

AOK|ATHÉE OKIE

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VALENTINE'S IS NOT FOR SAINTS

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Believers often question atheists about the perceived meaning of life and existence without god(s). For me, the biggest and most important part of my life is the love of and for my family. When I respond with this answer, I'm often told that *love* itself must be credited to a deity. Love is such an intense experience and powerful motivator that it may sometimes seem to transcend the indifference of nature, but to claim that love is somehow supernatural is taking things too far. Love is merely one of the many wonderful things that may be rationally attributed to our mundane and material world.

Love, like all things humanity enjoys most, is not a divine gift but a naturally evolved emotion that is selfish to the core. Love evolved so that parents will be willing to sacrifice their desires and even their life for the protection of their children. Spousal love evolved for this same type of protection from intruders, interlopers, and other dangers inhibiting successful breeding. Love is a defense mechanism to ensure successful reproduction. The only true "purpose" in nature is successful reproduction, and for us humans that means S-E-X.

Sex is not only the true meaning of this Cupidian holiday but the only true meaning and purpose of our lives when you get down to it. Everything is about successful breeding, passing on your genetic goods in perpetuity. Your desire and love for family is merely an evolved characteristic honed by natural selection to increase your ability to breed and get your children to breeding age. What is so interesting about this is that everybody *knows* this to be true. Most everybody feels the desire to propagate their genes and impart their knowledge to the next generation, it is the core motivator in our society. Get educated, stay healthy and clean, make a decent living so you can attract a spouse, get married and provide a nurturing home so the next generation can do it again. What's really interesting is that to admit that this is true is taboo.

GRAND CANYON, GRANDER DELUSIONS

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February 12, the date of Charles Darwin's birth in 1809, is International Darwin Day. "On this date, and throughout the month," according to the Darwin Day Program's Web site (<http://www.darwinday.org/>), "people from all over the world are honoring the life, work and influence of Charles Darwin with events and activities which celebrate science and our shared humanity."

In response to yet another proposal of an anti-evolution law, Massimo Pigliucci and others at the University of Tennessee introduced Darwin Day in 1996. In 2000, the International Darwin Day organization, presided over by Richard Dawkins, was formed to coordinate efforts worldwide. "Make no mistake about it," Pigliucci wrote in a review of *Defending Evolution in the Classroom* by B.J. Alters and S.M. Alters (Sudbury, MA: Jones & Bartlett, 2001), "the evolution-creation controversy is a war between intolerant and ignorant ideology on one side and open-ended inquiry on the other, a war that has already spread to other scientific disciplines such as geology, physics and cosmology. It will not go away and it will drain large resources of time and money from many scientists and educators for decades to come."

One of the latest battlegrounds in this war is the Grand Canyon. In July 2003 Donald Murphy, Deputy Director of the Park Service, ordered three bronze plaques—put up some 30 years ago by the Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary in Phoenix—remounted on the Grand Canyon's south rim viewing platform. The plaques are inscribed with effusive praise of Yahweh, from Psalms 68:4, 66:4 and 104:24, and an unattributed paean to "Father Almighty, wonderful Lord." On a legal opinion issued by the Interior Department that the displays violated the First Amendment, Joseph Alston, superintendent of Grand Canyon National Park, had the plaques removed. Nuns from the Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary importuned Murphy to

overturn the superintendent's actions; in Murphy's judgment, the nuns' delusions trumped the First Amendment. Murphy even wrote a letter of apology to the nuns—who cite on their Web site as evidence for the “avalanche of moral decay” the removal of Judge Roy Moore's Decalogue monument from the lobby of the Alabama Supreme Court.

A month later park bookstores, souvenir shops, and museums, began carrying, with Park Service approval, copies of a creationist volume titled *Grand Canyon: A Different View*, edited by Tom Vail. The book presents essays by creationists and features the averment that the 217-mile-long canyon is only 4,500 years old, not some 6,000,000 years old as the geologists claim. The creationists' evidence? “It was only a few thousand years ago that Yahweh created the Earth.”

“For years, as a Colorado River guide I told people how the Grand Canyon was formed over the evolutionary time scale of millions of years,” Vail writes in the introduction to the book. “Then I met the Lord. Now, I have ‘a different view’ of the Canyon, which, according to a biblical time scale, can't possibly be more than about a few thousand years old.” Contributor Dr. Gary Parker ascribes the origin of the Grand Canyon to a berserk Yahweh's hyperbiocidal fit: “Where did the Grand Canyon itself come from? [Noah's] Flood may have stacked the rock like a giant layer cake, but what cut the cake? One thing is sure: the Colorado River did not do it.”

Park rangers tried to publish a rebuttal to the book for staffers to consult when confronted by remonstrating creationists, however, the rangers' efforts were halted by the Bush administration.

Several scientific bodies and prominent scientists have weighed in on this peculiar little controversy at the expense of research time and resources, expenses that highlight the importance of International Darwin Day. May all those that extol logic and critical thinking join them in their efforts to promote sound scientific reasoning in the face of blind, sectarian dogma.

How ironic that our most human desire and core drive is our most shunned topic. Instead of dealing with the real and tangible aspect of male/female coupling we focus on the more nebulous concept, love. Love will conquer all! Love is a many-splendored thing!

Some even say god is love, but the ancients understood that sex is the true ultimate power and if anything borders the supernatural it is sexual experience. Thousands of ancient religions including ancestors of Christianity and Judaism recognized the importance of sex even over and above love. Historically, sex has been considered as a form of mystical communion with the sacred. Indeed, early Jewish traditions included a deeply sacrosanct and sexual ceremony within Solomon's temple in which devotees experienced the divine through holy union with priestesses.

It is a shame and a bane on our modern society that sex is so reviled while the concept of love is held up on such a high pedestal. The United States (where not only is it taboo to be naked in public, but actually criminal) have suffered from this puritanical view of sex far too long. We are slowly emerging from the dark ages, but without a rational and frank understanding of sex and love we will forever be trapped in the cloak of ignorance that religion foisted upon us.

I certainly do not mean to undermine the power or reality of love. Love is very real, but it is important to understand that love is *part of us*. It has meaning and purpose, but it is not our only one. Love and sex are aspects of nature and another result of our evolution – the natural world is explained beautifully and wonderfully through the process of evolution. Nature itself is so awe-inspiring, that one must wonder why anyone would want to obscure its grandeur with delusions of the supernatural.

February 2004 Freethought Calendar

Feb 12th – Church/state meetup – 8:00 pm

Please vote for your favorite location at
<http://churchandstate.meetup.com>

Feb 17th – Atheists meetup – 8:00 pm

Please vote for your favorite location at
<http://atheists.meetup.com>

Feb 27th – Galileo's Bar & Grill – 7:06 pm

Join us for food, fellowship, & fun!

Feb 28th – Agnostics meetup – 1:00 pm

Please vote for your favorite location at
<http://agnostic.meetup.com>



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