



SOCRATIC CLUB DISCUSSES NEW ATHEISM

By: Chris Heinrich

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The Gonzaga Socratic Club discussed new atheism at its meeting last Friday.

Aaron Brown and Brent Diebel, both graduate students of philosophy at Gonzaga, led the discussion through presentations and a question and answer session at the end of the meeting. Brown explained the unique aspects of this new movement, and Diebel followed with critical questions of whether new atheists properly understand faith in a religious sense.

Crystallizing with the publication of Sam Harris' "The End of Faith" in 2004, new atheism is an alternative to traditional atheism. The primary difference is that new atheists not only find religion wrong but actively malevolent. Not only are new atheists harshly critical of religiously inspired terrorism but also some have called raising a child religiously intellectually abusive, and Harris went so far as to suggest that religious believers should be jailed.

New atheists are also unique in their framing of the attack on religion as "reality versus fantasy" instead of "skepticism versus belief." The only things which can be called true are those backed by objective, scientific fact, Brown said.

"There are two ways to look at the world [for new atheists]," Brown said. "The right way and the wrong way."

Recent books strongly critical of religious practice and the existence of God by biologist Richard Dawkins, journalist Christopher Hitchens, mathematician John Allen Paulos and others are part of the movement and were passed out to the audience by Brown.

Audience questions focused on new atheism's lack of recognition for the beneficial aspects of religion and the true motivations for terrorism.

"The questions and comments were thoughtful and made for an interesting discussion," Diebel said in an e-mail.

David Calhoun, associate professor of philosophy and the Socratic Club's director, wanted to pursue the topic because of the public criticism of religion it has been a part of in recent years.

"It is a powerful and forceful challenge to Christianity," Calhoun said.

More than 60 students and faculty members attended the meeting, more than double the normal

attendance of 30, and Calhoun hopes to return to it in the future.

The Socratic Club, modeled on an Oxford organization of the same name, has pursued philosophical inquiry into the Christian worldview since 2004. Past topics have included "God, Suffering and Evil" and "Ignatius of Loyola's Idea of a Jesuit University."

At its next meeting the Socratic Club will discuss "Jesus: Person or Platonic Idea?" Matt Gallatin, professor of philosophy at North Idaho College, will lead the discussion. The meeting is scheduled for March 28 in College Hall 101.

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