



The North Texas

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The Breatharians

by John Blanton

Finished with Thanksgiving dinner? Good. Now take a deep breath.

That's all.

If you are a Breatharian you know you could have skipped the dinner and gotten by on the deep breath. You know eating and drinking is a cultural addiction passed down from generation to generation. Your parents got you hooked on food and drink early on by force feeding you until you have no choice but to continue this absurd ritual just to keep the rotting foodstuffs moving on through your body.

American Wiley Brooks seems to be leading the Breatharian cult in this country, but the idea of forsaking food and drink for life and health is not a new one. A search of the Internet turned up several notable instances of the practice:¹

- Judah Mehler, Grand Rabbi, 1660-1751, ate and drank sparingly one day a week (Ripley's Believe It or Not).
- In the 19th century Marie Frutner, a Bavarian girl, lived on water without food for 40 years (Hilton Hotema of Health Research).
- Teresa Avila, a Bavarian peasant, born 1898, took no food or water and did not sleep since 1926 (described by "Aberee 1960").
- Caribala Dassi lived for 40 years without taking any food or water (India's Message, 1932).
- Yand Mel, age 20, did not eat for nine years (Dr. T.Y. Gan, according to Jones H. B. et al, Am. J. Cancer, 40:243-50, 1940).
- Therese Neumann, a German nun, who passed away in 1952, did not eat for 40 years, no food, no water.
- Danalak Shumi of Marcara, India, age 18, for over one year took no food or water (the *Bombay Press* August 1953).

EVENTS CALENDAR

NTS Holiday Party / The Weakest Skeptic

December 14, 2002

2:00pm - ???

Center for Non Profit Management
2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas

Bring some good holiday food and drinks if you like. If you want to participate in the "**Secret Skeptic**" program, bring a wrapped gift of interest to skeptics (no gifts from previous years, please).

Also, *The Weakest Skeptic* is coming back! If you want a chance to play in our very own game show, just show up at the party and register. It's easy, and it's free! But beware - Anne Robinson may be gone, but *Weakest Skeptic* host Laura Ainsworth is not! Hell, no! And she's not about to let up on the skeptical trivia or the social Darwinism just because it's the holidays...

Continued on page 7

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- Balayogini Sarasvati of Amma, India, lived on water only for a period of more than three years (*Rosicrucian Digest*, June 1959)
- A woman named Giri Bala of Bahar, West Bengal took no food nor fluid since she was 12 (described by Paramhansa Yogananda, in his book "Autobiography of a Yogi")

Before we get on to Wiley Brooks we need to talk about Ellen Greve. Greve is a former Australian business woman who now calls herself Jasmuheen. She is a New Age guru promoting avoidance of food. Her cult is said to have a following of 5000 world wide. At least one wise-acre has conjectured these may not be the same followers from one year to the next. Her followers tend to be claimants of the famous Darwin Awards.²

Australian follower Verity Linn succumbed while attempting to follow Jasmuheen's guidelines near Cam Loch in Scotland in September 1999. Prior to that in the summer of 1998 Lani Morris of Melbourne breathed herself to death, and Timo Degen, a German kindergarten teacher, did the same in 1997.³

Jasmuheen spells out her recipe for everlasting life in her book "Living on Light." As described on Amazon:⁴

The book "Living on Light" offers the possibility and maintained by the Universal Life Force also called Prana. Some saints and sages have done this before, but now the time has come, when everyone can do this for themselves. The Australian author Jasmuheen has not eaten any food for 5 years. This book describes how this came to her and a special 21-day process to convert the body to the new way of being sustained. It explains in details from a metaphysical view, how the body works and methods for self healing, regeneration and rejuvenation. Breatharians get nourished from the purest source, the Universal Life Force which contains all bodily needs. It is not necessary to have a certain religion or belief system to do the process. The process is at least a way to listen and connect with the inner voice.

Prior to her death Verity Linn had announced her intent to follow the Bretharian quest, and a copy of Jasmuheen's book was found near her body. However, it is not apparent the notorious demise of Jasmuheen's followers resulted in major hit on her popularity. Besides "Living on Light," she has two other books, "In Resonance" and "Our Camelot," listed on Amazon.

More publicly Jasmuheen has been debunked on Australia's version of *60 Minutes*. She agreed to be tested for the program, and the producers put her in a hotel room with a 24-hour guard to prevent any possibility of cheating. They stopped the debacle after four days when Jasmuheen began to exhibit symptoms of malnutrition and dehydration.⁵

Anyhow, there are more where Jasmuheen came from.

"Internet health-consultant" Ahmen Heaven promotes his "Jesus Diet." "Stop Eating" is the name of his Web site promoting his tax-deductible "Christian Health Research" in Keaau, Hawaii.⁶

Stop Eating is the name of this web site, to convey its main point, which is quite literal, but it doesn't mean to stop eating for good. It just means that we should be more aware of how eating is in many ways more harmful rather than beneficial to health. The food industry is one of the largest industries in the world, and the barrage of advertisements advocating the "good" things in food, is testimony to its power. However, eating food, quite plainly, is often the route to ill-health, sickness, or pain, yet there are few, like myself, who are suggesting that food may not be that good for you, and that we need to be really careful, because eating food is like playing with poison.

He also hawks his various publications: "Jesus' Diet: For your Sins! (\$10), Urine: The Fountain of Youth! (\$7), Breatharianism: The Secret You've Been Looking For! (\$3), Stop eating: Fasting and Elimination More Important! (\$12)."

Then there is Stephen Arlin who only advocates eating less and places more emphasis on his "Raw Food" philosophy.⁷

Some people consider The Raw-Food Diet the next step past a vegetarian or vegan diet, but it really transcends all diets. It is simply the natural way to nourish your body. A raw-foodist is not something one becomes; a raw-foodist is something that all living creatures on earth already are. We are designed to eat raw foods. Food in its raw, natural state cannot be nutritionally improved upon, especially not by cooking it. Raw-foodists take all their nourishment from raw, fresh, natural foods — unadulterated by cooking.

Back to Wiley Brooks. He heads up the Breatharian Institute of America in Santa Cruz, California. Brooks claims priority to Breatharianism over Jasmuheen, having called himself a Breatharian for more than 20 years. He now finds himself upstaged by Jasmuheen, but is quick to defend her.⁸

Brooks offers an ingenious explanation for the death of Jasmuheen follower Verity Linn and for Jasmuheen's own embarrassment on *60 Minutes*. If you're relying on air for your nourishment, he points out, you're going to have to depend on the quality of that air — a risky proposition in modern times.

"The less food you have in the body, the more air is circulated through the body, which replaces the food," he says. "Which means a Breatharian, instead of taking in 110 lbs. of air a day, is probably taking in 1,000 lbs. a day. Now in that 1,000 lbs. of air is a percentage of pollutants. So you see that for a Breatharian the air is so deadly that we have to take something not to increase energy but to decrease the sensitivity to the air. We take food as you would take a drug or a medicine — to reduce the sensitivity."

Brooks is more like a regular guy than you would expect from a Breatharian. He explains his Breatharian philosophy in an interview on the Breatharian Institute Web site.⁹

Breatharianism is philosophy based on the exploits and knowledge gain by God experiencing itself in the flesh as the personality, Wiley Brooks, A Breatharian, on a planet that is on a fast track to annihilation. My job or purpose for the past 30 years has been to seek out the causes of this destructive phenomenon or system and re-direct its forces to manifest more positive and constructive effects in the world. A Breatharian is just another way of saying "God in the flesh." A Breatharian is also another way of saying any Human Being who breathes. A Spiritual Being sustained by the breath of life. As you can see from my perspective all people are Breatharians or God in the flesh.

For 30 years I have known the truth about who I am and what I am. I have also known the truth about who everybody else is as well. The truth is that "I am God, You are God," so get to used to it. Until people experience themselves as the God they truly are, they will not be able to comprehend the fact that "we really are all One." From and of the same Source.

The information I have gathered during the past 30 years, as a Breatharian, is vital to the survival of this planet and my intent and priority is to get this information to the masses as soon as possible by whatever means available and appropriate. I have definite plans and knowledge that will be needed to help the world prepare itself for much higher levels of consciousness. These rapidly increasing levels of consciousness and spirituality reacting with the many poisonous gases polluting our environment and the deadly effects caused by electro-magnetic fields from electric power cables, Radio, TV and telephone transmitting towers are creating dangerous levels of heat that could end life on this planet as know it. The prevention of this kind of thing from happening has been the sole purpose of Breatharianism.

For a cult leader Brooks displays an uncommon touch of candor, as when he was asked when he last ate.¹⁰

Wiley: 2 hours ago.

Bruno: What kind of food did you eat?

Wiley: A Double Quarter Pounder with cheese and a Diet Coke from McDonald's. Some people would call this junk food.

Bruno: Why did you eat it?

Wiley: It is the perfect food that has the necessary poisons and pollutants to harmonized my blood stream

with the frequencies of a poisonous and polluted environment...

Brooks may be on to something there.

Besides the references already cited, a number of other interesting URLs turned up in the Web search for this article. Here are a few:

“Breatharianism” on the Apologetics Index Web site at <http://www.gospelcom.net/apologeticsindex/b12.html>

“A Light Lunch” on the Internet Infidels Web Scan. A delightfully comprehensive treatment of Breatharianism with numerous links. <http://www.infidels.org/infidels/web.scan/1999/scan11.html>

“Wiley Brooks,” he gives his explanation of Breatharianism. <http://www.fruitnut.net/html/FamousB/Wiley.htm>



References

- 1 Historical Breatharians at <http://seasilver.threadnet.com/Preventorium/others.htm>
- 2 1999 Darwin Awards at <http://www.darwinawards.com/darwin/darwin1999-58.html>
- 3 Etelka Lehoczky, “Living On (Hot) Air, Recent deaths contradict Breatharians’ claims” Published November 17, 1999 in Whoa! and on the Internet at <http://www.gettingit.com/article/344>. See also Rick Ross’ “Sect Madness: Disciples starve themselves to death,” <http://www.rickross.com/reference/breat/breat11.html>
- 4 Amazon.com at http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/3929512351/the_northtexasske
- 5 Lehoczky 1999
- 6 Ahmen Heaven’s Web site at <http://www.sabon.org/prana/stop1.html>
- 7 “Questions and Answers with Stephen Arlin,” <http://www.rawfood.com/interviewrp.html>
- 8 Lehoczky 1999
- 9 “Letter to Color Magazine in Italy,” from The Breatharian Institute of America Web site at <http://www.breatharian.com/secret.html>
- 10 Ibid.

The existence of God

by John Blanton

This was a question that has been kicked around for about 2800 years as far as anybody could tell. So they decided to get together Monday night and settle the issue, the idea being that afterwards we could all get on to other things. So some good people at The University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) invited two noted experts on the subject to come and explain the underlying facts and reach some sort of conclusion.

Michael Shermer is publisher of *Skeptic* magazine and director of the Skeptics Society. He now writes a column in *Scientific American* about skeptical issues and has published a number of books, including *Why People Believe Weird Things* and *The Borderlands of Science: Where Sense Meets Nonsense*. He’s also into cycling and has written some books on it.

Douglas Geivett is Department Chair of the Talbot School of Theology at Biola University in La Mirada, California. He has written *Evil and the Evidence for God* and *In Defense of Miracles*. He spends a lot of time debating the existence of God with other people.

Dr. Denny Bradshaw moderated the discussion before a crowd of 1000 or more people, including lots of students and walk-ins like myself. The UTA people were kind enough to send advance notice to the NTS and a bunch of us clueless skeptics bought our tickets and sat in on the festivities.

It was apparent from the beginning that things were off to a bad start, because the star speakers, learned as they were, could not seem to agree.

Geivett

Geivett (pronounced guy-vett) got up first and told us there *is* a God. Not only that but *which* God, but I will get to that later. He started off explaining *first cause*. Look, everything has a cause. He seems to have overlooked some finer details of quantum mechanics and disappearing socks in the dryer, but that’s another matter. How are you going to explain his daughter, who is the product of two human beings, who were the product of ... etc. Ultimately, if you concede time is not infinite, there was a first event, and nothing caused it, unless you consider God.

He also touched on the fine tuning of the universe. You know we all would not be here if the balance of forces of nature were not just so-so. And that’s unthinkable. And who did this fine tuning? You guessed it.

He also mentioned *human dignity*. How can we explain human nature with all our *good* and *evil* unless there is some purposeful *person* behind it? At this point my notes from the discussion have the entry “B.S.,” but I can’t remember what I meant by that.

He also mentioned morality and evidence of evil. All good testaments for the existence of God. These last two points rounded out his five-point argument, but now he got to the specifics of God that I alluded to previously.

What has God done to address our human aspirations? The prime example is the miracle of the Resurrection. Of course, this is the famous resurrection of Jesus. Furthermore, the resurrection is certainly true, because it is a well documented historical event. There were many eye witnesses. Good, reliable eye witnesses. And it was later written down and eventually put into a book. Pretty solid.

Shermer

Not knowing how Michael Shermer was going to respond to this powerful evidence, we leaned forward in our seats as he got up to speak.

Geivett's description of God, Shermer explained, seemed to fit that of an alien—an extraterrestrial (E.T.). This all-knowing, all-powerful being can account for all the blessings we received from God, he noted. Except, I think, the resurrection. More on that.

Geivett had argued that science now supports the idea of God. Back when we thought of a steady-state (never ending) universe, there was no place for the creation, by God. Then we discovered the Big Bang, and God was confirmed. Not so fast, Shermer reminded us. Geivett is picking and choosing. Although he did not say it in exactly this way, the implication is that when science agrees with the existence of God, science is right and science is good. When science disagrees, then so much the worse for science.

Speaking of the Big Bang, a bell went off in my head (happens when you get old), and I made a note to myself: "If God made the universe, and that's the explanation, then what made God?" I thought about elephants and turtles.¹

Shermer expressed the opinion that the universe is constructed from the bottom up by first principles, and not from the top down by a grand designer with an anthropocentric purpose in mind.

Many of the manifestations of God have prosaic explanations, he went on. He put up a photo of the vision of the Virgin Mary that appeared in the side of a building. And, by golly, it was a good likeness. Also a good likeness of Marge Simpson, he showed.

He also showed my favorite Syd Harris cartoon. It shows two science type fellows at a blackboard with a cloud of math with a note in the center that says "Here a miracle occurs." The idea is that when you can't explain everything it's not wise to invoke a miracle. If you want to understand first causes you need to get past the supernatural claptrap.

Geivett rebuts

In his rebuttal to Shermer, Geivett reminded us he had previously put the full responsibility of demonstrating there was no God on Shermer. Furthermore, Shermer had come up short in showing that God does not exist.

One would think at that point that Geivett would just collect his honorarium, step off the stage, and join us all for a beer. However, custom decreed he continue onward and assail Shermer's arguments.

It is important to believe in God, he pointed out, because of all the rewards deriving from the existence of God. To not believe is to forgo these wonderful gifts, while believing costs you nothing in case there turns out not to be a God. The term

"Pascal's wager" came to mind, and I determined to bring that up later.

Shermer must explain human dignity in the absence of God he further insisted. Also, what about the resurrection? Furthermore, Extra Intelligent, ExtraTerrestrials would not be proof against God. Besides, what if these EI, ETs came to visit us and confirmed the existence of God?

Shermer rebuts

In his turn, Shermer argued that God is not necessary for the existence of morality (and human dignity and all the rest). These qualities can be explained by evolution. They are survival properties resulting from societal pressure on natural selection. To myself I added this was possibly true for our primitive ancestors, but modern society may not exert these same pressures, and we no longer experience *natural* selection anyhow.

He also disputed the historicity of Jesus (no, not the Jesus who coaches your Little League team). The sterling eye witnesses of the resurrection, for example, did not get their stories straight, some describing it one way and others describing differently.



Michael Shermer (foreground) debates Douglas Geivett (right) at UT Arlington. Moderator Dr. Denny Bradshaw watches the time. (photo by John Blanton)

Besides, the messiah story was a common motif of that time. For example, in another historical setting Apollonius the Messiah disappeared during his trial before the local emperor then ascended to Heaven.² God and religion are human constructs, and many religions have gods, many gods. Which one to accept, and who gets to choose? He threw in mention of the myth of the Flood of Noah.

Closing—Geivett

Geivett closed by insisting on consistency. He did not refute the “many gods” statement of Shermer but insisted on an explanation of why we should be moral. What purpose do we have for being moral? We must have morality based on authority. I think I have seen this argument before, and I call it “the argument from morality.” I’m sure my characterization is an original idea.

Forget about the contradictory testimony of the witnesses of the resurrection. They’re like witnesses to a murder. The killer drove a white van, the killer drove a Chevy Malibu. There was a murder, non-the-less. There are so many believers, it must be true. Where else did Jesus get his popularity?

Closing—Shermer

Shermer reminded us our morality and our human dignity are programmed into us. This is evidenced by people without God who have these properties. He pointed out that the human cruelty encouraged and abetted by the God of the Old Testament puts the lie to any moral teachings of that particular god.

Questions—answers

During the question and answer period that followed the formal discussion Shermer re-emphasized that people construct morality from natural causes. We have certain properties wired into us (my terminology) that enables us to work in society. This is a survival property (natural selection again).

Geivett noted that naturalists are on the run these days. Naturalism (belief in natural causes) is a religion. Some must believe naturalism, so they look for ways to make the facts fit. He said that scientists must supply evidence that there is no God. Then he went on to shoot himself in the foot.

Where is the evidence of cross speciation he asked, referring to biological evolution. His flawed concept of evolution pointed up his weak understanding of known science, against which he proceeded to argue. There is micro evolution, he continued, but no evidence of macro evolution. There are all these gaps in the fossil record where we should have a record of the origins of the species.

That’s revealing. Geivett is, at the base, a creationist. For all his pronouncements of divinely inspired morality, in the end he places himself squarely in league with the likes of Don Patton, Duane Gish, Jonathan Wells and Kent Hovind.

Epilog

During his presentation Geivett had hinted at the great benefit of accepting Pascal’s wager. In my own clumsy manner I attempted to expose Pascal’s fallacy. If betting on the rewards of believing in God is such a good idea, why not believe in Bob. Bob will promise you everything God has promised you, and more. Bob will promise you redemption and everlasting life, too. In addition to all that Bob will promise you a *new car*! If the strength of an argument is the benefit to be derived from accepting its premise, then the argument that promises the greatest reward is the one to accept. It is not necessary to argue with facts. Promises will do.

However, I don’t think I got that point across as well as I should have, because Geivett was able to argue back that 1) he never heard of Bob before, and 2) his own personal beliefs were based on a long and deep study of the stories of God and Jesus.

In the end I was shocked, *shocked*, to learn the issue had not been settled. When asked whether they still believed in God the vast majority of those in attendance raised their hand. Shocking still was that some did not raise their hand at all. Will this question never be answered?

Geivett and Shermer have been doing this series of debates for a while, and there appears to be no end in sight. This may take another 2800 years before it’s finally settled.

This was our first encounter with Douglas Geivett, but a number of the more erudite have studied his writings and arguments. Richard Carrier has reviewed *In Defense of Miracles*. In “Geivett’s Exercise in Hyperbole” Carrier takes issue with Geivett’s lack of understanding of history:

He then issues a comparison, in the voice of a mock critic, asserting that the resurrection of Jesus is as historically evidenced as Julius Caesar’s crossing of the Rubicon in 49 B.C.³

Geivett’s over the top comparison of the resurrection with this well-established historical event severely blunts the credibility of any other arguments he might make, and it takes some of the shine off his professed piety. Whether he will continue to be an effective proponent of the reality of God will depend on how well he controls his handling of the truth. His standing as a creationist, however, is looking brighter all the time. □

References

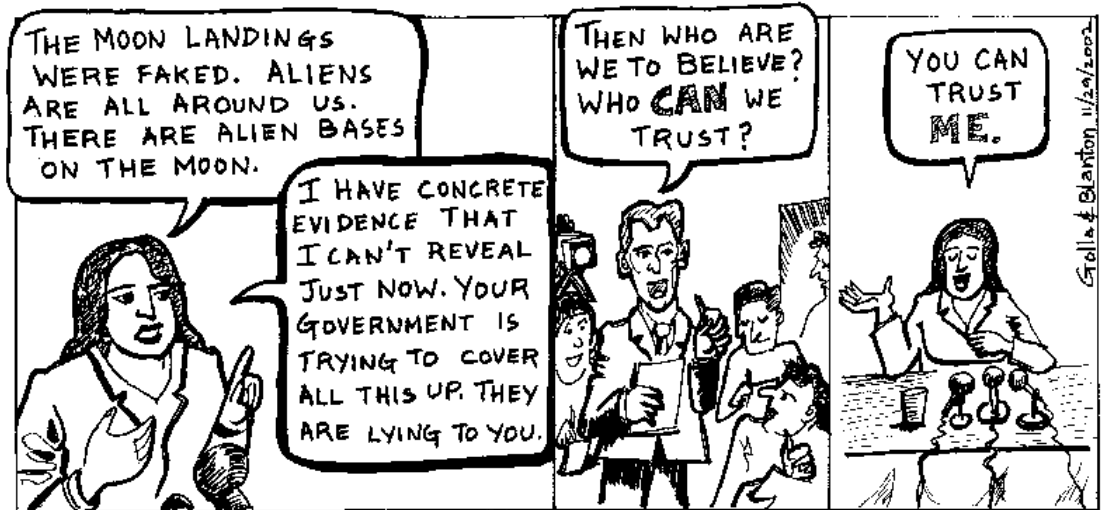
1 The reference is to “One less elephant,” appearing in the November 2002 issue of this newsletter.

2 See “Apollonius of Tyana” at http://www.themystica.com/mystica/articles/apollonius_of_tyana.html and “Apollonius of Tyana” at <http://www.livius.org/ap-ark/apollonius/apollonius08.html>.

3 http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/richard_carrier/indef/4b.html

Skeptic Ink

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Events Calendar continued from page 1

NTS Board Meeting and Elections

Saturday, January 11, 2003, at 2 p.m.
Center for Non Profit Management
2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas

Full members may vote for the NTS Board of Directors.
No other program is planned.

Call the NTS Hotline at
(214) 335-9248 to get more information.

What's new

By Robert Park

[Robert Park publishes the *What's New* column at <http://www.aps.org/WN/>. Following are some clippings of interest.]

Climate change: about that beach-front property you bought...

Unlike previous climate talks, the talks in New Delhi, which ended last Friday, addressed ways of coping with a warmer world in addition to emission controls (WN 25 Oct 02). Both are needed. No matter what we do to limit emissions, climate change models predict continued warming for maybe 100 years from gases we've already put in the atmosphere. So what became of the Climate Change Vulnerability and Resilience Program, introduced by Rep. J.C. Watts, Jr. (WN 14 Jun 02)? It had seemed like a sure thing: the Oklahoma congressman was chair of the powerful House Republican Conference, and because the bill didn't call for

increased regulation, it attracted industry backers. But a month later, Watts announced he was not running for reelection. His phone stopped ringing, and his bill disappeared from the agenda. Emissions must eventually be cut, of course, and the Bush Administration is pursuing a program of "voluntary reductions" by industry. But meanwhile, you might want to think about moving the sump pump from the basement to the first floor.

Irradiated meat: risk perception and the American hamburger.

Several grocery chains are gambling that consumers, spooked by recent outbreaks of illness and death from E. coli and listeria bacteria, may at last be ready to try irradiated ground beef. Past attempts to introduce consumers to irradiated foods fell victim to the exaggerated fear of anything "atomic," but the two largest meat recalls in history may have changed that. The supermarket experiment will test whether the very real risk of bacterial contamination can overcome the public's irrational fear of radiation.

Misconduct in physics: APS council revisits ethics and values.

In what may be remembered as the summer of lost faith, physicists woke up to find two separate cases of blatant fabrication in physics research. And it wasn't just two loners: Ninov and Schoen. They had as many as 15 coauthors on some of the papers (WN 19 Jul 02). This was not supposed to happen in physics. In some soft science maybe, but not in physics. At its meeting two weeks ago, the APS Council revised the "APS Guidelines for Professional Conduct" to spell out coauthor responsibility www.aps.org/statements/02.2.html and added a "Statement on improving education for professional ethics, standards and practices" www.aps.org/statements/02.4.html.

Bob Park can be reached via email at opa@aps.org

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