyright on all past, present and future truth.

Graham also states: “Never forget: God created everything that exists, including the laws that rule the universe.”

Even the processes of the universe that demonstrate otherwise? Such a tricky fellow.

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### **RET Newsletter submissions**

Feel free to submit news of interest. Submissions are welcomed but may be limited by space and topic relevance. The format may vary depending on the amount of information submitted. Short submissions are preferred but longer ones may be accepted if they can be published as a series over two or more issues. Text or Word format are best for submission. Text may also be included in an E-mail.

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The Newsletter can also be found online at our Web site: [www.rationalists.org](http://www.rationalists.org). Scheduling: Philosophy (Michael Lance) [lancem@ornl.gov](mailto:lancem@ornl.gov); Round tables (Carl Westman) [cawestman@bellsouth.net](mailto:cawestman@bellsouth.net); Book Club (John McCaffrey) [jkmccaffreytn@yahoo.com](mailto:jkmccaffreytn@yahoo.com) Newsletter: (Carl Ledendecker) [ledendecker@earthlink.net](mailto:ledendecker@earthlink.net), 982-8687 Material published in The RET Newsletter represents the views of the individual authors. Publication does not constitute an endorsement by the Rationalists of East Tennessee or its members.